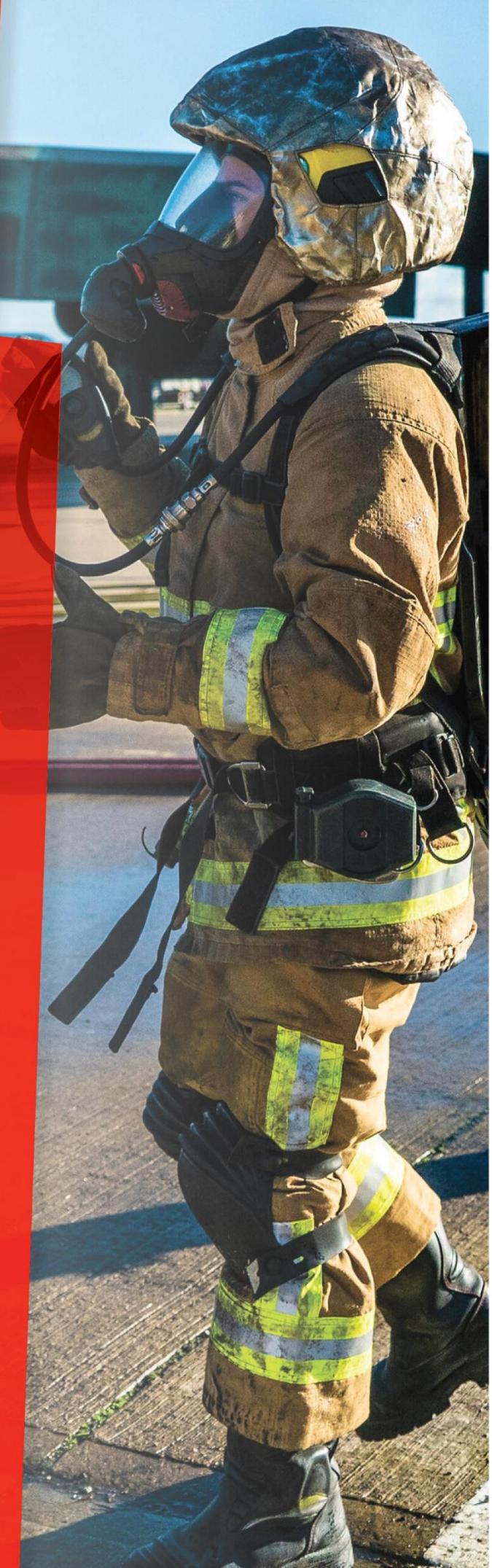




Health and Safety Annual Report 2020/21

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Health, Safety and Wellbeing

Annual Report

2020 – 2021

1. Summary

Health and Safety (H&S) is an important, integral element of everything that Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service does. H&S is a fundamental aspect of the management of all of its activities and this has never been more important than in the past year as the Service has been faced with fulfilling its statutory duties and supporting the communities it serves whilst faced with the Coronavirus pandemic.

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 review of risk assessments and the associated procedures as a result of Covid 19
- A decrease in the number of injury accidents
- An increase in the number of duty days lost as a result of accidents

2. Background

The year has seen the pandemic that started to affect the country in January 2020 have a significant impact on the Service. The Service was faced with the duty to protect our staff whilst maintaining our statutory services to the public and when undertaking a variety of new activities to support our partners and the inhabitants of Cheshire. 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.

The HSE continues to review health and safety legislation and guidance, the Service must reflect the changes to legislation and guidance in our H&S management systems and how we manage the H&S of our staff; the pandemic resulted in new legislation and guidance as to how to manage our activities. The HSE commissioned contractors to carry out Covid Secure checks on several Service premises throughout the pandemic. No issues were raised as a result of these checks.

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 review reports resulting from fatal or serious accidents in other

Fire and Rescue Services to identify any lessons that we may need to learn and reflect in our operational procedures. We monitor Coroners Regulation 28 letters published to try to prevent future deaths to identify issues that may affect the Service.

