

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the Central Safety Committee held in Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness/remotely on Monday, 9 December 2024 at 2.00pm.

Present:

Employer’s Representatives:

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

Staff Side Representatives:

Mr A Bell, LNCT
Mr D Griffiths, GMB
Ms M Macrae, RCN (substitute)(remote)
Mr M Smith, Unite/Ucatt (remote)

In attendance:

Mr F Macdonald (**FM**), Chief Officer – Property & Assets
Ms F Malcolm, Health & Social Care, Health & Safety Wellbeing Co-ordinator
Ms E Barrie, Head of People
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, Infrastructure & Environment Health & Safety Co-ordinator
Mr A Yates, Communities & Place, Health & Safety Wellbeing Co-ordinator
Mr I Jackson (**IJ**), Education Officer
Ms D Ferguson, Ross, Skye & Lochaber Area
Ms H Ross (**HR**), Caithness, Sutherland & Easter Ross Area
Mr W Munro, Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch & Strathspey Area.
Mr A MacInnes, Senior Committee Officer

Item No.	Subject/Decision	Action
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1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr C Munro of the Employer’s Side, and Ms S Purdie, RCN of the Staff Side.

2. Declarations of Interest/Transparency Statement

There were no declarations of interest/transparency statements.

3. Appointment of Vice Chair

At the last meeting, the Committee 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.

Ms M Macrae seconded by Mr R Gale, moved that Mr D Griffiths be appointed as Vice Chair. There being no other nominations, Mr Griffiths was duly appointed.

4. Minutes of Last Meeting

There had been circulated for confirmation, Minutes of the last meeting of the Committee held on 25 September, 2024, the terms of which were **Approved**.

5. Matters Arising from the Minutes

i EVOLVE – there had been ongoing issues with the EVOLVE system which had to be completed before schools could go on excursions with pupils. High Life Highland had undertaken training sessions on the system. It was important that all the health and safety checks were completed before excursions took place. There were a number of training modules in place and during the school year 2023/24 132 school staff attended training courses and so far this school year 20 additional staff had attended courses. There had been a fall in the number of late submissions so far this school term as a result of this training. The Committee were content that this action had now been completed.

ii Workplace inspection restart – the intention was to issue a formal communication encouraging staff to come forward as health and safety representatives.

iii. Portable Appliance Testing (PAT) – the recruitment of two posts to carry out PAT Testing was in progress and an update on this would be provided at the next meeting. An update was also provided on the approach to testing being undertaken across the Council's estate within the current available resource. Priority areas included school hostels and schools. Eliminating cabled equipment would considerably reduce risk, but this would introduce other risks such as use of batteries and battery charging stations. Encouraging staff to undertake visual inspections of equipment was highlighted and staff should not take their own equipment into work. There was a need for localised risk assessments on types of equipment that was a risk, who was using it and for what purpose.

iv. Woodwork machinery training – the Education Officer had completed a training course required by the procurement team. This would enable him to prepare procurement documents and invite tenders to provide a service on woodwork machinery training for school staff.

v. Solar Panels – progress with the work to switch all solar panels back on was advised with around 70 sites being re-energised. There were 180 sites with solar panels and further information on work being undertaken to switch on the remainder of solar panels would be sent to the Committee. It was requested that the process being undertaken before solar panels were re-energised be also included in the update.

FM

It would be checked if the housing service had a process in place for clearing leaves, bird nests etc. from solar panels on Council houses and how many Council houses had solar panels. An update on this would be provided to the next meeting. **FM**

vi. Emergency Call Facilities in Public Toilets across the Estate - this matter was being progressed in conjunction with ICT Services to scope the technical requirements and costs of installing this facility across the infrastructure. There was a need for a policy on which public toilets had emergency call facilities and which Services would cover these facilities. **FM/TM/HR**

vii. Council Depots – an update was sought and provided on progress with Council depots including the Portree, Nairn, Dingwall and Diriebught depots. An update was also provided on the preparatory work being undertaken in terms of delivering the improvements to the Council depots estate as contained in the Highland Investment Plan.

viii. Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC) (HAC) – the six sites affected were all subject to regular surveys and any remedial works would be undertaken until such time these buildings were removed from the estate.

ix. Recording of pupil/staff incidents – these incidents were recorded and quarterly statistics provided to trade unions. This was not only a Highland issue but also a national issue. There was a need to reduce the number of incidents and ensure they were dealt with appropriately. Some Councils, led by Shetland Isles Council, were liaising on this issue to share incident rates and a timeline for the outcome of this work would be shared with the Committee. **DC**

Looking at areas of best practice to deal with incidents, anecdotally when there were good parental relationships with schools, incidents are easier to deal with. There was a need for adequate training of staff, appropriate resources and better staff to pupil ratios in the classroom. Staff should be encouraged to report all incidents so these can be analysed to identify possible trends and target resources to this. The Education Officer undertook to share data with the OHSWM on incidents within Highland schools to see if there were any areas of best practice to address this issue. **IJ**

There were also wider issues of violence and aggression incidents affecting staff in other services and non teaching unions should be involved in any work to address this. However, the largest impact was on Pupil Support Auxiliaries.

x. Staff using their own power tools - Housing Managers had advised staff not to use their own power tools and the Service was working with the Procurement Team on standardising equipment.

xi. RPOs – a review was being undertaken on the RPO role and responsibilities, and the training required to support staff and

thereafter a report would be submitted to the Corporate Management Team. Options for responding to out of hours calls would also be considered.

