

Agenda Item	8
Report No	CC/16/25

Committee: Caithness

Date: 28th April 2025

Report Title: Environmental Health - Annual Report and Activity 2024/25

Report By: Assistant Chief Executive – Place

1. Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report is to provide an update to Members on the Environmental Health team and provide an annual report on local activity during 2024/25.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked to:-

- i. **Note** the range and volume of work being undertaken locally by the environmental health team;
- ii. **Note** Highland wide issues; and
- iii. **Note** the report format and content

3. Implications

- 3.1 **Resource** – The resources available to Environmental Health have to be prioritised, focusing on areas of greatest public health significance. The team continually explores ways to delivering services more efficiently and within budget including reviewing associated income streams, working with COSLA regarding resource allocation and seeking efficiencies in working practice and team structure.
- 3.2 **Legal** - As a regulatory service the Environmental Health team have a wide range of statutory duties. The team have an Enforcement Policy in place and officers follow the five principles of better regulation - regulation should be transparent, accountable, consistent, proportionate and targeted.
Please note that for purposes of this report no reference is made to individuals or businesses to ensure compliance with Data Protection and not to impact on any ongoing investigations or court proceedings.

- 3.3 **Risk** – There is current pressures on the environmental health profession and challenges in workforce planning. These challenges have been noted by COSLA and the Scottish Government. Work is ongoing with the Royal Environmental Health Institute of Scotland (REHIS) and the Society of Chief Officers of Environmental Health in Scotland (SoCOEHS) to increase resilience of the service and a sustainable workforce. A BSc course at University of the West of Scotland which includes an integrated placement with Councils has closed, with a replacement course being planned. Currently there is no method of new entrants training to become an EHO in Scotland. Environmental Health currently have three students already enrolled in the UWS course and one student will qualify in 2026, with two others qualifying in 2027. Two Food Safety Officers have recently completed their training and have successfully passed their professional qualifications last month. This includes one officer in Caithness.
- 3.4 **Health and Safety (risks arising from changes to plant, equipment, process, or people)** – There are no staff Health, Safety and Wellbeing implications arising from this report.
- 3.5 **Gaelic** - There are no Gaelic implications arising from this report.

4. Impacts

- 4.1 In Highland, all policies, strategies or service changes are subject to an integrated screening for impact for Equalities, Poverty and Human Rights, Children's Rights and Wellbeing, Climate Change, Islands and Mainland Rural Communities, and Data Protection. Where identified as required, a full impact assessment will be undertaken.
- 4.2 Considering impacts is a core part of the decision-making process and needs to inform the decision-making process. When taking any decision, Members must give due regard to the findings of any assessment.
- 4.3 This is a monitoring or update report and therefore an impact assessment is not required.

5. Background

- 5.1 Members may be aware that Environmental Health submit an annual operational plan for Member approval. The plan details the objectives for the whole of the Environmental Health team, including the priorities for the year ahead. The latest 2024/2025 plan was approved by the Communities and Place Committee on 6th March 2024 – link to report [here](#). An updated plan will be submitted in May.
- 5.2 This operational plan gave a commitment to provide reports on Environmental Health Activity and performance to local committees. The purpose being to increase awareness of the activities covered locally by the Environmental Health team, and to seek feedback from local Members on both the work being carried out and/or any local issues going forward that may wish to see prioritised.

- 5.3 Environmental Health conduct a wide range of statutory duties on behalf of the Council with the general remit to protect and improve public health. This includes:-

Public Health Protection

This includes private water supplies, statutory nuisances (e.g. foul odours; smoke; premises in such a state etc), smoking in public places, port health, and communicable disease investigation (e.g. Food-borne / waterborne disease, legionnaires Disease).

Food Safety

This includes an enforcement and advisory role in all aspects of food hygiene, food labelling, and food export certification.

Health and Safety,

This includes an enforcement and advisory role for all aspects of health and safety at work in Local Authority enforced premises, particularly the investigation of workplace accidents.

