



Cheshire
Fire & Rescue Service

Annual Report 2020/21

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

September 2021



Author: Mark Shone, Safety Central Manager
Head of Department: Lee Shears, Head of Prevention & Protection

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This is Safety Central's third annual report, summarising performance for the period April 1st 2020 to March 31st 2021. It is important to note that the reporting period straddles two school years – in this case the summer term of 2019/20 and the first term and a half of 2020/21.
- 1.2 The Covid-19 (C19) pandemic forced us to suspend our education programmes on Friday 13th March 2020, just before the start of this reporting period. Although we have been able to deliver limited activities, the centre has remained closed to visitors throughout much of 2020/21.
- 1.3 The closure came at a time when Safety Central was beginning to establish itself as a destination of choice for school trips and an increasing number of community groups. Shortly before we suspended visits, we welcomed our 20,000th visitor at the end of a year in which visitor numbers increased by 26% compared to 2018/19. 2020/21 was shaping up to be another successful year, with more than 5,300 visitors from 113 school groups, 42 community and youth groups, and 25 partner agencies booked to attend between April 1st and December 31st 2021. The vast majority of these bookings had to be cancelled.
- 1.4 In spite of a very difficult situation, we have worked hard over the last 12 months to maintain momentum while keeping ourselves and each other safe. While this annual report is briefer than we would like, we are pleased to be able to describe over the following pages:

- the support the Safety Central team has been proud to offer our partners in their **response to the health emergency**
- our C19-safe **visits for families and schools** while restrictions were eased during August, September and October 2020
- work to develop our **programmes, partnerships, volunteers and ourselves**
- our **plans for the year ahead.**



2. Response to the health emergency

2.1 Like many other fire staff, the Safety Central team began working from home in the middle of March 2020. Initially we focussed on cancelling and rearranging visits booked for the remainder of the school year and keeping our volunteer rangers informed and engaged. However, we were also keen to get involved with the Service's efforts to support partners in responding to pandemic.

2.2 As a result, during the course of 2020/21:

- our Operations Officer, Support Officer and Visitor Relations Officer made hundreds of **welfare phone calls** to people who needed help with shopping and medication
- our Development Officer joined a team of Service personnel trained to **fit and test face masks** for North West Ambulance Service crews, NHS colleagues and dental staff
- our Centre Manager became the Service's **Single Point of Contact** for partners in Cheshire East. This included assisting Cheshire East Council in setting up a process for triaging requests for help and deploying Service staff and volunteers to visit people who were shielding
- we supported several **foodbanks**, including Cheshire Streetwise in Macclesfield, by collecting bulk food items from a depot in Manchester
- three of the team worked as **vaccinators** at the Chester Racecourse and Orford mass vaccination centres
- our Support Officer delivered **swab test kits** to staff and patients of Warrington and Halton Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust and returned samples to the lab.

2.3 In addition, Safety Central was used:

- as a location for **face mask fitting and testing**
- by the NHS Foundation Trust's community midwives on Thursdays (as well as their routine Fridays) when other **antenatal clinic** venues closed
- in the **retraining of recently-retired firefighters and officers**, recruited by the Service to provide additional resilience to crews.



3. Family and school visits

3.1 During August, September and part of October 2020, C19 restrictions eased sufficiently for us to run a limited programme of family and school visits. In preparation, we worked closely with the Service's health and safety team to undertake a thorough C19 risk assessment and put in place control measures to keep staff, volunteers and visitors safe. These included:

- asking anyone **symptomatic** or in close contact with anyone with C19 to stay away from the centre
- operating as **two separate bubbles** on assigned days to prevent all staff and volunteers from coming into contact with each other on the same days
- **temperature checking** people on arrival, installing **hand sanitisers** throughout the centre, mandating **masks or visors** for anyone aged over 11, putting in place enhanced **cleaning** regimes and ensuring good **ventilation** throughout
- maintaining two-metre **social distancing** by limiting group sizes and adapting learning activities to rely less on handling props.

3.2 These precautions allowed us to operate as a C19 Secure venue and there were no reports of C19 infection among staff, volunteers or visitors as a result of mixing at the centre.

