

Annual Health & Safety Report

Covering the year 2020-21

January 2022

Document information

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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 fifth 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, and a fire safety adviser 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 accidents, 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.

During the year, the HSE visited some of our premises, including a number of schools, to sample check our Covid controls – we are happy to report that no significant issues were raised.

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).

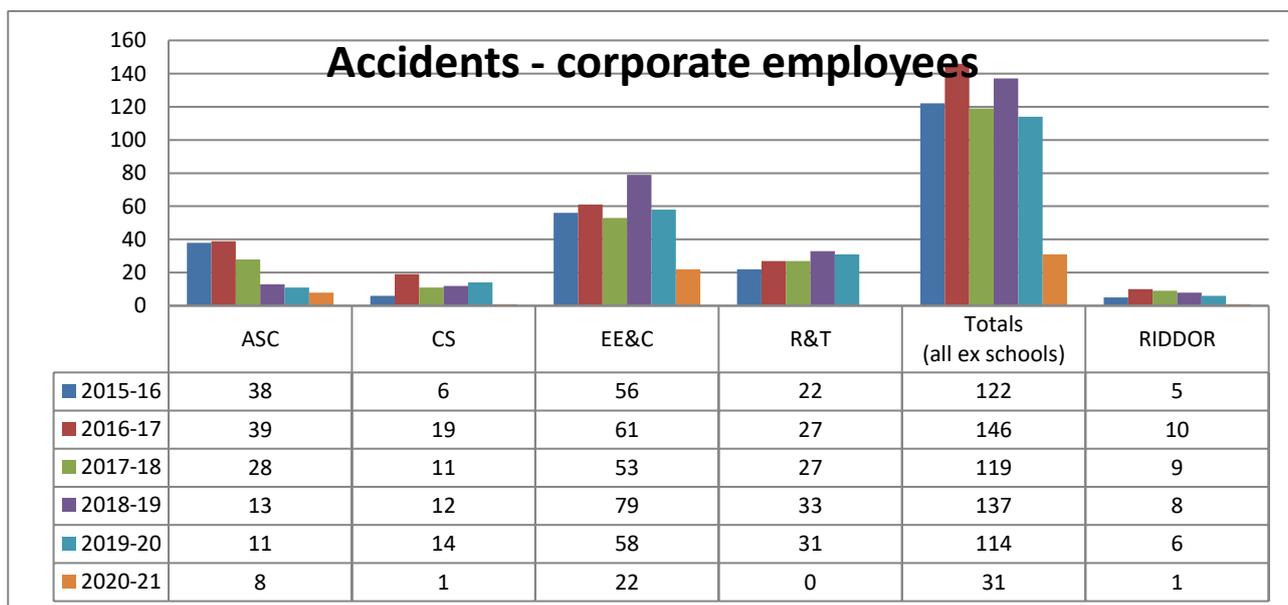
In addition, key health & safety messages and changes in procedures are communicated via Inside Walsall, and other communication channels as appropriate.

