

## The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Central Safety Committee** held in Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness/remotely on **Monday, 17 March 2025 at 2.00pm.**

**Present:**

**Employer's Representatives:**

Mr R Gale (remote)  
Mr D Louden  
Mr P Oldham (remote)  
Ms M Reid (substitute)

**Staff Side Representatives:**

Mr A Bell, LNCT (remote)  
Mr M Smith, Unite/Ucatt (remote)  
Ms S Purdie, RCN

**In attendance:**

Mr I Kyle, Health & Social Care, Health & Safety Wellbeing Co-ordinator (substitute)  
Ms E Barrie, Head of People  
Mr D Cowie (**DC**), Occupational, Health, Safety & Wellbeing Manager  
Mr T Murdison (**TM**), Service Lead, Corporate Property Management  
Ms D Sutherland, Corporate Health & Safety Wellbeing Co-ordinator  
Ms T Urry (**TU**), Infrastructure & Environment Health & Safety Co-ordinator  
Mr A Yates (**AY**), Communities & Place, Health & Safety Wellbeing Co-ordinator  
Mrs A MacPherson (**AMcPh**), Education & Learning, Health & Safety Wellbeing Co-ordinator  
Ms D Ferguson, Ross, Skye & Lochaber Area  
Ms H Ross, Caithness, Sutherland & Easter Ross Area  
Mr W Munro, Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch & Strathspey Area.  
Mr A MacInnes, Senior Committee Officer, Corporate Service

Item No.	Subject/Decision	Action
1.	<b>Apologies for Absence</b>  Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr B Lobban, Mr C Munro of the Employer's Side, and Mr D Griffiths, Ms L Mackay of the Staff Side.	
2.	<b>Declarations of Interest/Transparency Statement</b>  There were no declarations of interest/transparency statements.	
3.	<b>Update on Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing initiative and activities</b>  There was circulated Report No. CSC/1/25 by the Head of People.  The report provided an update on fire, health, safety and wellbeing issues and developments for the Highland Council for the Q3 period of October to December 2024. It reviewed activities arising from Health & Safety Executive interventions; activities and initiatives of the OHSW team as well as proposed changes to strategies or policies.	

	<p>It was highlighted that there had been 29 fire risk assessments undertaken for the Council and 5 for High Life Highland in the Q3 period; the new violence and aggression reporting system Assure had now gone live and since its launch about 2 weeks ago there had been 14 violence and aggression incidents reported; an update was provided on health and safety team recruitment and information provided on accident statistics.</p> <p>Further, there had been 30 Viva Engage articles on the health and safety page and 31 articles on the mental health and wellbeing page. There had been regular positive feedback on these articles with employees sharing them and the Committee were also invited to share these articles to get these important messages to a wider audience.</p> <p>A point was made that it was good to see improvements on health and safety initiatives and activities contained in the report.</p> <p>Thereafter, the Committee <b>Noted</b> the updated information on health, safety and wellbeing issues and developments contained in the report.</p>	
<b>4.</b>	<p><b>Update on Occupational Health Services</b></p> <p>There was circulated Report No. CSC/2/25 by the Head of People, which provided an update on the Occupational Health (OH) service contract for the period Q3 October to December 2024.</p> <p>It was highlighted that there were 541 new referrals made between October 2024 – December 2024 a significant increase from the previous quarter. Of these 541 referrals, 8.55% were missed (wasted) appointments. This was a significant cost (circa £4k this quarter) to the Highland Council and OHSW team, and HR were working with People Asset Management Group (PAM) to try to reduce the numbers of missed appointments and working on better communication between PAM and the service managers and workers. If the employee failed to attend an OH appointment then decisions would require to be made in the absence of OH information, which might be to the employee's detriment.</p> <p>An undertaking was given to provide the RCN trade union representative with OH service data for the Health and Social Care Service.</p> <p>The Committee <b>Noted</b>:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. the updated position in reference to the Occupational Health contract; and</li> <li>ii. the usage of the Occupational Health service for the period Q3 October – December 2024.</li> </ul>	<b>DC</b>

