

Agenda Item	9
Report No	RES/07/21

HIGHLAND COUNCIL

Committee: Corporate Resources Committee

Date: 25 February 2021

Report Title: Annual Occupational Health and Safety Report 2019/20

Report By: Interim Head of HR

1 Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 The Highland Council's Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing Policy includes a commitment to the production of an annual report on its Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing (OHSW) performance. Annual reporting on health and safety performance is also reflective of best practice.
- 1.2 The OHSW achievements for 2019/20 include:
- Introduction of an Employee Support Programme
 - Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing Policy 2020 approved
 - Reducing the severity of accidents
 - Reducing the All Incident (AIR) rate
 - Increasing attendance at health and safety training
- 1.3 The key challenges for the Highland Council for 2020/21 are:
- Providing support and advice re Covid-19
 - Supporting ECOs implement health and safety within the new council structure
 - Ensuing new Service health and safety plans for improvements to specific risks are actioned, implemented and monitored regularly.
 - Ensuring sensible, proportionate risk management
 - Improved accident, incident, near miss recording and reporting
 - Delivering a Programme of prioritized workplace fire risk assessments



Recommendations

Members of the committee are asked to:

- Note the achievements and performance for 2019/20
- Approve the OHSW Report
- Agree to the key challenges for 2020/21

1. Implications

- 1.1 Resource – Health and safety should be an integral part of management; failure to properly consider, plan and make sufficient resources available for health and safety will result in a negative impact on performance.

Legal - Failure to follow health and safety legislation can lead to enforcement action by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) which can range from the serving of a Notification of Contravention, Improvement Notice, Prohibition Notice or Court Proceedings. HSE intervention is now charged at a cost of £156 per hour. Additional costs to the Council will always be required to rectify the breach of legislation.

Community (Equality, Poverty and Rural) - None

Climate Change/Carbon Clever - None

Risk – Failure to ensure staff safety can lead to civil action against the Council

Gaelic - None

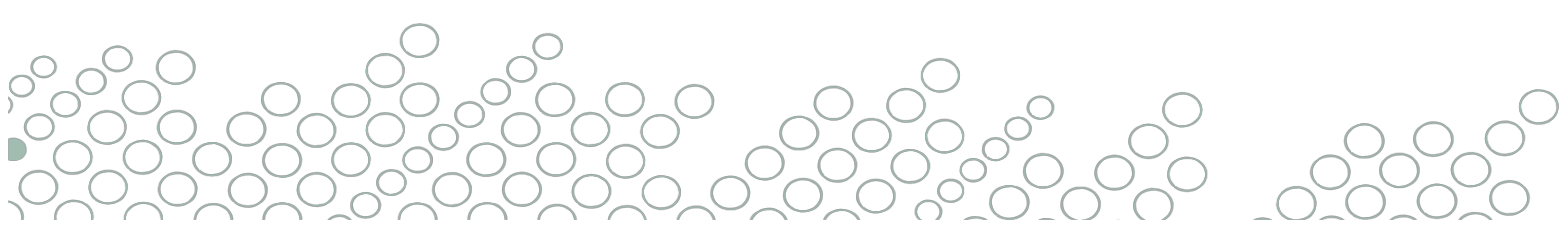
Designation: Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing Manager

Date: 26/01/21

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Background Papers:

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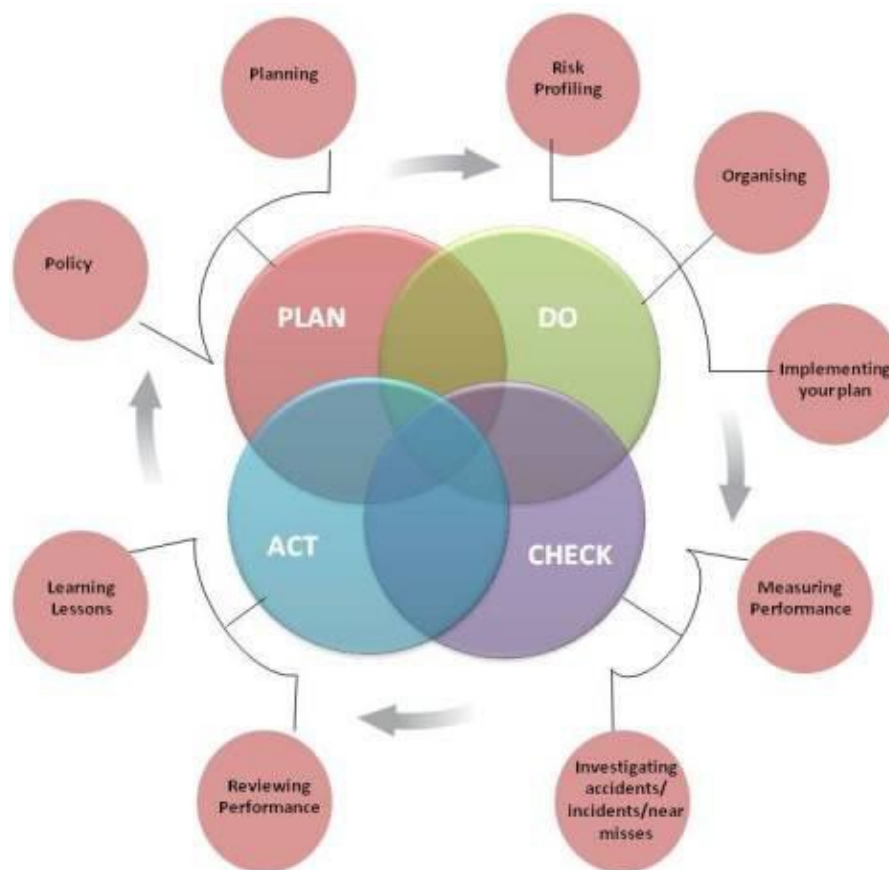


Occupational Health Safety and Wellbeing

**Annual Report
2019/2020**

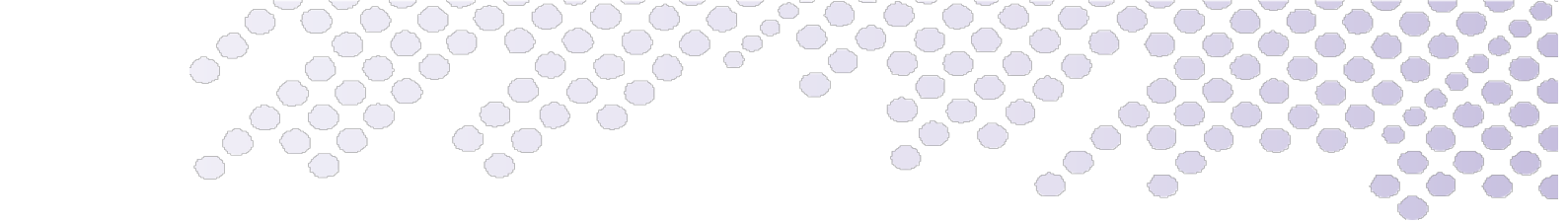
1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 The Highland Council's Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing (OSHW) Policy includes a commitment to the production of an annual report on its Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing (OSHW) performance. Annual reporting on health and safety performance is also reflective of best practice. This report presents the council's OHSW performance, achievements and progress in 2019/220 and presents the OHSW plan for 2020/22.
- 1.2 The OHSW policy is based on the Health and Safety Executive's model for successful health and safety management: Plan-Do-Act Check cycle and this report is structured in a similar manner.



- 1.3 The OHSW team is based within the HR Team in Resources and Finance. The team is responsible for:



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- Ensuring that the Council meets its statutory obligations in respect of the health, safety and welfare at work of its employees and all others affected by its activities;
 - Developing policies, procedures and standards
 - Monitoring and inspecting workplaces and investigating accidents, incidents and occupational ill-health;
 - Managing the occupational health contract;
 - Managing the EAP contract
 - Providing health and safety training.

1.4 The small team is made up of:

1x OHSW Manager
1x Senior H&S Adviser
2x H&S Advisers
1x Fire Safety Officer
1x Trainer/Moving and Handling Coordinator
1x H&S Assistant
1x Clerical Assistant

1.5 The team is also responsible for the delivery of the Occupational Health contract; the Employee Assistance Programme, and the contract for Ergonomic Assessments and Provision of Ergonomic Equipment/Support.

2.0 Plan

2.1 Policy

2.1.1 The Corporate OHSW policy reflects the Council's values, beliefs and commitment to provide a safe and healthy workplace. The policy includes link to further guidance on managing the hazards faced by staff in the Council. The last review of the policy was in March 2020 and reflects the new Council Structure. It was approved a Council meeting in August 2020.

