

**Health and Safety
Annual Report
2021/22**

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Health, Safety and Wellbeing

Annual Report

2021 – 2022

1. Summary

Health, Safety and Wellbeing (HSW) is an important and integral part of duties and obligations at Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service. HSW is a fundamental aspect that is encompassed in all management systems.

This annual report highlights the HSW performance over the previous financial year (1 April 2021 – 31 March 2022).

Performance monitoring and evaluation was measured by the number and severity of accidents reported, lost time days as a result of injuries and the proactive measures taken for continual improvement.

Overall performance has been satisfactory, although accident rates have remained flat, with no significant increase or decrease in the number of accidents reported in the last three years.

Manual handling injuries and slips, trips and falls remain the most frequent contributor to injury events, which can be expected given the high number of manual handling activities undertaken during operational and training activities.

Key points to note during the period include:

- A return to more normal activities post Covid-19.
- A decrease in the number of injuries.
- A decrease in the number of lost time days.

2. Background

The Pandemic that started to affect the country in January 2020 continued to have an impact on the Service, however as the year progressed, the Service was able to adopt a less cautious approach and able to relax restrictions that had kept staff safe during the Pandemic. Throughout the Pandemic the Service has remained committed to operating safely and to look for continual improvement in its HSW performance.

As the Health & Safety Executive continues to update legislation and guidance, the Service must implement the necessary changes in its management system.

Changes to legislation are monitored via external providers and internal checks ensure that our policies and procedures remain compliant with changes issued by the HSE, the Home Office and National Fire Chiefs Council.

During the Pandemic the HSE commissioned contractors to carry out Covid-19 Secure checks on several Service premises and no issues were raised.

Serious accidents reports from other fire and rescue services were reviewed to identify any learnings that may need to be considered in our own operational procedures and Coroners' letters published under regulation 28 to prevent future deaths are monitored for continual improvement.

Good HSW management supports the effectiveness and efficiency of the Service by reducing both the direct and indirect costs associated with accidents, work-related ill health and damage to plant and equipment.

3. Key Achievements

Relaxation of the Covid-19 restrictions and reintroduction of fitness testing and alcohol and drug testing.

The development of initiatives to manage the risks to staff from contaminants including the introduction of a clean cab policy and personal protective equipment disrobing procedure.

The creation and introduction of training videos for the disrobing process and banksperson signalling.

The Service continues to perform better than the national average for fire and rescue services.

4. Accident rates

The Reportable Accident Rate (RAR) is the way in which HSE calculates accident rates for various industries; the rate is expressed as the number of accidents per 100,000 employees. Of the RIDDOR injuries the Service reported, four were to operational staff giving an RAR for 2021/22 of 564 which is higher than the previous year.

National statistics for 2021/22 show the rate for injuries to operational FRS staff in England for 2020-21 was 1059. The national RAR for all employers is 185 although the HSE recognises that, due to underreporting, this is artificially low. The Labour Force Survey (LFS), which is generally seen as more accurate, puts the national injury accident rate for this period at 1410.

The Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations (RIDDOR) requires the Service to report certain classes of accident, work-related illness and specified dangerous occurrences to the HSE. Four injury incidents were reported under these regulations, which is an increase of one from the previous year. One dangerous occurrence was reported which is a decrease of one from the previous year.

5. Minor accidents and Near Misses

The electronic accident reporting system introduced to make the reporting and investigation of accidents easier and quicker is achieving its aim.

Reports and investigations are being completed in a timelier manner; by the end of the reporting year 97% of accident investigations were completed within the deadline.

Those outside of the allocated time were more complex incidents that required more detailed investigations.

