

The Highland Council
Central Safety Committee

Minutes of Meeting of the Central Safety Committee held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Friday 22 April, 2016 at 10.30 a.m.

Present:

Employer's Representatives:

Mr B Fernie (by telephone conference)
Mr A MacKinnon
Dr D Alston
Mr F Parr
Mrs M Smith

Staff Side Representatives:

Mr M Hayes, UNISON
Mr A Wemyss, UNITE
Mr D Griffiths, GMB

In attendance:

Mr J Batchelor, Head of People and Performance, Corporate Development Service
Mr S Duncan, Property Risk Management Officer, Development & Infrastructure Service
Mr W Munro, Inverness, Nairn and Badenoch & Strathspey Operational Area Health and Safety Working Group
Mr A MacInnes, Administrative Assistant, Corporate Development Service

Mr D Griffiths in the Chair

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Ms D Grant, Caithness, Sutherland & Easter Ross Health & Safety Working Group and Ms G Falconer, Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing Manager, Corporate Development Service.

2. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Minutes of Last Meeting

There had been circulated Minutes of the last meeting of the Committee held on 5 February, 2016, the terms of which were **APPROVED**.

4. Matters Arising from the Minutes

Arising from the minutes the following matters were raised:-

i item 7 – Occupational Health Report – in relation to the Attendance Management Policy and the monitoring system in place to ensure that Managers were delivering this Policy, it was advised that three Services – Finance, Corporate Development and Development and Infrastructure were now able to record information on attendance management on the ResourceLink system and this function would be rolled out to the Care and Learning Service and Community Services in due course.

ii item 6 – Health, Safety and Wellbeing Team: Update on Current Health, Safety and Wellbeing Issues – it was requested that the information issued in respect of what the £4.5m set aside in the capital programme over the next ten years for health and safety was spent on, be re-circulated to the Committee.

5. Minutes of Area Health and Safety Groups

There had been circulated, for information, the Minutes of the:-

- i. Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch & Strathspey Joint Health and Safety Working Group held on 23 March, 2016;
- ii. Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross Health and Safety Working Group held on 25 February, 2016; and
- iii. Ross, Skye and Lochaber Health and Safety Group held on 3 March, 2016.

The Committee **NOTED** the Minutes.

6. Health, Safety and Wellbeing Team: Update on Current Health, Safety and Wellbeing Issues

There was circulated Report No. CSC/4/16 by the Head of People and Performance which provided an update on current health and safety issues and developments in relation to Health and Safety Executive issues; Health and Safety management system updates and other relevant issues.

In particular reference was made to a court case where an employee slipped on ice whilst walking to a client's home. This claim was upheld on appeal and therefore had potential implications for employers whose staff were working outdoors. It was advised that where an employer is (or ought to have been) aware of work related risks, but fails to adopt adequate control measures, it is likely that any claims will ultimately succeed. In this respect, advice and guidance would be provided to Services, but it was likely that risk assessments will have to be reviewed for employees working outdoors, and decisions reached regarding whether or not personal protective equipment (PPE) is required in certain weather conditions, and if so, what PPE is required. Training and advice would also need to be provided to employees to ensure that any PPE provided is used correctly in the conditions for which it is appropriate. An update on this issue would be provided at the next meeting.

In discussion, it was noted that the potential implications for employers as a result of this case could be significant. It was advised that some employers issued snow/ice grips for shoes to be used in wintry conditions. This also sent a useful message to the public, i.e. by having the proper footwear, this could protect you in wintry conditions. Also, it may be the case that although PPE was available in the

workplace, employees may not be aware of this, and therefore it was important that staff were aware of PPE available and given training and advice on how to use it properly.

It was also reported that a recruitment exercise had been undertaken to fill the vacant Fire Safety Officer post. Responses to the advert had been good, and interviews would take place soon. Requests for Fire Risk Assessments were currently being managed by the Construction Fire Safety Officer in the Development and Infrastructure Service. In response to a query, it was advised that there was a database containing properties that had been fire risk assessed and it provided summaries of the actions required. The database would be made available to Members of the Committee to access.

The Committee **NOTED:-**

- i the updated information on health, safety and wellbeing issues and developments contained in the report;
- ii that an update in respect of the provision and training of PPE for employees would be provided at the next meeting; and
- iii that the database of properties that had been fire risk assessed would be made available to Members of the Committee.

7. Occupational Health Report

There was circulated Report No. CSC/5/16 by the Head of People & Performance which provided an overview of the work undertaken by RS Occupational Health for the period January to March, 2016.