5.	<p><b>Update on Employee Assistance Programme</b></p> <p>There was circulated Report No. CSC/3/25 by the Head of People which provided an update on the Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) for the period Q3.</p> <p>It was highlighted that there were 124 enquiries to the EAP with 41 consultations. The primary reason for contacting the service was for mental health issues, primarily anxiety/ worry incidents (23.1%) followed by stress (20.5%) then anxiety (16.3%).</p> <p>The Committee <b>Noted</b>:-</p> <p>i. the updated position in reference to the usage of the EAP; and ii. the usage of the EAP in the period Q3 October – December 2024.</p>	
6.	<p><b>Property Related Health and Safety Issues</b></p> <p>There had been circulated Report No. CSC/4/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place. The report provided an update on significant property-related health and safety concerns, any emerging future risks and new policy and procedures introduced.</p> <p>It was highlighted that weather related damage had been less than that in previous years. The most expensive single event was storm damage to the roof at Grantown Grammar which had been temporarily repaired.</p> <p>Some corrosion had been found to a steel bracket forming part of the interconnecting structure between the Assembly Hall and Technical department block at Dornoch Academy. An assessment of the component would be undertaken to enable a remedial detail to be developed.</p> <p>An investigation into a small fire which occurred within the biomass at Kiltarn Primary School in October had been concluded. The fire was due to a faulty circuit board. Other biomass units on the estate have been checked to ensure that the same fault is not present.</p> <p>Procurement dialogue was ongoing with modular building suppliers to provide suitable demountable welfare facilities for the Criminal Justice team at the Drummie site. The required works to the Local Exhaust Ventilation system would be concluded by 10 April, 2025.</p> <p>A recruitment process would shortly commence to support the first phase of portable appliance testing roll out. If it was not possible to recruit to an internal team a contractor would be brought in to</p>	

	<p>undertake this work. A report on this was to be submitted to the Corporate Management team.</p> <p>The Committee <b>Noted</b> the property related risks arising and overall progress being made in regard to improving and maintaining statutory compliance across the built estate.</p>	
<b>7.</b>	<p><b>Progress Audit Actions</b></p> <p>There was circulated Report No. CSC/5/25 by the Head of People.</p> <p>It was explained that an audit took place on a review of health and safety practice across the Council to ensure this was compliant with corporate policy and that legal obligations were being met. Findings and recommendations were reported to the Audit Committee on 5 February 2025 and ten actions agreed to be implemented. The Appendix to the report provided an update on the agreed actions in the Audit report as way of the Committee having sight on the progress to date.</p> <p>Following a summary of the health and safety audit actions/timescales and what work was be done to meet targets, points raised in discussion included:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• trade unions had been asked to provide a current list of safety representatives. These safety representatives were a big asset to the Council and the Health and Safety team in order to ensure the Council was complying with health and safety legislation. Appropriate training would be provided to trade union members wishing to become safety representatives. A further Education and Learning trade union safety representative was highlighted at the meeting.</li> <li>• it was welcomed that the number of outstanding incident reports that had still to be closed off had fallen significantly;</li> <li>• format changes would be made to the action list so that titles to each action were repeated on the top of every page.</li> </ul> <p>The Committee <b>Noted</b>:-</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. the progress on actions; and</li> <li>ii. a report would be brought back to the Central Safety Committee on progress throughout the year.</li> </ol>	<p><b>DC</b></p> <p><b>DC</b></p>
<b>8.</b>	<p><b>Minutes of Last Meeting</b></p> <p>There had been circulated for confirmation, Minutes of the last meeting of the Committee held on 9 December, 2024, the terms of which were <b>Approved</b>.</p>	

<b>9.</b>	<b>Matters Arising from the Minutes</b>
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i RPOs – a review was being undertaken on the RPO role and responsibilities and consideration was being given to a new model for the RPO function with additional support being provided to RPOs. A paper on this would be prepared for consideration by the Corporate Management team.

ii. Portable Appliance Testing (PAT) – a report was being prepared for consideration by the Corporate Management team to consider two options to undertake PAT, – recruitment of an inhouse team or an external contractor. There was not a sufficient budget allocated yet to support either model.

iii Solar Panels switch on – an update on progress with work to switch all solar panels back on would be e-mailed to the Committee.

iv Emergency Call Facilities in Mobility Public Toilets across the Estate - this matter was being progressed in conjunction with ICT Services to scope the technical requirements and costs of installing a voice alarm in mobility public toilets. There would be a need to recruit a contractor for the out of hours response. A report on this would be submitted to the Corporate Management team.

v Woodwork machinery training – Procurement documents had been prepared and an invite for tenders would shortly be issued to provide woodwork machinery training for school staff.