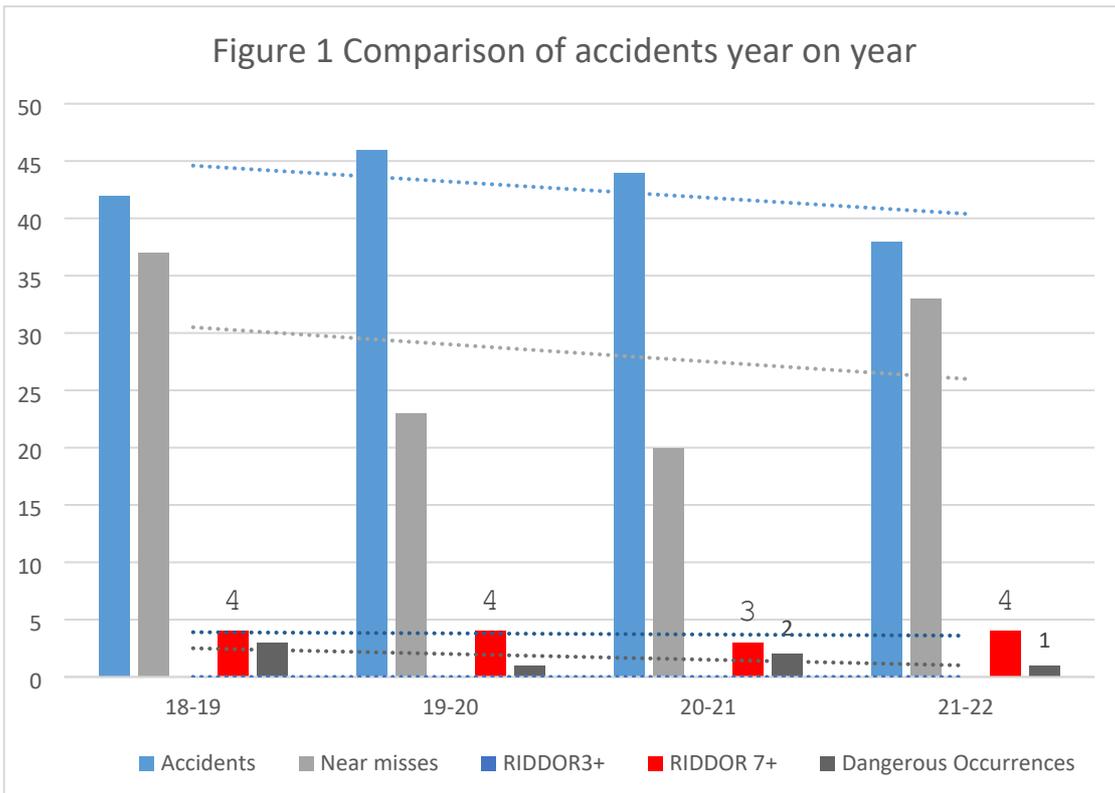


Figure 1 shows a comparison of the number of minor accidents, RIDDOR reports, near misses and dangerous occurrences for the last four years.

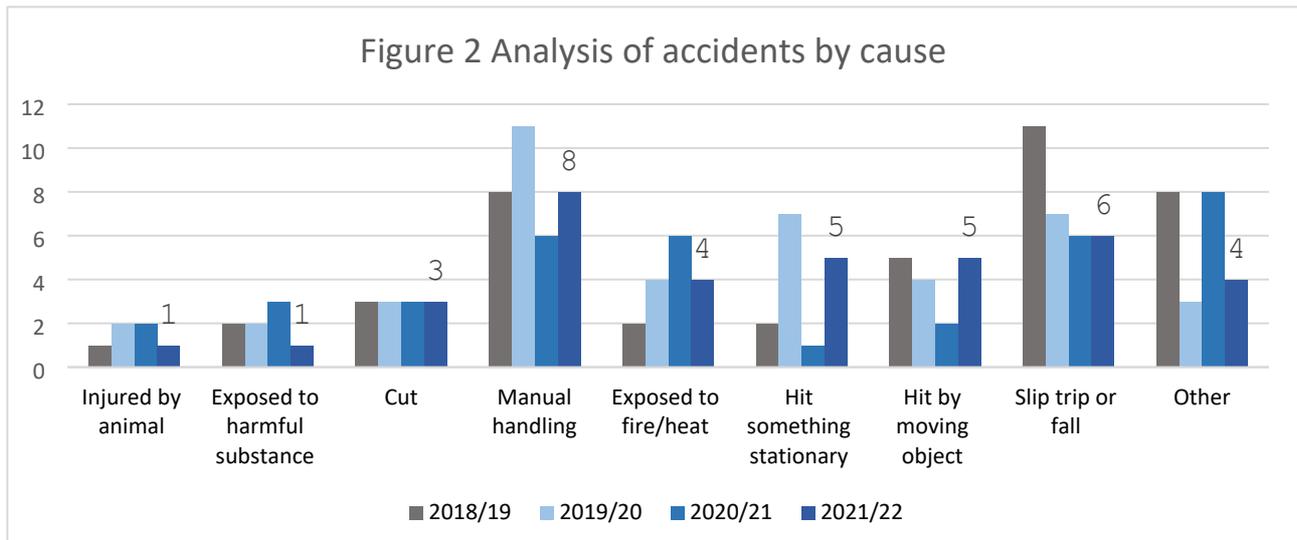
In 2021/22 the Service recorded thirty-eight injuries to employees, a decrease of six compared to forty-four the previous year. There was an increase in the number of near miss reports, which is promising as this type of report allows us to learn from incidents where there was no injury or damage in order to prevent future injuries.