5. Statistical information

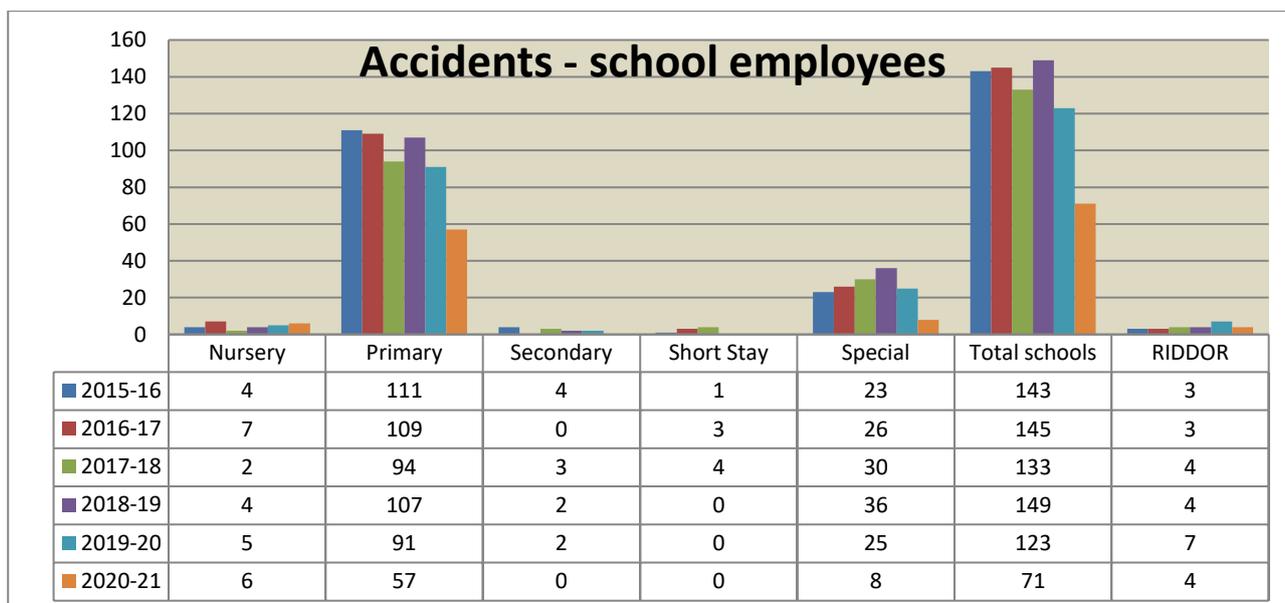
Key statistical information on accidents, aggressive incidents, and work-related liability claims, along with an overview of auditing activity and fire risk management are included in this section. For clarity, we split accident/incident data for schools from the overall corporate data.

Note; this year was greatly affected by the coronavirus pandemic (initial lockdown started 23 March 2020) with most staff working from home, and our public facing services often closed or conducted remotely for large parts of the year. 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.

5.1 Accidents – employees



There has been a large fall in the number of employee accidents; this can be attributed to many staff working from home due to the pandemic. Staff can, of course, have accidents in their homes, however these are less likely to be work related. Given our “new ways of working” we expect that accidents to employees will stay at a reduced level, although since the period covered by this report is right at the start of the pandemic, the figures may not be representative of the “new normal” and we may get higher levels in subsequent years as more staff are using our facilities. The lower accident figures were accompanied by a similar fall in accidents reportable under RIDDOR¹.



The number of employee accidents in schools has also fallen; however, since most school staff quickly returned to the workplace, the fall is not as dramatic as with other corporate employees. The fall in accident numbers could be Covid related in a couple of ways – schools were shut at times, so staff weren’t in the workplace; and, in addition, there may have been changes in behaviour, as part of the controls introduced to keep schools Covid-secure, which meant staff had less opportunity to have accidents. RIDDOR incidents have fallen, 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)

