

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Central Safety Committee** held in Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on **Monday, 9 March 2026 at 2.00pm.**

Present:

Employer's Representatives:

Mr R Gale (remote)
Mr P Oldham

Staff Side Representatives:

Mr R Boyle, UNITE
Mr D Griffiths, GMB

In attendance:

Ms E Barrie, Head of People, Corporate Service
Mr D Cowie (**DC**), Service Lead, Safety Health Emergency Planning
Mr T Murdison, Service Lead, Corporate Property Management
Mr A Yates (**AY**), Communities & Place Health & Safety Co-ordinator
Mr D Martin, Education & Learning, Health & Safety Wellbeing Co-ordinator (remote)
Ms M Montaner, Health & Social Care, Health & Safety Wellbeing Co-ordinator (remote)
Ms D Ferguson, Ross, Skye & Lochaber Area (remote)
Mr W Munro, Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch & Strathspey Area
Mr P Tomalin, Caithness, Sutherland & Easter Ross area (remote)
Mr A MacInnes, Senior Committee Officer, Corporate Service

Mr P Oldham in the Chair

Item No.	Subject/Decision	Action
1.	Apologies for Absence Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr A Christie, Mr K Gowans, Mrs M Reid from the Employer's Side and Ms R Fry, Chief Officer HR & Communications, Ms D Sutherland, Corporate Health & Safety Wellbeing Co-ordinator.	
2.	Declarations of Interest/Transparency Statement There were none.	
3.	Staff Side Items i Balblair Depot, Nairn The Staff Side highlighted serious concerns about the state of the Balblair Depot had been raised in 2022, that roof defects and water ingress required urgent remedial action. While works had been made to repair the immediate risks, concern was expressed regarding the length of time to find a long term solution to the ongoing repair works required. Throughout this whole period the building remained non compliant in terms of health and safety.	

	<p>In response, it was well known that the Balblair depot was needing replaced or significantly refurbished and needed significant investment to do this. Roof repairs were starting soon, but unfortunately given the state of the building it was likely that there would be ongoing issues with the building going forward. A number of other depots were in a similar state. Repair issues that could cause immediate danger would always be addressed. The Strategic Lead (Asset & Property Management) would attend the next meeting to give a presentation on depots outlining the challenges and options available.</p> <p>ii Terberg bin lift, Refuse Collection Vehicle broken spring incident</p> <p>The Staff Side highlighted that this incident, where a large spring was ejected from the back of a refuse collection vehicle and hit a member of staff could have been very serious. Thankfully the employee was not badly injured. The Service had contacted the manufacturer who was to provide an engineering solution to protect staff should a spring break again. An update was requested on progress with this and the delay for action to be taken was concerning as there were vehicles being used and it was known the springs could break.</p> <p>In response, a video of the incident and pictures of the broken spring were shown to the Committee. Pending the manufacturers engineering solution and it being implemented, an interim arrangement would be put in place to introduce a maintenance and inspection regime to look at springs on these vehicles. Also, training and a safety alert would be provided to ensure that staff working behind refuse collection vehicles know the safety zones of where to stand while the vehicle was in operation.</p> <p>There was discussion regarding issuing personal protective equipment (PPE) to staff, such as hard hats, to protect them from future incidents of this type. The challenges of getting staff to wear PPE were highlighted and instead the importance of staff standing in safe zones to prevent injury was stressed.</p> <p>Thereafter, the Committee AGREED:-</p> <p>i that pending the manufacturers engineering solution and implementation to safeguard employees from failures in refuse collection vehicle springs, an interim arrangement would be put in place to introduce a maintenance and inspection regime to inspect springs on these vehicles; and</p> <p>ii employee training and a safety alert would be issued to ensure that staff working behind refuse collection vehicles know the safety zones of where to stand while these vehicles were in operation.</p>	<p>DC/AY</p>

<p>4.</p>	<p>Update on Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing initiative and activities</p> <p>There had been circulated Report No. CSC/1/26 by the Chief Officer HR & Communications which provided an update on fire, health, safety and wellbeing issues and developments for the Highland Council for the Q3 October to December 2025/2026. It reviewed activities arising from the Health and Safety Executive interventions; activities and initiatives of the Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing (OHSW) team as well as proposed changes to strategies or policies.</p> <p>It was highlighted that the OHSW team had developed and begun roll out of conflict management training throughout the Council as part of the actions against violence and aggression. An unacceptable behaviour survey for staff to complete also captured violence and aggression incidents.</p> <p>The OHSW team had also been supporting on election planning and preparedness. The team had also been delivering a roadshow of training to Education for Head Teachers and Deputy Head Teachers covering a range of subjects, including risk assessments, Assure reporting and Responsible Premises Officers duties.</p> <p>In terms of accident reporting, violence and aggression incidents were now included in the statistics. The OHSW team had been helping staff from various services on mental health and wellbeing issues.</p> <p>Thereafter, the Committee NOTED the updated information on health, safety and wellbeing issues and developments contained in the report.</p>	
<p>5.</p>	<p>Update on Occupational Health Services</p> <p>There had been circulated Report No. CSC/2/26 by the Chief Officer HR & Communications on the Occupational Health (OH) service which included Health surveillance (HS) and physio services contract for the period Q3 October to December 2025.</p> <p>It was highlighted that 489 new referrals were made in Q3 which was a reduction from the previous quarter where there was 634 referrals. Of these 489 referrals, 7.5% were wasted appointments which was a significant increase from 4.07% wasted appointments in the last quarter. It was clarified that missed (wasted) appointments are normally due to one of the following reasons: employee did not attend (DNA) the appointment due to work commitments, forgetting the appointment or, in some cases it was suspected, deliberately not attending to waste the appointment. There were other cases where due to bad signal calls appointments could not be completed resulting in a chargeable appointment. This was a significant cost to the Highland Council and OHSW, and HR were working with the OH provider to try to reduce the numbers of missed appointments.</p>	