The proactive programme of workplace inspections aimed at identifying and rectifying any issues that may contribute to workplace accidents continues to run quarterly.

6. Response to accident data

Figure 2 shows a breakdown of accidents in the Service by cause. Comparative data is shown for the past four years (numbers are for 2021/22).

The analysis of the Service's accident reports in 2021/22 shows that slips, trips and falls and manual handling incidents have been the cause of the most accidents. We have seen an increase in the number of people injured whilst in training.



All accidents are investigated at an appropriate level to ensure that we learn from these events with the aim of preventing a recurrence. The accident data helps identify future areas for campaigns and to direct training and resources where they will achieve the greatest effect.

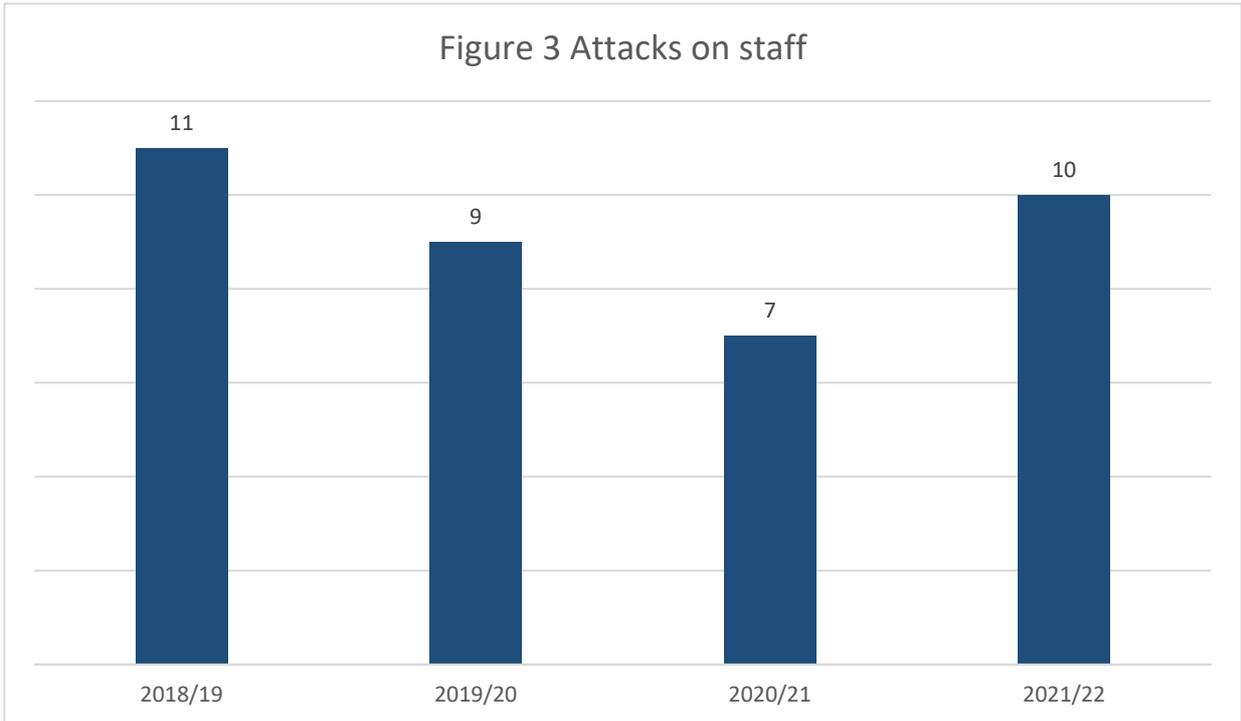
7. Violence and aggression towards staff

