

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Central Safety Committee** held in Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness/remotely on **Monday, 9 June 2025 at 2.00pm.**

Present:

Employer's Representatives:

Mr R Gale
Mr D Louden
Mr P Oldham (remote)

Staff Side Representatives:

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

In attendance:

Ms E Barrie (**EB**), Head of People, Corporate Services (remote)
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
Mr D Martin (**DM**), (substitute) Education & Learning, Health & Safety Wellbeing Co-ordinator
Ms M Montaner, Health & Social Care, Health & Safety Wellbeing Co-ordinator (remote)
Mr W Mackinnon, (substitute) Ross, Skye & Lochaber Area (remote)
Mr P Tomalin, Caithness, Sutherland & Easter Ross Area (remote)
Mr W Munro, Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch & Strathspey Area.
Mr A MacInnes, Senior Committee Officer, Corporate Service

Item No.	Subject/Decision	Action
1.	<p>Apologies for Absence</p> <p>Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr D Griffiths of the Staff Side, Mrs A MacPherson, Education & Learning and Mrs D Ferguson, Ross, Skye & Lochaber area.</p>	
2.	<p>Declarations of Interest/Transparency Statement</p> <p>There were no declarations of interest/transparency statements.</p>	
3.	<p>Update on Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing initiative and activities</p> <p>There was circulated Report No. CSC/6/25 by the Head of People.</p> <p>The report provided an update on activities arising from Health and Safety Executive (HSE) interventions; activities and initiatives of the Occupational Health and Safety Wellbeing team as well as proposed changes to strategies or policies.</p> <p>It was highlighted that the HSE chose this Council as part of their UK wide asbestos campaign. They investigated property and housing</p>	

	<p>services. HSE were pleased with arrangements in property. They were concerned at the lack of Responsible Premises Officers at our buildings and had recommended this is addressed. They raised an improvement notice in housing, in relation to poor record keeping and not being able to produce asbestos surveys when requested. An action plan was produced and asbestos surveys were being re commissioned to ensure paperwork was up to date. The HSE had marked the notice complied and work was ongoing to continue improvements.</p> <p>The Chair of the Committee had sent a letter to the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (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. The SFRS call challenging meant there had to be 2 ways to identify a fire i.e. a smoke detector being activated and also some other detector such as a heat detector being activated. They would not dispatch a crew just on a single detector being activated. A meeting to discuss matters with the SFRS was held in May, 2025 and the SFRS were of the view that their current call out arrangements would remain the same. It remained for the Council to have a technological and procedural solution to this issue and how it would manage this risk. An update on the work being carried out on this matter was provided and it was still work in progress.</p> <p>It was highlighted that the SFRS rules on responding to alarms did not apply to sleeping accommodation and they would always attend even if one alarm went off in such premises.</p> <p>It was queried if staff training could be done through the College in on the use of fire alarm control panels. It was advised that in the OHSW team there were two Fire Officers that undertook fire risk assessments and both were on standby to offer training on fire alarm control panels in all Council properties. There was also training available through the service contract provider.</p> <p>Further, the new violence and aggressive report form had been launched, supported by training sessions as well as training materials put on traineeasy.</p> <p>The Scottish Government were recognising and featuring as an exemplar the Mental health and wellbeing helpline the Council had set up. This would be featured in the Improving Wellbeing and Working Cultures 'In Practice Guide' published by the Leadership, Culture and Wellbeing Divisional Support Department, Scottish Government. This was a national level recognition. The Highland Council were leading the way on this and others are looking to follow our lead.</p> <p>Thereafter, the Committee Noted the updated information on health, safety and wellbeing issues and developments contained in the report.</p>	