Private Sector Housing

This includes an enforcement and advisory role in sub-standard housing, closing and demolition orders, Houses in Multiple Occupation and housing defects. It also includes the administration of housing improvement and repairs grants.

Pollution Control

This includes an enforcement and advisory role in respect of noise control (commercial and domestic) and local air quality management.

Contaminated Land

This includes a regulatory and enforcement role for contaminated land prevention through development control. The team also provide an advisory role to other Council services on asset transfer and development.

Animal Health and Welfare

This includes an enforcement and advisory role in all aspects of Animal Health legislation. For example, dealing with disposal of animal carcasses on farm and taking animals into possession in serious farm welfare cases.

Licensing

This includes a general enforcement and advisory role for activities licensed under the Civic Government legislation, including short term lets. The Environmental Health team also have an administrative and enforcement role in respect of the licensing of caravan sites, venison dealers, animal boarding establishments, pet shops, zoos, cinemas, riding establishments, sports grounds and dangerous wild animals.

Dog Control,

This includes an enforcement and advisory role in respect of stray dogs, dangerous/aggressive dogs, dog fouling and micro-chipping.

Pest Control, Litter, Fly-tipping, Waste Duty of Care, Abandoned Vehicles.

This includes a general enforcement and educational role regarding such issues. The team work closely with the Councils waste team and SEPA regarding waste and fly tipping issues.

- 5.4 Much of the work is pro-active and preventative. The team has an important role in ensuring the Highlands maintains its reputation of a safe and healthy place in which to live, work and holiday. We aim to support local businesses by providing advice on appropriate regulations and ensuring any regulatory activity follows the five principles of better regulation: Proportionate, Consistent, Accountable, Transparent and Targeted. This includes successfully adopting a '4Es' approach - **E**ngage, **E**xplain, **E**ncourage and **E**nforce in responding to the vast majority of cases.
- 5.5 The Environmental Health operate three operational areas: **North**, **Mid** and **West**, with Caithness being part of the North Team. The North Team has one Senior Environmental Health Officer who manages officers covering the different functions for both Caithness and Sutherland. This SEHO is based in Caithness. For the Mid area, three SEHOs manage the officers, two from Inverness, with the third based in Dingwall. For the West, one SEHO manages the team.

There are five posts (4.6 FTE) based in Caithness House; they are:

2 x Environmental Health Officers (1.6 FTE)

1 x Food Safety Officer (1 FTE)

1 x Education and Enforcement Officer (Dog Warden) (1 FTE)

1 x Animal Health and Welfare Officer (covers Caithness and Sutherland) (1 FTE)

Officers completing work relating to private sector grants, private water supplies, animal health and short term let inspections conduct duties throughout the North area, with all bar the Animal Welfare Officer being based in Sutherland. All officers will also undertake cross boundary work to support the Mid and West teams as and when necessary. Any work related to contaminated land is delivered from our Mid team.

SEHO also have a Highland wide functional lead role for key statutory areas of work. This functional lead role includes developing policy and operational guidance and supporting officers with significant/complex cases.

Appendix 1 details the latest team structure for Environmental Health and includes a map of the relevant EH operational areas.

6. Summary of Environmental Health Activity/Local Issues

6.1 For the purpose of this report, the Environmental Health activity has been split into three main areas. These are outlined below:-

- i. **Reactive work** (i.e. service requests);
- ii. **Pro-active/scheduled work** (i.e. programmed inspections/visits); and
- iii. **Formal Enforcement Activity** (i.e. Formal enforcement notices and reports to Procurator Fiscal)

For each area of activity, the relevant figures have been obtained from our case management system and presented as a total figure for both Caithness wards (i.e. Wards 2 and 3). See Fig 1 below for ease of reference.

