

Annual Health & Safety Report

Covering the year 2019-20

February 2020



Walsall Council

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1. Introduction

It is best practice for local authorities and other large organisations to summarise their health & safety performance in an Annual Report. This is Walsall Council's fourth annual report since they were reintroduced in 2017.

The report summarises how Walsall Council manages health & safety and gives key performance data for the reporting period.

Health & safety legislation requires employers to have competent health & safety advice and appropriate systems in place to manage health & safety. In Walsall, we have a small central team of advisers consisting of a health & safety manager, two health & safety advisers, a fire safety adviser, and a part-time health & safety support officer based in Human Resources. In addition, we have a health & safety training officer (also based in HR) and a health & safety/training manager based in Clean & Green (Economy Environment & Communities).

2. Corporate management

The council's health & safety management system is aligned to HSE's guidance "Managing for health & safety" (HSG65) and follows the **Plan, Do, Check, Act** approach to management.

The council has a Health & Safety Policy in place that is reviewed every three years (last revised Feb 2019, published Sep 2019); in addition, there is a suite of 32 Safety Management Standards (SMSs). These are reviewed on a rolling programme (see appendix 1).

The council's main health & safety forum is the Corporate Health & Safety Board that meets three times per year; the Board is chaired by the Executive Director of Economy Environment & Communities (the "nominated director" for health & safety). Following each Board, a report is taken to Corporate Management Team (CMT) outlining the main issues discussed at the Board and any learning points. Each directorate and recognised trade union is represented at the Board and it is supported by the health & safety team.

Each directorate has established a Health & Safety Committee that meets three times per year; committees are chaired by the directorate's "lead officer" who is also their representative at the Board and sits on their Directorate Management Team (DMT). Committees consist of both management and trade union representatives, with support from a member of the health & safety team.

The Board/Committee meeting cycles are designed to feed into each other and help ensure effective communication. The links between the Board/CMT and Committees/DMTs are also designed to help monitor health & safety and ensure that key information is considered at the right level.

We have a range of active and reactive measures in place to help monitor health & safety performance. On the active side, we have a programme of health & safety audits and fire risk assessments (FRA) of all corporate establishments, including council schools – generally, premises have an audit and FRA every two years.

On the reactive front, the Board and Committees receive regular reports on our accident, near misses, and aggressive incidents, and directorates are expected to take appropriate remedial action to help prevent recurrence.

3. Regulatory intervention

This year has seen no regulatory intervention from either the Health & Safety Executive (HSE) or the Fire Authority, and no notices have been served on the council.

If we receive any regulatory intervention, CMT and the Board would be notified and informed of the implications for the council, including what actions are required to address the issues.

4. Communication

Directorates are charged with ensuring that they take ownership of health & safety issues and communicate corporate initiatives and learning points effectively to their staff. Over and above this, the health & safety team ensures that the policy, SMSs, and a range of guidance and tools are available on the council's intranet site [Inside Walsall](#). A comprehensive range of clear, up to date, school related guidance and tools is also available on the schools' intranet [Walsall Link](#) (access to the traded pages requires user name and password).

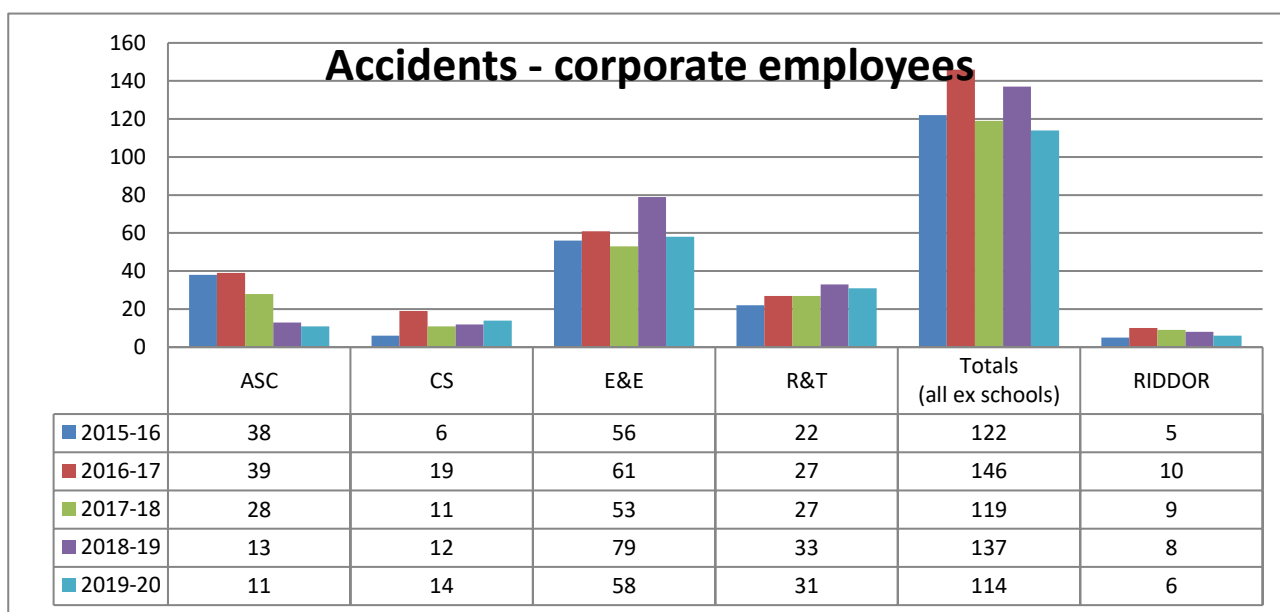
In addition, key health & safety messages and changes in procedures are communicated via Inside Walsall, and other communication channels as appropriate.

