

Safety Central Annual Report 2021 / 22

For Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service's
Performance and Overview Committee

September 2022



1. Introduction

- 1.1 Safety Central's fourth annual report summarises performance for the period April 1st 2021 to March 31st 2022. This reporting period straddles two school years – the summer term of 2020/21 and the first term and a half of 2021/22.
- 1.2 The Covid-19 (C19) pandemic continued to suspend our education programmes this year, with the centre being closed twice during this reporting period;
- Following the second national lockdown in January 2021, we were closed for most of quarter one, with limited opening in June 21
 - The impact of the Omicron variant later in the year, resulted in the centre being closed from the second week in December 21 and the whole of January 2022.
- 1.3 Although it has been a very unsettled year, our staff team and volunteers have worked hard to ensure the success of the phased reopening of Safety Central while keeping ourselves, each other, and all our visitors safe. While this annual report is briefer than we would like, we are pleased to be able to describe over the following pages:
- changes to the Safety Central staff team and volunteer programme.
 - safe, phased re-opening of our educational visits from September 21 – March 22
 - our performance relating to educational visits and also additional achievements throughout the year
 - our plans for the year ahead.



2. Safety Central team and volunteers

Staff Team

- 2.1 The Safety Central team continued to support the vaccination sites at Chester and Ellesmere Port at the beginning of the year whilst also gradually returning to working from the centre.
- 2.2 May saw all the staff team return full time to the centre to prepare to welcome back our volunteers in June and to get our SafetyQuest programme ready for September.
- 2.3 During this year there have been various changes to the staff team;
- The Support Officer left in April 21 and a new one appointed in June 21.
 - The Centre Manager, was promoted to interim Head of Comms and the Development Officer was made interim Manager becoming permanent in March 22.
 - The Development Officer role was filled temporarily on October 1st and made permanent in June 22
 - The Operations Officer left in March on secondment to a fixed term contract with OPA until April 2023. The Support Officer has taken over the Operations role temporarily and we are in the process of recruiting for a temporary Support Officer.
- 2.4 The centre has four full time posts and one part-time, term time contract. Due to some of the moves detailed above as well as higher than expected sickness absence, staffing levels have fluctuated during this year. For the majority of the year we have operated on three full time staff, two of whom were brand new in their role. Roles were adapted to ensure resilience.

Volunteers

- 2.5 Phase one of our recovery focused on our volunteers, the Safety Rangers. They are vital to the success of Safety Central, and without them the educational visits would not take place, therefore a number of actions took place to re-engage and retrain existing volunteers and recruit new people;



- Six socially distanced coffee and catch-up sessions were held throughout April and May 21 to re-engage with our rangers and update them on the stages of re-opening the centre.
- A Summer BBQ was organised at the end of July to bring all volunteers together socially before the next academic year
- A number of mandatory and refresher training sessions were arranged throughout August for both existing and new rangers.
- Recruitment days were held in August 21 – these were not very successful, only one person booked onto the sessions, however they did go on to complete the application and become a ranger.

2.6 We started the year with **25 rangers registered** and throughout the year we **lost 6** but recruited **5**. We ended the year with **23 registered** and **one** in the recruitment process.

2.7 Although 25 rangers were registered, we have an **active cohort of 10 – 12** who have returned and supported the visits fully. It was very noticeable that the pandemic had;

- changed the priorities and circumstances of our rangers and some were unable to commit to as many hours as they had previously.
- made our volunteers feel quite vulnerable, nervous and anxious about returning to the centre, therefore suspending their restart until January, after the flu season.
- heightened anxiety and concerns of volunteers and prevented them from supporting as often and affected the restart until further into the year. The Omnicron variant was a particular factor.
- the impact of the pandemic effected the confidence of some of our rangers and more training sessions were organised.

2.8 The active cohort, were extremely committed and supportive, they have gone above and beyond the agreed commitment within the volunteer agreement, changed personal appointments and come in at very short notice to ensure visits were not cancelled. The visits would have been at risk without them, we are extremely thankful for their loyalty and commitment.



