

**The Highland Council
Central Safety Committee**

Minutes of Meeting of the Central Safety Committee held REMOTELY on Tuesday 9 February, 2021 at 10.30 a.m.

Present:

Employer's Representatives:

Mr R Gale
Mr D Louden

Staff Side Representatives:

Mr D Griffiths, GMB
Mr M Hayes, Unison
Ms S McCready, UNITE

In attendance:

Ms E Barrie, Interim Head of HR
Ms G Falconer, Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing Manager
Mr T Murdison, Acting Property Manager
Ms T Urry, Infrastructure & Environment Health & Safety Wellbeing Co-ordinator
Mr I Jackson, (substitute for Education and Learning, Health & Safety Wellbeing Co-ordinator)
Mr F MacDonald, Housing and Property, Health & Safety Wellbeing Co-ordinator
Ms D Sutherland, Corporate Resources, Health & Safety Wellbeing Co-ordinator
Mr A Yates, Community Services, Health & Safety Wellbeing Co-ordinator
Mr C Howell, Caithness, Sutherland & Easter Ross, Operational Area Health and Safety Working Group
Mr W Munro, Inverness, Nairn and Badenoch & Strathspey Operational Area Health and Safety Working Group
Mr A MacInnes, Administrative Assistant

Mr D Griffiths in the Chair

SUBJECT/DECISION

ACTION

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr A MacKinnon, Mr G MacKenzie and Mr S Mackie from the Employer's Side and Mr M Rodgers, ECO Housing & Property, Mr R Cattle, RSL and Ms H Ross, CSER, Operational Area Health and Safety Working Groups.

2. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Minutes of Last Meeting

There had been circulated Minutes of the last meeting of the Committee held on 13 November, 2020, the terms of which were **APPROVED**.

4. Matters Arising from the Minutes

Arising from the Minutes the following matters were raised:-

i Homeworking Issues – some staff had taken home their Posturite chair, but they should be aware that this is set up for their desk in the office and would need to be readjusted to suit their desk at home. A corporate communication would be issued to staff on this point.

**Interim
Head of
HR/
OHSW
Manager**

Continuing, a communication had been issued to staff covering support and guidance on a number of homeworking and related issues. Further staff guidance in relation to recent changes in Government Covid-19 regulations had been issued to trade unions for comment prior to issue.

It was advised that there was a project on modernisation of the working environment as part of the recovery process. The new working normal would be a significant change to how most staff deliver services.

Reference was made to documents received recently for completion of home working risk assessments. It was understood that the guidance on homeworking had not been issued prior to Officers being asked to complete the risk assessment. It was advised that this guidance should already have been issued to Managers as part of the support and guidance on homeworking related issues. However, some Managers may have been missed from the circulation and this would be checked.

**Interim
Head of
HR**

In terms of financial support available to staff working from home, some staff could claim a tax rebate, but for those on small incomes they may not be eligible. However, particularly during winter, staff would have significant increased costs due to heating their homes while working from home. The Council would also be saving money from not having to heat unoccupied offices. In response, it was advised that there was a fuel payment that staff and the wider Highland community could apply for. Further, the Council's Finance Welfare team was looking at what other assistance could be provided with fuel costs. It was also advised that frost protection was still required in Council buildings even though some were vacant. There was also increased costs across the School estate to heat buildings at a comfortable level for vulnerable children and children of key workers. Therefore, there was very little energy savings being made at present.

ii RPO's - It had been requested at the last meeting that the project to review the role and function of the RPO be reinstated. It was advised that it had not been possible to resume this project, but as part of the return to workplace project, the issue ensuring there was enough RPOs for Council premises, was being considered by the Executive Leadership Team (ELT).

Further, the Property team were submitting a report to ELT highlighting concerns regarding Council Hub Offices not having an RPO in place and recommending that Officers be appointed into these RPO positions with additional Facilities Management support for the RPO.

iii Portable Appliance Testing (PAT) – updated guidance would be sent to trade unions for review and comment prior to the guidance being issued to staff.

**OHSW
Manager**

iv Service Trade Union Health and Safety Liaison Groups - higher risk Services would have their own separate health and safety meetings in order to give each Service more time to discuss health and safety issues. The lower risk Services such as Resources/Finance and Performance and Governance were to have shared meetings.

It was noted that Kayrin Murray had been appointed Health and Safety Co-ordinator for the Health and Social Care Service.

5. Minutes of Area Health and Safety Groups and Service Trade Union Health and Safety Liaison Groups

There had been circulated, for information, the Minutes of the:-

Area Health and Safety Groups

- (i) Ross, Skye and Lochaber Health and Safety Group held on 3 December, 2020.
- (ii) Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch & Strathspey Joint Health and Safety Working Group held on 21 January, 2021; and

Service Trade Union Health and Safety Liaison Groups

- (iii) Health and Social Care: Health, Safety and Wellbeing – 4 December, 2020;
- (iv) Education Health, Safety and Wellbeing Consultative Group – Draft Minute 19 November 2020.

The Committee **NOTED** the Area Health and Safety Groups and Service Trade Union Health and Safety Liaison Groups Minutes.

Arising from the Minutes the following matters were considered:-

Ross, Skye and Lochaber Health and Safety Group held on 3 December, 2020

i Covid Related Issues – Sharepoint had a Covid-19 risk assessment site where Services should be uploading their Covid-19 risk assessments.

ii information on the usage of the HR Helpline would be forwarded to Councillor R Gale.