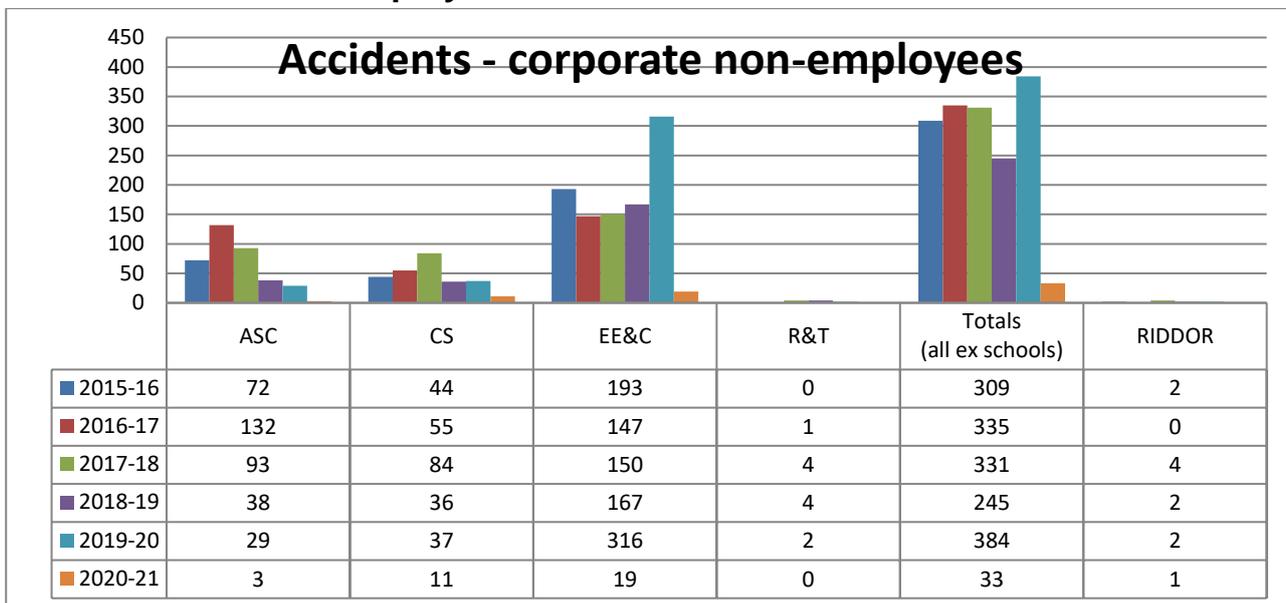
Directorate	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Adult Social Care	80.1	63.9	32.6	33.7	21.4
Children’s Services	30.7	18.0	19.4	22.8	1.3
Economy Environment & Communities	77.1	68.5	105.5	77.6	29.3
Resources & Transformation	30.3	31.7	38.8	36.0	0.0
Overall (exc. schools)	52.3	44.5	52.4	44.7	12.0
Note: we only calculate incident rates for schools where the council is the employer					
School employee accident rate	45.4	46.4	52.0	42.6	25.5

It is worth noting that the fall in the incident rate in Adult Social Care and Economy, Environment & Communities, whilst significant, is nowhere near as dramatic as in Children’s Services and

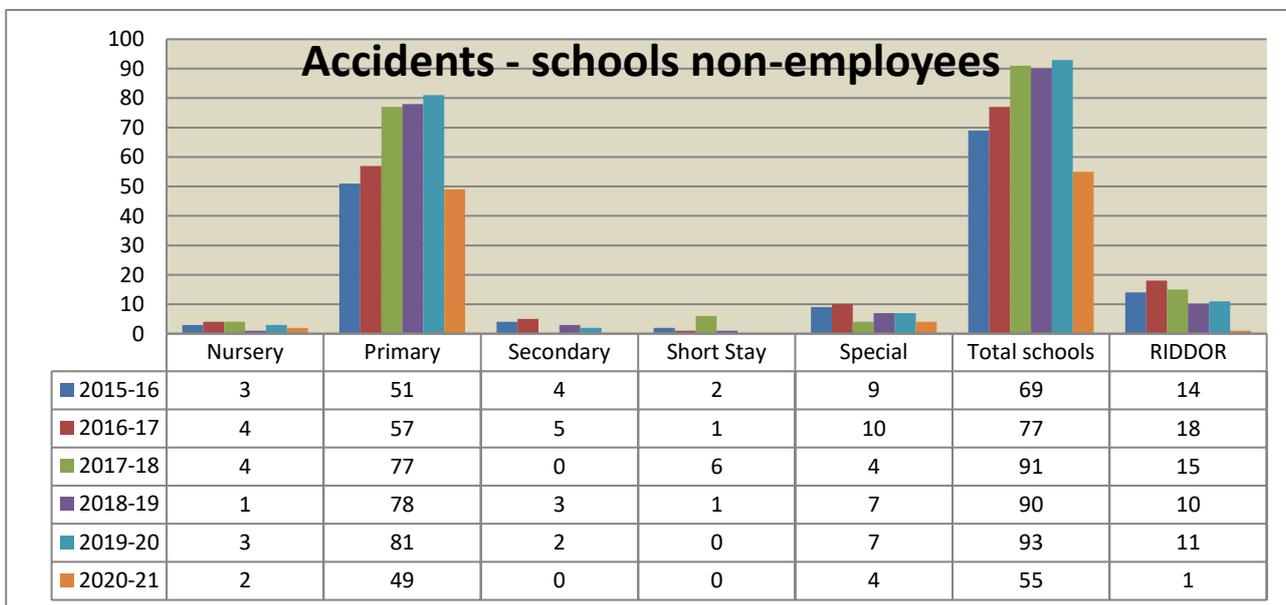
¹ Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 2013