Fig 1 – Ward Areas covered by Report



All data is for the period between **1st April 2024 – 31st March 2025.**

Reactive Work

- 6.2 Table 1 below provides the number of Service requests (*i.e. complaints; requests for advice; consultations etc*) received by the Environmental Health team, broken down by the general type category. A more detailed breakdown within each of the general category types is contained within **Appendix 2**.

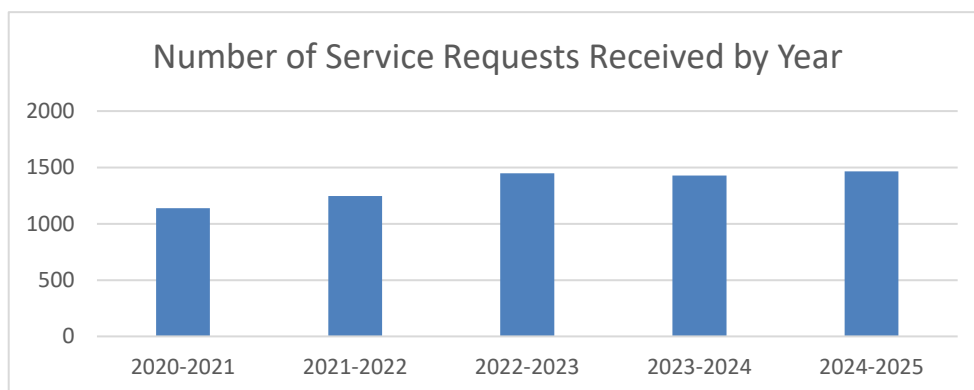
Table 1: Number of Service Requests by General Category Type for Wards 2 and 3

Category Type	Total Number of Service Requests 2024/2025
Noise	99
Statutory Nuisance	64
Food Safety	133
Health and Safety	40
Civic Government Licensing	15
Miscellaneous Licensing	91
Short Term Let Licensing	184
HMO Licensing	4
Animal health	114
Housing	79
Pests (e.g. mice, rats, seagulls etc.)	19
Water Supply (inc PWS)	45
Dog Control	56
Planning Consultations	70
Export Health Certificates	84
Fly Tipping/Waste/Trade Waste	36
Litter	8
Abandoned Vehicles	163
S87 Public Health Funerals	5
Infectious Disease/HPT Referral	6

The total number of Service requests received by the Environmental Health team for these wards was **1466**.

This continues the post Covid trend of increased numbers of service requests. There is a general trend of increasing numbers of service requests across Highland. It reflects the increased statutory duties undertaken by the Service. Fig 1 illustrates.

Fig 1 – Comparison of Service Request demand between 2020 – 2024 within Wards 2 and 3.



In addition, 291 planning applications being screened by Contaminated Land Officers, with 133 of these being in Thurso and Northwest Caithness and 158 being in Wick and East Caithness.

- 6.3 Table 2 below provides the number of Housing Scheme of Assistance and Private Water Supply Improvement Grants that have been approved during the period within Wards 2 and 3.

Table 2 – Number and value of Approved Grants

Type	Number	Total Value of Grants
Scheme of Assistance Housing Grant – Adaptation (for installation of stairlifts; level access showers and access ramps etc)	6	£45,180
Scheme of Assistance Housing Grant – Repair (for significant essential repairs of privately owned property)	5	£53,512
Private Water Supply Grants (i.e. to improve the quality of private water supply)	1	£800