Post Meeting Note:- Total calls to HR helpline between 1st December, 2020 and 31st January, 2021:- 30 calls in December and 78 in January. It should be noted that the helpline is not COVID specific, therefore some of the calls may relate to general HR issues. The

**Interim
Head of
HR**

increase in January is likely to be attributable to the First Minister's announcement on 26th December.

Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross - Drummie Old Bus Depot Fire Risk Assessment and building compliance

It was advised that this was redundant building at the back of the main Drummie offices which appears to have become occupied over time. A fire risk assessment had been undertaken that identified 28 recommendations, 17 of which were rated high and needed to be completed within one month, which given their scope and nature was not going to occur. It was recognised that the building was not fit for purpose. All the occupants of the building were advised that they required to undertake a risk assessment to see if they could introduce mitigation measures to allow the continued use of the building. The building was being used by both the Council and a lessee. Community payback team within the council indicated that they would stop using it, noting this is a statutory duty.

**Head of
Property**

The Property team felt it preferable in the long term to stop using the building and it may be possible to relocate some of the services in it to other premises. The building could also be included in the asset rationalisation programme for disposal if possible. The Property team would work with the occupiers to make their situation better going forward.

**Property
Manager**

6. Occupational Health Service and EAP Services

There had been circulated Report No. CSC/1/21 by the Interim Head of Human Resources.

It was highlighted that the number of people who did not attend appointments (DNAs) especially management referral appointments had increased. Services should remind managers and staff about their joint responsibility for these appointments. The Council was charged the full cost for every missed appointment and DNAs were costing the Council a lot of money.

There had also been a number of missed health surveillance appointments. It was a statutory requirement to attend these appointments. Each one of these appointments cost a lot of money and Services should remind managers and staff of their responsibility for these appointments.

It was advised that Employee Assistance Programme was contacted over 10,000 times in the 3 months covered by the report. The majority of contacts with the service was for mental health reasons.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED** the activity for both Occupational Health and EAP activity for October to December, 2020.

7. Update on Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing Issues

OHSW
Manager

There had been circulated Report No. CSC/2/21 by the Interim Head of Human Resources.

It was highlighted that if Covid-19 was contracted in the workplace, it had to be reported to the Health and Safety Executive as an occupational disease. The Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing team could advise Managers on how to report cases.

In relation to Brexit, whilst the UK has left the EU, it was anticipated that there will be very few health and safety changes which will impact on the Council.

The Supply of Machinery (Safety) Regulations 2008 (as amended in 2011 and 2019) require that Machinery is safe when supplied; comes with a Declaration of Conformity and user instructions in English; and is marked with the UKCA conformity marking, as follows:-



The UKCA conformity marking replaces the requirement for equipment to display European CE marking. The CE mark remains valid until 31 December 2021. Guidance for those who purchase equipment on behalf of the council would be available soon.

Also, as part of the Council's commitment to supporting staff with long term conditions, a suite of new e-learning modules was under development:- self-management of long term conditions. One recently added module related to the self management of Long Covid. The work was being undertaken by the HTSI Project "Let's Get on With It Together" which promotes self-management across the Highlands. It would be available free of charge to the Council.

The Committee **NOTED** the updated information on health, safety and wellbeing issues and developments contained in the report.

8. Accident Investigations

The Staff Side reported that there had been some recent incidents involving both staff and vehicles. These were not being reported to the Trade Unions, yet one incident was RIDDOR reportable and the other involved the Police, VOSA and the Traffic Commissioner. There was a

Partnership Agreement that clearly states that part of the Safety Representatives role is:-

4.0 The Role and Functions of Safety Representatives

8. Investigating notifiable accidents, cases of diseases or ill health and dangerous occurrences.

Trade Union Safety representatives were not being advised or consulted and if an incident occurs it is investigated by the Service and then it is only shared with the Trade Unions. The purpose of any investigation is to discover the route cause and finding out how we can avoid similar incidents, not about looking for blame.

In order to improve the involvement of Trade Unions, the Safety Representatives Charter stated that Managers should be encouraged to involve Safety Representatives. Consideration should be given to changing the wording to making it a requirement for Managers to involve Safety Representatives in the investigation of accidents. It was advised that the Health and Safety Representatives Partnership Agreement and Charter were valid until the end of March, 2021. A review of these documents was underway and once updated would be issued for consultation.

The Staff Side requested that Service Health and Safety Co-ordinators develop an integrated management system for each Service to record an accident and allow Safety representatives to have access to it. It was advised that the lack of an information management system for health and safety was listed on the Council's Corporate Risk Register. Permission had now been received to move ahead with this project.

Further, there had been significant changes to personnel in the Council and new managers may not be aware of the requirements in terms of incident and accident reporting. The Council would continue to raise awareness of staff to incident and accident reporting and combined with a new information management system for health and safety, these measures should go a long way to resolving this issue.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

i It was advised that the Health and Safety Representatives Partnership Agreement and Charter were being reviewed and once updated would be issued for consultation; and

ii the need to continue to raise awareness in terms of the staff requirements of incident and accident reporting.

**Interim
Head of
HR/
OHSW
Manager**

9. Dates for Meetings

The Committee **APPROVED** the undernoted dates of meetings for the Committee for the remainder of 2021:-

Thursday, 3 June – 10.30 a.m.

Wednesday, 15 September – 10.30 a.m.

Friday, 3 December – 10.30 a.m.

The meeting ended at 11.30 a.m.