4.	<p>Update on Occupational Health Services</p> <p>There was circulated Report No. CSC/7/25 by the Head of People, which provided an update on the Occupational Health (OH) service contract for the period Q4 January to March 2025.</p> <p>It was highlighted that there were 673 new referrals to occupational health between January – March 2025 an increase from the previous quarter. An analysis of referrals would be undertaken to understand the reasons behind the increase. Referrals to occupational health should be seen positively as it showed the Council was proactive in its approach to the health and wellbeing of its employees.</p> <p>The number of wasted appointments had dropped which was good news as it cost £200 for every wasted appointment. Around £3,000 a quarter was being paid on wasted appointments. The reduction in this quarter was hopefully due to better publicity on encouraging staff to turn up for these appointments.</p> <p>There was a backlog on health surveillance with approximately 200 outstanding. There was only 1 part time health surveillance nurse for Highland and extra support was being sourced to assist with health surveillance.</p> <p>The Committee Noted:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. the updated position in reference to the Occupational Health contract; ii. the usage of the Occupational Health service for the period Q4 January – March 2025; and iii an analysis of the increase in referrals to occupational health would be included in the next report to the Committee. 	EB/DC
5.	<p>Update on Employee Assistance Programme</p> <p>There was circulated Report No. CSC/8/25 by the Head of People which provided an update on the Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) for the period Q4 January – March, 2025.</p> <p>It was highlighted that there had been an increase in the use of the Spectrum Life app which had a wide amount of services which could be accessed. The most common reason for visiting the app was in relation to the mind which includes tips to improve mental health, sleeping etc. This was a positive reflection on the publicity for these services that were available to staff.</p> <p>The Committee Noted:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. the updated position in reference to the usage of the EAP; and ii. the usage of the EAP in the period Q4 January – March 2025. 	

6.	<p>Property Related Health and Safety Issues</p> <p>There had been circulated Report No. CSC/9/25 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 Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC) mitigation works were effectively complete at Charleston Academy and Nairn Academy and had significantly improved the safety and functionality of the affected areas. Regular inspection regime ensures that any future issues will be promptly addressed, maintaining the integrity and safety of the school buildings.</p> <p>In relation to Slains School, Collieston, Aberdeenshire, the gym hall ceiling collapsed. Slains School was constructed in the 1960s and the roof consisted of TDA timber trusses with intermediate rafters and ceiling joists. It had been determined by a Structural Engineer that the ceiling collapse was due to a failure of the connection between the ceiling joists and the rafters. In response, a review of The Highland Council's property estate was underway to identify any buildings with similar roof construction and potential vulnerabilities. A desktop study and preliminary on-site inspections had identified eight buildings requiring more detailed, intrusive investigations to confirm their construction details. These investigative works are currently in progress and will continue throughout the summer break.</p> <p>The process of uploading and managing compliance-related service contracts within the corporate Computer Aided Facilities Management (CAFM) system, Concerto, was ongoing. Utilising Concerto for service contract management significantly enhances the ability to monitor and report on performance and compliance.</p> <p>The required works to the local exhaust ventilation system for the Criminal Justice workshop at Drummie had now been completed.</p> <p>In relation to Nurse call systems at public toilets, it was advised that the Property team are continuing to liaise with colleagues across Services with regards to the proposals for emergency call facilities in public toilets across the estate. This requirement was currently under review by the Corporate Improvement Team and the Property team were awaiting the review outcome. There were challenges in some areas where public toilets were located with connectivity for alarms to send out a signal and staff being available to respond to call outs. Currently there was no budget provision for the call system at public toilets and this would need to be taken account off in preparation for next year's budget. There was discussion in relation to the challenges in providing this service and that there were different strategies for</p>	
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	<p>different sites. The outcome of the Corporate Team Review of the nurse call system at public toilets was awaited.</p> <p>A report had been submitted to the Corporate Management Team outlining the challenges with the current Responsible Premises Officer status. An update would be provided to this Committee as soon as the outcome was known.</p> <p>Corrosion had been found in a steel bracket in Dornoch Academy that formed part of the interconnecting structure between the Assembly Hall and the Technical Department block. A detailed scan of the internal condition of the component and further assessment to inform the development of a suitable remedial solution was to be undertaken. An update on this work would be provided in the report to the next Committee meeting.</p> <p>The Committee Noted the property related risks arising and overall progress being made in regard to improving and maintaining statutory compliance across the built estate.</p>	TM
7.	<p>Minutes of Last Meeting</p> <p>There had been circulated for confirmation, Minutes of the last meeting of the Committee held on 17 March, 2025, the terms of which were Approved.</p>	
8.	<p>Matters Arising from the Minutes</p> <p>i <u>Portable Appliance Testing</u> – recruitment would commence soon to recruit an inhouse team to undertake portable appliance testing.</p> <p>ii <u>Solar Panels switch on</u> – an update on progress with work to switch all solar panels back on would be e-mailed to the Committee.</p> <p>iii <u>Woodwork machinery training</u> – tenders for a contract to provide woodwork machinery training for school staff had been received. Subject to approval for an exemption to financial regulations as the successful tender had exceeded a financial threshold, an award of contract would be made in time for the start of the August school term.</p> <p>iv <u>Depots</u> – a report was to be submitted to the Housing & Property Committee and would give an overview of the progress with depots.</p> <p>v <u>Recording of pupil/staff incidents</u> – the use of the Assure system to record pupil/staff incidents of violence and aggression was being explored.</p> <p>vi <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>	TM

