



Making Cheshire Safer

Health, Safety and Wellbeing Annual Report 2019/20



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Health, Safety and Wellbeing Annual Report 2019 – 2020

1. Summary

Health and Safety (H&S) is an important, integral element of everything that Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service does; it is a fundamental aspect of the management of all of its activities nevermore so than in the past year. This applies equally to its responsibilities as a frontline emergency service in protecting local communities as well in its role as a key local employer.

This annual report highlights the performance over the last 12 months in H&S when measured by the number and severity of accidents reported, time lost as a result of injury accidents and proactive measures taken to improve our H&S performance.

Key issues to note include:

- A small increase in the number of minor accidents reported to the Service, there was a small decrease in the number of incidents we reported to the Health and Safety Executive (HSE).
- A decrease in the number of duty days lost as a result of accidents
- A decrease in the number of accidents involving Service vehicles
- A small decrease in the number of reports of attacks and abuse directed at staff
- Greater focus on decontamination of firefighters to reduce the risks of work related cancer
- More robust working time arrangements to include increased monitoring, training and recording.
- A review of risk assessments and the associated procedures as a result of Covid 19

2. Background

The Service faces continued challenges posed by the economic climate and in the final months of the year by the emergence of Covid 19. Against this backdrop the Service has remained committed to continue to operate safely and to look for a continuous improvement in its H&S performance and the well being of its employees, volunteers and cadets.

Good H&S management supports the 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.

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) continues to review health and safety legislation and guidance.

The Health, Safety and Wellbeing Section monitors changes to national legislation and guidance and ensures that our policies and procedures remain compliant with the guidance on legislation issued both by HSE, the Home Office and NFCC. We also consider reports resulting from fatal or serious accidents in other Fire and Rescue Services to identify any lessons that we may need to learn and that these are reflected in our operational procedures. We monitor Coroners Regulation 28 letters to identify issues that may affect the Service.

The final quarter of the year saw the Covid 19 pandemic take effect across the country; the Service took immediate action to identify measures that would reduce the risks to our staff and their families yet allow us to continue to meet our statutory obligations to the communities of Cheshire. In response to requests from partner agencies we have undertaken additional work such as face fit testing NWS staff and delivering supplies to people shielding from the virus. All of our routine activities and the new responsibilities the service undertook were risk assessed in the light of Covid 19 to ensure we could do so with the minimal risk to our staff.

3. Key Achievements

The Service has continued to deliver IOSH Managing Safely courses for our staff with a 100% success rate in the examinations. We have continued to respond to requests from North West Control, Cheshire Police and local businesses to provide this training for members of their staff.

The Service has introduced a sub-group of the H&S Committee to consult on the decontamination of firefighters and operational kit. There have been several joint initiatives with the representative bodies, and there are ongoing campaigns to improve this aspect of Service activities. This has proven to be especially important in helping to protect our staff from Covid 19. New fire appliances continue to be designed in collaboration with our staff with the aim of reducing cross contamination as far as reasonably practicable,

The Service has employed a Mental Health and Wellbeing Adviser to help improve the management of mental health in the Service and mitigate the effects of stress on its employees.

The Service continues to run a H&S refresher training course for managers to ensure their understanding of legislation, guidance and Service procedures remains current.

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. We reported 5 incidents under these regulations; 4 of these were as a result of injuries to staff and 1 as a result of a breathing apparatus incident that fell within the dangerous occurrences reporting requirements. To allow comparison with the Service's performance prior to 2013 when the reporting requirements changed we also track injury accidents that result in more than 3 days absence from work. There were no injuries in this classification.

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 and allows for a comparison between organisations of differing sizes. Changes to HSE's statistics database means it is difficult to compare the injury rates for the total number of staff in FRSs. However, it is possible to compare injuries to operational fire fighters.

Comparison of RIDDOR Accident numbers and RAR						
Year	Over 3 day injuries	Over 7 day injuries	Significant injurie	Fatalities	Dangerous Occurrence	RAR
2016 - 17	1	5	1	0	5	450
2017 – 18	2	4	2	0	4	450
2018 – 19	2	3	0	0	2	386
2019 – 20	0	4	0	0	1	456

. The average RAR for all FRSs in the North West is 767.

HSE's national statistics show the national rate for injuries to operational FRS staff in 2018-19 was 1230. The national RAR for all employers in 2019/20 is 230 although the HSE recognise 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 430.