Resources & Transformation, which is probably a reflection of the ability of more staff to work from home in the latter two directorates.

5.2 Accidents – non-employees



With non-employees, we have seen an unprecedented fall in the number of accidents reported. This is a direct consequence of the pandemic – during much of the first year of which our public facing services were often closed or conducted remotely. As our facilities reopen to the public, we expect these figures to recover, particularly in our leisure facilities.



The number of non-employee accidents in schools has fallen sharply for reasons similar to the fall in employee accidents in schools. As schools return to “normal” we expect the accident figures to recover.

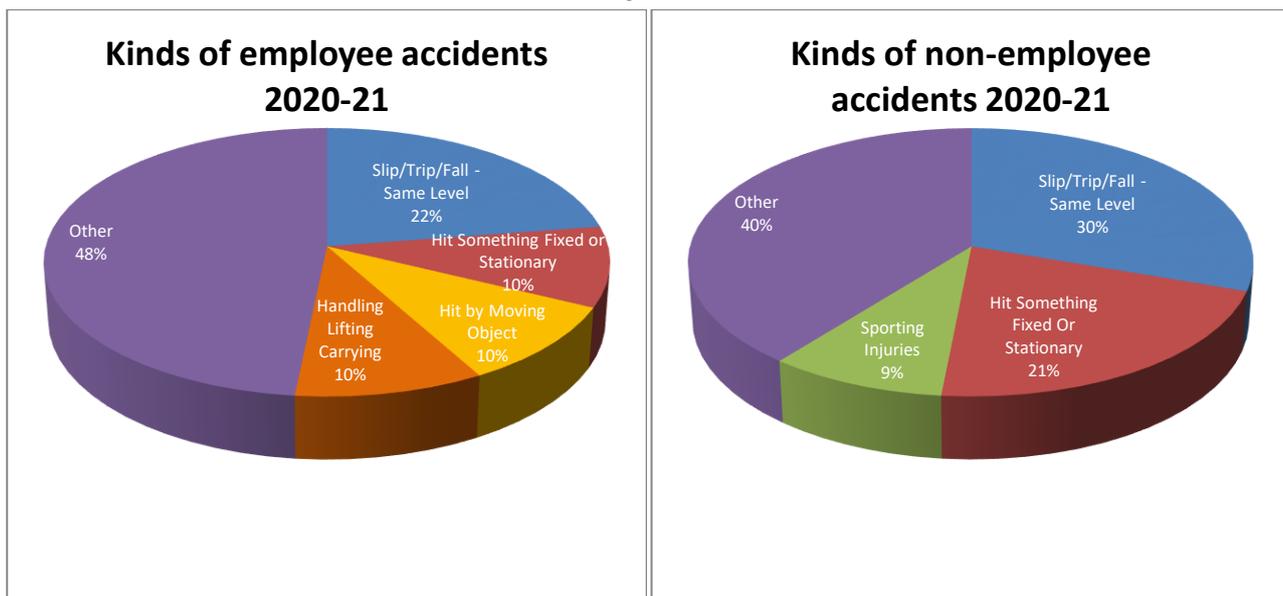
5.3 Kinds of accident

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

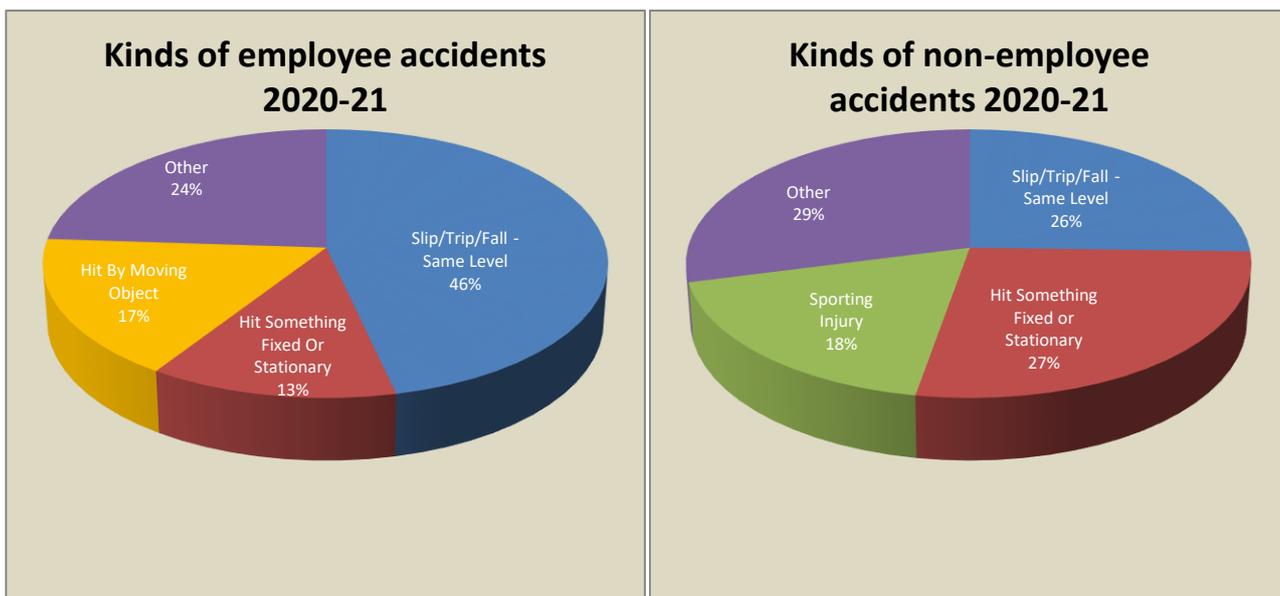
	1st	2nd	3rd	Others
Employees	Slips/trips/falls on same level (7)	Hit something fixed or stationary (3) Hit by moving object (3) Handling, lifting and carrying (3)		(15)
Non-employees	Slips/trips/falls on same level (10)	Hit something fixed or stationary (7)	Sporting injury (3)	(13)
School employees	Slips/trips/falls on same level (33)	Hit by moving object (12)	Hit something fixed or stationary (9)	(17)
School non-employees	Hit something fixed or stationary (15)	Slips/trips/falls on same level (14)	Sporting injury (10)	(16)