	<p>vii <u>Lone working</u> – there was a presentation on the use of Orbis RedAlert Professional, smartphone app which provided a 24/7 support service for lone workers. It provided reassurance to officers that they could contact someone if required at all times. This was being used within the Environmental Health team whose work frequently involved lone working. The Social Work Mental Health team were also piloting the system. Details of how the system operated were provided. The service was provided at a reasonable cost. The system had been tested and would be reviewed on a regular basis.</p> <p>Contact would be made with the provider of this system to explore whether their system could provide a potential solution to the call system at public toilets.</p> <p>viii <u>Council Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)</u> – at the last meeting of the Committee reference was made to Council provided PPE 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. It was advised that this matter had been investigated and the PPE sweatshirts removed from sale by the charity shop. An instruction had gone out to staff to undertake a stocktake and that any old PPE must be returned to the stores.</p>	AY
9.	<p>Minutes of Area Health and Safety Groups and Service Trade Union Health and Safety Liaison Groups</p> <p>There had been circulated, for information, the Minutes of:-</p> <p>Area Health and Safety Groups</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) Ross, Skye and Lochaber – 15 May, 2025 (ii) Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch & Strathspey – 21 May, 2025 (iii) Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross – 22 May, 2025. <p>Service Trade Union Health and Safety Liaison Groups</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (iv) Corporate – 2 April, 2024 (v) Education - 13 May, 2025 (vi) Place – 6 May, 2025 (vii) Health & Social Care – 31 March, 2025 <p>The Committee Noted 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). It was advised that ventilation for most of the building was to open windows. However, given the height and recess of the windows, it was not practicable for staff to open them. A solution to open the windows remotely was being worked on. In relation to the</p>	

	<p>open plan area of CKB a solution was also being worked on for ventilation to this area.</p> <p><u>Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch & Strathspey</u> – an issue was highlighted that windows had been painted shut in the old part of the building at HQ, Inverness which affected the ventilation. An undertaking was given to look at this issue.</p> <p><u>Caithness, Sutherland & Easter Ross</u> – It was highlighted that there was now a First Aider for the Drummie building. Also, there were works to be done at Osprey House and plans to move the Health and Social Work team in the building. Timescales for this would be provided to Sam Purdie, RCN.</p> <p><u>Corporate</u> – issues highlighted were a proposal on reporting of violence against staff would go to the Corporate Improvement Team; and accidents within the Service.</p> <p>Further, in terms of violence and aggression incidents, Officers were to discuss sharing data on violent markers for different service areas. There would be an analysis of current violent markers in service areas.</p> <p><u>Education</u> – It was highlighted that Martyn's Law (Protection of Premises) Act 2025 would affect venues in larger schools. Work was being undertaken on major incident planning which covered Martyn's Law, to improve readiness and implement procedures easier within all venues. Linked to this was Prevent duty guidance that had been developed and Prevent would be corporate wide to raise awareness to staff of the Prevent agenda on how to protect communities.</p> <p>An issue regarding risk assessments for outward bound activities had been addressed.</p> <p><u>Place</u> – issues highlighted from the minute were a Place restructure update; general health, safety and wellbeing matters such as reporting of violent incidents; Strategic Asset Management Plan; and a Traffic Commissioner audit.</p> <p><u>Health & Social Care</u> – issues highlighted were – piloting within the Mental Health team of the Orbis smartphone app which provided a 24/7 support service for lone workers; Violent markers sharing of information; a training need for staff on the use of the Assure system to record violent incidents; and consideration of risk assessments being kept centrally.</p>	<p>TM</p> <p>TM</p>

The meeting concluded at 4.00 pm.