	<p>Further, after the introduction of the drug and alcohol policy there had been 2 appointments for drug and alcohol tests which showed the policy and testing procedure was working.</p> <p>Thereafter, the Committee NOTED:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. the updated position in reference to the Occupational Health contract; and ii. the usage of the Occupational Health service for the period Q3 October to December 2025. 	
<p>6.</p>	<p>Update on Employee Assistance Programme</p> <p>There had been circulated Report No. CSC/3/26 by the Chief Officer HR & Communications which provided an update on the Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) for the period Q3 2025.</p> <p>The report provided detail from Spectrum Life on the usage of EAP and the usage of their platform which has a wide range of services which can be accessed via their website or app. The usage was up for the last quarter with 123 interactions compared to the last quarter which had 66 interactions. The primary reason for contacting the service was for anxiety / worry (24%) with complex mental health being second (21%) and thirdly stress (13%). The Spectrum life report also gave a detailed breakdown on the usage of the app (as opposed to the website) with the most common search being recognising and managing ADHD and secondly stress.</p> <p>The EAP was also available to Elected Members and a communication on this would be issued to Members.</p> <p>The Committee NOTED:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. the updated position in reference to the usage of the EAP. ii. the usage of the EAP for the period Q3 October to December 2025. 	<p>DC</p>
<p>7.</p>	<p>Property Related Health and Safety Issues</p> <p>There had been circulated Report No. CSC/4/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive, Place which 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 that there had been a pipe failure at Kinmylies Primary School during the Christmas holiday period which resulted in significant water damage to several rooms in the main school block. Part of the school remained out of use. Refurbishment work would hopefully be concluded before the summer holiday period.</p>	

	<p>In terms of Responsible Premises Officers (RPO), a new working group had been established to review the current situation and present potential improvements to be considered by the Corporate Leadership Team. An update would be available for the next Central Safety Committee meeting.</p> <p>Further, a new Health and Safety Policy was being considered by the Corporate Management team. The new policy included the RPO being the Service/Strategic Lead unless another Senior Officer in the building was given this role.</p> <p>Thereafter, the Committee NOTED the property related risks arising and overall progress being made regarding improving and maintaining statutory compliance across the built estate.</p>	
8.	<p>Appointment of Health and Safety Champion</p> <p>In terms of the Corporate Health and Safety Policy the Council will appoint an Elected Member as Health and Safety Champion with the specific remit of promoting workplace health and safety in line with this policy.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED to appoint Mr P Oldham as a Health and Safety Champion.</p>	
9.	<p>Minutes of Last Meeting</p> <p>There had been circulated for confirmation, Minutes of the last meeting of the Committee held on 15 December 2025 the terms of which were APPROVED.</p>	
10.	<p>Matters Arising from the Minutes</p> <p>i an issue regarding personnel protective equipment in the Waste Services team had escalated to a formal collective grievance. The grievance meeting had been held and the outcome was awaited;</p> <p>ii it had been agreed that there was a need for a corporate approach to support lone workers. A working group would be set up to progress this.</p>	
11.	<p>Minutes: Area Health & Safety Groups; Service Trade Union Health & Safety Liaison Groups</p> <p>There was circulated for information, Minutes of Meeting of:-</p> <p>Area Health and Safety Groups</p> <p>i. Ross, Skye and Lochaber – 12 February 2026. ii. Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch & Strathspey – 18 February, 2026 iii. Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross held on 12 February, 2026</p>	

	<p>Service Trade Union Health and Safety Liaison Meeting</p> <p>iv. Corporate – 18 December 2025 v. Place – 4 February 2026 vi. Health and Social Care – 16 February, 2026 vii. Education – 3 February, 2026</p> <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>i the absence of First Aiders in Charles Kennedy Building, Fort William was a concern. Staff were being encouraged to volunteer for this role and training courses were available.</p> <p>ii a health issue concerning an employee was reported and details would be provided to the Service Lead, Safety Health Emergency Planning.</p> <p>iii in terms of potentially introducing a double break for lanyards, it was felt at this time there was no need to introduce this, given incidents involving lanyards were relatively small. However, incidents would be kept under review.</p> <p>iv in terms of violence and aggression towards frontline staff in the Place Cluster, works were ongoing with the relevant teams regarding the use of Bodycams.</p> <p>v in terms of the Health and Social Care, the outcome of the corporate approach to support lone workers was awaited. Staff were being reassured with the current measures to support lone working and making sure risk assessments were up to date.</p> <p>v in terms of the Education Service minute, the main points considered at their meeting were highlighted as playground equipment safety; pupil/staff incidents; health and safety duties; Assure incident reporting system; business continuity training; and The Schools (Residential Outdoor Education) (Scotland) Bill.</p>	<p>DC</p>

The meeting concluded at 3.06 pm.