5. Minor accidents and Near Misses

The SharePoint based 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 100% of accident investigations were completed within the deadline.

Figure 1 shows a comparison of the number of minor accidents, RIDDOR reports and near misses the Service has recorded each year since 2005. In 2019/20 the Service recorded 51 injury accidents to staff, an increase compared to 43 the previous year. There was a decrease in the number of near miss reports, this is disappointing as this type of report allows us to learn from incidents where there was no injury or damage.

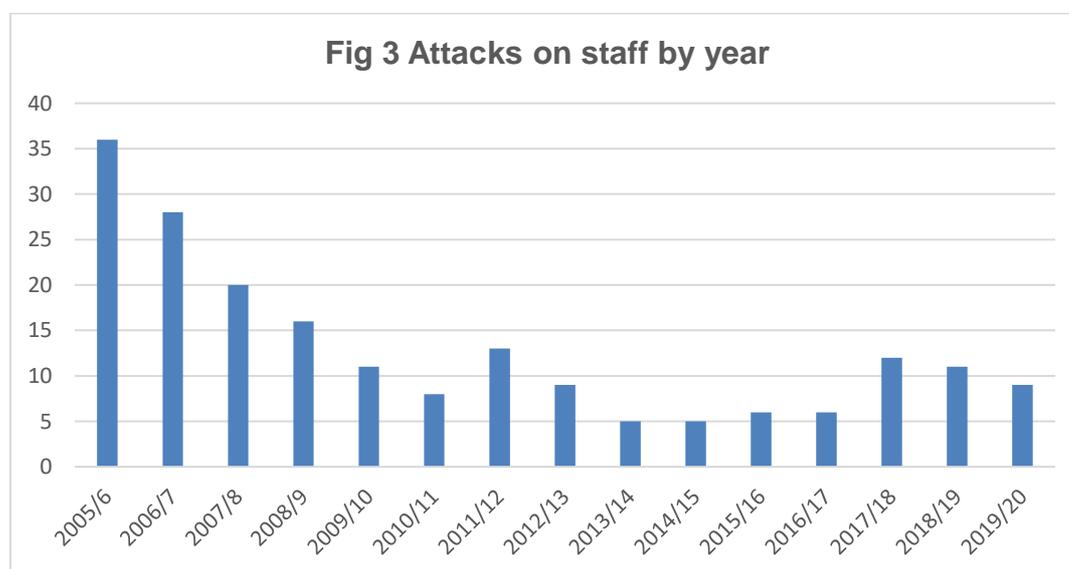
The proactive programme of workplace inspections aimed at identifying and rectifying any issues that may contribute to workplace accidents may be a factor in the reduction in the number of near miss reports.

The analysis of the Service's accident reports in 2019-20 shows that most of the accidents resulted from slips trips and falls, with manual handling the next most common cause. This mirrors the picture nationally in Fire and Rescue Services and across all industries.

The accident data helps inform future campaigns and to direct training and resources where they will achieve the greatest effect.

7. Violence and aggression towards staff

The Service recorded 9 incidents of violent and abusive behaviour towards staff (see figure 3) this is slightly fewer 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 staff in the year is 47.

The Service will continue to collect information about violence and aggression towards firefighters and other employees 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 where practical.

8. Duty days lost as a result of injury accidents

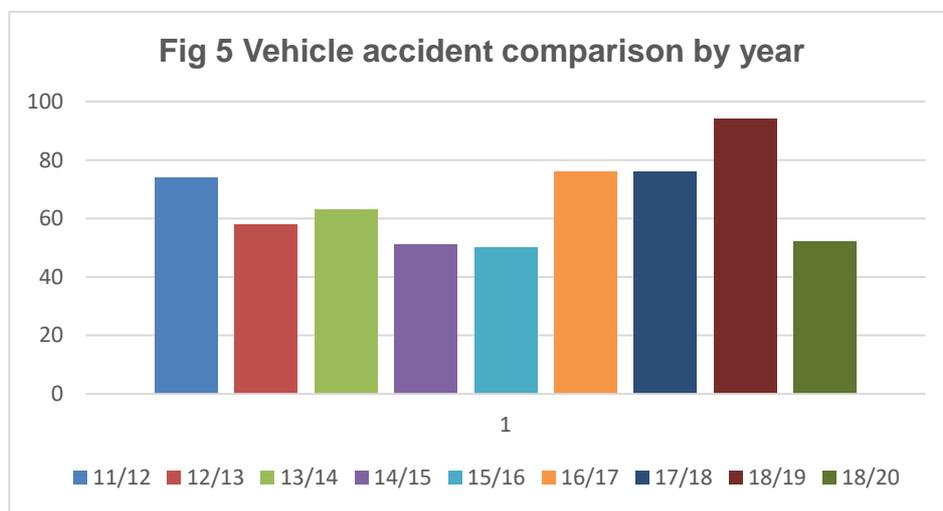
As part of its accident reporting procedure the Service records the number of duty days lost as a result of accidents; this includes days lost to both serious accidents and those of a more minor nature. This data is one of the performance measures reported to Government.