The actions the Service took early in the pandemic enabled it to take measures to reduce the risks to our staff and their families yet allow us to continue to deliver our statutory services to the communities in Cheshire. Unfortunately this meant curtailing some activities such as Cadets and Princes Trust Teams. However, in response to requests from partner agencies we have undertaken additional work such as face fit testing NWAS staff, delivering supplies to people shielding from the virus and supporting the vaccination program. All of our routine activities were reviewed and these and the new responsibilities we accepted were risk assessed to ensure we could do so with the minimal risk to our staff. Risk assessments were aligned to the Tripartite Risk Assessments published by the NFCC.

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.

3. Key Achievements

The Service has continued to develop initiatives to manage the risks to staff from contaminants including the introduction of a clean cab policy and a procedure for decontaminating firefighters and their equipment following incidents involving Covid 19.

The Service has issued all fire fighters with personal issue Breathing Apparatus (BA) masks to eliminate the risk of contracting Covid 19 from shared masks.

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; 3 of these were as a result of injuries to staff and 2 as a result of a breathing apparatus incident that fell within the dangerous occurrences reporting requirements. To allow comparison with the years 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 which means that overall, this is a slight decrease on the previous year and represents a sustained, high performance for this class of incident.

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. Changes to HSE's statistics database mean

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. Of the RIDDOR injuries the Service reported, 3 were to operational staff giving an RAR for 2020/21 of 456 which is the same as the previous year. We did report 2 Dangerous Occurrence under these regulations; these related to the failure of BA sets. The average RAR for all FRSs in the North West is 760.

National statistics for 2020/21 show the rate for injuries to operational FRS staff in England for 2019-20 was 1076. The national RAR for all employers is 238 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 2430.

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.