- 2.9 The volunteer programme received £5,000 sponsorship from SP Energy networks this year. This is 50% of the annual funding, as volunteers have been active for half of the year due to centre closures. Part of this funding will be used for, a portable recruitment roadshow, to be taken to community events.
- 2.8 The Rangers have been attending some of the many other volunteering opportunities within the service i.e. multi agency training days and open days. These are amazing opportunities, but whilst we have such low numbers, it has proved to be a challenge to the centre.
- 2.9 Shortage of staff at the centre and unexpected closures has had significant impact on recruitment of volunteers this year. We will be prioritising this in the next financial year and with a new operations officer in post we will be;
- setting up a recruitment roadshow, with up-to-date promotional materials and opportunities.
 - creating more opportunities for the operations officer to leave the building to attend various events, becoming more visible in Lymm Village.
 - liaising with Lymm radio to promote the Safety Ranger role and the centre programmes.
 - offering evening tours of the centre
 - organising a recruitment event during careers week in March 23.

2.10 Volunteer numbers and hours for 2021 - 2022

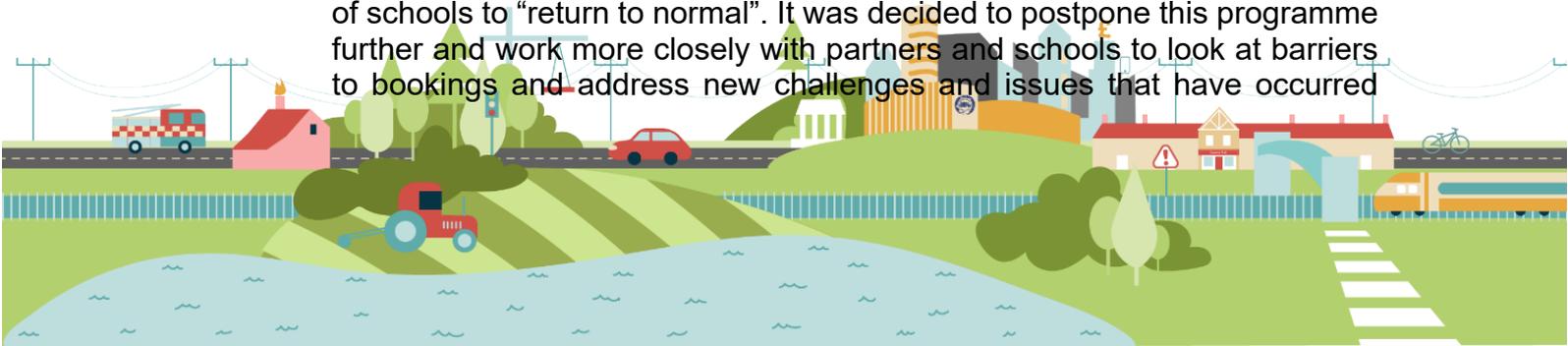
	Qtr 1	July	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
Vols	19	14	13	15	17	20	18	0	17	18
Hours	53	121	49	235	272	290	114	0	155	114

- 2.11 In total volunteers committed 1403 hours during the year and from October onwards the number of rangers per month is higher due to new rangers shadowing existing volunteers.



3 Re-opening educational visits.

- 3.1 Educational visits were able to restart in September by continuing with a very strict Covid 19 risk assessment and cleaning regime and we welcomed our first school on September 7th.
- 3.2 Phase two and three of the centre re-opening plan prioritised the key stage two 'SafetyQuest' visits only. September to October involved, three days of small groups of 30 pupils from one school only. From November to Christmas this was increased to four days, with one single school group of 60 pupils, so as to not mix bubbles. This approach also factored in hesitancy among schools about making trips but also ensured the volunteers felt safe, comfortable and confident when delivering activities.
- 3.3 All available dates for 'SafetyQuest' were fully booked, and the appetite for visits from schools was quite healthy and bookings were made for the remainder of the academic year.
- 3.3 Phase four was planned for January 22 and aimed at the remaining core programmes; KS1 'Safety Stars', KS3 'Safewise' and 'SaferTogether' for the adult community groups. Unfortunately, the impact of the Omicron variant postponed the programmes from starting.
- 3.4 The increase in the Omicron infection rate in December 2021 impacted the centre and programmes in the following way;
- **Safety Central** - closed from the third week in December and for the month of January 2022. All planned visits were cancelled and re-arranged
 - **SafetyQuest** – three visits were cancelled in December 2021 and all visits in January 2022. Most schools were accommodated within the same academic year.
 - **Safety Stars** – was due to start in February, but the January closure affected the training and upskilling of the rangers. The planned visits were postponed until later in the year, and these dates used for volunteer training. Our first KS1 visit was April 5th 2022 and these have continued throughout the year.
 - **Safewise** - there were additional issues with our KS3 programme as we found it difficult to engage external partners that supported our programme delivery. Some were still working from home and not yet starting face-to face sessions, others had changed their role within the organisation or left entirely. There were very few bookings for this programme due to pressures of schools to "return to normal". It was decided to postpone this programme further and work more closely with partners and schools to look at barriers to bookings and address new challenges and issues that have occurred