5. Statistical information

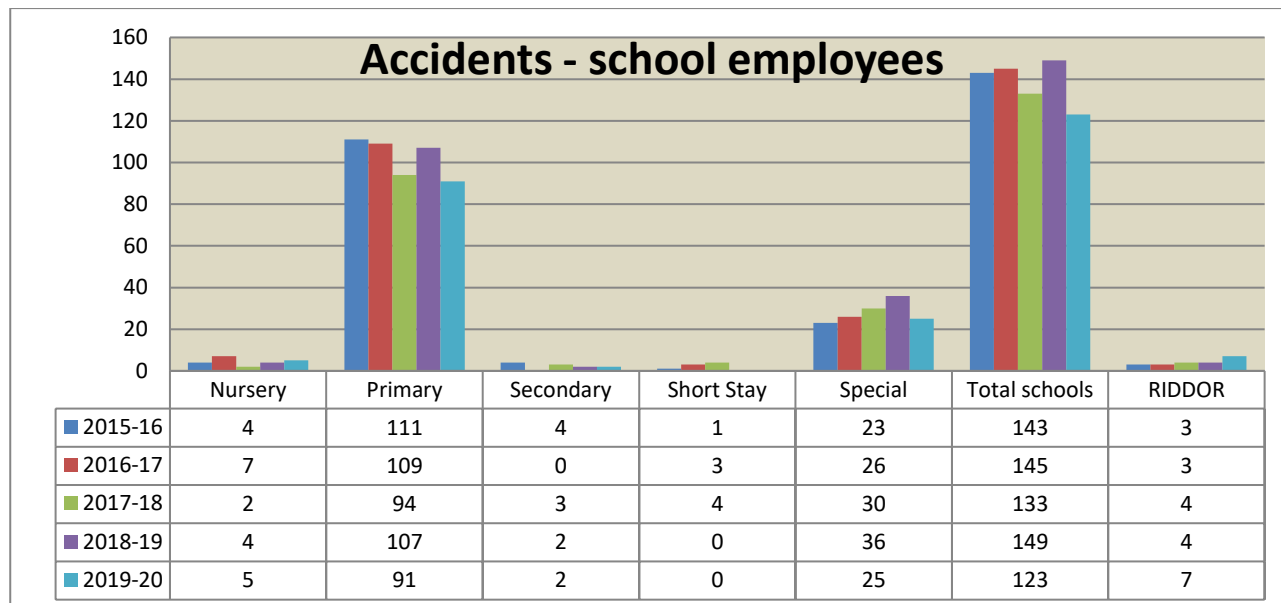
Key statistical information on accidents, aggressive incidents, and work-related liability claims, along with an overview of auditing activity and fire risk management are included in this section. For clarity, we split accident/incident data for schools from the overall corporate data.

Note; the end of the financial year coincided with the start of the coronavirus pandemic (initial lockdown started 23 March 2020) and the start of most staff working from home. This new way of working had a dramatic impact on accident numbers in 2020/21, and on the health & safety audit and fire risk assessment (FRA) programmes, which will be reflected in next year's report; however, the impact on 2019/20 accidents/incidents was minimal.

5.1 Accidents – employees



There has been a small fall in accidents to employees; however, we should not read too much into small changes¹, and we note that there has been a slight fall in accidents reportable under RIDDOR².



The number of employee accidents in schools have fallen slightly; however, the small change is probably not significant over the short term. RIDDOR incidents have risen, but the overall figure is low so we shouldn't read too much into it – schools sometimes “over-report” sporting injuries (which aren't reportable under RIDDOR).

Annual accident incident rates

The following table provides incident rates (per thousand FTE employees, excluding casuals)

Directorate	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
Adult Social Care	65.9	80.1	63.9	32.6	33.7
Children's Services	8.2	30.7	18.0	19.4	22.8
Economy & Environment	44.7	77.1	68.5	105.5	77.6
Resources & Transformation	30.7	30.3	31.7	38.8	36.0
Overall (exc. schools)	37.2	52.3	44.5	52.4	44.7
Note: we only calculate incident rates for schools where the council is the employer					
School employee accident rate	36.7	45.4	46.4	52.0	42.6