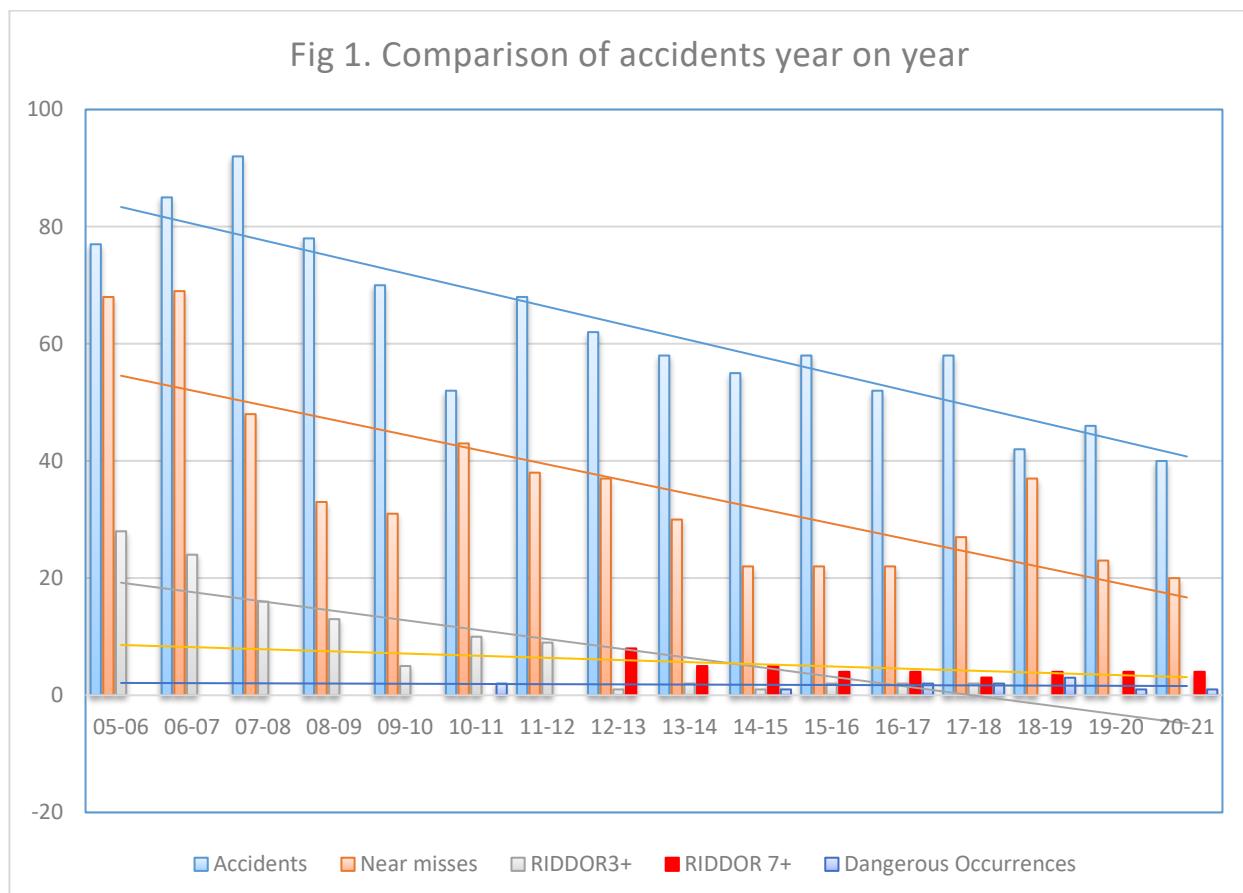


Figure 1 shows a comparison of the number of minor accidents, RIDDOR reports and near misses the Service has recorded each year since 2005. In 2020/21 the Service recorded 44 injury accidents to staff, a decrease compared to 52 the previous year. There was a decrease in the number of near miss

reports, this is disappointing as this type of report allows us to learn from incidents where there was no injury or damage but there was the potential for either of these as a result of the occurrence.

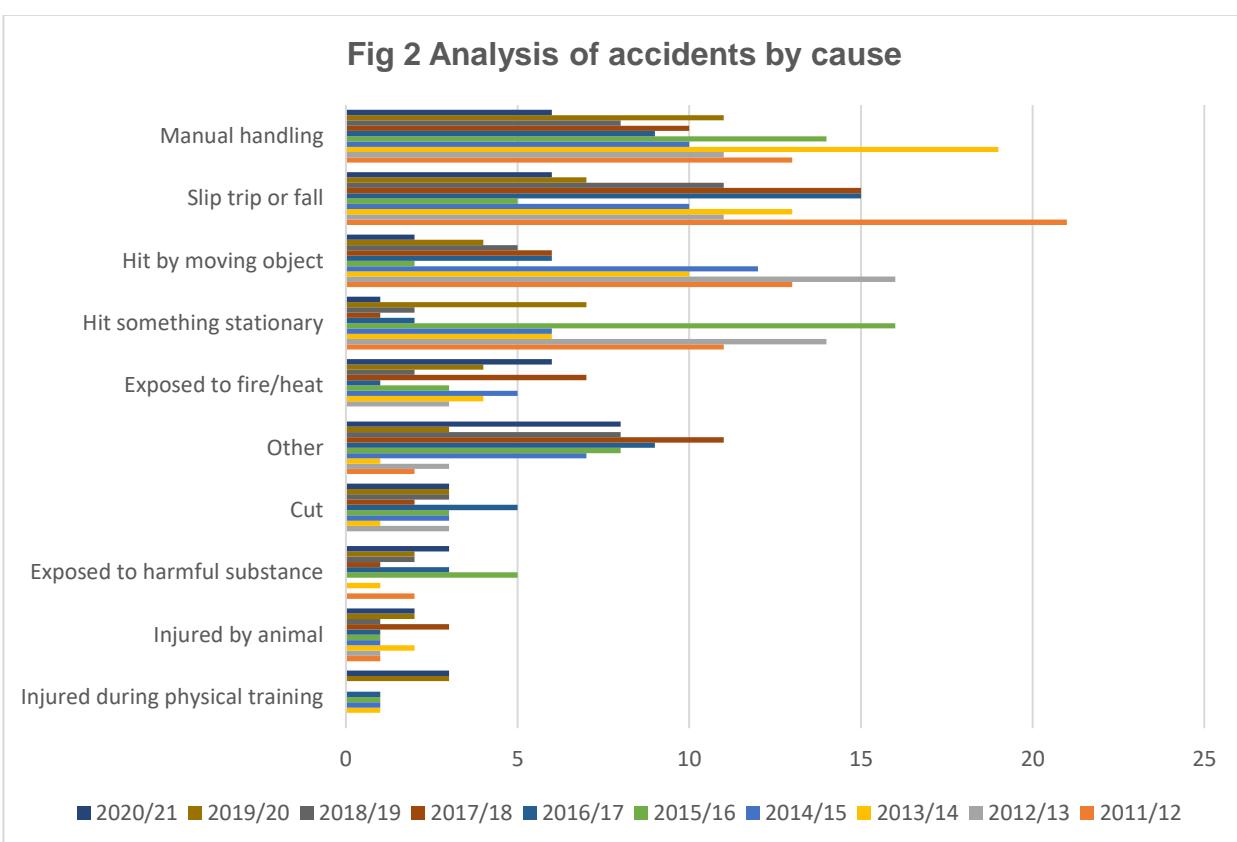
Importantly, when we apply trend lines to the graph they show a continued reduction in all types of unsafe, unwanted events across the Service.