from lock down. Dates that became available were filled with SafetyQuest programmes that were cancelled in January.

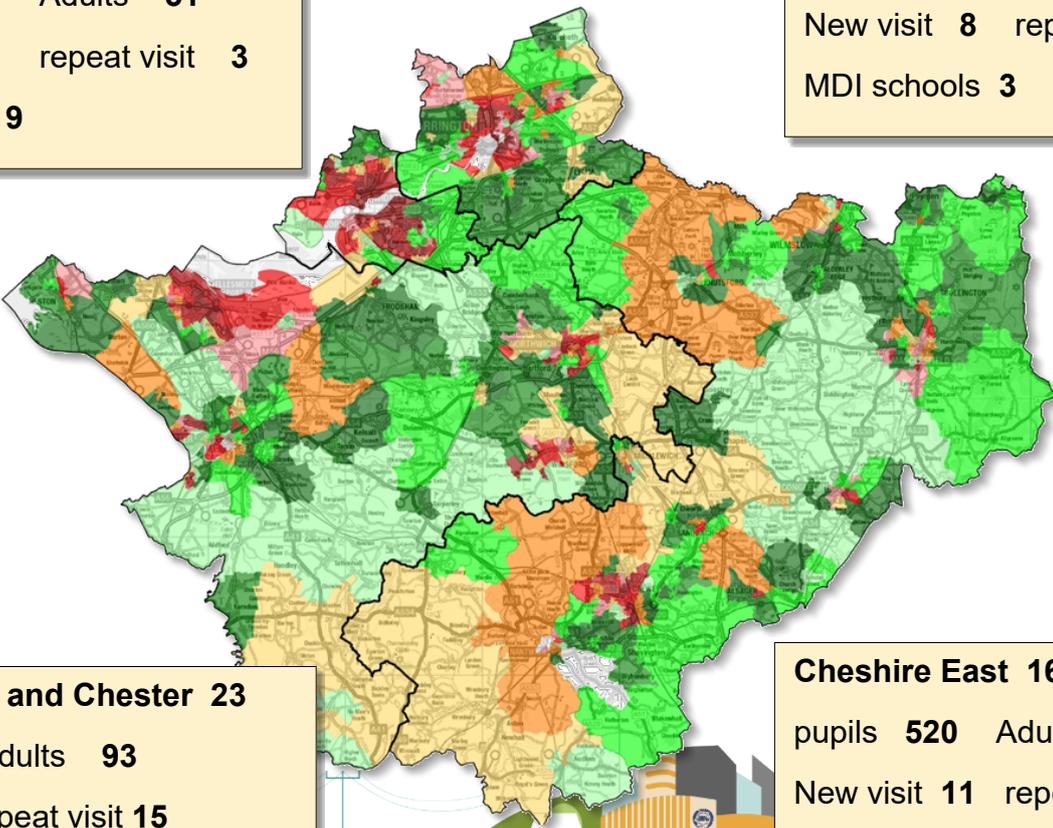
- SaferTogether – our adult programme was very slow to re-engage. As this programme is quite popular with older members of the community, there was a reluctance to organise trips. We did not receive our first booking until May 2022.

3.5 The challenges of Omicron, flu season, the reduction in active volunteers and long-term sickness of staff, as detailed above meant the educational visits from September 2021 to March 22 were made up of Key Stage Two only. This turned out to be beneficial as it was manageable and therefore all bookings were honoured.