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

Corporate



Schools



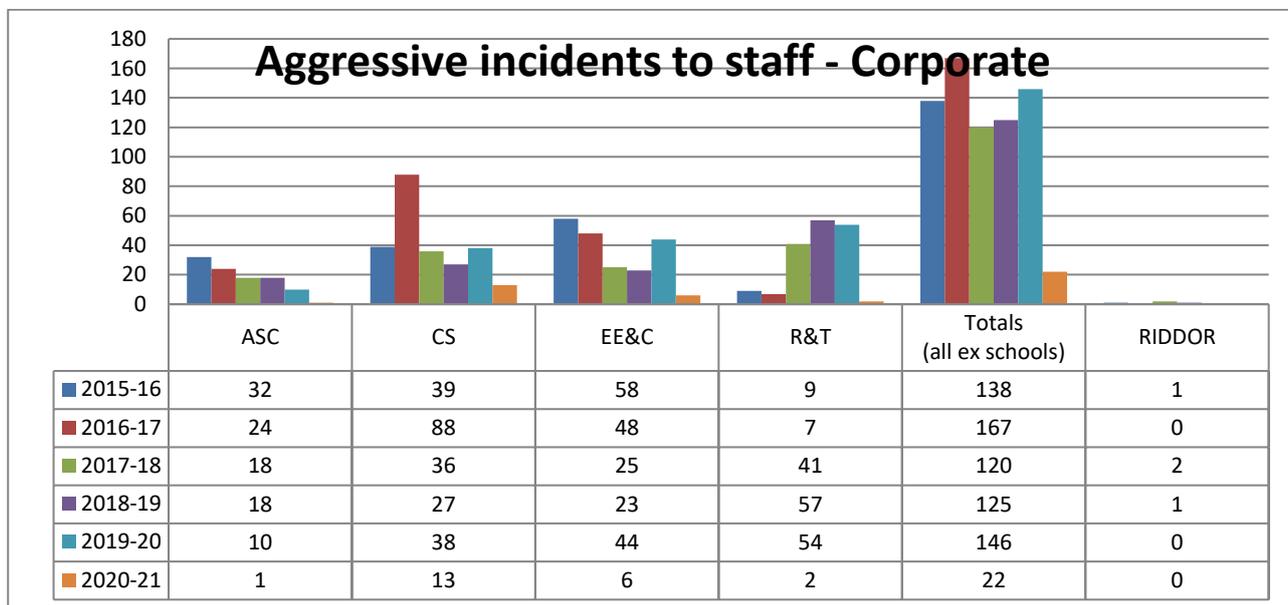
It is interesting to note that, even with the overall reduction in accident numbers due to the pandemic, the proportions of “kinds of accidents” are broadly in line with previous years.

Once again, slips/trips/falls on same level is the main, or a close second, 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.

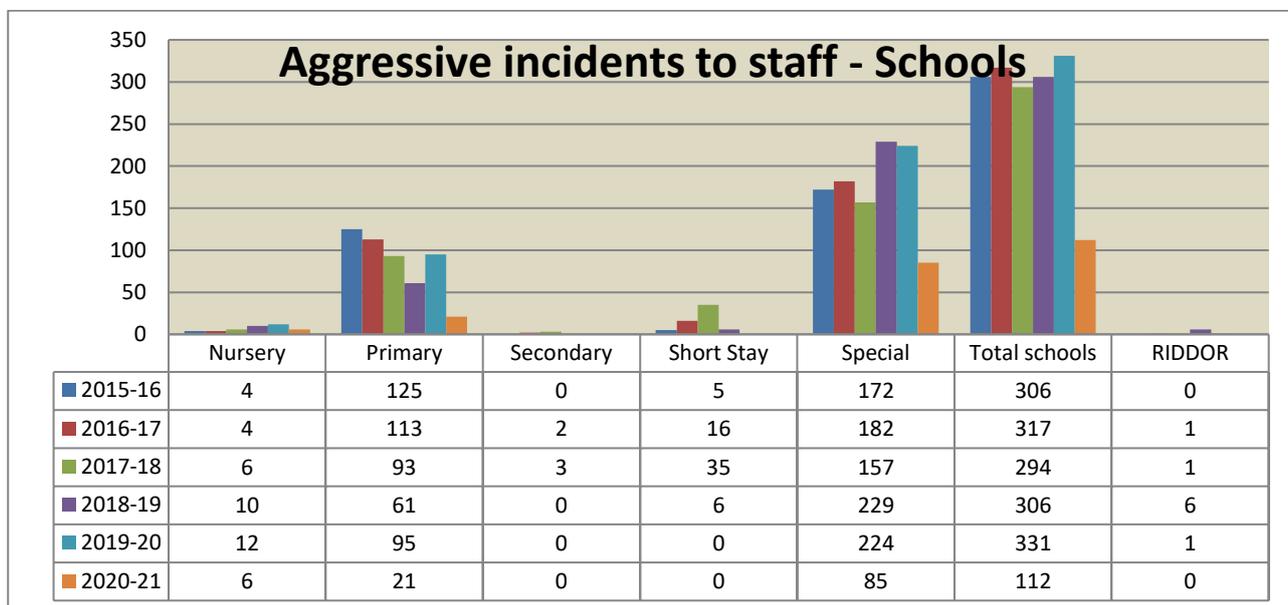
“Hit something fixed or stationary” is, once again, often a significant “kind” of accident and the prevalence may at first seem strange; however it covers a range of common incidents including walking into furniture. As with slips/trips/falls, there are many scenarios behind this kind of accident and 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.



