

**The Highland Council
Central Safety Committee**

Minutes of Meeting of the **Central Safety Committee** held remotely on **Friday 4 February 2022 at 10.30 a.m.**

Present:

Employer's Representatives:

Mr R Gale
Mr J Gray
Mr D Louden
Mr G Mackenzie

Staff Side Representatives:

Mr M Hayes, Unison
Mr I Macleman, Unite/Ucatt

In attendance:

Ms L Denovan, Executive Chief Officer, Resources & Finance
Ms E Barrie, Head of HR, Resources & Finance Service
Ms G Falconer, Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing Manager, Resources & Finance Service
Mr F MacDonald, Property & Housing Health & Safety Wellbeing Co-ordinator
Ms T Urry, Infrastructure & Environment Health & Safety Wellbeing Co-ordinator
Mr J Shepherd, Head of ICT & Digital Transformation
Ms K Murray, Health & Social Care Health & Safety Wellbeing Co-ordinator
Mr I Jackson, (substitute) Education and Learning, Health & Safety Wellbeing Co-ordinator
Ms D Sutherland, Resources & Finance/Performance & Governance/Transformation, Health & Safety Wellbeing Co-ordinator
Mr A Yates, Communities & Place Service, Health & Safety Wellbeing Co-ordinator
Mr C Howell, CSER, Operational Area Health & Safety Working Group
Ms H Ross, CSER, Operational Area Health & Safety Working Group
Mr W Mackinnon, Ross, Skye and Lochaber, Operational Area Health and Safety Working Group
Mr A MacInnes, Administrative Assistant, Performance & Governance Service

Mr J Gray in the Chair

SUBJECT/DECISION

ACTION

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr D Griffiths, GMB of the Staff Side; Mr R Cattle, Ross, Skye and Lochaber, Operational Area Health and Safety Working Group and Mr W Munro, Inverness, Nairn and Badenoch & Strathspey Operational Area Health and Safety Working Group.

2. Declarations of Interest

Item 4 – Mr R Gale (non-financial)

3. Minutes of Last Meeting

There had been circulated Minutes of the last meeting of the Committee held on 3 December 2021, the terms of which were **APPROVED**.

4. Matters Arising from the Minutes

Declaration of interest - Mr R Gale declared a non financial interest in the following item, as a family member was an employee of Police Scotland, but having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that his interest did not preclude his involvement in the discussion.

Serious Assaults at Inverness High School – there had been circulated confidential response from Police Scotland in relation to incidents at Inverness High School.

Police Scotland were keen to work with partners to ensure the safety of staff and pupils within schools. It was advised that the Occupational, Health, Safety and Wellbeing Manager (OHSWM) met regularly with Police Scotland's Counter Terrorism team at which there had been discussions on security at schools. In particular, a Police Architect would help the Council at the design stage of new premises and particularly schools to ensure the design was safe in terms of security. It would be useful to have further discussions with the Police to discuss the issue of response times to incidents at schools and whether there was a need for staff training on how to deal with intruders in a safe and legal manner and whether schools should be provided with a security procedure for dealing with an internal or external threat.

Thereafter, it was **AGREED** that the Secretaries to the Highland Secondary Head Teachers Association and Primary Head Teachers Representative Group be asked to liaise with the Area Commander Police Scotland to discuss security issues at schools and disseminate appropriate security advice to schools.

Clerk

Safe use of woodwork machinery – it was advised that there were various strands of action ongoing including a member of the Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing (OHSW) team visiting all schools to identify staff who had been trained and those who had not on woodwork machinery. Also, initial discussions had been held with the Scottish Schools Education Research Council on the potential for Highland to have its own training centre for woodwork machinery.

**H&S Co-ordinator
Education**

A further update on progress would be provided at the next meeting of the Committee.

Continuing, if there was a trainer for Building maintenance staff on woodwork machinery, this could be an option for providing training to staff in schools.

OHSWM

Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing Policies – the OHSWM, trade union representatives and Health and Safety Service Co-

ordinators had met to discuss the Corporate and Service Health and Safety Policies. Some potential changes to the documents were proposed. Further consultation would take place on these changes before the final policies were submitted to this Committee for approval.

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:-

Area Health and Safety Groups

- (i) Ross, Skye and Lochaber – 9 December, 2021.
- (ii) Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch & Strathspey – 20 January, 2022;

Service Trade Union Health and Safety Liaison Groups

- (iii) Health and Social Care Service – 14 January, 2022;
- (iv) Draft Communities and Places Service – 24 January, 2022;
- (v) Housing and Property Service – 19 January, 2022.

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 general matters were raised:-

i Ross, Skye and Lochaber minutes - Security at Tigh na Sgìre was noted as being of concern. It was advised that work was planned on the roof of Tigh na Sgìre and work on improving security in the building was to be carried out at the same time.

ii Communities and Places – it was noted that there had been a number of minor accidents in the Carrs Corner Depot and it was queried what the cause of this was. It was understood that the Head of Performance and Resources, Communities and Place had been tasked with addressing this issue and an update would be sought on progress.