It was advised that the local exhaust ventilation contract undertook ad hoc training to Secondary Schools on how to use woodworking equipment and dust extraction equipment. While this was not a replacement for formal training to be procured, it did try to mitigate the risk in the interim period on the use of woodworking machinery in schools.

vi Workplace inspections - All OHSW staff would check health and safety inspections have been carried out by the service areas on each visit and where other contacts are required such as accident investigations.

vii Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC) (HAC) – the six sites affected were all subject to regular surveys and any remedial works would be undertaken until such time these buildings were removed from the estate. Only one issue relating to Dornoch Academy had been reported since the last meeting of this Committee, the details of which were covered in the Property Related health and safety issues report at item 6 of this minute.

viii Recording of pupil/staff incidents – the Education Service was exploring the use of the Assure system to record incidents of violence and aggression. It was queried if there was any link with the NHS

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	<p>Datix system and information on this would be shared with the RCN representative.</p> <p>ix <u>Staff using their own power tools</u> - Housing Managers had advised staff not to use their own power tools and the Service was working with the Procurement Team on standardising equipment.</p> <p>x. <u>Battery equipment</u> – there was a significant increase in battery powered equipment across the Council’s estate. Updated guidance on the safe use of this equipment would require to be issued.</p> <p>xi <u>Lone working</u> – feedback on the use of Orbis RedAlert Professional, smartphone app which provided a 24/7 support service for lone workers would be provided at the next meeting.</p> <p>xi <u>Pennyland Primary School issue on Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) response</u> – it was confirmed that the Chair of the Committee had sent a letter to the SFRS highlighting the Committees concerns about the incident at Pennyland Primary School and general concern that the Service was not responding to activated fire alarms without evidence of fires. A response to the letter was awaited.</p>	<p><b>DC/TM</b></p> <p><b>AY</b></p>
10.	<p><b>Minutes of Area Health and Safety Groups and Service Trade Union Health and Safety Liaison Groups</b></p> <p>There had been circulated, for information, the Minutes of:-</p> <p><b>Area Health and Safety Groups</b></p> <p>(i) Ross, Skye and Lochaber – 20 February, 2025  (ii) Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch &amp; Strathspey – 26 February, 2025  (iii) Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross – 27 February, 2025.</p> <p>Service Trade Union Health and Safety Liaison Groups</p> <p>(iv) Corporate – 19 December, 2024  (v) Education - 13 February, 2025</p> <p>The Committee <b>Noted</b> the Area Health and Safety Groups and Service Trade Union Health and Safety Liaison Groups Minutes.</p> <p>Matters arising from the minutes were highlighted as follows:-</p> <p><u>Ross, Skye and Lochaber Minute</u> – issues highlighted were heating/ventilation and openable windows in the Charles Kennedy Building (CKB) and RPOs. Also, the Tigh na Sgìre building would be multi-agency once the project was completed and the RPO function for this building was to be clarified.</p> <p>In terms of the ventilation improvements at CKB, once feedback was received from Planning and Conservation Officers due to the CKB building’s listed building status, works to improve the ventilation would</p>	

	<p>hopefully commence.</p> <p>It was noted that someone had slipped on slabs outside the Service Point door at CKB. The Facilities team had been provided with a new power washer and CKB pathways were now cleaned weekly.</p> <p><u>Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch &amp; Strathspey</u> – a leak at Grantown Grammar school had been fixed, but was still subject to regular inspections and structural review.</p> <p>In relation to Nairn Balblair depot, the Architectural design team had drawn up plans for Services to review.</p> <p><u>Caithness, Sutherland &amp; Easter Ross</u> – in particular, it was noted that the previous certified First Aider in the Drummie building had left and this vacancy still required to be filled. A communication had been sent out to staff asking for First Aider volunteers and it was noted that a number of staff had completed the one day course in First aid.</p> <p>Reference was made to Council provided Personal Protective Equipment sweatshirts being found for sale in a charity shop. These sweatshirts were new and had Council logos on them which was very concerning as it was a safeguarding issue. This would be investigated as a matter of urgency.</p> <p><u>Education</u> – issues highlighted from the minute were the RPO function and the out of hours call out duty for staff; lockdown procedures with staff were to be discussed further with Head Teachers in the next school term; consideration of how the Service could fund regular inspections of school play ground equipment – information on costs would be shared with the Chair of the Committee. Guidance on the selection of non-bespoke play equipment had been developed.</p>	<p><b>TU/DC</b></p> <p><b>AMcPh</b></p>

The meeting concluded at 3.15 pm.