

# **Annual Health & Safety Report**

## **Covering the year 2021-22**

January 2023



**Walsall** Council

**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 sixth 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 usually reviewed every three years (last published Sep 2019). The policy is due a review, but it seems premature to reissue a policy whilst we are awaiting the appointment of a new Chief Executive; no substantive changes to the policy are envisaged, hence the current policy remains fit for purpose. 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 (CHSB) that meets three times per year; the Board is chaired by the Executive Director of Economy Environment & Communities (the "executive 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.

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.

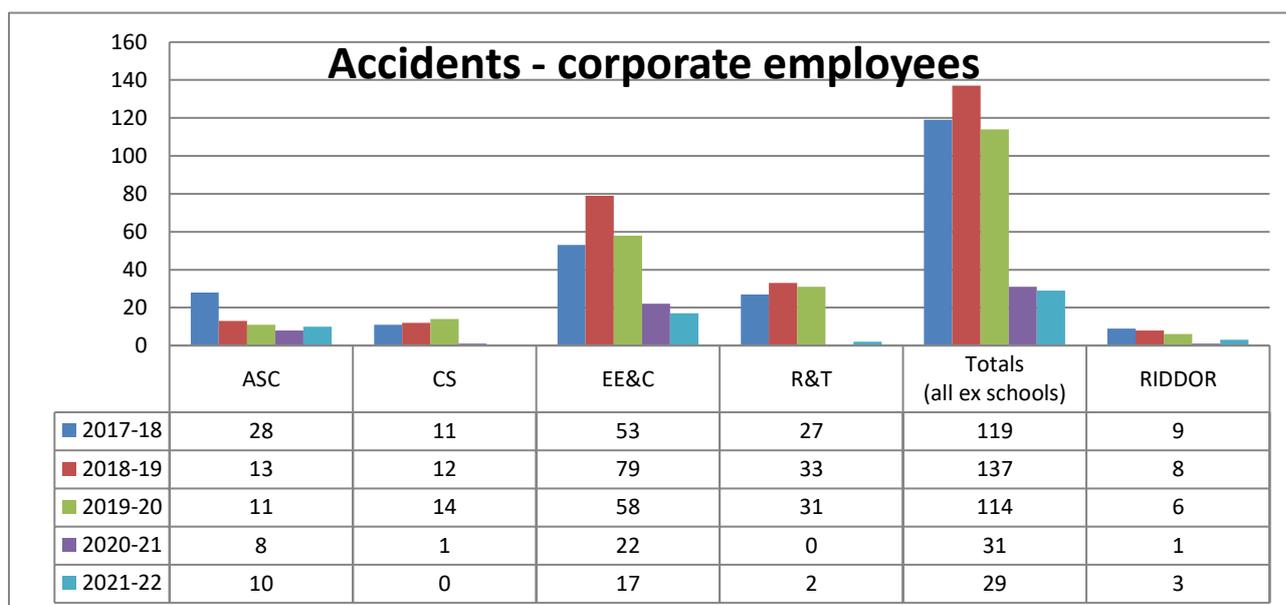
### **5. Statistical information**

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.