The Service recorded ten incidents of violent and abusive behaviour towards employees (figure 3) which is slightly more than the previous year. The Service has continued to work to identify the locations where violence may occur and to engage with the local community to try to reduce the risk of violent and abusive behaviour.

The Service performance compares well with other FRSs in the north west, where the average number of attacks on employees in a year is twenty-seven across the fire and rescue services.

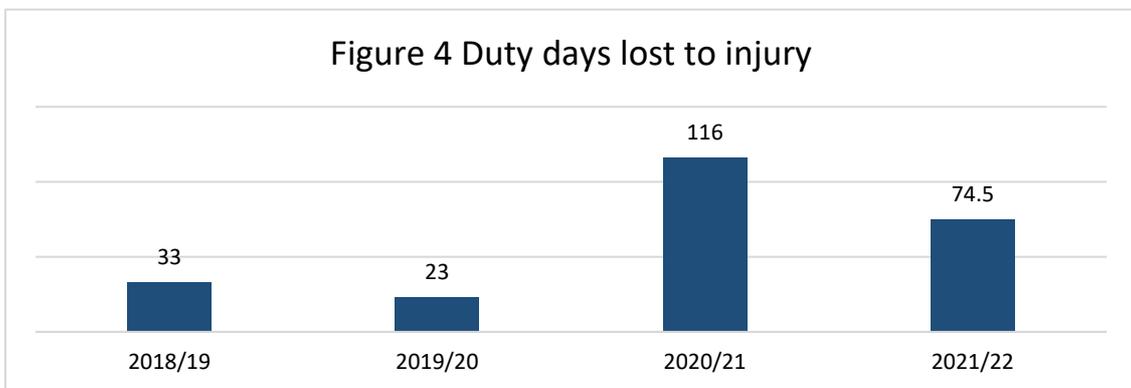
The Service will continue to collect information about violence and aggression towards firefighters and work to address the causes of this type of behaviour.

When appropriate, we will report violent attacks to the police and provide evidence from the closed-circuit television cameras mounted on appliances.



8. Duty days lost as a result of injury accidents

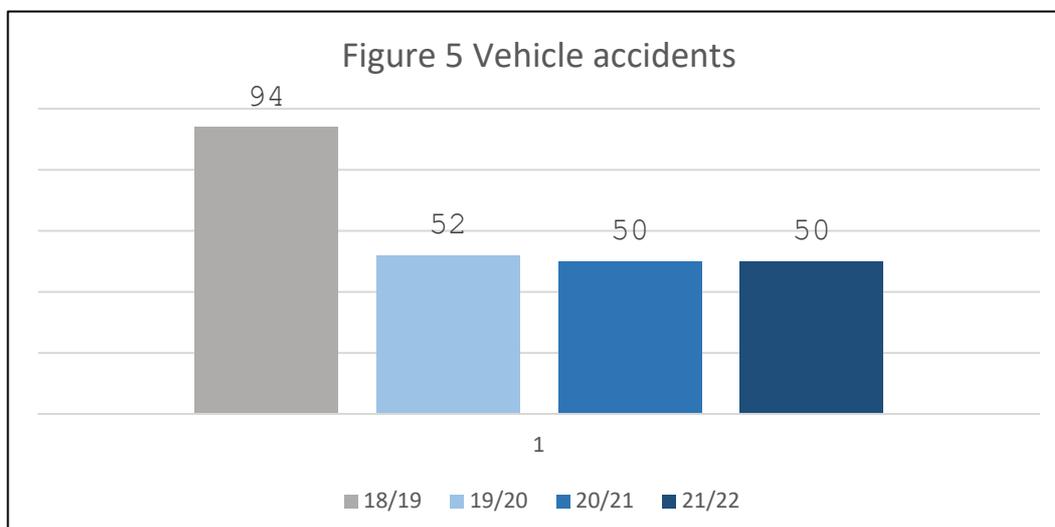
As part of its accident reporting procedure the Service records the number of duty days lost as a result of accidents.