As with accidents, aggressive incidents have fallen dramatically due to the pandemic and our more limited face-to-face interactions with the public due to facilities being closed or offered remotely. As our facilities open up we expect some recovery in the number of aggressive incidents reported.



Aggressive incidents in schools have fallen – this is probably due to schools being closed for periods during lockdowns, but may also be due to fewer pupils being in schools due to isolation requirements. The highest levels of aggressive incidents are, as expected, in our special schools, where a small number of children displaying disruptive behaviour can seriously affect incident numbers; consequently, figures can be volatile year on year regardless of Covid.

Annual violence and aggression incident rates

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

Directorate	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Adult Social Care	49.3	41.1	45.2	30.7	2.7
Children's Services	142.4	58.9	43.7	61.8	16.5
Economy Environment & Communities	60.7	32.3	30.7	58.9	8.0
Resources & Transformation	7.9	48.2	67.0	62.7	3.0
Overall (exc. schools)	59.8	44.9	47.8	57.3	8.5
Note: we only calculate incident rates for schools where the council is the employer					
School aggressive incident rate	108.4	109.4	115.0	119.5	41.6

The dramatic fall in the corporate aggressive incident rate is not quite matched by the rate reduction in our schools – the reasons for this are noted above. Both reductions are welcome, but we suspect that rates will recover somewhat as our services return to “normal”.

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 insurance year 2020-21:

- There were a total of four employer's liability claims received with three relating to premises/use of equipment/substances. Of these three there are two closed: one at nil and one with £3,500 damages paid. There is one still open with damages currently paid of £315,000 (an historic asbestos claim going back to 1982).
- There were two public liability claims related to work/council premises – one was closed at nil with one currently open with damages reserved at £5,500.

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 2020-21 were:

- Employer's liability claims total 14 claims with damages paid during this period in sum of £136,200.
- Public liability claims related to work/council premises total 6 claims costing a total of £1,210 paid for injury.

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 2020/21, there were five management audits² of schools and five intermediate audits. In addition, three corporate management audits and two corporate intermediate audits were carried out. As noted above, Covid had a major impact on the health & safety team's work program – for much of the year we were unable to carry out face to face audits and it was only towards the latter part of the year that we were able to carry out some audits remotely via Microsoft Teams (note, whilst a walkabout is part of the audit process, it is a relatively minor part – most of the audit is checking that systems are in place and that there is evidence that the systems remain robust). Consequently, the number of audits carried out this year was lower than initially planned. However, this did free up some capacity to deal with the many Covid related challenges that arose (see Key achievements (overview) below).

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 2020/21, there were 19 FRAs of schools, along with 14 FRAs of corporate premises. Our FRA programme was impacted by Covid in a similar way to the audit programme and at the start of the pandemic no FRAs could be conducted. However, unlike audits, FRAs can't really be carried out remotely, so once we knew more about how to manage Covid the decision was made to restart face to face FRAs – with an appropriate risk assessment in place to ensure they could be conducted safely. Inevitably, the initial pause in the programme and teething problems as it restarted meant that fewer FRAs were conducted than planned.