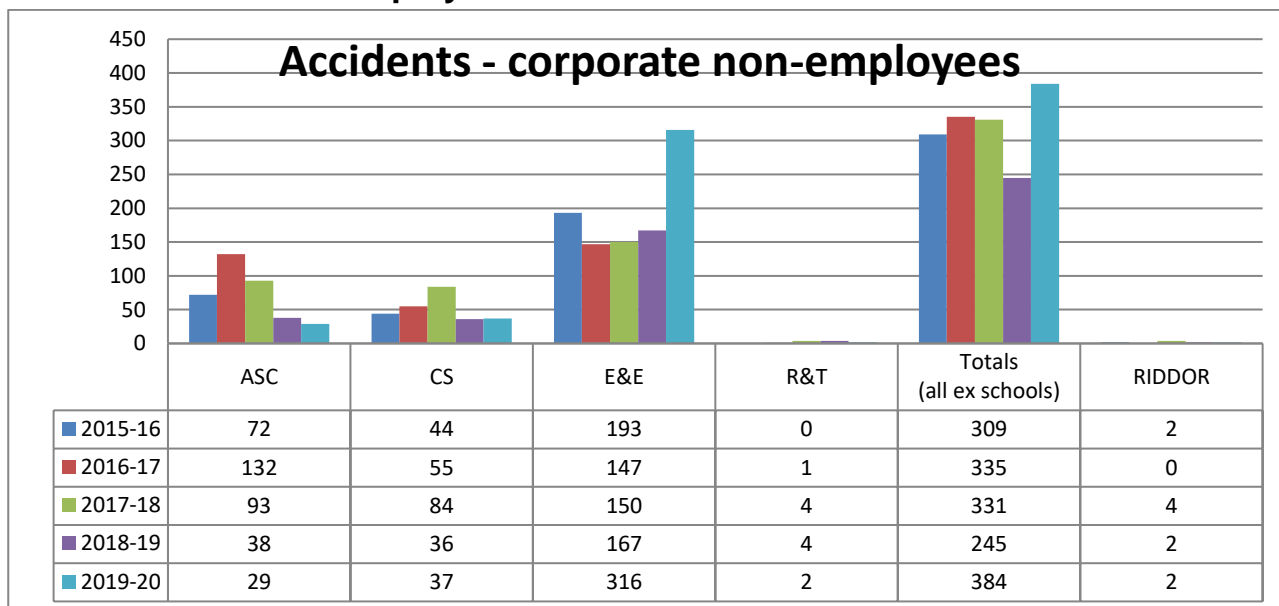
It is worth noting that the fall in the incident rate in Adult Social Care, probably due to the closing of Hollybank, has been sustained.

In 18/19, we received a number of Near miss/Damage incidents reports from Economy & Environment that were not always health & safety related. We clarified with E&E what should be reported to the H&S team and what only needs recording locally, this may account for the incident rate falling to more a “normal” level.

¹ Accident/incident trends and significant incidents are discussed at both the Board and H&S Committees

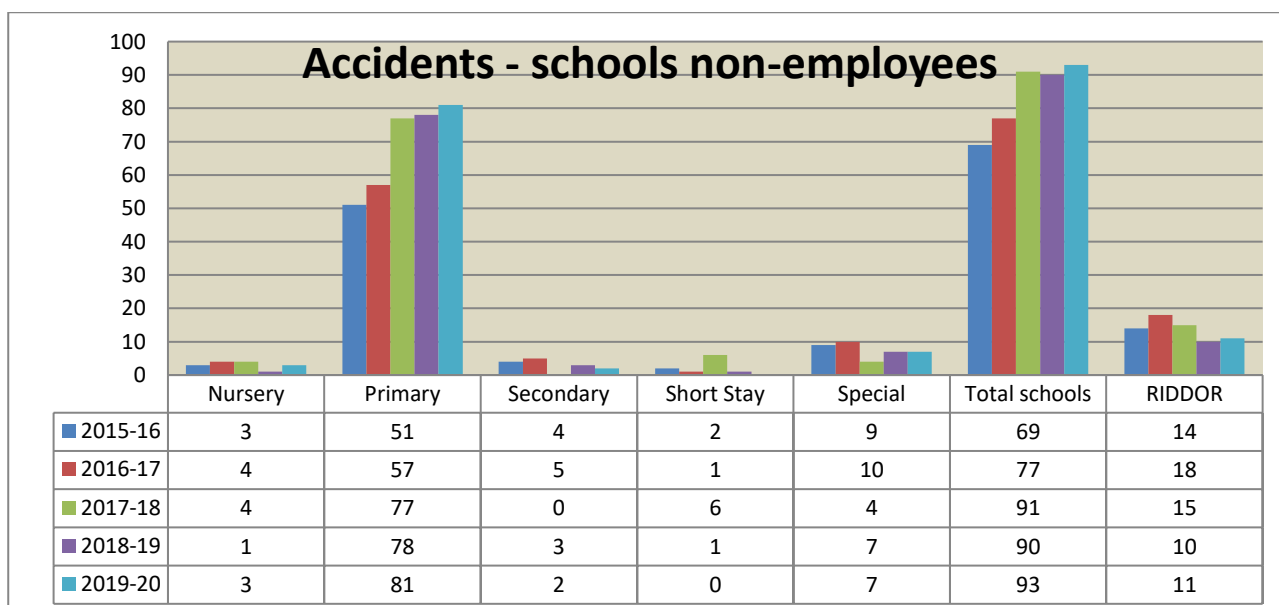
² Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 2013