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

6. Response to accident data

Figure 2 shows a breakdown of accidents in the Service by cause, comparative data is shown for the years since 2011/12.

Fig 2 Analysis of accidents by cause



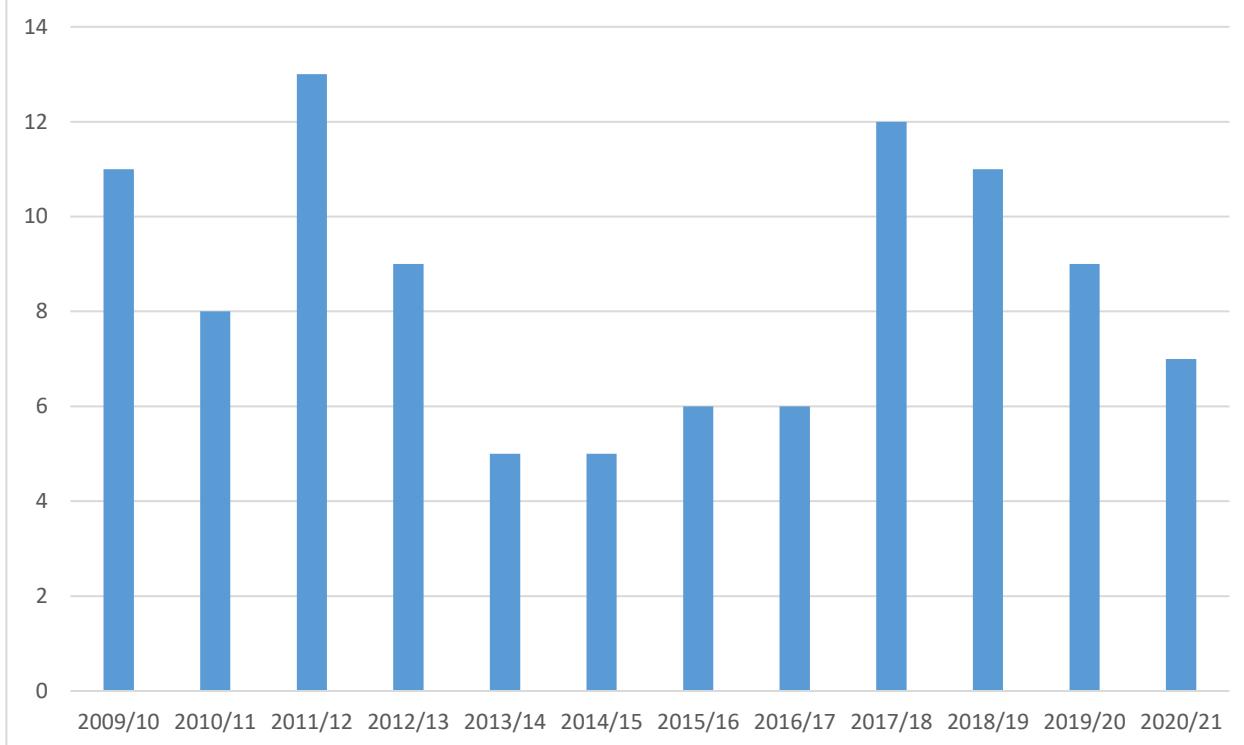
The analysis of the Service's accident reports in 2020/21 shows that slips trips and falls, manual handling and exposure to heat account for equal numbers of accidents and are responsible for the majority of incidents.

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 7 incidents of violent and abusive behaviour towards staff (see figure 3) this is slightly less 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.