3.6 The performance figures for visiting schools is shown below. We worked hard to encourage visits from those schools identified within the top 10% and 20% of the multiple deprivation index (MDI) within Cheshire as they are from higher risk areas and also those schools who had never visited the centre before

Halton 12 schools
 pupils **340** Adults **51**
 New visit **9** repeat visit **3**
 MDI schools **9**

Warrington 18 schools
 pupils **599** Adults **68**
 New visit **8** repeat visit **10**
 MDI schools **3**



Cheshire West and Chester 23
 pupils **611** Adults **93**
 New visit **8** repeat visit **15**
 MDI schools **0**

Cheshire East 16
 pupils **520** Adults **53**
 New visit **11** repeat visit **4**
 MDI schools **0**



4 Performance

4.1 In spite of some significant challenges and uncertainty, we were able to make progress in the following areas:

- host 3,385 visitors in total throughout the year, from schools, training, meetings and tours of the centre for potential partners and volunteers, the annual Cheshire Downs Syndrome family day and also the relaunch of 'Heartstart' the community First Aid sessions.
- completely changed the theme and format of the KS2 'SafetyQuest' programme incorporating the new intro and outro film.
- installed the completed intro and outro films for KS1, KS3 and the adult programmes.
- hosted a pop-up vaccine centre at Safety Central alongside our Warrington NHS partners where a total of 434 members of the public received covid jabs.
- following an ISO:9001 scoping visit in November 2022, we have been successfully incorporated into the departmental inspection process and able to use the quality standard in all promotion.
- held our very first Prevention Team Christmas family afternoon, 35 people attended and took part in socially distanced activities.
- hosted the Community Foundation's Cheshire 100 club Christmas networking event. This was an evening event where 60 people had cocktails and canapes in the street scene. It was a popular event and something that the team would like to replicate again with other groups in the future.
- held the first face-to-face meeting of the Safety Centre Alliance in January 22, with colleagues from Wales, Staffordshire, Bristol, Milton Keynes and Gloucestershire. Also, representatives from the Gas Safe Charity have been engaged with to look at the funding opportunities for all the centres as a larger alliance project.
- Designed and installed the new map of Cheshire feature wall in the presentation area.

4.2 In addition, our staff team and volunteers have been able to participate in a number of development opportunities including:



- **Safer recruitment** training for staff team members, improving our knowledge and understanding of safeguarding when recruiting staff or volunteers.
- The Centre Manager and Development Officer conducted their first **internal ISO:9001 audit** of the Princes Trust Team in April / May 21
- The Interim Centre Manager supported the new Apprentice cohort assessment centre as part of the presentation panel
- The Interim Centre Manager took part in **Investigation skills training** and **Step Up training**.
- The Interim Development Officer completed **Level 3 Education and training**.
- Our volunteers have attended mandatory **safeguarding** and **first aid training**.



5 Our plans for 2022/23

5.1 There are three main areas that are a high priority for the centre in 2022 / 23:

- ensuring that all paid roles are filled as soon as possible
- concentrating on volunteer recruitment and having a structured marketing campaign, with a clear focus on Lymm Village. Low numbers is a high risk to the centre and this will be a top priority.
- re-engaging with partners to ensure that Key stage 3 and the adult sessions are restarted, with current, relevant safety messages.

5.2 As well as restarting the remaining programmes in a safe and orderly way and returning to pre-pandemic visitor numbers, our other priorities for the year ahead include:

- aiming for 25% attendance from **schools from disadvantaged areas**
- gaining **Learning Outside the Classroom** endorsement as a quality assurance for school visits
- becoming a registered venue for **Childrens University** across the four unitary areas.
- producing a business case for replacing our building site scenario with a **new educational feature**
- developing a strategy for **packaging and integrating the Service's offer to schools** so that Safety Central, Key Stage 2 visits to schools, Respect and online resources are more closely aligned.
- In line with the IRMP, Safety Central will be supporting the **Cheshire Water Safety Group** as an educational provider and committed to adding a water safety activity to all educational programmes in the centre