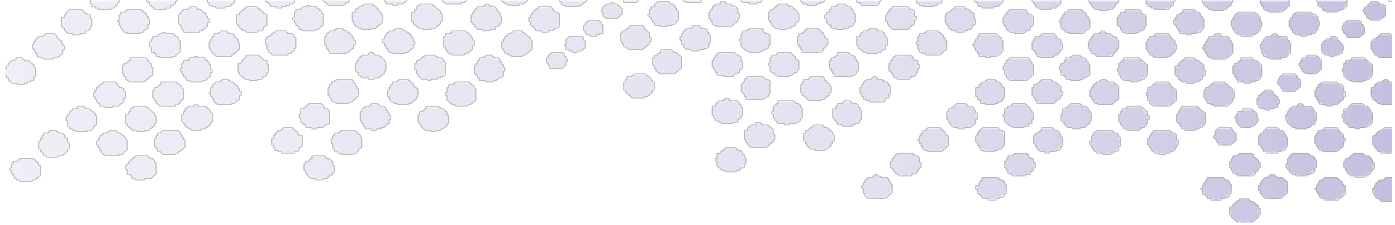
2.1.2 In addition to the corporate policy, each Service should have its own service-specific health and safety policy which identifies Service risks and sets out the Service's arrangements for managing health and safety. These policies and plans should be submitted to the Central Safety Committee. These policies and plans, once approved, can be posted on the Health and Safety [Intranet site](#).

2.2 Planning for implementation

2.2.1 Effective planning for health and safety is concerned with prevention through identifying and controlling risks. This involves:

- designing, developing and implementing suitable and proportionate management arrangements, risk control systems and workplace precautions
- operating and maintaining the system while also seeking improvement where needed
- linking it to how other aspects of the Council are managed

2.2.2 Each Service should nominate a Head of Service to take on the role of Service Health and Safety Coordinator. Their responsibilities include



coordinating health safety and wellbeing issues within their service and championing health and safety. They play a major part in implementing the corporate policy into their Service, developing their health and safety plan and ensuring planning for health and safety is included in Senior Management Team meetings at least quarterly.

3.0 Do

3.1 Risk profiling

3.1.1 The Council's health and safety delivery model covers the significant hazards faced by staff as they conduct their work activities. Not all services face the same hazard (or level of risk), and the Service health and safety action plan should focus on relevant risks, how they will be addressed within the Service and meet the requirements of Council policy and guidance.

3.1.2 There is a strong focus on the use of risk assessment as a management tool and ensuring that controls are proportionate to the risks. A continued emphasis on sensible, proportionate risk assessment will be one of the main themes for the OHSW team in 2020/2022. There will also be a focus on the HSE's message: Go Home Safe

3.2 Organising

3.2.2 Health and safety responsibilities are described in the Corporate Policy and reflected in Service Policies. In addition to Service H&S Coordinators, individuals with specific responsibilities in Services for: risk assessment, Responsible Premises Officers, first aid, fire wardens, key workers (lifting and handling), trainers, assessors etc. have been identified. The basic requirement that everyone is responsible for the health and safety of themselves and others is one that is oft repeated.

3.3 Plan Implementation

3.3.1 OHSW plan

The main actions in the 2018/2019 OHSW plan were to:

- Introduce an OHSW Electronic Management System (ongoing)
- Work with Services to maintain H&S plans (ongoing)
- Reduce the number of occupational health appointments where employees did not attend: percentage reduction achieved (ref 4.5.8)
- Review Violence and Aggression reporting in schools (ongoing ref 5.1.10)

3.3.2 Communication

The Staff Intranet and use of email are the main means of communication health, safety and wellbeing issues. The most important messages are published on the Intranet home page as well as the health and safety site. Health and safety advisers also raise issues at Area, Service and other health and safety meetings.

3.3.3 Communication messages have mainly focused on security issues; mental health awareness; safe driving and safety alerts regarding battery disposal, safe use of ladders, sun exposure and manual handling. All messages can be found on the [OHSW news page](#).

3.3.3 Co-operation and consultation

3.3.3.1 The Central Safety Committee (CSC) is the main arena for health and

safety consultation in line with the requirements of the Safety Representatives and Safety Committees Regulations 1977. Reports on the occupational health service, health and safety updates and property health and safety issues are all standing items on the agenda. Where Services have had HSE intervention, there is an expectation that update reports will be submitted to the committee until the issue has been closed out.