Fig 3 Attacks on Staff



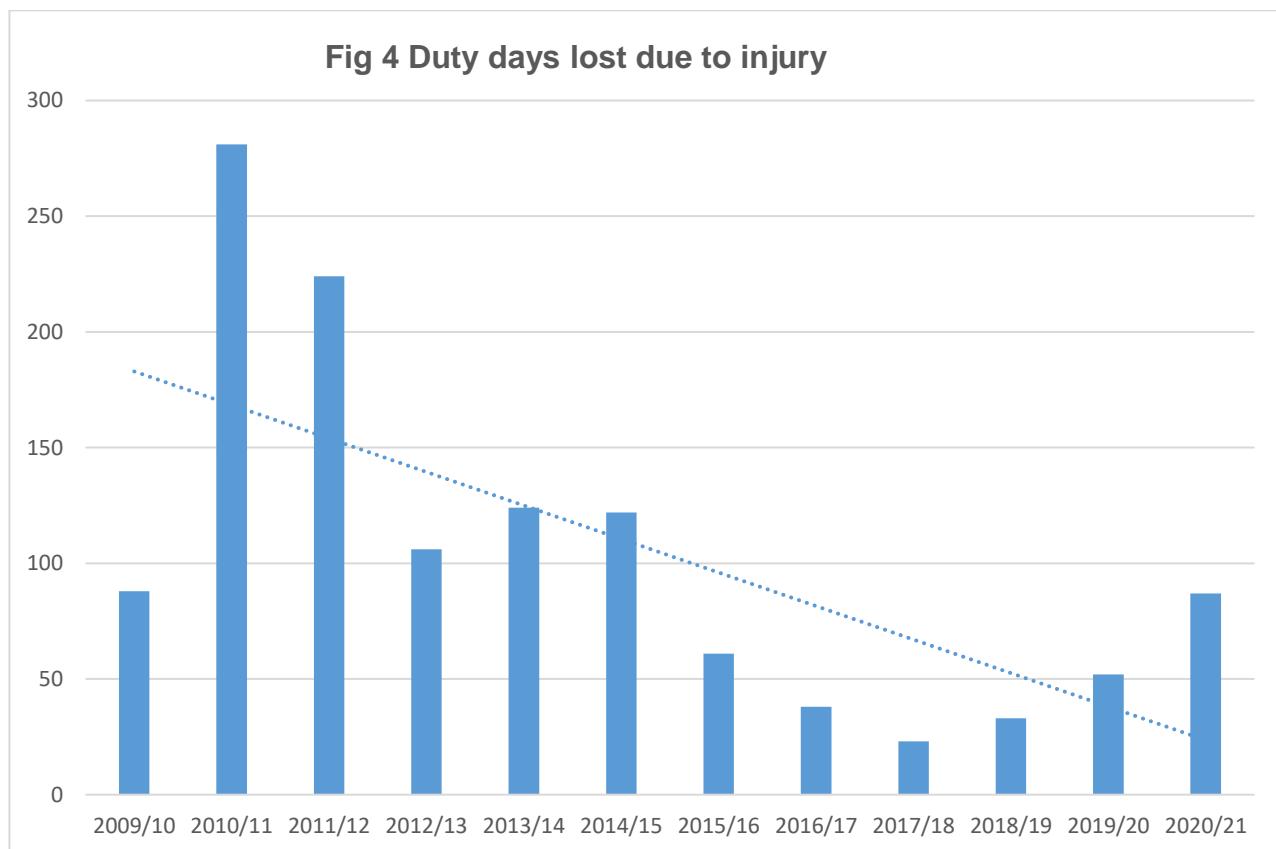
The Service performance compares well with other FRSs in the North West where the average number of attacks on staff in a year is 27 across the fire and rescue services.

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 the Government. The final figure for the