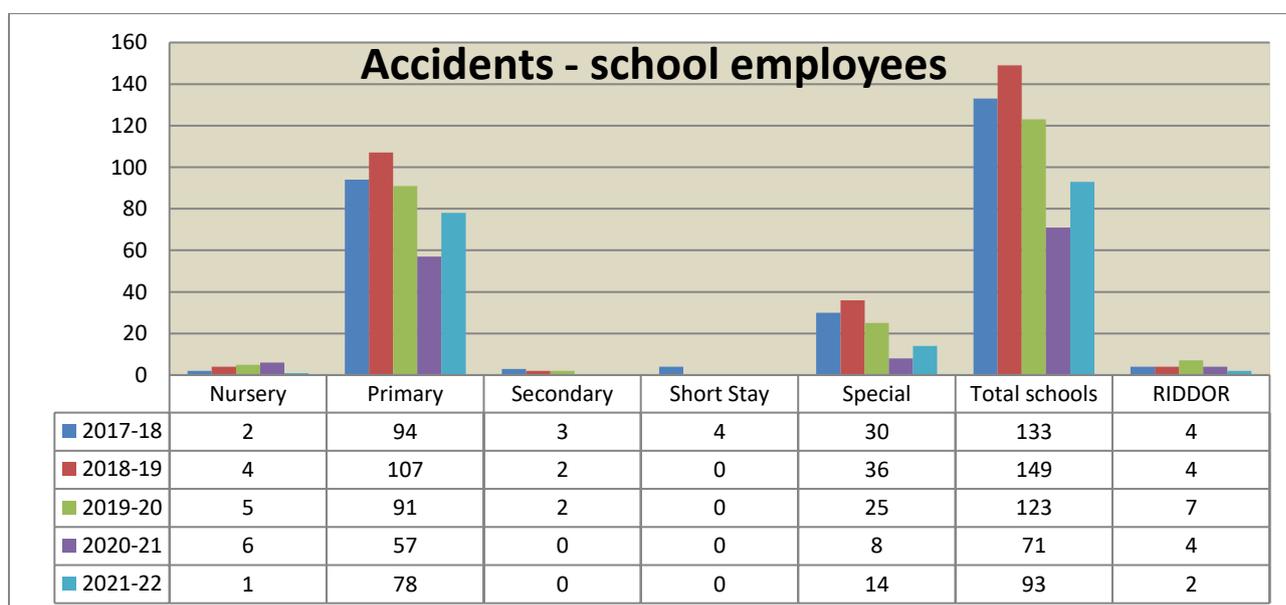
Please note this period continued to be heavily affected, particularly during the early months, by the Covid-19 pandemic; many staff were working from home and interactions with customers were reduced – this impacted both accidents and incident numbers. At the November 2021 CHSB the Chair noted that the way we are working appears to be producing fewer incidents/accidents. Given that our [customer focussed] ways of working are now the norm, it was suggested and agreed that in future any comparison of reporting periods use September 2021 as a baseline.

Apart from the impact on accidents/incidents, it should be noted that the pandemic also affected the health & safety audit and fire risk assessment (FRA) programmes during this period, with some being postponed at short notice due to unavailability of staff.

### 5.1 Accidents – employees



The number of employee accidents is broadly similar to last year’s and reflects the fewer accidents staff have now that many are working from home. Unless there is a dramatic change in how we work, then we expect these lower accident numbers to be the norm in future. There was a slight rise in the number of accidents reportable under RIDDOR<sup>1</sup>, but nothing that causes any immediate concern.



Most school staff are unable to work from home, hence the fall in accident numbers in 2020-21 was not as dramatic as for other council employees. It is interesting to note however that the figures for 2021-22 have remained at a lower level than the historic norm. No obvious reason accounts for this, however as more schools become academies we expect accident numbers to fall since the staff will no longer be our employees.