5.2 Accidents – non-employees



A few points are worth noting:

- The large fall in non-employee accidents in Adult Social Care, which we suspect was due to the closure of Hollybank, has been sustained
- There was a large increase in non-employee accidents reported in E&E, notably from our leisure centres. We have worked with Leisure Services to better understand accidents in their area and believe that accidents are now being reported more consistently (albeit progress in this work was curtailed by the start of the first lockdown and few service users have used our leisure facilities since then)



The number of non-employee accidents in schools has risen slightly, as have RIDDOR reportable incidents. Given the diverse schools community, trends can be difficult to spot; however, the data is examined in more detail at Children's Services Health & Safety Committee to establish any learning points.

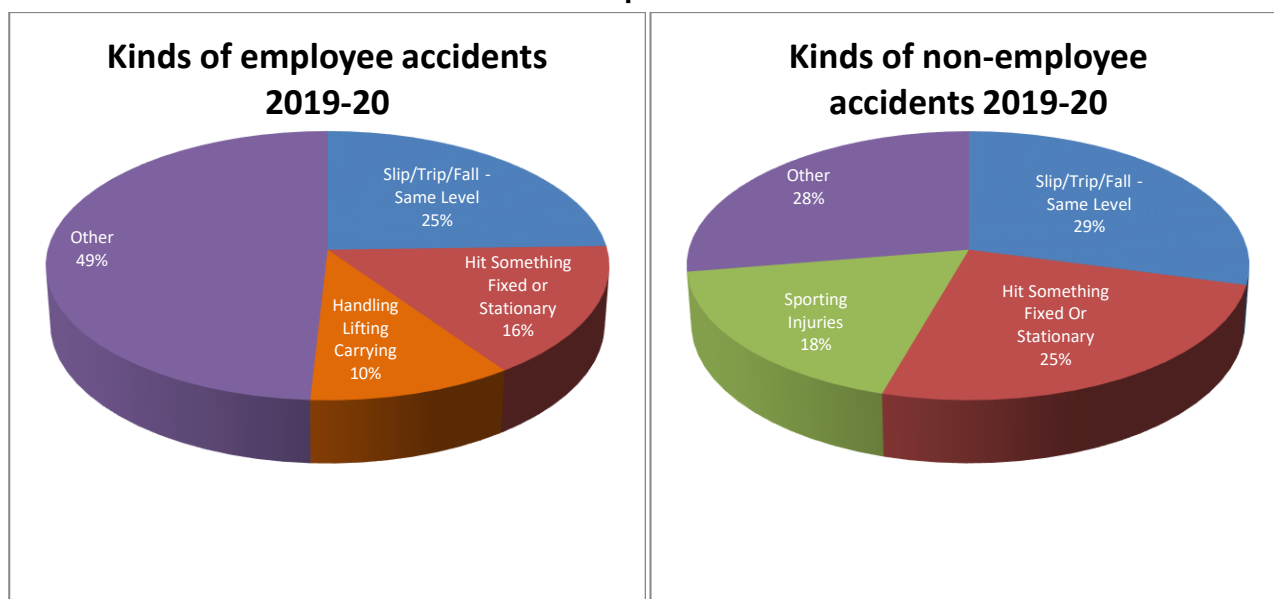
5.3 Kinds of accident

The top three “kinds” of accident for employees/non-employees both corporately and in schools were (numbers of incidents in brackets):