It was advised that following a re-provision exercise, RSOH were awarded the occupational health services contract for the next 3 years from 1 April, 2016. This was a joint contract with Highlife Highland.

A total of 171 management referrals were seen by RSOH in this period. This was an increase in the number of referrals from the previous quarter. The main issues that staff were presenting with were anxiety, depression, stress, etc; or musculoskeletal problems. Services were urged to ensure that the prevention of workplace stress was a priority and that stress risk assessments have been undertaken and action plans in place.

A request was made for a breakdown of the categories of staff in terms of the management referrals during the period as this may help understand the reasons behind the referrals and could help identify actions to address the problem.

Further, in relation to the mandatory training course for Managers on Mentally Healthy Workplaces it was queried if there was a database where Managers that had undergone the training were listed. It was advised that the Corporate Development Service had a list of its Managers who had received this training and an undertaking was given to check if other Services had similar information for their Managers.

It was advised that Staff who TUPE transferred from NHS Highland were entitled to

confidential self-referral appointments. There were no such appointments in this period. This was not something offered to employees in the current contract as the current referral method to Occupational Health was through line Managers. It was queried if a pilot of self referral appointments could be introduced to establish the take up amongst employees and its effectiveness. It was felt that in some situations, employees may be reluctant to seek a referral if they had to go through their line manager in the first instance. An undertaking was given to consider a pilot with a report back to the next meeting.

A total of 26 do not attend appointments (DNAs) were reported during the period at a cost to the Council of almost £2500. The cost was currently borne by the Occupational Health budget in People and Performance and consideration would be given to charging Services for DNAs. Consideration was being given to emailing/texting to remind staff about Occupational Health appointments, and it was hoped that this would reduce the number of DNAs. RSOH would continue to work with the Council to address this problem.

A view was given that texting employees may be better than sending an e-mail, given that this was the practice for attending appointments in NHS Highland. In appointment letters to employees, it should be stressed that employees should provide appropriate notification if they were cancelling an appointment otherwise the Council would be charged if not.

It was noted that the majority of DNAs occurred in the Care and Learning Service who also had the highest number of staff absences due to mental health issues. It was queried if there could be a correlation between DNAs and the underlying illness of employees. A request was made for an analysis of the percentage of Care and Learning DNAs who were being treated for the classification stress, depression, anxiety etc. It was advised that there could be a number of reasons for DNAs and further analysis was required to better understand the reasons for this.

In terms of the Committee's decision to support an Employee Assistance Programme being introduced which would help in managing stress in the workplace, it was noted that funding for the Programme would be required prior to it being implemented. It was requested that an update on the bid for funding be reported to the next meeting.

The Committee:-

- i **NOTED** the information contained in the report;
- ii **AGREED** that a breakdown of the categories of staff in terms of the management referrals during the period be issued to the Committee;
- iii **AGREED** that consideration would be given to introducing a pilot on self referral appointments for Occupational Health with a report back to the next meeting.
- iv **AGREED** that an update on the bid for funding of an Employee Assistance Programme would be reported to the next meeting.
- v **NOTED** that it would be checked if all Services had a list of Managers who had attended the mandatory training course for Managers on Mentally Healthy Workplaces.

vi **NOTED** that in the further analysis of DNAs being carried out, an analysis would also be made of what percentage of Care and Learning DNAs were being treated for the classification stress, depression, anxiety etc.

8. **AOCB**

The Staff Side advised that the Lighting Manager and Radio Communication Manager jobs were deleted from the Community Services structure. It had been intended to replace these posts with a new Manager, but this was no longer proposed and instead Lighting Engineers would report to the Head of Performance and Resources Manager. There was a concern that this Manager, given the generic role of the post, would not have an understanding of the electricity at work regulations, how contractors work, who they report to, etc. They preferred one of the Engineers acting up to take responsibility for everything relating to contractors, private works, new and ongoing works. There was a concern that whatever was passed to this Manager would not be fully understood and could cause problems.

It was suggested that this issue be addressed to the Director of Community Services in the first instance. If there were still concerns thereafter, the matter could be brought back to this Committee for consideration.

With service changes in the organisation and a large number of voluntary redundancies with experienced employees leaving, this situation could occur in other areas of the organisation as well. There was a need to ensure that Managers were competent and understood the risks of the jobs they were managing and this could be challenging and should be monitored.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED** that the Staff Side would raise their concerns on this issue with the Director of Community Services.

The meeting concluded at 10.55 a.m.

Date of Next Meeting – Friday, 12 August, 2016 at 11.45a.m