<sup>1</sup> Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 2013

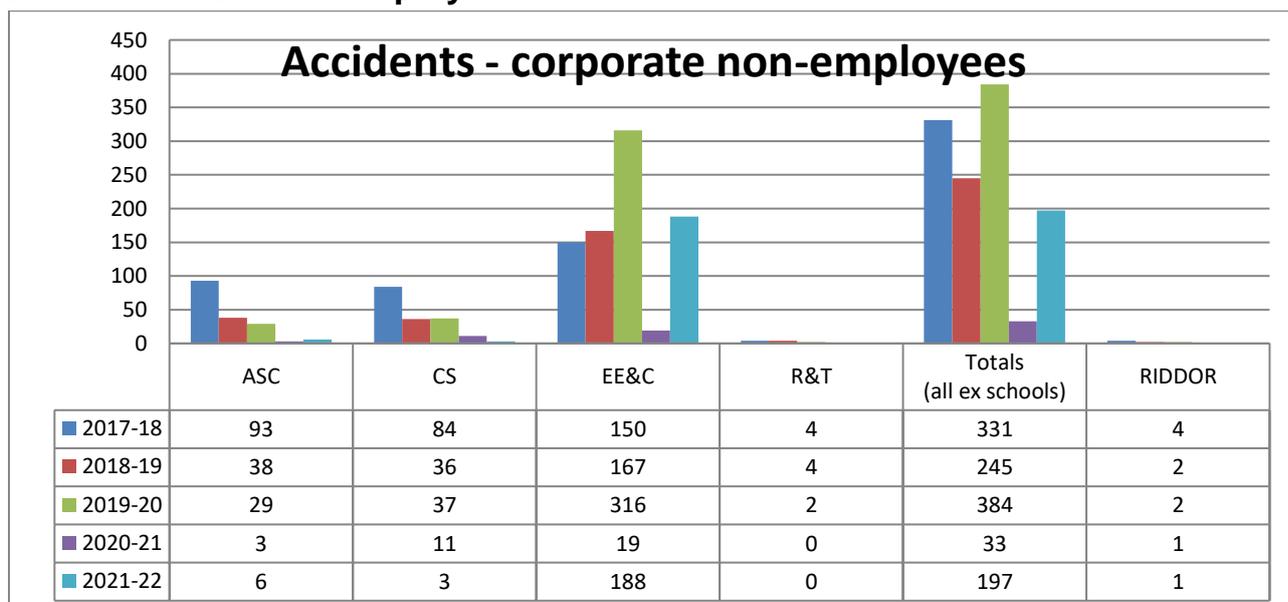
### Annual accident incident rates

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

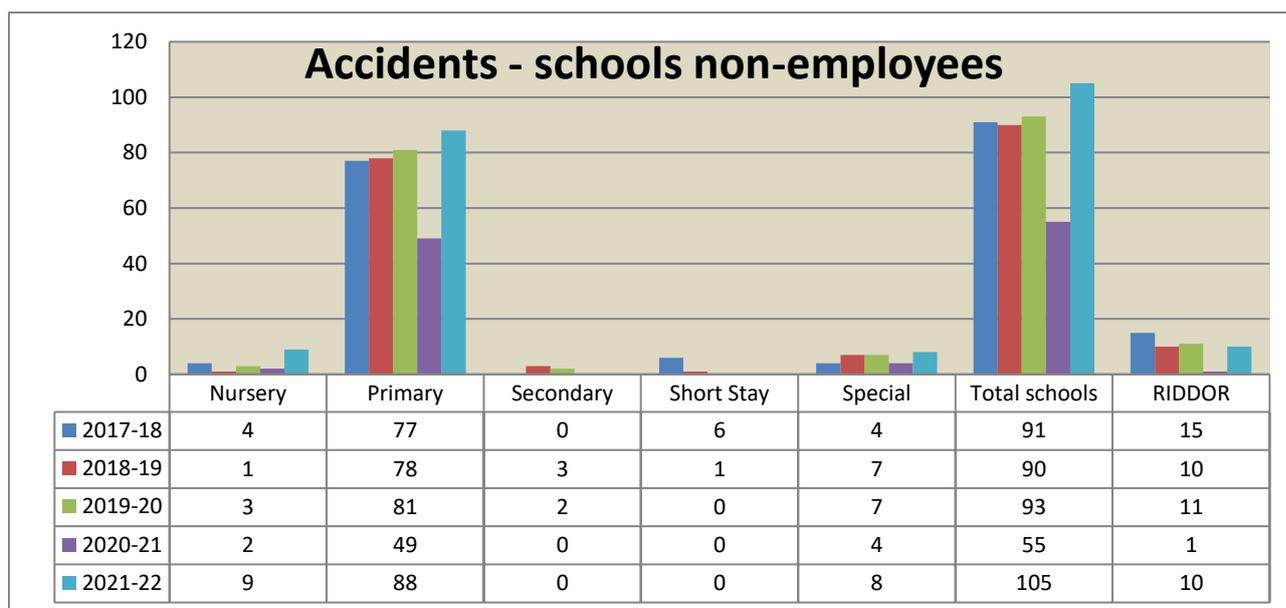
Directorate	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Adult Social Care	63.9	32.6	33.7	21.4	25.4
Children's Services	18.0	19.4	22.8	1.3	0.0
Economy Environment & Communities	68.5	105.5	77.6	29.3	25.8
Resources & Transformation	31.7	38.8	36.0	0.0	3.1
<b>Overall (exc. schools)</b>	<b>44.5</b>	<b>52.4</b>	<b>44.7</b>	<b>12.0</b>	<b>11.7</b>
Note: we only calculate incident rates for schools where the council is the employer					
School employee accident rate	46.4	52.0	42.6	25.5	33.5

