



Council Health & Safety Enforcement

Introduction

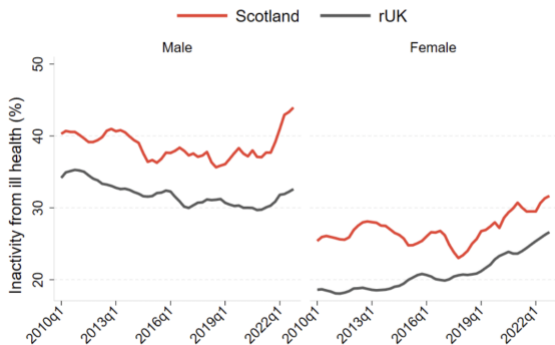
Local authorities in Scotland are responsible for enforcing health and safety legislation in 45 per cent of workplaces, while the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) is responsible for the remainder. In this briefing, we examine how that statutory duty is being carried out in Scotland.

Workplace Health in Scotland

Workplace ill health in Scotland has increased by 50 per cent over the past decade. It now affects 1 in 30 workers, compared with 1 in 20. In surveys, 25 per cent of workers say their work causes their ill health, rising to 33 per cent for their mental health.

Inactivity rates are rising faster in Scotland, and we have the highest fatal accident rates in the UK. The [cost](#) to the Scottish economy of poor workplace ill health has been estimated at £1.6bn.

Chart 2: Inactivity from ill-health by gender, Scotland vs. rUK



Local Authority Duties

Local authorities take the lead in [enforcing](#) health and safety across offices, shops, warehouses, residential care (without nursing), catering, and leisure services. They are responsible for conducting workplace inspections to check for compliance and for investigating accidents and serious workplace incidents. They can enforce the legislation by issuing advice and enforcement notices, and by prosecuting those who breach regulations. They should also respond to employee or public complaints about safety.

Local authorities submit an annual return to the HSE on their enforcement activity. We obtained copies of these returns and supplemented the data

through a Freedom of Information request to all local authorities in Scotland.

Local authorities are responsible for the health and safety of 140,571 premises in Scotland. In 2025, they made just 476 planned visits, which was only 0.34 per cent. Put another way, each workplace in Scotland receives a planned visit, on average, every 295 years! 2025 was also the highest level of planned visits in recent years. There were 390 visits in 2024, 384 in 2023 and 371 in 2022. There are considerable variations between councils. Two-thirds have effectively abandoned planned visits.

Local Authority name	Premises	Planned visits
Aberdeen	6796	1
Aberdeenshire	9324	55
Angus	2928	6
Argyll and Bute	3166	38
Clackmannanshire	897	0
Dumfries and Galloway	4917	40
Dundee	3156	0
East Ayrshire	2568	2
East Dunbartonshire	2129	42
East Lothian	2444	47
East Renfrewshire	1979	0
Edinburgh	14973	28
Eilean Siar	998	6
Falkirk	2958	3
Fife	7358	8
Glasgow	16650	0
Highland	8869	0
Inverclyde	1268	0
Midlothian	2015	0
Moray	2571	7
North Ayrshire	2535	59
North Lanarkshire	6458	14
Orkney Islands	1151	7
Perth and Kinross	4771	0
Renfrewshire	3962	64
Scottish Borders	3858	0
Shetland Islands	1248	0
South Ayrshire	2847	6
South Lanarkshire	7300	38
Stirling	3065	1
West Dunbartonshire	1541	0
West Lothian	3871	4
Total	140571	476

There were 308 revisits, 273 visits to investigate accidents, 673 visits to investigate complaints, and 115 visits in response to requests. This is a total of 1369 reactive visits. This is an average of 1% of workplaces receiving a reactive visit.

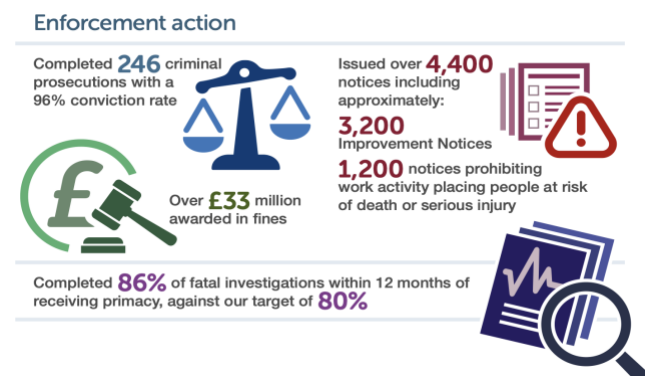
Limited inspection unsurprisingly results in minimal enforcement activity. In 2025, only 107 improvement notices were issued, along with 21 deferred prohibition notices and 163 immediate prohibition notices, for a total of 291 notices. As the titles imply, improvement notices require the fixing of health and safety breaches by a deadline, while prohibition notices immediately stop dangerous activities due to the risk of serious injury. This limited enforcement means that a workplace in Scotland has only a 0.2 per cent chance of receiving any form of enforcement notice.

Visits and enforcement are only possible if staff are available to perform the duties. These duties are mainly carried out by Environmental Health Officers (EHOs), with support from technical assistants. There are 353 authorised inspectors, but they also carry out other duties alongside their health and safety functions. Councils estimate that there are 43 full-time equivalent (FTE) inspectors in Scotland. That is one inspector for every 3269 workplaces. EHOs also used to undertake educational and advisory duties to assist workplaces, but, in discussions with EHOs, that function is now extremely limited.

The inspection and enforcement problems are not unique to Scotland. The data for England is very similar.

Health & Safety Executive

The HSE has primary responsibility for [enforcing](#) health and safety legislation in Scotland. This is a reserved power of the UK. Enforcement activity has declined, though there has been a modest recovery in the past year. Prosecutions fell from 683 in 2016 to 199 in 2021. The latest figures show 246 completed prosecutions. Enforcement notices have halved over the past eight years.



This is a consequence of a 50 per cent funding cut and a 25 per cent reduction in the number of inspectors. There is also a drive to reduce regulation, with the HSE claiming to be a 'proportionate and enabling regulator'.

A New Approach

Enforcement of health and safety is not a panacea for tackling workplace ill health, but it helps improve employer culture. Along with Scottish Hazards, we have argued for expanding the role of the [trade union](#) safety representative, as unionised workplaces are [safer places](#) to work.

In a [joint paper](#), *Tackling the causes of working-age ill health*, we set out a range of actions that governments should take to promote healthy, sustainable work. The UK Government commissioned the Mayfield Report, which reached similar conclusions about the problem, but recommended more of the same failed 'market-led' solutions.

Tackling the causes of ill health

"The number of working-age people claiming social security is rising faster than in similar countries, which has consequences for workers, public finances, and the economy. However, no evidence exists that cutting benefits helps people return to work. Largely missing from this debate is poor work quality. A bad job can be worse for health than no job. We need urgent action by governments and employers to guarantee good-quality work and effective occupational health services."

The Jimmy Reid Foundation
Dave Watson, Director
www.reidfoundation.scot



Scotland needs a stronger culture of health and safety enforcement and an NHS-led occupational health service. The HSE's powers should also be [devolved](#) to Scotland. This would reflect the distinct safety challenges and align with the wider devolved health powers.

Conclusion

The underfunding and near-abandonment of health and safety enforcement by local authorities stem from [council cuts](#) and a culture of deregulation. We need adequate funding for both the local authority and the HSE to fulfil their statutory duties.

Jimmy Reid Foundation

The Jimmy Reid Foundation is a think tank which brings together different voices from across Scotland to make the case for economic, environmental, political and social equity and justice in Scotland and further afield.

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