3.3.3.2 In line with the Policy and Guidance on Consultation, Service and Area health and safety meetings are held quarterly. Area meetings can sometimes be negatively impacted upon due to poor attendance – even though these now include the ability to join remotely. Actions raised at these meetings can be escalated to the CSC if not addressed in a timely manner.

3.3.3.3 The appropriate health and safety adviser attends both Service and Area meetings. A representative from H&P’s Property Management Team is also invited to the meetings to discuss health and safety property-related issues.

3.3.3.4 All work teams are encouraged to have health and safety as a regular item on the agenda for team meetings to ensure that issues can be raised and addressed.

3.3.5 Training

3.3.5.1 Health and safety training is, in the main, delivered by the health and safety team, without cost to Services, except where specialist input is required. The OHSW team can deliver training across the Council’s geographical area, where there are adequate numbers of delegates.

3.3.5.2 A number of new courses were introduced, other developed to address new ways of working. An e-learning course on Managing Asbestos in Schools, aimed at Headteachers/Depute Headteachers in schools built pre 2000, was developed in response to an HSE exercise on this topic

3.3.5.3 The table below shows the number of Council staff attending health and safety courses in 2019/2020:

Course title	2019/20	Trend
Dealing with challenging behaviours	13	↓
Mental Health Representative	55	↑
Accident Investigation and Reporting	6	↑
Responsible Premises Officer	9	↑
First Aid Certificate	33	↓
First Aid Certificate Refresher	31	↓
Emergency First Aid	205	↑
Moving and Handling (People)	13	↓

Evac chair / ski pad	0	↓
Evacuation procedures	0	↓
Fire Marshal	86	↑
Lone Working	30	↑
Manual Handling	81	↓
Risk Assessment	29	↓
Stress Awareness	7	=
Mentally Healthy Workplaces	29	↑
Preventing Violence at Work	29	↑
E-learning courses	Complete (in progress) 2018/19	Trend
Alcohol and drugs in the workplace	7 (42)	↑
Mentally Healthy Workplaces	61 (16)	↑
Managing Asbestos (Schools) (NEW)		
Preventing violence and aggression	63 (25)	=
Snow and ice clearing	41 (9)	↑
Working with Computers	987 (187)	↑
Managing stress	44 (8)	↑
Extinguishing Fires	925 (289)	↑
Introduction to OHSW	743 (172)	↑
Occupational Health	96 (7)	↑

3.3.5.4 The general trend shows a significant increase in health and safety training whether it is delivered face to face or by e-learning. This training is an important element in improving safety culture and safety behaviours. Whilst risk assessment training decreased in 2019/20 there is evidence that numbers attending this essential course will have increased for 2020/21 due to the requirement for Covid-19 risk assessments

3.3.5.5 Training of staff is one of the criteria that the HSE will always ask for during inspections or accident investigation. In many cases, training is a legal requirement and corporate health and safety training addresses our most serious risk. Services will be asked to commit to ongoing programmes of health and safety training in their updated plans. In addition, a focus on full completion of eLearning courses will be emphasised: any members of staff do not complete the final element which is normally an assessment.

3.3.5.6 A new course – Supervising Health and Safety in Highland Council – was offered towards the end of the period with no uptake to date. This will be promoted to the new Services.

4.0 Check

4.1 Monitoring performance

4.1.1 Ensuring and encouraging compliance with OHSW policy and associated guidance, as a minimum standard, is at core the core of the proactive work of the OHSW team whilst also promoting a culture of continuous improvement. The quarterly CSC receives reports on the Council’s health and safety performance as well as that of the contracted-in occupational health service.

4.1.2 Benchmarking, peer support and sharing of experience and policy and guidance is a core part of the North of Scotland Health and Safety group. This group is comprised of health and safety senior officers from CNES, Orkney, Shetland, Moray, Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire Councils. A subgroup has also been established to share information and resources for the management of HAVS across these Councils.

4.1.3 It is proposed that a health and safety audit is conducted across the Council once the focus on the pandemic can be lifted. This will give a baseline as to how Services are meeting requirements and results will assist in the development of health and safety plans. (The health and safety advisers are all qualified and experienced in conducting audits.)