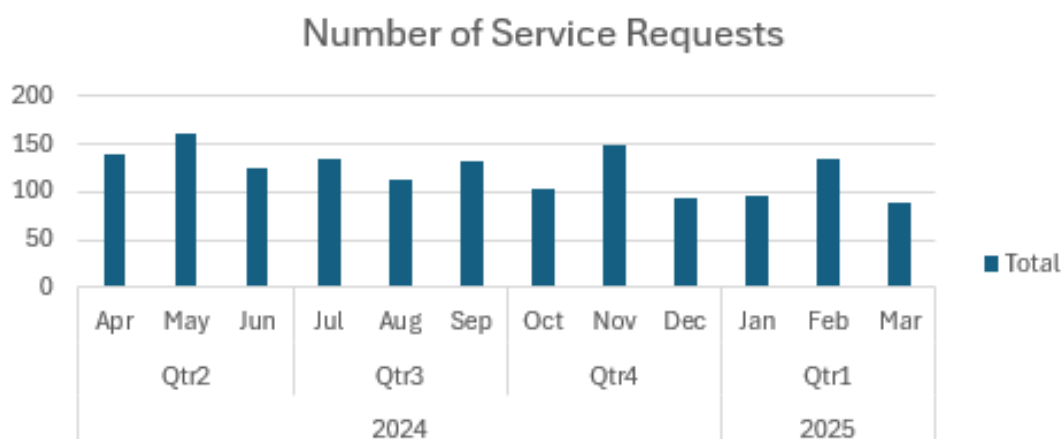
- 6.4 To provide an indication as to the different demand between the ward areas, a breakdown of the numbers within the individual ward areas is shown in Table 3 below.

Table 3 – Service Request Numbers by Ward Area

Ward No	Area	Total No of Service Requests
2	Thurso and Northwest Caithness	786
3	Wick and East Caithness	680
Total		1466

- 6.5 Unusually when compared to other areas in Highland, there is no significant fluctuation of service request numbers between summer months and the rest of the year.

Fig 2 – Monthly breakdown of Service Request Demand



- 6.6 As well as being a statutory consultee for miscellaneous licences, Environmental Health also administer the issuing of these licences. Miscellaneous licensing includes animal boarding, breeding and selling, riding establishments, caravan sites, cinemas, dangerous wild animals, performing animals, venison dealers and zoos. Full details [here](#).

In Caithness, 17 such licences have been issued, this is in keeping with previous years.

Pro-Active/Scheduled Work

- 6.7 The Environmental Health team conduct a range of programmed work, particularly in respect of food safety where a significant number of inspections are conducted of food businesses to check compliance. Such work is in addition to responding to Service Requests.

A breakdown of the number of programmed inspections/visits that were undertaken for the period **1st April 2023 – 31st March 2024** within Wards 2 and 3 is detailed within Table 4 below.

Table 4 - Pro-Active Inspections/Visits by Type

Inspection/Visit Type	No of Inspections/Visits Conducted
Food Safety	122
Water Sampling	10
Miscellaneous Licensing	24
Health and Safety	1

Please note that these figures **do not** include any reactive inspections/visits conducted in response to a Service Request (i.e. complaints).

Three private water risk assessments have been completed in Caithness. Private water supplies are relatively uncommon in Caithness with a total of only 50 supplies, 10 of which are Type A supplies which require a risk assessment. Most properties are supplied with mains water from Scottish Water.

Note there are eight approved establishments in Caithness. These are premises which are classified as food manufacturers and/ or processors. These require an enhanced level of intervention at regular intervals throughout the year.

Formal Enforcement Activity

- 6.8 Whilst the vast majority of service requests and issues identified by the Environmental health team are satisfactory resolved without the need to pursue formal enforcement action (i.e. by following the 4 Es approach), there is always a number of cases due to their seriousness or failure of the duty holder to comply, where formal enforcement action is required.

A breakdown of the number and type of enforcement notices that have been served between 1st April 2023 and 31st March 2024 in Wards 2 and 3 are detailed in Table 5 below.

Table 5 – Enforcement Notices Served between 1st April 2023 and 31st March 2024

Notice Type	Number Served
Health and Safety	
Improvement Notice	1
Prohibition Notice	1
Environmental Protection - Accumulations	1
Fly-tipping fixed penalty	1
Animal Health and Welfare	3

One of the animal health and welfare notices involved the seizure of around 120 sheep and significant numbers of lambs.