This data point is one of the performance measures reported to the Government. The number of days lost as a result of injuries in 2021-22 is 74.5; a reduction on last year, but an increase on 2018 and 2019.

9. Vehicle accidents

The number of vehicle accidents reported was fifty; this was the same as last year. The majority of these accidents are of a minor nature and in six of the reports our vehicle was hit by another vehicle or object. Figure 5 shows a comparison of vehicle accident numbers since 2018.

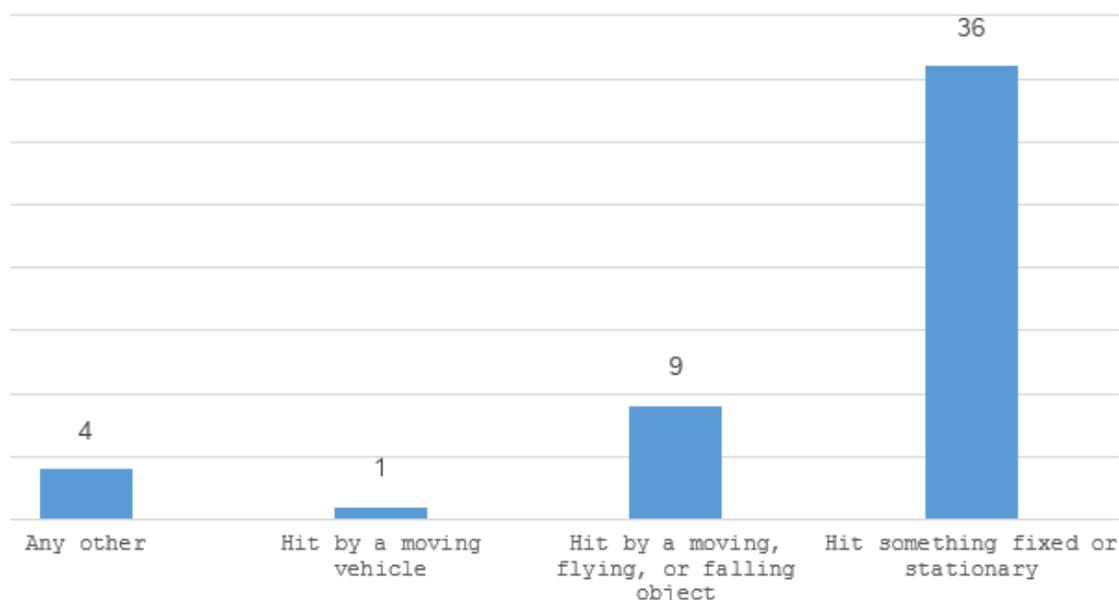


The Service has a Road Risk Management Group, the purpose of which is to examine vehicle accident reports and introduce measures to drive down both the severity and number of vehicle accidents and so reduce the risks to the Service that arise from the use of Service vehicles. There has been a sustained and successful campaign to reduce the number of incidents when Service vehicles have been driven in excess of the speed limit.

During 2021-22 the Service had a programme of licence checks to ensure that drivers had the correct licences for the vehicles they drove and a programme of retention and accreditation for all blue light and LGV drivers.

