

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Central Safety Committee** held in the Leader's Meeting Room, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness/remotely on Friday 1 December 2023 at 10.30 am.

Present:

Employer's Representatives:

Mr D Louden
Mr C Munro

Staff Side Representatives:

Mr A Bell, LNCT
Mr D Griffiths, GMB
Mr M Hayes, UNISON
Mr I Macleman, UNITE/UCATT
Ms S Purdie, RCN

In attendance:

Ms E Barrie (**EB**), Interim Head of People, Resources & Finance Service
Ms G Falconer, Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing Manager, Resources & Finance Service
Mr D Cowie (**DC**), Interim Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing Manager, Resources & Finance Service
Mrs A MacPherson (**AMacP**), Education & Learning, Health & Safety Wellbeing Co-ordinator
Mr F MacDonald (**FM**), Property & Housing, Health & Safety Wellbeing Co-ordinator
Mr T Murdison (**TM**), Service Lead, Corporate Property Management, Housing & Property
Mrs F Malcolm, Health & Social Care, Health & Safety Wellbeing Co-ordinator
Mr A Yates (**AY**), Communities & Place, Health & Safety Wellbeing Co-ordinator
Ms D Sutherland, R&F/P&G/Depute CEX Services, Health & Safety Wellbeing Co-ordinator
Ms T Urry, Head of Roads & Infrastructure
Mr I Jackson, Education Officer
Mrs D Ferguson, Ross, Skye & Lochaber Area (substitute)
Mr W Munro, Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch & Strathspey Area
Ms H Ross, Caithness, Sutherland & Easter Ross Area
Ms M Murray, Principal Committee Officer, Performance & Governance Service
Mrs G MacPherson, Committee Officer, Performance & Governance Service

Also in attendance:

Mr M Smith, UNITE/UCATT (observer)

Mr D Louden in the Chair

Item No.	Subject/Decision	Action
1.	<p>Apologies for Absence</p> <p>Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr R Gale, Mr B Lobban and Mr P Oldham of the Employer's Side.</p>	
2.	<p>Declarations of Interest/Transparency Statement</p>	

	There were no declarations of interest/transparency statements.	
3.	<p>Appointment of Vice Chair</p> <p>At the last meeting, the Committee had deferred the appointment of a Vice-Chair of the Committee from the Staff Side to the next meeting to allow more Staff Side representatives to be in attendance. The Committee were invited to appoint a Vice Chair of the Committee from the Staff Side.</p> <p>Ms Purdie seconded by Mr Hayes, moved that Mr David Griffiths be appointed as Vice Chair. There being no other nominations, Mr Griffiths was duly appointed.</p>	
4.	<p>Minutes of Last Meeting</p> <p>There had been circulated for confirmation Minutes of the last meeting of the Committee held on 15 September 2023, the terms of which were APPROVED.</p>	
5.	<p>Matters Arising from the Minutes</p> <p><u>Portable Appliance Testing (PAT)</u> – guidance on visual checks of portable appliance equipment had now been circulated. Two permanent members of staff would be recruited to carry out PAT testing, supplemented by temporary contractors, and additional resource was being sought to increase the number of staff given the amount of appliances to be tested across the whole estate.</p> <p><u>Solar Panels</u> – it having been explained that work remained ongoing, the Chair commented that it should be a high priority for the Energy Team given the serious financial implications and it was hoped progress would be made by the next meeting.</p> <p><u>Assistance call alarm for accessible toilets</u> – work was still ongoing to identify the location of all alarmed accessible toilets and what the out of hours response would be, and an update would be provided at the next meeting.</p> <p><u>EVOLVE</u> – training was ongoing, and a short-life working group would be established so expertise could be shared.</p>	
6.	<p>Staff Side Item: Pupil-Staff Incidents reporting – Change of process – Education Service</p> <p>Health & Safety representatives had been informed on 31 August that the way schools reported pupil-staff incidents had changed and the use of the Assure system had been replaced with immediate effect. The Staff Side wanted to discuss the implications of this change for trade union health and safety representatives.</p>	