All enforcement notices were complied with by the duty holder.

- 6.9 There has been one case involving animal health and welfare offences which has been submitted to the procurator fiscal, and this is currently progressing through the court. There are other significant animal health and welfare cases which are ongoing which have the potential to result in cases being reported.

Local Matters

6.10 Border Control Post (BCP) in Scrabster

Following Great Britain leaving the EU, controls on imports of products from the EU were required from 30 April 2024.

Scrabster Harbour received substantial quantities of farmed salmon from the Faroe Islands, and to allow this trade to continue Environmental Health were required to set up a BCP at Scrabster. This BCP is staffed with officers from Caithness, with support from an officer in Sutherland and an officer in Inverness. The process of setting up the BCP took over a year of joint working with Scrabster Harbour Trust and the building was designated as a BCP by the Scottish Government in time for checks to start on 30 April 2024.

Scrabster is the only BCP designated for the import of food in Highland and is one of only three BCPs with this designation in Scotland.

The importer of farmed salmon redesigned their business model in the autumn of 2024, so the import of Faroese fish is currently suspended. We are hopeful that this trade will re-start and the BCP remains available for the import of fish.

A total of 190 consignments of fish were cleared through the Scrabster BCP.

6.11 Abandoned Vehicles

As can be seen there is a significant number of abandoned vehicles reported to our Service for investigation. We received 163 service requests which equates to around 11% of the total service requests for Caithness. These take up a significant resource in investigating and following up and are often found not to be truly “abandoned” vehicles. The team have been working with colleagues in the Housing and Parking enforcement teams to continually improve the response to abandoned vehicles. Improvement have been made to the Council website, cost recovery and a pilot of a new approach to housing car park areas in being trialled in Easter Ross. Improvement work in this area will continue in 2025/26.

6.12 Dog Control/Littering

There were 100 cases reported to the team relating to dog control, litter and fly-tipping in the last year. A single officer who deals with dog control, litter, fly-tipping and abandoned vehicles in Caithness. This is in keeping with other areas across Highland.

Officers have carried out 38 pro-active patrols in respect of dog fouling and littering across Caithness, with dog fouling signage being affixed to lampposts in 13 villages where we have a history of issuing being reported to us. This activity will continue in the coming year. If there are areas which are felt should be priorities, then please let us know.

7. Highland Wide Issues/Service Priorities

- 7.1 The short term lets licensing regime commenced on 1 October 2022. The team have a key role as a consultee on applications, assessing compliance at licensed premises and responding to complaints. The team across Highland responded to around 70-80 consultations per week. It is estimated that there could be up to 10,000 short term let properties within Highland. The implementation of the scheme will continue to be a priority and require significant resource going forward. Currently the short term let consultations for Caithness are covered by an officer from Sutherland.
- 7.2 There have been new licensing requirements introduced for animal breeders (dog, cat and rabbit) and certain animal welfare establishments. This includes rehoming centres and animal sanctuaries. The new licensing schemes are in the process of being implemented. Following a Scottish Government consultation in 2023, the team are awaiting confirmed proposals on extending animal licensing to cover activities such as dog walking, dog grooming, livery services, and canine fertility services. It is expected that canine fertility services will be licences from April 2026, with no current planned date for the other activities, although an update on this is expected in the next year.
- 7.3 The Environmental Health team are continuing with EU exit related activities including undertaking inspections / audits of exporting food businesses to verify legislative compliance; provision of Export Health Certification; and liaison with UK and Scottish Government on import controls. As well as assisting with the arrangement of audits by countries we export to.
- 7.4 The team is continuing with the implementation of a new national approach to inspection of Approved Food Establishments – Official Control Verification (OCV). This approach, required across 8 establishments in Caithness, has substantially increased to resourcing required to inspect such premises.