Year	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
Duty days lost due to injury	283.5	122	61	38	20	33	20

The number of days lost as a result of injuries in the reporting year is 20. This is an decrease on the previous year. The table above shows a continuous trend for a decrease in the time lost as a result of injury accidents.

9. Vehicle accidents

The number of vehicle accidents report to the Service was 52; this is a marked reduction on the previous year. The majority of these accidents are of a minor nature and in 6 of the reports our vehicle was hit by another vehicle or object. Figure 5 shows a comparison of vehicle accident numbers since 2011.



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 numbers 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.

The Service has a programme of licence checks to ensure that drivers have the correct licences for the vehicles they drive and a program of retraining and accreditation for all blue light and LGV drivers.

Of the 52 vehicle accidents reported during the year, 8 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.

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 strict guidelines for reversing vehicles agreed with the Representative bodies; failure to follow these guide lines has resulted in disciplinary action against individuals.

Vehicle technicians ensure that Service vehicles are maintained and meet all the relevant road safety requirements and there is a requirement that the driver checks the vehicle before use to ensure that there are no problems that may affect its 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 we were not at fault.

11. Corporate Governance

The Fire Authority continues to demonstrate its commitment to Health and Safety by appointing a dedicated Member Champion, while Principal Officers are provided with regular information about accidents, progress with personal injury insurance claims and other H&S related issues.

The results of any internal H&S audits are shared with the Service Health Safety and Welfare Committee (SHSWC) which monitors the implementation of the action plans arising from these audits.

12. Risk management

The Service regularly reviews the Risk Register to ensure that high level H&S risks are being managed

The Service has a process for ensuring that all of our H&S policies and procedures are reviewed and remain up to date. 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.

Service activities are subject to risk assessment; significant risks and their associated controls are documented and subject to regular review.

As a result of a review of the management of fire risk within the Service there has been a project to improve fire safety across all of our premises with the Emergency Evacuation Policy rewritten to include a wider range of emergencies.

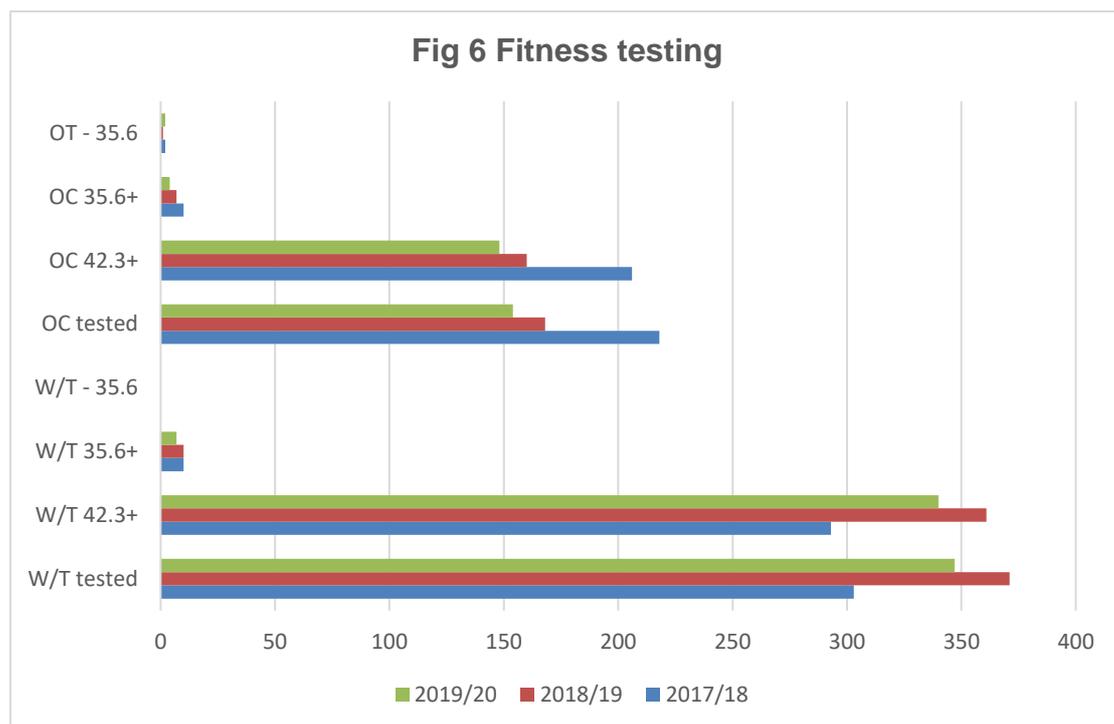
The H&S Department has an overview of the H&S practices of contractors working on Service premises and involved in the refurbishment projects to ensure a consistent approach to H&S.