**Community
Services
H&S Co-
ordinator**

6. **Health, Safety and Wellbeing Policy – Infrastructure, Environment & Economy**

There had been circulated Report No. CSC/1/22 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment & Economy which provided a copy of the Health, Safety and Wellbeing Policy for the Infrastructure, Environment & Economy Service.

In particular, it was highlighted that the policy would require to be revised to reflect any changes arising from the review of the Corporate Health, Safety Wellbeing Policy. Recognition was given to the input from trade unions and the OHSW team to the Policy.

The Committee **NOTED** the Infrastructure, Environment & Economy Service Health, Safety and Wellbeing Policy.

7. Update on Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing Issues

There was circulated Report No. CSC/2/22 by the Head of HR which provided an update on health and safety issues and developments for the Highland Council.

It was highlighted that a health and safety awareness course for Elected Members had been developed and this would be included in the Elected Member induction post Election.

Further, a new piece of legislation would place additional security responsibilities on local authorities. In addition to protecting premises, local authorities would also be responsible for managing the security of “grey spaces”, i.e. the roads, pavements, paths etc between buildings. Training on the new Protect legislation had been offered to the relevant Executive Chief Officers.

It was noted that 3 Health and Safety Adviser posts had been re-advertised as it had been challenging to fill these posts. Alongside this the option of encouraging applications from former Armed Forces personnel on a temporary or permanent basis was being looked at in line with the Council’s Armed Forces commitment.

As a result of Covid, many training certificates for employees such as First Aid certificates were out of date. With the relaxing of Covid restrictions it was hoped that more training could now start to be delivered.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

- i **NOTED** the updated information on health, safety and wellbeing issues and developments contained in the report; and
- ii **AGREED** to escalate the requirement to have all CCTV operators (and those who may have access to CCTV) appropriately trained in order to ensure the Council is meeting all legislative requirements.

OHSWM

8. Update on Occupational Health, Safety and Employee Assistance Programme Services

There had been circulated Report No. CSC/3/22 by the Head of HR which provided an update on the work of the occupational health service and the Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) for the period October – December, 2021.

It was highlighted that there had been a reduction in did not attend appointments which was good news, and everyone involved in encouraging staff to attend their occupational health appointments were thanked for their efforts.

There had been a significant increase in referrals as a result of long term absence and requests for consideration of ill health retirement. This increase was as a result of the pressures on the NHS due to Covid-19. Staff had reported delays and cancellations for GP or specialist

appointments, along with a similar impact on operations or treatment. The Council were now in the position where a number of staff were on a half pay or no pay situation due to these delays which was of no fault of their own. The OHSWM undertook to ask Services to identify how many employees were in a no pay category.

OHSWM

It was highlighted that there was specific criteria which had to be met for an employee to be eligible for ill health retirement and the Council had looked at whether there was any discretion to allow employees access to ill health retirement. However, the advice was that any discretion would require changes to pension scheme legislation. Other Authorities were being contacted as to what they were doing on this issue and consideration was being given as to what other support could be given to staff in this situation, such as whether jobs could be redesigned. An update on progress with solutions to supporting staff in a no pay situation would be provided at the next meeting.

There were benefits available for those with health issues, low income or for those not working and some trade unions had a benevolent fund to help their members who were in a difficult financial situation. All Staff in this situation should be made aware of the benefits that were available and perhaps a referral to the Council's Welfare team would be beneficial. An undertaking was given to look at what support and information could be provided to staff, such as through the Welfare team and Employee Assistance Programme. Information on what financial advice the EAP provided would be shared with the Committee.

OHSWM

The Committee **NOTED:-**

i the activity for both Occupational Health and the EAP for October to December, 2021; and

ii the Interim Head of HR would consider what support and information could be provided to staff who were in a difficult financial situation such as through the Welfare team and the Employee Assistance Programme.

Head of HR

9. Property Related Health and Safety Issues

There had been circulated Report No. CSC/4/22 by the Executive Chief Officer Property and Housing.

In particular, it was welcomed that an additional one-off budget allocation of £2.850m had been provided for 2021/2023 to deal with a number of priority compliance issues.

There was to be a change in the way The Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) responded to fire alarms and they will not be responding to every alarm that goes off and it will be up to the organisation to check if there was an actual fire or not. This highlighted the importance of the Responsible Premises Officer (RPO) project and to ensure RPO's were appropriately trained. A meeting was to be held with the SFRS to discuss the new arrangements. There was the

potential for the Building maintenance team to be included in the future call out service for the RPO team.

A number of positive legionella samples had been returned following a focused sampling programme at three PPP sites. Officers were working with the PPP provider to resolve these issues. The Health and Safety Executive would recover the costs that it incurs for the work it does in relation to these contraventions. It was the Council's view that these costs should be passed onto the PPP provider and this would be subject to discussion with them. An update on this would be provided at a future meeting.

**Property
Manager**

Further, steps continued to be taken to address non-compliance on asbestos management arrangements. Training in Asbestos Awareness had been rolled out and the Health and Safety Executive were being updated on progress.

The Committee **NOTED** the current levels of statutory compliance and overall progress being made.

The meeting ended at 12.05 p.m.