Approved Establishments are manufacturers of products of animal origin (i.e. smokehouses; fish processors, dairies, manufacturing butchers etc)

- 7.5 There is a current consultation from the Scottish Government covering the regulation of non-surgical cosmetic procedures. This is likely to bring additional work for environmental health as some of these procedures are likely to fall to us to enforce standard at. We do not have a definitive count of the number of such premises in operation in Caithness, but we expect it to be somewhere between 6 – 12 premises.

7.6 SSEN Network – Pathway to 2030

SSEN Transmission is currently consulting on and undertaking significant work to upgrade the electricity transmission network across the North of Scotland. Officers from each of our three EH operational teams are involved in assessing and responding to consultations for overhead line and substation proposals. Such work has been ongoing throughout the last year and will continue through 2025/26 and beyond. Particular input is being required in respect of assessing complex noise assessments and any potential noise impacts arising from such developments.

8. Going Forward

- 8.1 The local team will continue to follow the priorities as set by the Environmental Health Operational plan and respond to any local emerging issues as and when they arise. Any urgent public health issues will always continue to be prioritised.
- 8.2 The local team would welcome feedback on this report, particularly regarding the usefulness and type of data presented; the report format and any information that Members would wish to see for future reports. Additionally, the local team would want to know if there are any local issues that Members consider should be prioritised or be given increased attention, we would welcome comments.