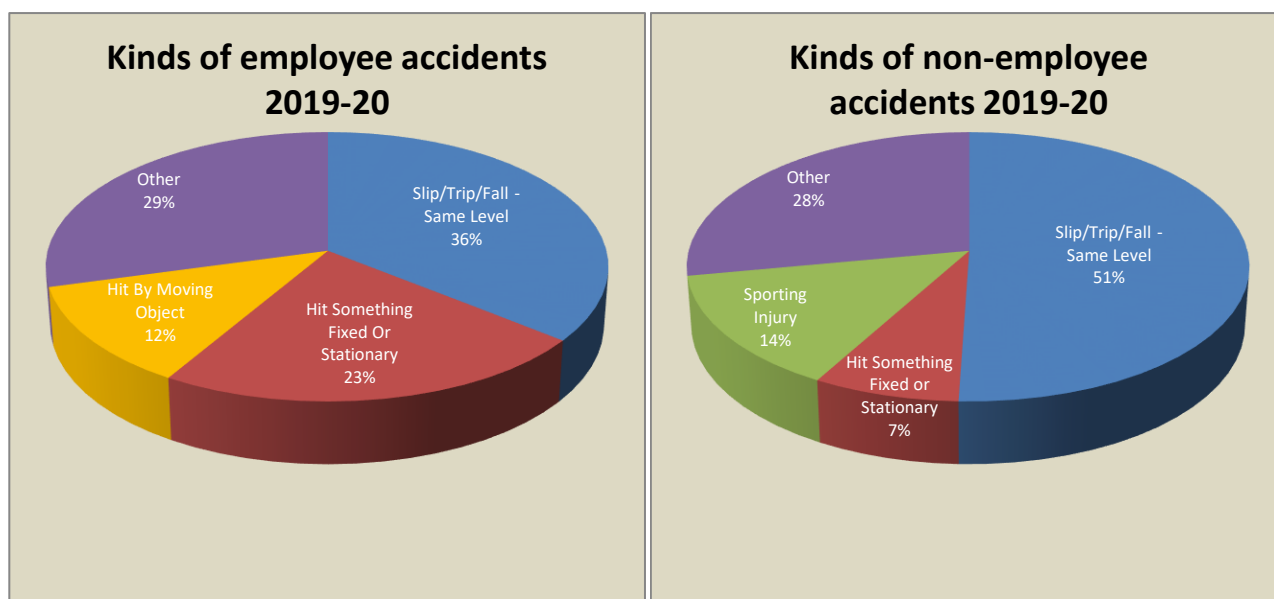
	1st	2nd	3rd	Others
Employees	Slips/trips/falls on same level (28)	Hit something fixed or stationary (18)	Handling, lifting and carrying (12)	(56)
Non-employees	Slips/trips/falls on same level (112)	Hit something fixed or stationary (97)	Sporting injury (69)	(106)
School employees	Slips/trips/falls on same level (44)	Hit something fixed or stationary (28)	Hit by moving object (15)	(36)
School non-employees	Slips/trips/falls on same level (47)	Sporting injury (13)	Hit something fixed or stationary (7)	(26)

This can be better illustrated as percentages on the following charts:

Corporate



Schools

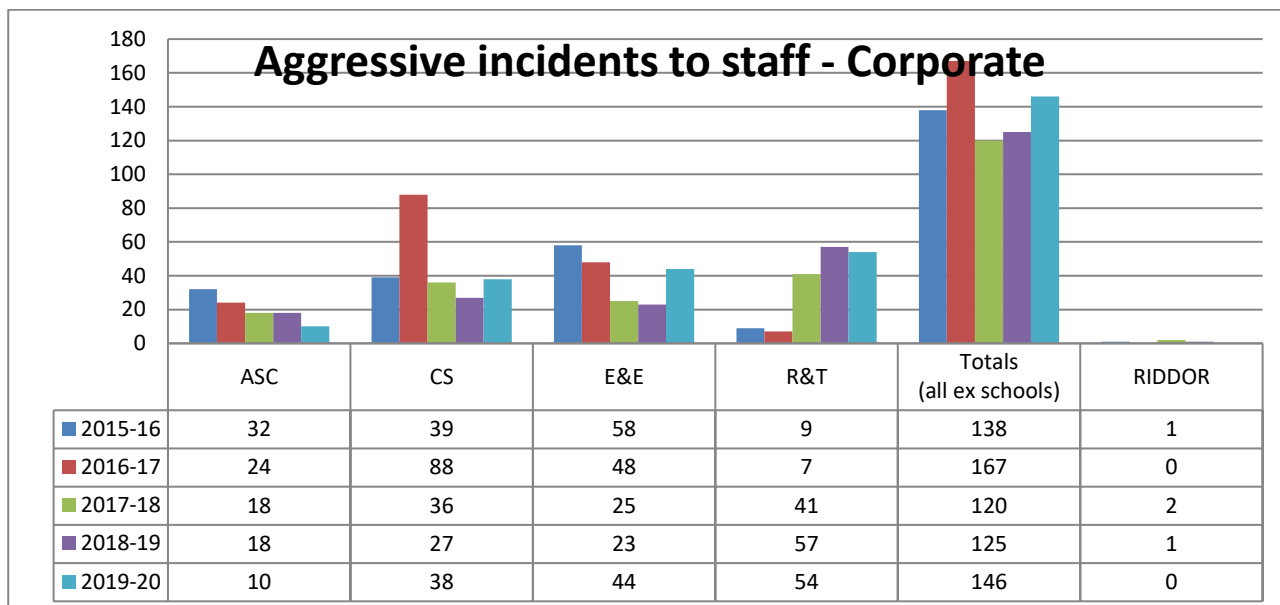


It is interesting to note that slips/trips/falls on same level is the main cause of accidents both corporately and in schools. However, when we look at these in more detail, it appears that there are many scenarios behind this kind of accident and there is no one simple solution that will work in all circumstances, although good housekeeping always helps. The prevalence of this kind of accident does illustrate however, that accidents often have simple causes.

“Hit something fixed or stationary” is, once again, often a significant “kind” of accident and the prevalence may at first seem strange; however it covers a range of common incidents including walking into furniture. As with slips/trips/falls, there are many scenarios behind this kind of accident and no one simple solution.