The Service has continued with its program of random drug and alcohol testing; this has proved an effective both as a deterrent and as a tool for education. No staff tested positive for drugs or alcohol in the random tests.

The Service has continued to implemented guidance issued by NFCC regarding fire fighter fitness.

The fitness adviser has continued the program of annual fitness tests. The Service has only had to take two firefighters off the run due to failing the test; both returned to full duties following a period of remedial training.

Figure 6 below shows the results of the fitness tests during 2019/20 compared with previous years. The national standard for firefighter fitness is 42.3 VO₂max, the point at which we would take a firefighter off the run is 35.6 VO₂max a fitness score between those values would result in the firefighter being kept on the run with a program of remedial training and a requirement to complete a Functional Fitness Test.



The Fitness Adviser has supported the Apprentice and recruit firefighters with fitness training and advice and has run training sessions for potential recruits to improve their fitness before undertaking the selection tests.

The Service has continued to respond to new and revised guidance issued as part of the National Operational Guidance program.

13. Training

Training is a key element of the organisation's strategy for maintaining and improving the H&S culture in the Service. It enables managers to identify and meet the H&S 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 facility 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 is 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 have reviewed and responded to training advice issued by the NFCC.

The Service has continued to train managers using the IOSH Managing Safely course. We have offered this training to partner organisations. In addition, we have provided the training to companies who have approached us as we are listed as a training provider on the IOSH website. The Service ran a total of 7 Managing Safely courses. During the year we introduced a H&S refresher course to update managers knowledge and skills; we also introduced an Accident Investigation course for managers to ensure a more consistent approach to investigations and to the learning that can come from them.

We have developed new e-learning to raise awareness about Noise, the effects on hearing and how to reduce the risks of the hearing loss that noise may cause.

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

14. Consultation

The Service Health Safety and Welfare Committee meets quarterly and is the main mechanism for consulting representative bodies and staff on matters relating to their H&S. The meeting is the mechanism for consulting staff on new and revised Health, Safety and Wellbeing policies. The meeting also enables representative bodies to raise any concerns that they have about the health, safety and wellbeing of their members.

The minutes from these meetings are published on the Service's Intranet and hard copies displayed on H&S notice boards. The Member champion for H&S has continued to attend meetings of the committee.

15. Health and Wellbeing

The annual programme of health and wellbeing campaigns is planned in a sub-group of the SHSWC that includes members of Occupational Health and

Human Resources to ensure the most efficient use of resources and avoid the possibility of duplicating effort.

Campaigns have been run both internally to address specific issues in the Service and in partnership with external organisations such as Cancer UK; this ensures that the messages provided to staff are consistent with national messages and reinforce wider campaigns.

The campaigns this year have continued and include mental health awareness campaigns led by the Mental Health and Wellbeing Advisor including those based on the MIND Blue Light program to which the Service signed up this has resulted in additional training for managers and the recruitment of Mental Health champions on watches to support their colleagues.

16. Conclusion

The Service has continued to achieve its aim of a continuous improvement in Health and Safety 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, 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 H&S on behalf of the Fire Authority.