Designation: Assistant Chief Executive - Place

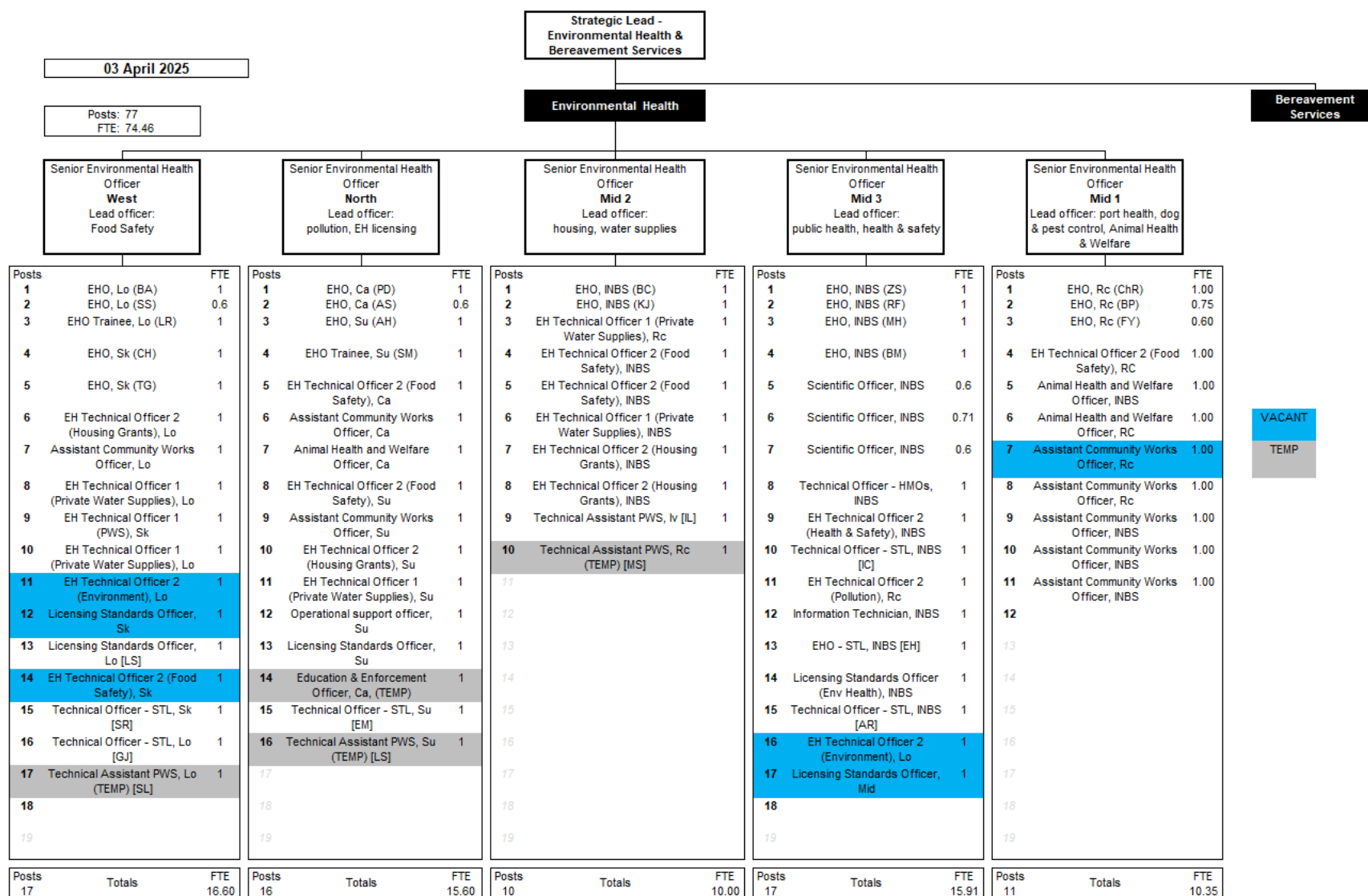
Date: 3 April 2025

Author: Daniel Hopwood (Senior Environmental Health officer)

Background Papers: None

Appendices: Appendix 1 – Environmental Health Team Structure and EH Operational Areas
Appendix 2 – Detailed breakdown of service request numbers within each of the general category types

Appendix 1 - Current Environmental Health Team Structure and Operational Areas



EH Operational Areas



Appendix 2

Detailed breakdown of service request numbers within each of the general category types

Animal Health and Welfare	A01 ABP ENQUIRY	2
	A02 Animal welfare ENQUIRY	16
	A03 ANIMAL - General ENQUIRY (not nuisance etc)	31
	A04 Animal disease ENQUIRY	5
	A05 Animal traceability ENQUIRY	5
	A11 ABP COMPLAINT	10
	A12 Animal welfare COMPLAINT	13
	A14 Animal disease COMPLAINT	21
	A15 Animal traceability COMPLAINT	7
	A16 WATSR COMPLAINT	4
Dog Control	D01 DC Dog Fouling	30
	D02 DC Stray Dog CALL OFFICER IMMEDIATELY	9
	D04 DC Aggressive Dog	5
	D05 DC Dog Bite - Person	3
	D06 DC Dog Bite - Animal	1
	D07 DC Dog - Other	8
Planning and Other Consultations	E02 Planning – General CONSULTATION (enter type code)	70
	E11 SEPA Consultation/Enquiry	4
	E15 EIR (Environmental Information Request)	3
	E16 Planning – MAJOR Applications (enter type code)	19
	E18 Planning – ENQUIRY (enter type code)	8
Misc	E17 GENERAL EH Enquiry	126
	E12 FOI request	9
	OA1 Other	32
	G05 Grounds Maintenance - Trees	1
	G15 Public Conveniences	1
	N42 Blue Green Algae ALERT	1
	N89 Air quality complaint	3
Abandoned Vehicles	G01 Abandoned Vehicle	163
Litter and Fly-tipping	G03 Grounds Maintenance - Litter	1
	G09 Street Cleaning	1
	G11 Litter	7
	G16 Roadkill - removal of dead animals from verge	10
	G21 Fly-tipping - Non-Urgent	36
	N60 Routine Refuse Complaint	1
Health and Safety	H03 H and S Complaint (Non Work Related)	21
	H11 HandS Request For Information	5
	H19 RIDDOR Accident Notification	3
	H20 H and S Complaint (Work Related/ HASAWA)	5
	H23 H and S Request for Information/ Advice	3
	H26 H and S Safety at Sports Ground Intervention/ Visit	3