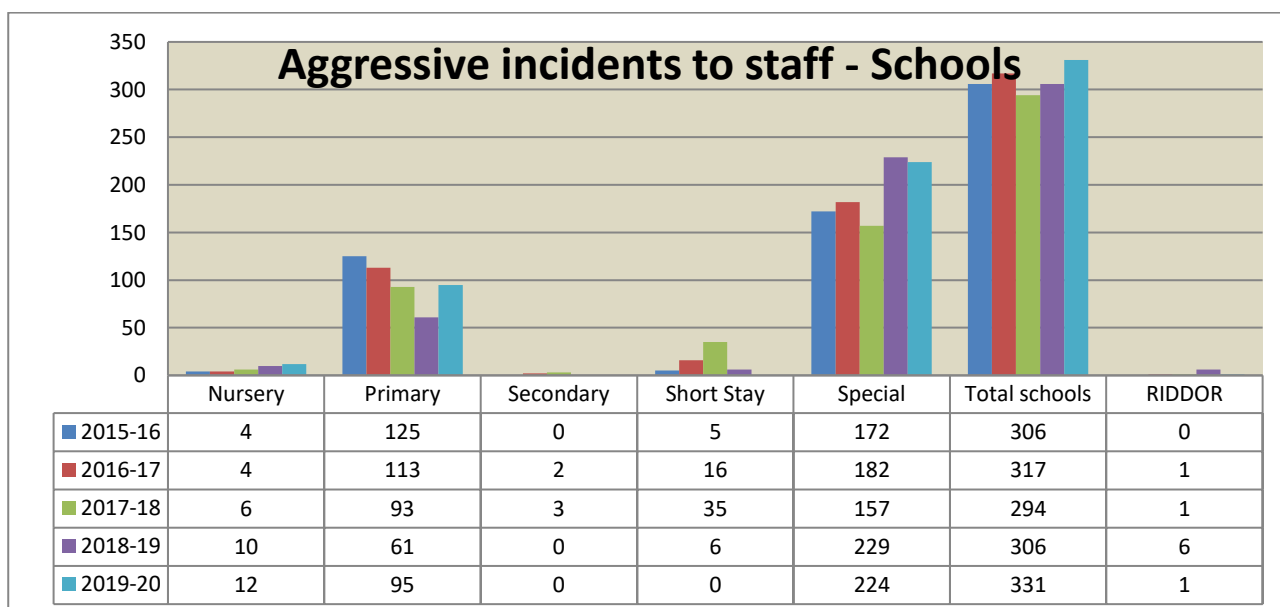
5.4 Violence and aggression (to staff)

We collect data on physical assaults, threatening behaviour, and verbal abuse aimed at our staff. Physical assault tends to be reported more than the other categories; but “physical assault” encompasses a wide range of incidents from simple scratches through to more serious issues; however, the vast majority are minor incidents, many with no intent behind them.



Overall incident numbers have risen slightly; however, a few points should be noted:

- Incidents in Children’s Services have risen slightly; however, we recognise that in care environments, a small number of children displaying disruptive behaviour can seriously affect incident numbers; consequently, figures can be volatile year on year
- Having fallen in previous years, incidents in Economy and Environment have risen to earlier levels – this could just be natural variation but we will continue to monitor incident levels and discuss them with E&E – surprisingly, many of these incidents are in our libraries



Overall, the changes in number of aggressive incidents to staff in schools do not appear to be particularly significant; however, as stated earlier a small number of children displaying disruptive behaviour, for instance in special or short stay schools, can seriously affect incident numbers;

consequently, figures can be volatile year on year. This year's fall in incidents in special and short stay schools appears to have been mainly offset by a rise in primary schools. We continue to work with Children's Services Health & Safety Committee to see if there are any underlying causes.

Annual violence and aggression incident rates

The following table provides incident rates (per thousand FTE employees, excluding casuals)

Directorate	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
Adult Social Care	55.5	49.3	41.1	45.2	30.7
Children's Services	53.0	142.4	58.9	43.7	61.8
Economy & Environment	46.3	60.7	32.3	30.7	58.9
Resources & Transformation	12.6	7.9	48.2	67.0	62.7
Overall (exc. schools)	42.0	59.8	44.9	47.8	57.3
Note: we only calculate incident rates for schools where the council is the employer					
School aggressive incident rate	97.4	108.4	109.4	115.0	119.5

Corporately, the overall aggressive incident rate is slightly higher than that for accidents; however, in schools, the aggressive incident rate is markedly higher. Please note, for most staff incidents of aggression are rare; however, some staff are more exposed to aggression due to the nature of the service users/customers they work with, hence, we tend to get "hot spots", and this is where resources should be concentrated.

5.5 Employers' liability and public liability claims

During the financial year 2019-20:

- There were 13 employer's liability claims received with two relating to pupils (one currently still open and one closed at £7,293). Out of these 13 claims a total of seven were closed at a cost of £12,322.00
- There were 7 public liability claims related to work/council premises with two relating to defective premises but both closed at nil. Out of these 7 claims only one has been paid at £12.50 and there remain two still open

Both employer's liability and public liability can include historic claims – some of which take a while to come through and/or be settled. The cost of historic claims settled during 2019-20 were:

- Employer's liability claims total 10 claims paid during this period in sum of £53,126
- Public liability claims related to work/council premises total 4 claims but closed at no cost

Note 'net claim costs' quoted above include legal fees.