Of the fifty vehicle accidents reported during the year, sixteen occurred when fire engines were responding to emergency incidents under blue lights. The majority occurred when manoeuvring vehicles in narrow spaces, particularly some of the narrower domestic streets where there are often vehicles parked on both sides of the road. An indication of vehicle accident types can be found below.

Figure 6 (vehicle accident category)



The Service investigates all vehicle accident reports with a view to preventing a recurrence, while it also continues to invest in driver training and assessment to improve their skills.

The Service has produced a video to train the banksperson who helps guide the driver when manoeuvring in tight spaces. The Service has strict guidelines for reversing vehicles agreed with the representative bodies and failure to follow these guidelines has resulted in disciplinary action against individuals.

Vehicle technicians ensured that all Service vehicles were maintained and met all the relevant road safety requirements and there was a requirement that the driver carried out a pre-use check before driving to ensure that there were no problems that may affect the vehicle's operational performance.

10. Claims and complaints

In the last year the number of personal insurance claims made against the Service has remained low, most were as a result of minor injuries. The Service and its insurer have contested a number of claims where it was felt the Service was not at fault.

11. Corporate Governance

The Fire Authority continues to demonstrate its commitment to Health, Safety and Wellbeing by appointing a dedicated Member Champion. Principal Officers are provided with regular information about accidents, progress with personal injury insurance claims and other health and safety related issues to encourage continual improvement.

12. Risk Management

The main thrust of risk management in the year was with regard to a gradual, risk assessed reduction of Covid-19 controls and a return to more normal work activities. The Service monitored Government and NFCC advice and adopted a cautious approach to relaxing the Covid-19 measures. We consulted the representative bodies on the new and amended risk assessments and procedures.

The Service has retained some of the flexible working arrangements introduced during the Pandemic recognising the value to both staff and the Service.

A full programme of training for operational staff has been reinstated whilst incorporating the training for a new cohort of recruits at the beginning of 2022.

A process for ensuring that all of our HSW policies and procedures are reviewed and remain up to date is working well. We monitor legislation to ensure that the policies reflect the latest legal requirements and, when appropriate, we comment on published drafts and consultations of proposed legislation.

The HSW department has an overview of the HSW practices of contractors working on Service premises and is involved in the refurbishment projects to ensure a consistent approach to all health and safety matters.

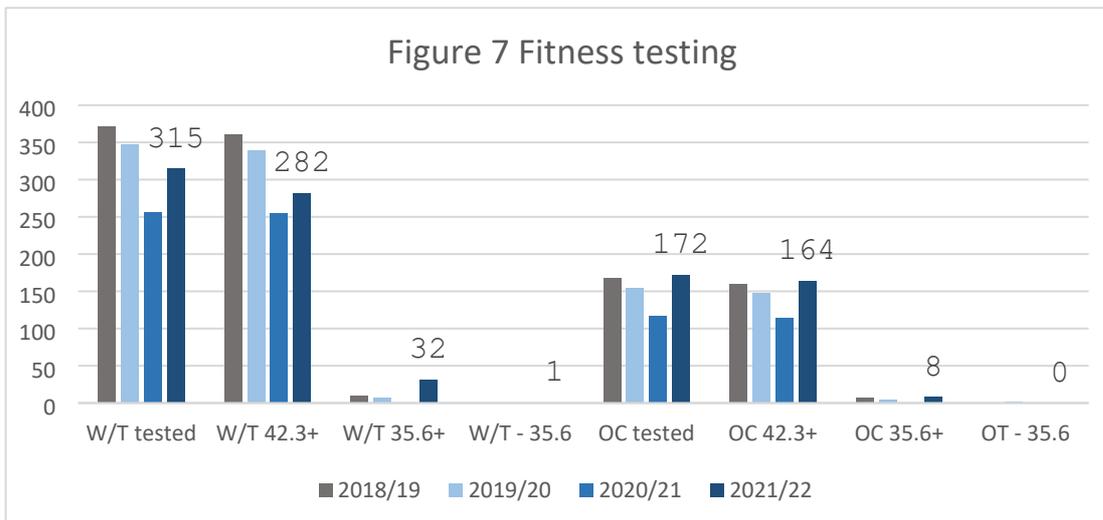
The Service is reintroducing its programme of random drug and alcohol testing to reduce the risk of staff working whilst under the influence of drugs or alcohol.

