

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Central Safety Committee** held in Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness/remotely on **Monday, 29 September, 2025 at 2.00pm.**

Present:

Employer's Representatives:

Mr R Gale
Mr P Oldham
Mrs M Reid (remote)

Staff Side Representatives:

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

In attendance:

Ms E Barrie, Head of People, Corporate Services
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
Mr A McKinnie, (substitute), Communities & Place Health & Safety Co-ordinator
Ms T Urry (**TU**), Infrastructure & Environment Health & Safety Co-ordinator
Mr D Martin (**DM**), Education & Learning, Health & Safety Wellbeing Co-ordinator (remote)
Ms M Montaner, Health & Social Care, Health & Safety Wellbeing Co-ordinator (remote)
Mr J Libby, Inverness Unite (observer)
Mr W Mackinnon, (substitute) Ross, Skye & Lochaber Area (remote)
Mr W Munro, Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch & Strathspey Area
Ms F Richardson (**FR**), (substitute) Caithness, Sutherland & Easter Ross area (remote)
Ms G Warburton, LNCT Observer (remote)
Mr A MacInnes, Senior Committee Officer, Corporate Service

Item No.	Subject/Decision	Action
1.	Appointment of Chair and Vice Chair Members were advised that, in terms of the remit of the Committee, following an election of councillors, and annually thereafter, the Committee shall appoint from amongst their members a Chair and Vice Chair. If the Chair appointed be one of the Employer's representatives, the Vice-Chair shall be one of the Staff Side representatives and vice versa. Having been duly nominated and seconded, Mr P Oldham was appointed Chair. Thereafter, having been duly nominated and seconded, Mr R Boyle was appointed Vice Chair.	
2.	Apologies for Absence Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr K Gowans from the Employer's side, Mr F MacDonald – Chief Officer, Property &	

	Assets, Mrs D Ferguson, Ross, Skye & Lochaber area; Mr A Yates, Communities & Place, Health & Safety Wellbeing Co-ordinator; Mr P Tomalin, Caithness, Sutherland & Easter Ross Area.	
3.	Declarations of Interest/Transparency Statement There were no declarations of interest/transparency statements.	
4.	Place Cluster Service– Occupational Health, Safety & Wellbeing Policy There was circulated Report No. CSC/10/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place. There was commentary on the report by the Infrastructure & Environment Health & Safety Co-ordinator. During discussion, it was requested that the Place Service Cluster Health & Safety Action Plan for 2025/26 should include an action to address the poor condition of Council Depots. It was explained that Depots were referenced in the Council’s strategic asset master plan and there was currently a Depot rationalisation programme being undertaken. An overview of this programme would be provided at the next meeting. In discussion relating to RPOs, it was highlighted that a report had been submitted to the Corporate Management Team outlining the challenges with the current RPO status. An update will be provided as soon as the outcome was known. The Committee NOTED:- i the content of the report and the accompanying Service policy and draft action plan; ii measures being taken to address the poor condition of Depots in the Place Cluster would be included in the action plan; and iii an overview of the Depot rationalisation programme would be provided at the next meeting.	TU TM
5.	Communities and Place Service Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing Annual Report – 2024/25 There was circulated Report No. CSC/11/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place. In particular, it was highlighted that the use of the Assure system had significantly improved the management of accident and incident reports and the efficient gathering of management data. The use of the system had been promoted throughout the service to encourage reporting of accidents, near misses and incidents of damage.	