	<p>The Staff Side expressed surprise that the Education and Learning Service had opted out of using the Assure system to report pupil-staff incidents without consultation with trade unions. In response, it was explained that the Assure system was not built to record such incidents and, in addition to information provided being inaccurate, sensitive information could be divulged. However, it was acknowledged that more detailed discussion could have taken place with trade union partners.</p> <p>During further discussion, the following main points were raised:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the appropriate place for the Service to raise this issue would have been at the Project Board; • clarification was requested regarding how long the Service had used the Assure system for recording pupil-staff Incidents before opting out, and it was confirmed this would be provided; • it was emphasised that the Service had not withdrawn completely from Assure, and was still using all the reporting within it other than for Pupil-Staff incidents; • one of the attributes of the Assure system was to identify where problems and issues were so that resources could be appropriately targeted, and it was emphasised that sensitive details could be redacted; • a key issue was that the Assure system could not record or report on when seclusion or restraint had been used; • staff needed to feel confident that incidents were being properly and thoroughly investigated; • it was reiterated that the Assure system was not capturing the information required in respect of pupil-staff incidents, and the Education & Learning Health & Safety Wellbeing Co-ordinator undertook to share a draft of the reports produced by the replacement system. The Service was committed to engaging with trade union partners, and was happy to discuss any particular incident if there were any concerns; • it was important to ensure, during future Project Board considerations, that all trade unions were content before the implementation stage; and • it was important that follow-ups were carried out after an incident had been reported so that staff felt their reports had been taken seriously. <p>The Committee otherwise NOTED the position.</p>	<p>AMacP</p> <p>AMacP</p>
<p>7.</p>	<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> <p>(i) Ross, Skye and Lochaber – 16 November 2023 (ii) Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch & Strathspey – 8 November 2023</p>	

(iii) Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross – 23 November 2023

Service Trade Union Health and Safety Liaison Groups

- (iv) Health & Social Care – 25 September 2023
- (v) Communities and Places – 5 October 2023
- (vi) Education – 9 November 2023
- (vii) Infrastructure & Environment – 11 October 2023
- (viii) Performance & Governance, Resources & Finance and Depute Chief Executive Services – 11 October 2023.

The Committee **NOTED** the Area Health and Safety Groups and Service Trade Union Health and Safety Liaison Groups Minutes.

Arising from the Minutes the following matters were raised:-

Ross, Skye and Lochaber – in relation to staff using their own power tools, there was a process to purchase tools and staff should not be using their own. Discussions had taken place with the staff involved.

Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch & Strathspey

A fire exit at the Town House had been blocked by works on Inverness Castle. It having been queried whether the suggested alternative exit route had been approved, the Service Lead, Corporate Property Management, Housing & Property, undertook to investigate and report back to the Committee.

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A concern had been raised regarding the cleaning of technical equipment at a particular school that had previously been carried out by technicians and had been handed over to Facilities Management. The Education Officer explained that he was aware of the concern and was looking into ways of resolving it. Advice had been sought from the Scottish Schools Education Research Centre and this was awaited.

Health & Social Care

There had been no Staff Side representatives present at the meeting, and work was ongoing to address this as it was recognised that some former attendees had moved on or retired. The next meeting had been deferred to January on the basis that a meeting the week before Christmas might not be well attended.

On the point being raised, discussion took place on interview rooms, the different types of interviews held and the associated risks, during which the following points were raised:-

- the need for a standard template to be rolled out to ensure consistency of interview rooms;