4.2 Investigate accidents, etc.

4.2.1 There were 1024 incidents to staff reported in the period 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020, compared to 1238 in the previous year. This year’s trends and rates compared to the previous 5 years are presented in the table below:

	2013/ 2014	2014/ 2015	2015/ 2016	2016/ 2017	2017/ 2018	2018/ 2019	2019/ 2020
Total employee accidents	886	937	1196	1915	1171	1238	1024
Fatalities	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Working days lost	N/A	1348	1237	916	555	557	407
Major injuries	6	10	7	8	9	6	7
Over 7 day injuries	12	12	14	11	8	17	14
Total reportable to HSE	18	22	21	19	17	23	21

Accident Injury Rate (AIR)*	215	213	261	244	145	219	209
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***AIR = (reportable injuries/no. employees)*100,000**

4.2.2 The severity of the outcome of the accidents has slightly decreased– as noted in the decrease in the number of over 7-day absence injuries and those reported to the HSE. The legal definition of “Major injuries” includes injuries such as broken bones, amputation, loss of consciousness or loss of sight.

4.2.3 Benchmarking is normally undertaken with the six neighboring North Councils: our AIR is the second lowest across the North of Scotland.

4.2.4 It is considered essential that the Council makes more use of incident and near miss reports, results from accident investigations, inspections etc. to ensure sufficient learning from these and that appropriate responses are made to prevent recurrence of incidents and loss. This will be raised with Services over the next year.

4.3 HSE Intervention

4.3.1 Asbestos in Schools (Duty to Manage)

The Council was served with a Notice of Contravention in May 2019 following visits to four schools. The notice focused on lack of training for Headteachers/Depute Heads on their legal duty to manage asbestos, and on the lack of asbestos awareness training to school support staff. Both these issues have been addressed and will be monitored where there are staff changes.

4.3.2 Gairloch Recycling Centre

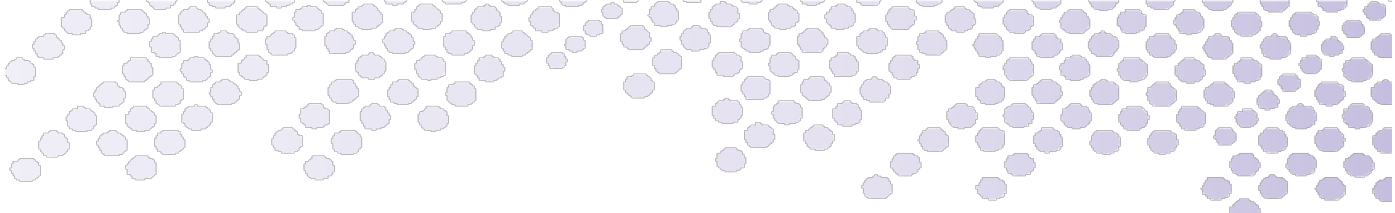
A Notice of Contravention was served on the Council following an accident at Gairloch Recycling Site. The inspector required improvements in safe access, written instructions and management of lone working. At a follow up visit, accompanied by the Senior Health and Safety Adviser, the inspector was satisfied that the required improvements had been made.

4.4 Occupational Health

4.4.1 Iqarus Occupational Health were awarded the Highland Council/Highlife Highland contract in 2019.

4.4.2 A total of 533 management referrals were seen by occupational health between 1 April 2019 and 31 March 2020. This represents a decrease from the 718 referrals in the previous year.

4.4.3 The main reason for referral to occupational health is for mental health issues, 49% of management referrals are classified thus by the medical staff. This is a decrease on the rate of 61% of cases in the previous year. There is a requirement for staff who are absent with mental health issues to be referred



immediately, as early intervention is viewed as crucial to recovery and getting back to work. It should be noted that not all referrals (for any condition) are made when staff are off ill: some are referred while staff are still at work in order to prevent absence.

- 4.4.4 Where work related stress has been identified, the management report aligns the cause to the HSE Stress standards (demands, control, support, role relationships and/or change) and this way the employee and the manager can focus on these areas specifically. Managers are advised to complete Stress Risk Assessments as part of the return to work process.
- 4.4.5 Statutory health surveillance is required for all employees who are exposed to certain defined hazards (such as noise) or to certain processes such as working with vibrating equipment. Health surveillance is any activity which involves obtaining information about employees' health and which helps protect employees from health risks at work. There is also a requirement to offer night workers a health assessment.
- 4.4.6 In addition to identifying early work-related health issues, health surveillance can help identify control measures which are not working as they should. Line Managers should review risk assessments and control measure when they receive reports which indicate that health is being negatively impacted by work.
- 4.4.7 Did not attend appointments (DNAs) are those where the employee fails to give more than 24 hours' notice of being unable to attend their appointment – in many cases there is no communication from the employee at all and they do not turn up. Both manager and employee receive notification of appointments and managers are expected to discuss this with the employee. They are also expected to investigate the reasons for DNAs.
- 4.4.8 Under the terms of the contract, the Council is charged the full appointment cost for DNAs. In 2019/20 there were 52 missed nurse/doctor appointments and 49 missed physiotherapy appointments. This represents a significant cost to the Council and additional work will need to be undertaken to reduce this cost.
- 4.4.9 DNAs will continue to be monitored at Central Safety Committee.