	Also, this would be the last Communities and Place Service Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing annual report and future reports would be provided as part of the Place Service Cluster. The Committee NOTED the content of the report.	
6.	Update on Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing initiative and activities There was circulated Report No. CSC/12/25 by the Head of People. Issues highlighted in the report were:- an accident involving a trim trail (wooden play structure) in Mallaig Primary School which the Health and Safety Executive were investigating in line with other similar accidents in relation to play equipment over the years. A programme of asset identification of play equipment in schools and inspections was being carried out. Further an update on staffing within the OHSW team was provided with an emphasis on 'growing our own' in order to fill vacancies in the team; there had been a reduction in accidents in quarter 4, 2025 compared to the same quarter the previous year, despite violence and aggression incidents now being included and support for mental health was highlighted. In response to a query, it was clarified that play equipment in schools was the responsibility of the Education Service. There was also a process to be followed on the purchase and installation of this equipment as it had to meet certain standards, including suitable ground covers and location. There was a need for a policy review on purchase and installation of play equipment. Play equipment required to be safe and have a regime of inspection and maintenance. In relation to the updated Smoke Free Workplace Policy, the Council would support employees who wanted to give up smoking and would also support those who wished to continue to smoke, but the policy set out rules around this. The rule relating to not smoking in privately owned vehicles when someone else was in the vehicle for work purposes would be checked and clarified if necessary. In relation to home visits, the legislation did not apply to domestic premises and therefore employees who visit service users in their home may still be exposed to second-hand smoke. The policy stated that where employees are concerned about customers smoking in their presence, they can ask that they refrain from smoking, smoke elsewhere or open a window to reduce the effects of second-hand smoke during the time the employee is in the house. It was suggested that the policy should be strengthened so that service users be asked to refrain from smoking at least one hour prior to a Council employee undertaking a home visit. An undertaking was given to review this and check guidance on this issue from the Health and Safety Executive and other partner agencies.	

	Thereafter, the Committee NOTED:- i the updated information on health, safety and wellbeing issues and developments contained in the report; ii that suggested changes to the Smoke Free Workplace Policy would be considered.	DC
7.	Update on Occupational Health Services There was circulated Report No. CSC/13/25 by the Head of People, which provided an update on the Occupational Health service which included health surveillance and physio services contract for the period Q1 April to June 2025. It was highlighted that the number of occupational health missed appointments had reduced again in this quarter which was good news. There was now a downward trend in missed appointments, but this needed a constant reminder and managing to keep this going in the right direction. The main reasons for missed appointments were highlighted in the report. The Committee NOTED:- i. the updated position in reference to the Occupational Health contract; and ii. the usage of the Occupational Health service for the period Q1 April – June 2025.	
8.	Update on Employee Assistance Programme There was circulated Report No. CSC/14/25 by the Head of People which provided an update on the Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) for the period Q1 April – June, 2025. It was highlighted that the usage of EAP was down for this quarter with 89 interactions compared to the last quarter which had 146 interactions. This may be due to school holidays but this trend would be monitored. EAP counselling was restricted to 6 appointments, and therefore would not be appropriate for those with complex needs. The Committee NOTED:- i. the updated position in reference to the usage of the EAP; and ii. the usage of the EAP in the period Q1 April – June 2025.	
9.	Property Related Health and Safety Issues There had been circulated Report No. CSC/15/25 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. It was highlighted that there had been a gas leak at Cradlehall Primary School. The Health and Safety Executive were currently investigating. An update would be provided to the committee on completion of the HSE investigation 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.	TM
10.	Minutes of Last Meeting There had been circulated for confirmation, Minutes of the last meeting of the Committee held on 9 June, 2025, the terms of which were APPROVED.	
11.	Matters Arising from the Minutes i an undertaking was given to look at the process for dealing with sharp objects such as needles, in void domestic dwellings. Information on this would be shared with the Committee. ii it was noted that the Orbis RedAlert Professional, smartphone app which provided a 24/7 support service for lone workers, was currently being tested. Instead of each Manager commissioning an Orbis contract for their team, one contract for the Council could be more cost effective. An undertaking was given to consult with the Procurement team on this and report back.	TM/DC TM
12.	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 – 28 August, 2025 (ii) Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch & Strathspey – 10 September, 2025 (iii) Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross – 11 September, 2025. Service Trade Union Health and Safety Liaison Groups (iv) Corporate – 27 June, 2025 (v) Education - 17 September, 2025 (vi) Place – 21 July, 2025 (vii) Health & Social Care – 9 June & 1 September, 2025 The Committee NOTED the Area Health and Safety Groups and Service Trade Union Health and Safety Liaison Groups Minutes.	

	Matters arising from the minutes were highlighted as follows:- <u>Caithness, Sutherland & Easter Ross</u> – it had been requested that alternative personal protective equipment (PPE) be provided to replace jumpers as PPE with a zip was easier to regulate body temperature. An undertaking was given to provide the Committee with an update on this. <u>Corporate</u> – It was advised that a module for reporting violent incidents/ accidents in schools had been developed within the Council's incident/accident recording Assure system. There was still some discussion to be had between Education and OHSW team around physical intervention in schools in order to ensure there was no double reporting, before the system went live.	FR

The meeting concluded at 3.02 pm.