Accident incident rates are broadly in line with the previous year which seems to reflect our new [customer focused] ways of working, with many staff working from home on a regular basis; resulting in lower staff accident numbers than was the norm pre-Covid. Even in schools, where staff rarely work from home, the rate still remains lower than pre-Covid; however working arrangements at the start of this period were still heavily influenced by Covid and the rates may not be typical.

### 5.2 Accidents – non-employees



Accident numbers for non-employees have recovered somewhat, now that our public facing services are open again, but remain lower than pre-pandemic levels. As expected, most of these accidents are in our leisure facilities and are mostly sporting related, rather than due to any issues with our premises, etc.



The number of non-employee accidents in schools has risen to pre-pandemic levels, which isn't surprising given that schools are now broadly back to "normal". This rise in accidents is mirrored in the rise in RIDDOR reportable incidents. Note – only schools where we are the employer have to report accidents to us, hence the absence of accidents in secondary schools.

### 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 (12)	Handling, lifting and carrying (4)	Hit something fixed or stationary (2)	(11)
Non-employees	Slips/trips/falls on same level (44)	Sporting injury (24)	Hit something fixed or stationary (22)	(107)
School employees	Slips/trips/falls on same level (42)	Hit by moving object (13)	Handling, lifting and carrying (10)	(28)
School non-employees	Slips/trips/falls on same level (62)	Hit something fixed or stationary (13)	Sporting injury (10)	(20)

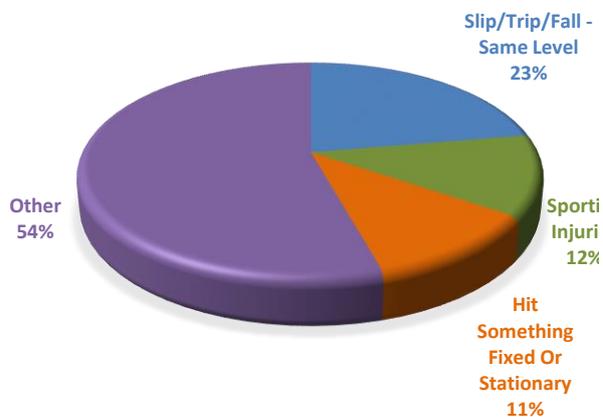
This can be better illustrated as percentages on the following charts:

**Corporate 2021-22**

**KINDS OF EMPLOYEE ACCIDENTS**

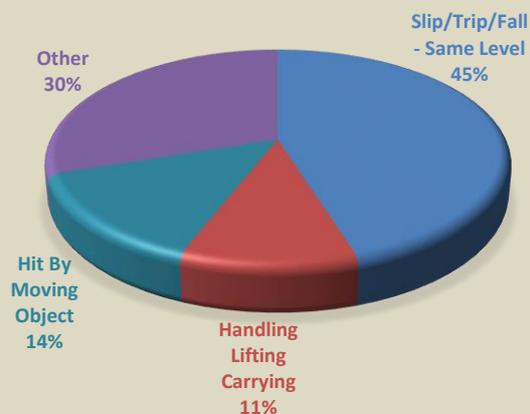


**KINDS OF NON-EMPLOYEE ACCIDENTS**

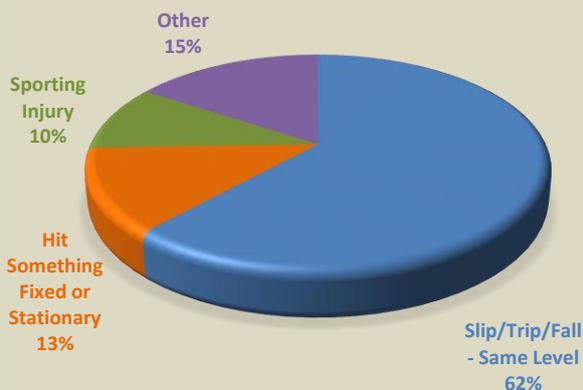


**Schools 2021-22**

**KINDS OF EMPLOYEE ACCIDENTS**



**KINDS OF NON-EMPLOYEE ACCIDENTS**



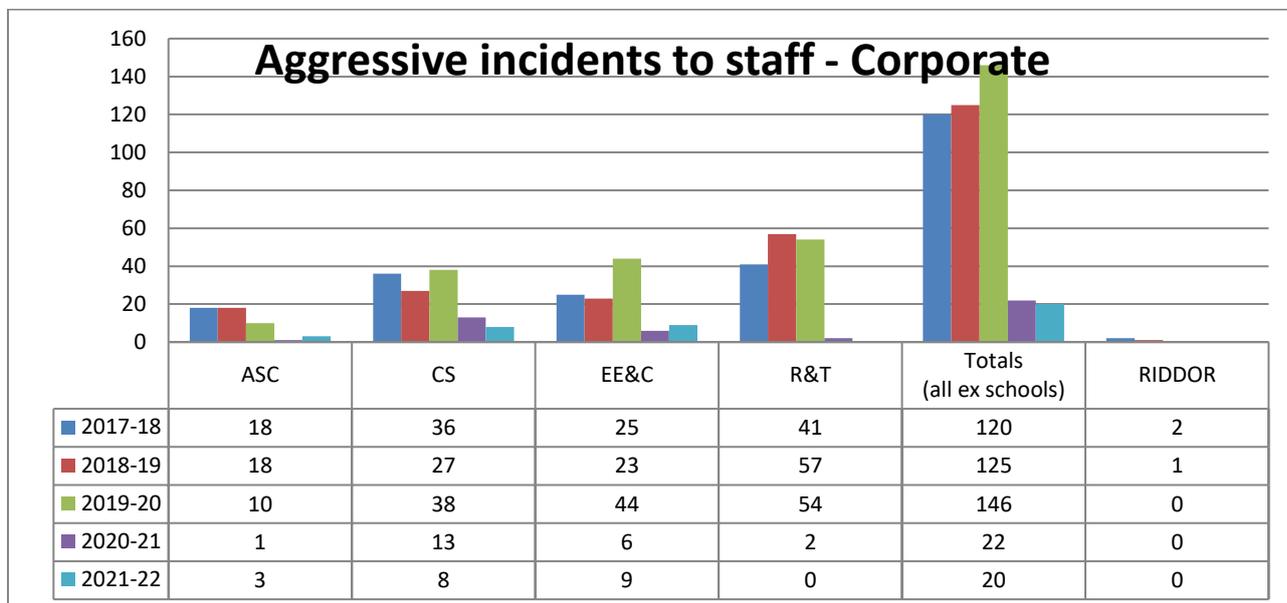
The proportions of “kinds of accidents” are broadly in line with previous years.

Once again, 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.