4.5 Fire safety

- 4.5.1 The prioritised programme of fire risk assessments for all Council workplaces has been reviewed, with an emphasis on all schools being assessed at least once. Large office premises and depots/workshops/garages are the next priority.
- 4.5.2 In 2019/20 74 fire risk assessments were conducted: most schools have had at least one assessment since 2010 – there is still a requirement to undertake these in 24 schools and then a programme of periodic reviews will be developed.
- 4.5.3 238 out of 251 offices/workshops/garages have been assessed for fire safety: this includes all the main offices and large depots with a higher fire



risk.

4.5.4 Services should be reviewing progress of the action plans for premises where they have an RPO, at their consultative meetings. Any updates submitted to the Fire Safety Adviser.

5.0 ACT

5.1 Achievements

5.1.1 Updates to the health and safety and management documentation included:

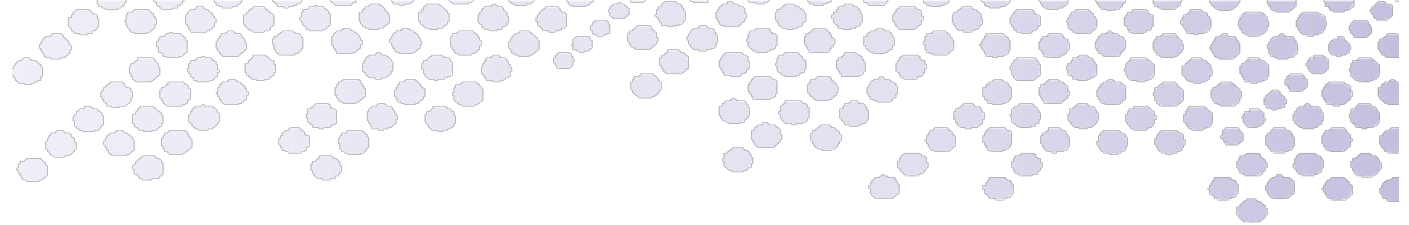
- Corporate Health, Safety and Wellbeing Policy
- First Aid at Work
- Guidance on Health Surveillance
- Working with Computers

5.1.2 March 2019 saw the introduction of a new service for staff, their families and Elected Members. The Employee Assistance Programme, delivered 24/7 by Spectrum.Life was introduced earlier than planned to help provide advice and support for Covid-19. The service includes information and advice on a number of health, legal and financial issue. Quarterly reports on usage of the Service is presented to the Central Safety Committee.

5.1.3 In partnership with colleagues in HR and Learning and Development, the Mental Health Reps training has continued, with additional training for this group of staff on topics such as resilience.

5.1.4 The OHSW team is leading on the development of an open water safety strategy and policy in line with the Scottish Government and Water Safety Scotland guidance. This responsibility has now been transferred to Development and Infrastructure, following an ELT review of the Corporate Risk Register.

5.1.5 With 5 different systems currently being used to record accidents, there is a need to streamline the process and reduce bureaucracy. The development of an electronic health and safety management system is still underway. A number of internal systems were reviewed for suitability and cost but rejected for a number of reasons. Purchasing a system “off the shelf” proved expensive so currently we are looking at how we can use the system developed and used by one of the Council’s partners. Initially the system will enable the capture and manipulation of accident data/trends but will also eventually include data on findings of safety audits/site visits etc. This will improve our ability to compile Service reports (and allow Services to run their own reports) and our ability to respond to FOIs and Insurance claims.



5.1.6 The OHSW team also achieved 100% attendance at Area and Service health and safety consultation groups.

5.1.7 A review of the role of Responsible Premises Officers has commenced, led by Property, with contributions from OHSW Manager and RPOs. This review was halted due to Covid-19 but is now being reconsidered as part of the Return to Workplaces project.