5.6 Auditing activity

Generally, our premises have an audit every two years; although this can be adjusted according to the risk profile of the establishment, (e.g. higher risk premises can be done more frequently). The audits are thorough and examine the management arrangements for health & safety at each establishment, in order to check compliance with legislative requirements, best practice and the council's Safety Management Standards.

During 2019-20, there were 18 management audits³ of schools and 18 intermediate audits. In addition, one corporate management audit and 11 corporate intermediate audits were carried out, along with 18 desktop reviews of lower risk premises.

Following an audit, managers/headteachers receive an Audit Report that includes an Action Plan setting out any issues that need addressing. The head of service or, in the case of schools, the schools' improvement team also receives a copy of the report. Managers/headteachers are asked to return a copy of the completed Action Plan to the health & safety team to show they are addressing any issues raised. Any learning points are shared as appropriate with directorate health & safety committees.

5.7 Fire risk management

Generally, our premises have a fire risk assessment (FRA) every two years, although this can be adjusted according to the risk profile of the establishment. Establishments are expected to review their FRA each year, and inform the health & safety team of any major changes that may affect the current FRA.

During 2019-20, there were 38 FRAs of schools, along with 26 FRAs of corporate premises.

Following an FRA, managers/headteachers receive an FRA Report that includes any deficiencies that need addressing, along with an Action Plan. The head of service or, in the case of schools, the schools' improvement team also receives a copy of the report.

Our FRA programme is quite mature and most premises have few substantive issues; consequently we only ask managers/headteachers to return a copy of the completed Action Plan if there are substantive issues raised. Any learning points are shared as appropriate with directorate health & safety committees.

6. Joint consultation

We consult with staff and appropriate trade unions representatives in the development and monitoring of our health & safety systems, policies, procedures and risk assessments.

In addition, we formally consult with trade union colleagues at both the Corporate Health & Safety Board and directorate Health & Safety Committees.

7. Key achievements (overview)

During 2019-20, we reviewed and updated the following safety management standards (SMSs):

- Work at heights
- Accident and incident reporting
- Manager's Responsibilities

We also updated the COSHH SMS and produced a new Training & Competence SMS both of which were due to be approved at March's Corporate Health & Safety Board. However, that meeting was cancelled due to the start of the coronavirus pandemic and so the SMSs were not published until August 2020.

³ Most of our establishments have a "four plus two" year audit programme; that is they receive a full management audit every four years, with a two yearly intermediate audit based around a self-audit questionnaire and the previous audit's Action Plan

In addition, we revised the COSHH assessment process and published a new assessment form. We also updated the Supporting Children with Medical Conditions Policy for use within our schools.

During 2019/20 our colleagues in Learning & Development launched the Mental Health First Aider initiative and of March 2020, 50 individuals had signed up to be mental health first aiders – these have proved to be an invaluable resource during the coronavirus pandemic

On the training front, in order to help ensure staff competence, we have comprehensive programmes of health & safety and fire safety training available both corporately and, as a traded service, to schools. This training aims to cover core health & safety topics, such as management of health & safety, risk assessment, accident investigation, and first aid. The training is often supplemented by more role-specific training arranged locally by service areas/schools. In 2019/20 we delivered the following⁴:

- 60 face to face training courses were delivered corporately with 508 attendees
- 43 face to face training courses were delivered to schools with 387 attendees
- 13 face to face fire training courses were delivered corporately with 109 attendees
- 4 face to face fire training courses were delivered to schools with 105 named attendees

A range of health & safety eLearning courses is also available for staff.

Our training offer and course take up was summarised in our Annual Health & Safety Training Report published in July 20.

8. Monitoring health & safety performance

We have a number of active and reactive monitoring systems in place, most notably the audit/FRA programmes and statistics/analysis of accidents and aggressive incident data collected by the health & safety team.

The Corporate Health & Safety Board receives a regular report outlining developments in health & safety. The report includes data on accidents and incidents, along with some interpretation of the results and any trends identified. The Board is also kept up to date with the audit/FRA programmes and any emerging issues.

Following the Board, a report is taken to CMT outlining the main issues discussed at the Board and any learning points.

Each directorate health & safety committee receives regular updates on learning points from audits/FRAs, along with more detailed analysis of accidents/aggressive incidents for their areas.

Directorates are asked to feedback to the Board/their committee any circumstances that influence accidents/incidents numbers and any initiatives taken to reduce the instances. In addition, directorates are now asked to feedback to the Board what action they have taken to share learning points raised at the last Board; how changes to SMSs, procedures, etc., have been communicated across the directorate; and how the directorate is checking that learning points are acted upon and amended procedures are implemented/monitored.