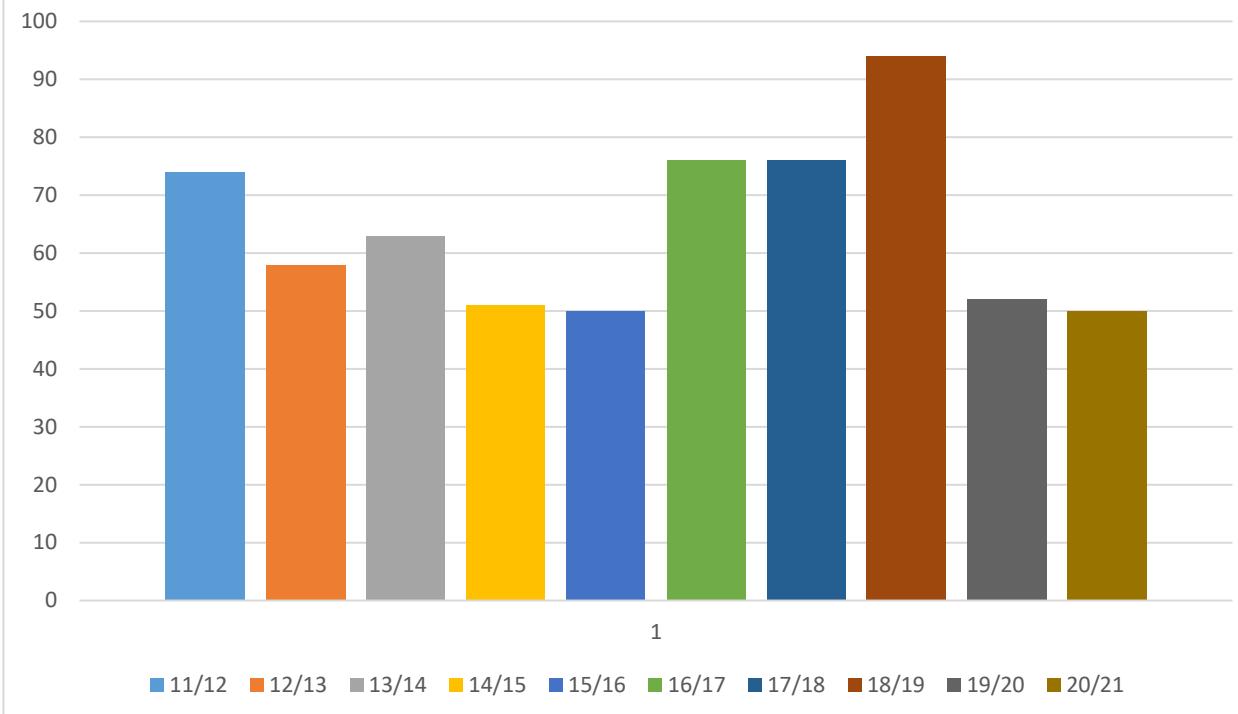
previous year has been adjusted to reflect 29 days lost in the current year as a result of injuries received in the previous year. The number of days lost as a result of injuries in the reporting year is 87. This is an increase on the previous year Figure 4 shows the pattern for this data since 2006/07; the data shows a continuous trend for a decrease in the time lost as a result of injury accidents. The increase is as a result of 4 injury accidents that resulted in significant lost time.



9. Vehicle accidents

The number of vehicle accidents reported to the Service was 50; this is a slight reduction on the previous year. The reduced number of vehicle movements as a result of the pandemic may have contributed to this fall in numbers however, the risk of our appliances hitting parked vehicles increased as with home working and the lockdown more vehicles were parked outside homes. The majority of these accidents are of a minor nature and in 8 of the reports our vehicle was hit by another vehicle or object. Figure 5 shows a comparison of vehicle accident numbers since 2011.

Fig 5 Vehicle accident comparison by year



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 50 vehicle accidents reported during the year, 9 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.

12. Risk management

The main thrust of risk management in the year was with regard to Covid 19. All Service premises had bespoke Covid Secure risk assessments with social distancing, enhanced hygiene arrangements and the necessary signage and shields introduced. All of the Service operational procedures were reviewed early in the pandemic to ensure the risk from the virus was minimised, these risk assessments had to be reviewed regularly as Government and NFCC guidance changed. All new activities undertaken to support partners and communities were risk assessed in line with the Tripartite risk assessments published by the NFCC. We consulted the representative bodies on the new and amended risk assessments and procedures.

Staff were required to develop personal Covid 19 risk assessments to allow the Service to identify vulnerable employees and manage them appropriately. All staff working at home were asked to complete a homeworking risk assessment and staff were provided with appropriate equipment to allow them to work safely.

The Service continued to manage training for operational staff albeit with a lighter touch so as to reduce the risks from Covid 19.

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.

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 suspended its program of random drug and alcohol testing to reduce the risk of introducing Covid 19 in to stations although we did retain the facility to commission For Cause alcohol and drug tests.