The Service has continued to implement guidance issued by NFCC regarding firefighter fitness.

Fitness testing was put on hold in the early stages of the Pandemic to reduce the risks of spreading the virus between stations, however the fitness advisor continued to work with staff with specific fitness issues. During the year the Service has reintroduced fitness testing on stations

Figure 7 shows the results for fitness testing during the year and, whilst not back to pre-Pandemic numbers, the increase in the number of tests conducted is evident. It may be seen from the data that only one firefighter failed to meet the minimum fitness standard and was removed from operational duties. The Service Fitness Adviser is on maternity leave and a replacement has been recruited to ensure that testing of and support for firefighters continues. The interim Fitness Adviser has worked with both the new recruits to the Service and the apprentices to develop their fitness to the required standard.

The Service has recruited a new Health and Safety Manager on the retirement of the previous post holder. This was managed in a way that allowed a handover period to familiarise the new manager with the Service.



(W/T Whole time & OC On call)

(42.3% VO2 MAX is the fitness requirement, <42.3 > 35.6 stay on duty and issued a with fitness plan. <35.6 restricted duty & issued a with fitness plan)

13. Training

Training was a key element of the organisation’s strategy for maintaining and improving the HSW culture in the Service. It enables managers to identify and meet the HSW responsibilities for their area, while encouraging staff to be aware of their personal responsibilities and for the impact of their actions on others. There has been major investment in operational training, including the Service’s interactive Incident Command Training Suite to improve and validate the knowledge and skills needed when managing operational incidents – a key area of criticism for some FRSs after major accident investigations.

As well as ensuring all basic and refresher training was provided according to programme, the Operational Training Group (OTG) has developed new training modules to reflect the nature of incidents staff may have to respond to. The Group has reviewed and responded to training advice issued by the NFCC.

The Service has recommenced the IOSH Managing Safely training courses that were suspended during the Pandemic and has formalised the arrangements for providing refresher training for managers.

We have continued to train new first aiders and provide refresher training for those staff with existing first aid skills.

14. Consultation

The Service HSW Committee meets quarterly and was the main mechanism for consulting representative bodies and staff on matters relating to their HSW; during the reporting year these meetings were held online. The meeting was the mechanism for consulting staff on new and revised policies. The meeting also enables representative bodies to raise any concerns that they have about the HSW of their members.

The minutes from these meetings are published on the Service's intranet with hard copies displayed on HSW notice boards.

15. Health and Wellbeing

The annual programme of health and wellbeing campaigns is now planned in a HSW sub-group that includes members of Occupational Health and Human Resources to ensure the most efficient use of resources and avoid the possibility of duplicating effort. This group has identified a trend towards an increase in the body mass index (BMI) of firefighters attending in-service medicals which was accompanied by an increase in the number of people struggling to meet the fitness standard. This has resulted in the formation of a working party to look at developing a holistic approach to fitness that includes nutrition advice and mental health support alongside a physical training regime.

The Service organised a number of online events to support the wellbeing of employees and their families during the Pandemic. Senior managers held virtual meetings with operational staff to offer support and hear about staff concerns and suggestions.

The campaigns this year have continued and included mental health awareness campaigns led by the Mental Health and Wellbeing Adviser; these are the subject of a separate report on Mental Health submitted to Members.

16. Conclusion

The Service has continued to achieve its aim of a continuous improvement in health, safety and wellbeing performance as set out in its health and safety policy. This improvement has been achieved due to a combination of the investment of time and money by the Service Management Team, a continuing improvement in the health and safety culture of both managers and staff in the Service and the cooperation of all employees including the participation of the representative bodies.

The Service has successfully discharged its legal duties for HSW on behalf of the Fire Authority.