⁴ There was some disruption to the training programme in March 2020 due to the start of the coronavirus pandemic

9. Strategic action plan - (long term corporate)

We believe that the building blocks are in place to ensure that we manage health & safety effectively; however, we want to ensure that we have the right health & safety culture in Walsall. To that end, a number of initiatives are already in place, for instance:

- We have increased engagement with managers, staff and the unions on key issues with a requirement that directorates update each Board on any outstanding matters
- Three times a year a report is presented to CMT to highlight trends, key issues and ensure effective responses have been put in place
- Most members of CMT and a number of their direct reports have attended health & safety for leaders training to reinforce the senior accountability for health & safety
- We have a Corporate Health & Safety Objective, along with a set of actions to help ensure that we keep health & safety on track
- We launched the annual health & safety sense check in December 2018 and have asked line managers to use a simple form once a year as a “sense check” that they are on top of all their main health & safety responsibilities

Going forward:

- The start of 2020/21 impacted on the health & safety service in quite dramatic ways – due to lockdowns and other restrictions, most of our auditing and fire risk assessment activities were put on hold for much of the year in order to avoid any non-essential visits. However, this did allow the health & safety team to concentrate on the many Covid-19 challenges that quickly started to come through – this included providing model risk assessments; undertaking reassurance checks on school Covid-19 risk assessments before they were allowed to reopen to more pupils; carrying out reassurance checks on risk assessments for corporate buildings before they were allowed to reopen; supporting both the Reset and Space Occupancy (SOG) Group; and, whilst liaising with Public Health, Children’s Services and other colleagues, dealing with numerous enquiries and contributing to communications relating to coronavirus.
- We have restarted the audits and FRAs, but have had to develop new approaches to delivering these programmes – particularly the audit programme that is now done predominantly online
- Our training programme has had to be adapted as well to be delivered remotely wherever possible
- Inevitably, we will continue to have to reprioritise work to take account of our new ways of working and the continuing restrictions in place – in uncertain times, flexibility is key
- We will continue to work with key service areas to better understand their accident and incident data – are we capturing the right data, is it being reported and investigated consistently; however, we know that 2020/21’s data is not easily comparable to earlier periods due to the changes in how we work and our more limited face to face customer interactions
- As resources and directorate capacity allow, we still want to engage directorates in some higher level auditing, that concentrates on planning, communication, and monitoring – to help ensure that we are embedding health & safety in the organisation and that we are closing the loop (the **Plan, Do, Check, Act** model)

10. Conclusion and development

The health & safety team has a work programme that includes a schedule of regular revision of all key health & safety documentation, along with a programme of audits/fire risk assessments of all corporate premises. In addition, the team continues to modernise our health & safety procedures, to ensure that they add value and do not impose an unnecessary bureaucratic burden.

The team, alongside colleagues in Learning and Development continually review all health & safety training offered corporately, to ensure it meets the needs of our customers and is fit for purpose.

As stated above, we believe that the building blocks are in place to ensure that we manage health & safety effectively; however, the council is committed to continuous improvement in health & safety and, as such, will continue to develop policies, systems and procedures to achieve that aim.

We want to ensure that we have the right health & safety culture in Walsall. We also want to ensure that there is effective succession planning so that the systems we put in place remain effective and do not fall apart if we lose key staff through retirement or restructure.

Having robust health & safety systems in place, along with the right health & safety culture, and effective succession planning helps compliment some of the wider workforce themes identified in the Corporate Workforce Strategy 2017-20, particularly the theme of having a “*valued workforce*”.

Monitoring of our policies, procedures, and training both by directorates and by our auditing systems should help ensure that health & safety remains one of our top priorities and we keep both staff and customers safe.

Appendix 1 – list of current Safety Management Standards

SMSs are reviewed on a rolling programme; however, reviews can be reprioritised to reflect emerging issues and changes in legislation, etc.

SMS	Issued
Accident and Incident Reporting	November 2019
Aggression & Violence	June 2015
Asbestos Safety	March 2015
Contractors – Selection and Control	November 2020
COSHH	August 2020
Driving ^{\$}	September 2017
DSE	November 2017
Electricity & Gas	September 2017
Fire and Evacuation	January 2019
First Aid	September 2017
Health Surveillance and Assessment	April 2015
Infection Control	April 2015
Legionella	March 2016
LOLER (Lifting Operations)	April 2018
Lone working/Home working	November 2020
Managers' Responsibilities	November 2019
Manual Handling	September 2017
New and Expectant Mothers	April 2018
Noise	November 2017
Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)	April 2018
Pressure Systems	March 2015
Radiation	July 2018
Risk assessment	November 2017
Safety Signs	July 2018
Stress	December 2016
Training & Competence	NEW – August 2020
Vibration	March 2015
Work at Height	November 2019
Work Equipment/PUWER	May 2016
Working conditions	June 2015
Workplace Inspections	September 2016
Young Workers	August 2016

^{\$}reviewed; awaiting further input before publication

Other substantive guidance	
Educational Visit Standards	November 2018
Schools' Safety Guides	November 2020
Supporting Children with Medical Conditions Policy	November 2019