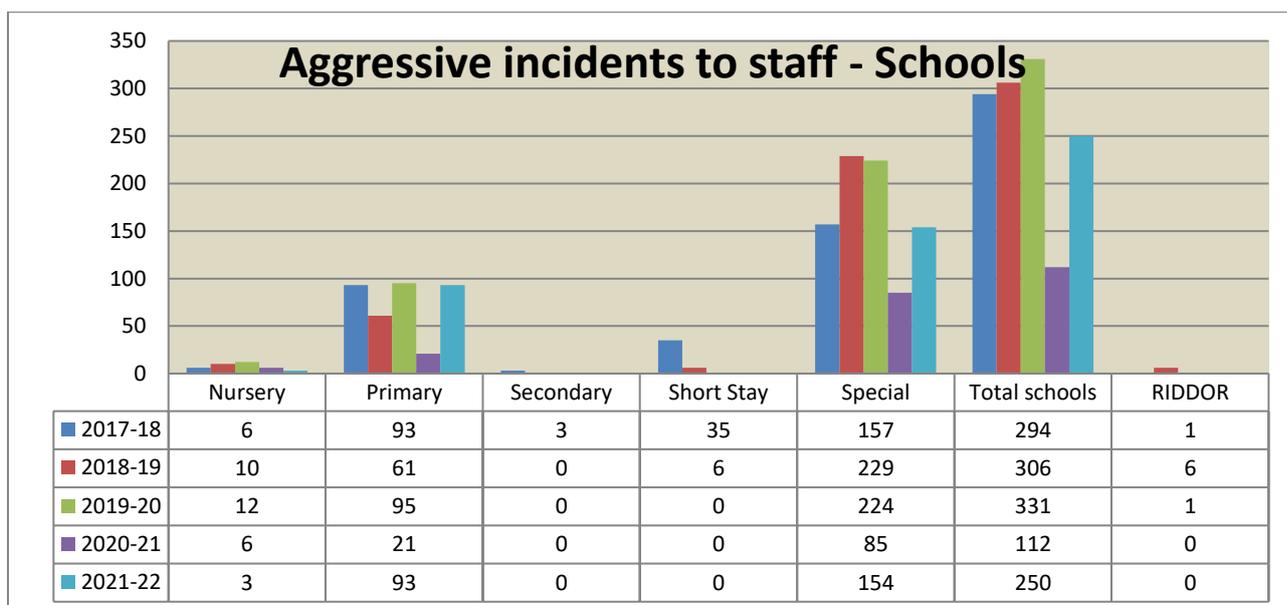
“Hit something fixed or stationary” is, once again, often a significant “kind” of accident and the prevalence may at first seem strange; however it covers a range of common incidents including walking into furniture. As with slips/trips/falls, there are many scenarios behind this kind of accident and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



We expected aggressive incidents numbers to “bounce back” once our public facing facilities reopened, but this doesn’t appear to have been the case; although we note that some services, such as the First Stop Shop, are now appointment only hence we have had few incidents in those areas. It is too early to say if the reduction in aggressive incidents will remain at these lower levels, but nevertheless the figures are welcome.



As with accidents, aggressive incidents to staff in schools have recovered as schools are now broadly back to “normal”. 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.

### Annual violence and aggression incident rates

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

Directorate	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Adult Social Care	41.1	45.2	30.7	2.7	7.6
Children's Services	58.9	43.7	61.8	16.5	10.3
Economy Environment & Communities	32.3	30.7	58.9	8.0	13.7
Resources & Transformation	48.2	67.0	62.7	3.0	0.0
<b>Overall (exc. schools)</b>	<b>44.9</b>	<b>47.8</b>	<b>57.3</b>	<b>8.5</b>	<b>8.1</b>
Note: we only calculate incident rates for schools where the council is the employer					
School aggressive incident rate	109.4	115.0	119.5	41.6	93.3

As with accidents, our aggressive incident rates are broadly in line with the previous year – note the rise in ASC, (2.7 to 7.6) may seem dramatic but reflects going from one to three incidents, so isn't really significant. Similarly, the rise in EEC is due to incidents rising from six to nine, so again not particularly significant. The incident rate in schools has recovered, but remains a little below pre-Covid levels.