3.3 August's **family visits** enabled household or support bubble groups of up to six people to take part in a two-hour Key Stage 1 or Key Stage 2 tour. These were promoted on social media, booked in advance on Eventbrite, ran every 15 minutes and were led by the Service's community safety and firefighter apprentices and a small number of volunteers.



A total of 78 families including 113 children and 110 adults visited over the course of 12 days.

During September and early October, **229 children and 44 teachers and assistants visited with eight primary schools**, to take part in an adapted version of our Key Stage 2 *SafetyQuest* programme. Visits were limited to four hours with no more than 30 pupils in a group. We surveyed the teachers who visited and **100% rated the steps we had taken to keep visitors safe as 'very good'**. Unfortunately in October tier three restrictions were introduced in Warrington and we made the difficult decision to suspend visits to prevent schools travelling into the area.



4. Development

- 4.1 In last year's annual report we set out a number of key objectives from the 2020/21 Prevention Department Plan, developed before the pandemic in late 2019. These included increasing visitor numbers to 9,500 a year, maintaining a cohort of 50 volunteers, benchmarking the number of schools visiting from disadvantaged areas and replacing our building site scenario. In addition, objectives around evaluation, external accreditation and developing a partnership with community midwives were carried over from the year before. We will return to these as soon as we are operating again normally.
- 4.2 However, in spite of significant practical challenges, we were able in 2020/21 to make progress in a number of areas in preparation for a staged re-opening in the months ahead. These include:
- awarding three-year **maintenance contracts**, following a competitive tender process, to interactives specialists Technically Creative and audio visual company Piranha Creative, ensuring our resources and special effects remain in optimal condition
 - a significant upgrade of our showpiece **burning bedroom scenario**, now featuring theme-park standard animation and projection
 - a new partnership with gas distribution network operators Cadent, who have provided funding for a touch screen TV and special effects in our kitchen, to highlight the signs and dangers of **carbon monoxide**
 - starting production on **four new intro films** to replace our existing cinema room film, providing age-appropriate context for our main visitor groups
 - updating all **Key Stage 2 lesson plans**, to bring safety messaging up to date and enable volunteers to more easily remember health and safety controls and equality, diversity and inclusion considerations
- 4.3 In addition, our staff team and volunteers have been able to participate in a number of development opportunities including:
- levels 1 to 3 **safeguarding** training for staff team members, improving our knowledge and understanding of risks to children, young people and adults
 - **Makaton** levels 1 to 4 for the staff team members, helping us to communicate more effectively with visitors who have additional needs
 - completion of **social media training** by our Visitor Relations Officer
 - **Mental Health First Aid, online safety and self-care training** as part of a package of regular contact and engagement with our volunteers.



5. Our plans for 2021/22

5.1 As part of the Service's roadmap to recovery from the pandemic, a plan has been agreed for the centre to reopen and once again host visits. This takes into account hesitancy among some schools and community groups about making trips and the need to ensure all volunteers feel safe, comfortable and ready to deliver activities. The plan is as follows:

June and July	Ranger refresher training and opportunities to practice delivery.
August	Volunteer recruitment 'open days' and days for Service staff to bring children and young people for a visit.
September to October	Three Key Stage 2 school visits a week, limited to 30 pupils per group.
November to Christmas	As above, but increasing to four visits per week with 60 per group as more rangers become available.
January 2021	Key Stage 1, Key Stage 3 and community group visits restart.

5.2 The pause in delivery is enabling us to refocus marketing and promotion of programmes. To fill slots between September and Christmas, we targeted head teachers of schools in areas of multiple deprivation followed by schools that have never visited. At the time of this report being written, this campaign has generated more than 100 bookings for 2021/22.

5.3 As well as restarting visits in a safe and orderly way and returning eventually to normal visitor numbers, our other priorities for the year ahead include:

- aiming for 25% attendance from **schools from disadvantaged areas**
- gaining **ISO9001:2015 accreditation**, to help assure the quality of our delivery, and prepare for **Learning Outside the Classroom** endorsement
- producing a business case for replacing our building site scenario with a **new educational feature** in summer 2022
- 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.