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • interview rooms should be of a reasonable size, welcoming, airy, with a panic alarm and nothing in them that could be used as a weapon; • interview rooms should have a door that opened outwards (subject to approval from fire safety) with a vision panel; • it was confirmed that work was ongoing to improve the interview rooms at the Family Resource Centre, Inverness and the Inverness Justice Centre; and • the Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing Manager undertook to circulate an interview room checklist and confirmed that it would be added to the Property section of the Intranet. <p><u>Communities and Place</u> – discussion took place on the issue of filming of Council employees, by the public, at Recycling Centres and other locations, and the difficulties with implementing a policy in that regard. It was acknowledged that it could be intimidating for staff; however, it was something that was difficult to control. There was a need for guidance, and it was suggested it was necessary to look at what other organisations and local authorities were doing to address the issue. The Interim Head of People undertook to look into whether this was being taken forward by the HR Subgroup and feed back to the Committee.</p> <p><u>Education</u></p> <p>Discussion took place on the Corporate Heating Policy, work on which was ongoing, and the complexities associated with controlling the temperature within buildings.</p> <p>Concern was expressed regarding the reduction in school cleaning staff and details were provided of an issue that had arisen in terms of where the responsibility for cleaning up bodily fluids lay. The Chair requested that any other such examples be provided to the Committee.</p> <p>An update was sought, and provided, on the provision of woodwork machinery training, which Members looked forward to seeing come to fruition as soon as a suitable contractor had been identified.</p>	<p>DC</p> <p>EB</p>
<p>8.</p>	<p>Occupational, Health, Safety and Wellbeing Annual Report 2022/23</p> <p>There had been circulated Report No. CSC/12/23 by the Interim Head of People.</p> <p>During discussion, the following main points were raised:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • it was unusual that the total number of employee accidents had reduced significantly but the number of working days lost had increased, and it was suggested this was due to better recording and management of absence data; 	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • it was necessary to recirculate the guidance on how to properly record an accident at work, and the Interim Head of People undertook to take that forward; • information was sought, and provided, as to whether it was still intended to recruit to the two vacant Health and Safety Adviser posts, the impact of the vacancies and whether they were included on the Risk Register, and concern was expressed regarding the pressure the team were under. <p>The Committee otherwise NOTED the contents of the report.</p>	EB
9.	<p>Service Annual Health & Safety Reports</p> <p>i. Health and Social Care</p> <p>There was circulated Report No. CSC/13/23 by the Head of Integration (Adult Social Care).</p> <p>Following discussion on the risks posed by vacant posts and the knock-on effect on remaining staff, the Committee NOTED the content of the report and the accompanying Service policy and action plan.</p> <p>ii. Communities and Place</p> <p>There had been circulated Report No. CSC/14/23 by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place.</p> <p>During discussion, the introduction of battery-powered ground maintenance equipment was welcomed. However, it was queried whether the necessary measures were in place in terms of fire safety. Such technology was fairly new to the Council and those using it, and close scrutiny, training and safe storage were required. The Communities & Place Health & Safety Wellbeing Co-ordinator undertook to feed these comments back to the Head of Community Operations and Logistics.</p> <p>Discussion also took place on the use of Orbis RedAlert Professional, a smartphone app which provided a 24/7 support service for lone workers. Health staff had been advised that the costs were prohibitive. However, those that had used the app had commended it and welcomed the reassurance it provided. It was suggested that details of the app be provided to all Services so they had the opportunity to review it. It was added that the staff currently using the app had already had smartphones, the provision of which was a potential additional cost.</p> <p>The Committee otherwise NOTED the content of the report and the accompanying Service policy and draft action plan.</p>	AY AY
10.	Update on Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing Issues	

	<p>There had been circulated Report No. CSC/15/23 by the Interim Head of People.</p> <p>The Committee NOTED the updated information on health, safety and wellbeing issues and developments contained in the report.</p>	
11.	<p>Update on Occupational Health (OH) and Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) Services</p> <p>There had been circulated Report No. CSC/16/23 by the Interim Head of People.</p> <p>In introducing the report, the Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing Manager highlighted that the Clinical Director for the Occupational Health Contract would be contacting Service Health and Safety Coordinators with a view to giving a talk on physiotherapy at Service Health and Safety Meetings.</p> <p>During discussion, the following main points were raised:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • in relation to the new Occupational Health Contract, it was confirmed that performance information would be available once the new IT system was fully operational; • it was requested that it be reiterated to managers that it was now their duty to share Occupational Health reports with employees; and • previous concerns raised by Unison regarding the process being undertaken by the new provider were still being looked into and an update would be provided at a future meeting. <p>The Committee otherwise NOTED:-</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. the updated position in reference to the occupational health contract; and ii. the usage of the Employee Assistance Programme for the period July-October 2023. 	
12.	<p>Property Related Health and Safety Issues</p> <p>There had been circulated Report No. CSC/17/23 by the Executive Chief Officer Housing and Property.</p> <p>During discussion, the following points were raised:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the Staff Side enquired into gas safety in school science labs and provided an example where the wrong gas, valves and Bunsen burners had been used. Details were provided to the Property & Housing Health & Safety Wellbeing Co-ordinator and the Service Lead, Corporate Property Management, who undertook to follow it up; and • in relation to the leaking roof at Balblair Depot in Nairn, temporary repairs had been completed but the long-term solution 	FM/TM

	<p>was a new roof and plans were underway in that regard, details of which were provided. The investment in a permanent solution was welcomed.</p> <p>The Committee otherwise NOTED the current levels of compliance and progress being made.</p>	
13.	<p>Dates for Meetings 2024</p> <p>The undernoted dates of meetings of the Committee in 2024 were AGREED:-</p> <p>Wednesday, 27 March – 2 pm Wednesday, 12 June – 2 pm Wednesday, 25 September – 2 pm Monday, 9 December – 2 pm</p>	
	<p>At this stage, the Chair expressed thanks to the Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing Manager, Ms Gena Falconer, on what was her last working day with the Council, for her contribution to the Central Safety Committee. She had been an exceptional officer, and he wished her every success in her new role.</p> <p>Staff Side representatives also thanked Ms Falconer for her remarkable support and wished her well.</p> <p>Members also welcomed Mr David Cowie, Interim Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing Manager, to his new role and looked forward to working with him.</p>	

The meeting concluded at 12.30 pm.