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

Fitness testing was put on hold in the early stages of the pandemic to reduce the risks of spreading the virus between stations. The fitness advisor continued to work with staff with specific fitness issues at the same time managing the social distance requirements. During the year the number of staff using station gyms at any one time was limited and strict decontamination procedures introduced as part of the controls to limit Covid 19 transmission.

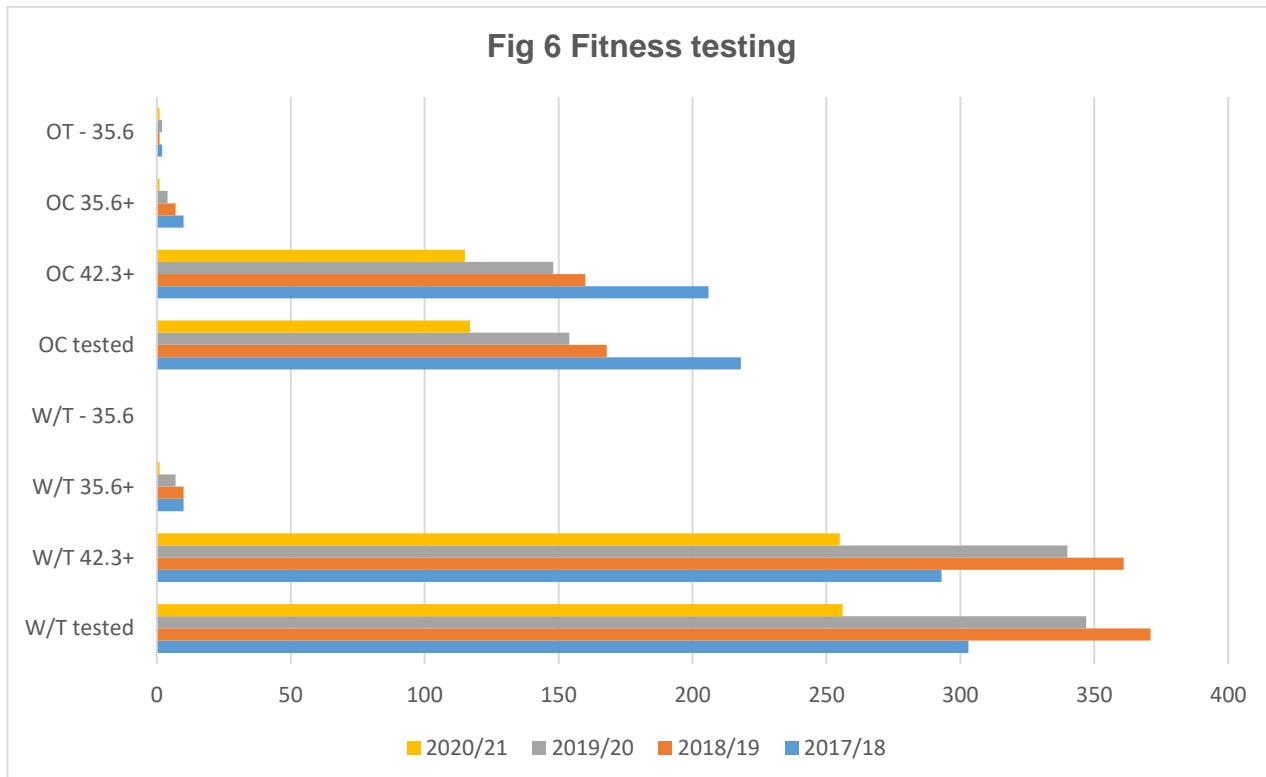


Figure 6 shows the overall reduction in the number of fitness tests conducted during the year in comparison with previous years. Although despite the reduction in testing and the availability of gym time, once testing restarted, only one firefighter tested failed the test and was taken off the run.

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 suspended the IOSH Managing Safely courses to reduce the risk of spreading the virus.

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; during the reporting year these meetings were held online. 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 Authority has appointed a Member Champion for Health and Safety.

15. Health and Wellbeing

The annual programme of health and wellbeing campaigns is now planned in a Health, Safety and Wellbeing 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.

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 include mental health awareness campaigns led by the Mental Health and Wellbeing Advisor with special emphasis placed on supporting the mental health of staff concerned about Covid 19.

16. Conclusion

During a very challenging year 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.