Licensing Consultations	LAB Miscellaneous Licensing Enquiry (enter type code)	14
	LAC Miscellaneous Licensing Consultation (enter type code)	74
	LAD Miscellaneous Licensing complaint (enter type code)	3
	LBB Civic Government Licensing Enquiry (enter type code)	6
	LBC Civic Government Licensing Consultation (enter type code)	8
	LBE Short Term Let Licensing Consultation	182
	LBF Short Term Let Licensing Enquiry	1
	LBG Short Term Let Licensing Complaint	1
	LCC Liquor Licensing Consultation (enter type code)	1
	LDB HMO Complaint - Licensed Premises [Enter Type Code CHC-CHF]	1
	LDC HMO Complaint - Unlicensed Premises [Enter Type Code CHC-CHF]	3
Noise	N05 Noise Advice Enquiry (enter type code)	22
	N06 Noise Non-Domestic (enter type code)	21
	N07 Noise Domestic (enter type code)	56
Other Statutory Nuisance	N21 Premises - Dirty Houses and Gardens	16
	N31 Foul Odours	12
	N32 Dust Complaint	2
	N33 Smoke Complaint	14
	N34 General Nuisance - Other	10
	N37 Water Nuisance	2
	N40 Choked/Defective Drain / Sewer	5
	N41 Choked/Defective Septic Tank	3
	N62 Animal waste nuisance (not dog fouling-use code D01)	3
	N63 Animal/Whale etc Carcass	1
Public Health Burials	NBB National Assistance Burial enquiry/request (s50)	3
	NBF Other burial/body enquiry	2
Housing	NGB Housing grant enquiry	47
	NGD Housing grant application	8
	NHB Housing general enquiry	3
	NHC Housing complaint - dampness	3
	NHD Housing complaint - structural	1
	NHE Housing complaint - other	3
	NHG Request for Housing Condition Report	8
	NHZ Ukraine Refugee Property Check	6
Pest Control	P03 Mice large inf HIGH (enter type)	1
	P04 Rats aff. House HIGH (enter type)	1
	P05 Wasps HIGH (enter type)	1
	P06 Mice small inf.LOW (enter type)	1
	P08 Rats NOT aff. House LOW (enter type)	7
	P09 Bees LOW (enter type)	1
	P11 Flies LOW (enter type)	1
	P15 Gulls LOW (enter type)	4
	P19 Other bird pest LOW (enter type)	2
Food Safety and Standards	X02 Food Premises Registration	55
	X05 FOOD SAFETY enquiry/consultation	23
	X07 FISH/Shellfish EXPORT Certificates	81
	X08 FOOD (non Fish/Shellfish) EXPORT Health Certificates	3
	X10 Approval/Lic/Auth application FH	1

	X11 Shellfish REGISTRATION Documents	11
	X16 Fishing Vessel Registration	3
	X19 FSS SHELLFISH - Sample FAILURE	1
	X41 Complaint: Food (Unfit, Microbiological, foreign body)	8
	X42 Complaint: Hygiene of Premises	13
	X43 Complaint: Food Standards - item (composition, labelling etc.)	2
	X46 APPROVED EST Hygiene of Premises complaint	1
	X47 APPROVED EST Food Standards Complaint - item	1
	X49 Support Attestation	8
	XIB ID REPORT from public	1
	XIC ID CONFIRMED Notification from NHS Highland	3
	XIF ID ADVISORY Notification from NHS Highland	2
Port Health	XPB Port Health enquiry/consultation	1
	XPC Ship Sanitation Certificate Request	1
Water Supply	XW1 Private supply grant enquiry	2
	XWB Private supply enquiry (non grant)	37
	XWC Private supply complaint/contamination report	3
	XWF Private supply other consultation	1
	XWH Private supply STL Questionnaire	1
	XWR Public Supply Incident (significant/major)	1