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.

² 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 formally consult with trade union colleagues at both the Corporate Health & Safety Board and directorate Health & Safety Committees.

7. Key achievements (overview)

The health & safety team faced a number of unprecedented challenges in the year due to the pandemic. Initially, working from home was quiet, and no one really knew what to expect as we waited for the next announcement in the Government's "roadmap to recovery". However, once the decision was made to start the phased reopening of schools (from 1 June) the team was tasked with obtaining Covid-secure risk assessments from each of our schools and checking them to ensure they were fit for purpose and that we were confident each school could reopen safely. This was a mammoth task with a very tight deadline; consequently the team had to work evenings, weekends and the bank holiday to ensure all the risk assessments were checked in time. The task was made more difficult due to long-term sickness absence of one of the team; however, we were able to call on the support of the health & safety training officer from our Learning & Development team to give us extra capacity.

Apart from supporting schools to reopen safely, we provided a number of model risk assessments; initially to schools, but then to the wider council to allow our workplaces to be used in a Covid-secure manner. These were regularly updated and we liaised with Public Health colleagues to ensure any infection controls were appropriate. At each step we tried to ensure our trade union colleagues were consulted so they bought into the process – the feedback we had from union colleagues was, with the odd hiccup, generally very positive and we were able to reassure them that any staff returning to the workplace could do so safely.

Inevitably, many of the enquiries we received during the year were Covid related; however, with support from colleagues in Public Health, and elsewhere, we managed to deal with them and ensure that managers and headteachers had the right advice to help keep our workplaces safe.

During 2020-21, we reviewed and updated the following safety management standards (SMSs):

- Aggression & violence
- Asbestos safety
- Contractors – selection and control
- Lone working/Home working
- Pressure systems
- Vibration

In addition, the COSHH SMS and a new Training & Competence SMS were both completed prior to the March 2020 Corporate Health & Safety Board; however that meeting did not take place due to the start of the coronavirus pandemic hence they were not approved until July and were published in August 2020.

Apart from SMSs we also contributed to a review of the Agile Working Policy which was updated to reflect the number of staff working from home. To reinforce the policy, we produced a simple "Home suitability and risk assessment" form to enable managers to support any staff working from home.

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.

There were challenges in 2020/21 delivering face to face training. Where possible, particularly towards the end of the year, training was delivered virtually via Microsoft Teams; however, some training such as first aid has to be delivered face to face and this was not an option for most of the year – these challenges/barriers meant that both corporately, and for schools, many fewer courses were run and fewer staff trained than usual.

In 2020/21 we delivered the following:

- 18 training courses were delivered corporately with 159 attendees (the initial, pre-pandemic offer was 50 courses)
- 9 training courses were delivered to schools with 55 attendees (the initial, pre-pandemic offer was 52 courses)

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 21³.

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.

³ Now that training courses have restarted, each directorate and our schools have been asked to prioritise health & safety training to ensure no gaps have developed

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
- We have restarted the audits and FRAs, but have had to develop new approaches to delivering these programmes – particularly the audit programme which was predominantly delivered remotely during the year; but which, going forward, we hope to deliver face to face wherever possible
- Our training programme also had to be adapted to be delivered remotely; but again we are now delivering this face to face 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.

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	March 2021
Asbestos Safety	March 2021
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	August 2021
Infection Control	August 2021
Legionella	January 2022*
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 2021
Radiation	July 2018
Risk Assessment	November 2017
Safety Signs	July 2018
Stress	January 2022*
Training & Competence	NEW – August 2020
Vibration	March 2021
Work at Height	November 2019
Work Equipment/PUWER	January 2022*
Working Conditions	August 2021
Workplace Inspections	January 2021*
Young Workers	August 2016

[§]Reviewed awaiting further input before publication, *Issue date TBC

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