6. 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 – 13 November, 2024
- (ii) Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch & Strathspey – 13 November, 2024
- (iii) Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross – 14 November, 2024.

Service Trade Union Health and Safety Liaison Groups

- (iv) Corporate – 30 October, 2024
- (v) Place – 13 November, 2024
- (vi) Education - 14 November, 2024

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

Caithness, Sutherland & Easter Ross –

Pennyland issue on Fire Service response – the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) had introduced an Unwanted Fire Alarm Signals (UFAS) Policy designed to address the frequent false alarm incidents that the Service encountered at specific premises. This had led to a revision of duty-holder responsibilities upon alarm activation. At Pennyland Primary School an alarm in the attic of the school had been activated and in accordance with the new policy, the duty holder i.e. Head Teacher was supposed to investigate if there was evidence of a fire, before the Service would respond. The Committee were concerned that staff would be put at risk by investigating if there was a fire in a confined space and general concern that the SFRS were not responding immediately to fire alarms activated in schools.

The Committee **Agreed** that the Chair send a letter to the 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.

DC

7. Health and Social Care Service Annual Health & Safety Report

There was circulated Report No. CSC/11/24 by the Chief Officer Integrated People Services, relating to the Service's performance during 2023/24 in respect of the health, safety and wellbeing of staff within the Health and Social Care Service.

Areas highlighted in the report included violence and aggression incidents being a significant issue for this service. Currently incidents were logged on a paper based system, but it was intended in future to use the Assure System, the corporate reporting system for the reporting and monitoring of accidents, incidents and near misses. This would help inform any lessons learned from such incidents.

Further, the removal of child health staff from Dochfour Drive huts had now been completed which was good news for all concerned. There was also a need for child health staff to be vaccinated and this was being addressed with the public health team, NHS.

The Committee **Noted** the content of the report and the accompanying Service policy and action plan.

8. Update on Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing Issues and activities

There had been circulated Report No. CSC/12/24 by the Head of People. The report provided an update on fire, health, safety and wellbeing issues and developments for the Highland Council for the Q2 period of July to September 2024. It reviewed activities arising from HSE interventions; activities and initiatives of the OHSW team as well as proposed changes to strategies or policies.

Following a summary of the report, it was advised that a significant number of officers had been trained to carry out the role of fire safety wardens and the training courses would continue.

The Committee **Noted** the updated information on health, safety and wellbeing issues and developments contained in the report.

9. Update on Occupational Health (OH) and Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) Services

There had been circulated Report No. CSC/13/24 by the Head of People which provided an update on the occupational health service contract and the Employee Assistance Programme for Quarter 2 2024.

In discussion, concern was again expressed at the number of employees who did not attend (DNAs) their occupational health appointments. There was a need to continue to address and understand the reasons for DNAs. Two main reasons were firstly that some employees did not want to be referred and they did not turn up for appointments, and secondly some employees changed the time of the OH appointment without informing their manager, but they were required to work at the time of the new appointment. It was suggested that using different methods to allay concerns about OH appointments may help, such as a video, to provide information about OH appointments.

Also, it was suggested that there be a requirement for OH appointments as part of the sickness absence process, so that staff could be supported back to work. If the employee failed to attend then decisions would require to be made in the absence of OH information. The money lost as a result of DNAs was a drain on the corporate resource for wellbeing initiatives. It was confirmed that employees were provided with call and text reminders of appointments.

The Committee **Noted**:-

- i. the updated position in reference to the occupational health contract; and
- ii. the usage of the Employee Assistance Programme for the period July 2024 to September, 2024.

10. Property Related Health and Safety Issues

There had been circulated Report No. CSC/14/24 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.

Arising from the report, an update was provided in relation to the Miller Academy Primary School, failed heating pipe. Interim heating was being used until the repair to the main heating in building had been carried out.

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.

11. Dates for Meetings 2025

The Committee **Approved** the undernoted dates of meetings of the Committee in 2025:-

Monday, 17 March
Monday, 9 June
Monday, 29 September
Monday, 15 December

All meetings to commence at 2pm.

The meeting concluded at 3.40 pm.