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 2021-22:

- There were six **employer's liability** claims received, two claims were unsuccessful, one received a £5000 payment, and three remain open with a £35,000 reserve
- Whilst there were 135 **public liability** claims, only one related to our workplaces, and this was unsuccessful

Both employer's liability and public liability can include historic claims – some of which take a while to come through and/or be settled. With regards to historic claims settled during 2021-22:

- There were ten **employer's liability** claims, five of which were unsuccessful, with damages of £24,293.67 paid to settle the remaining claims
- There were two **public liability** claims relating to our workplaces, one of which was unsuccessful and damages of £30,000.00 paid in the other case (a hand injury requiring surgery)

### 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 2021/22, there were nine management audits<sup>2</sup> of schools and 14 intermediate audits. In addition, 12 corporate management audits and two corporate intermediate audits were carried out, along with 21 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<sup>3</sup>, 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 2021/22, there were 37 FRAs of schools, along with 30 FRAs of corporate premises. At this stage of the pandemic, our FRA programme was less interrupted by Covid than the audit programme, with a return to near normal in the number of FRAs completed.

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) to end March 22

The health & safety team continued to face challenges due to the pandemic during this year, notable amongst these challenges was the lack of venue availability to deliver health & safety

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<sup>2</sup> 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

<sup>3</sup> Note, during 2023-24 the 24 month FRA cycle will move, in most instances, to a 30 month cycle to reflect the reduced working hours of our fire safety adviser. Given the maturity of our FRA programme, we do not envisage this increasing the overall risk

training, and trainees withdrawing at short notice for Covid-related reasons. In addition, as already noted, a number of our planned audits and FRAs were postponed, often at short notice, due to the unavailability of key staff.

Nevertheless, we managed to keep our work programme on target and have largely recovered from the pandemic, albeit many of our day to day working arrangements have changed.

The introduction of virtual meetings allowed us to rethink how we present some key data relating to accidents and incidents. Rather than just sharing recent statistics we realised that since, during these meetings, everyone was looking at a computer monitor we could present that data in a more dynamic way – consequently we developed an interactive “Accident dashboard” that allows directorates to not only view the latest accident statistics, but also to compare the statistics with earlier periods or to drill down into specific areas to better understand the data and, hopefully, learn more from the accidents that we do have. This can be done “live” during the meeting, or managers can explore the dashboard in their own time to highlight any trends, hotspots, etc.

An added bonus of the dashboard is that it allows us, almost instantly, to answer many queries relating to accident/incident numbers – saving on staff time/resources.

During 2021-22, we reviewed and updated the following safety management standards (SMSs):

- First Aid
- Health Surveillance & Assessment
- Infection Control
- Legionella
- Noise
- Risk Assessment
- Stress
- Work equipment
- Working Conditions
- Workplace inspection

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.

Whilst our training programmes mostly recovered from the pandemic during 2021/22, there continued to be challenges with a number of courses cancelled/deferred due to Covid-19, lack of venue or occasionally lack of attendees

In 2021/22 we delivered the following:

- 60 training courses were delivered corporately with 430 attendees (this was slightly down on the pre-pandemic level)

- 50 training courses were delivered to schools with 532 attendees (a small increase in attendees compared to pre-pandemic as schools played “catch up” with training)

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 22.

## **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.

## **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 regularly engage 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
- We have a Corporate Health & Safety Objective, along with a set of actions to help ensure that we keep health & safety on track
- Each year we publish an Annual Health & Safety Training Report to give an overview of our training activities
- 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” to show

that they are on top of all their main health & safety responsibilities. At the same time, we also ask them to complete a Managers' training checklist to help give themselves reassurance that they are on top of all their health & safety training needs

Going forward:

- Whilst the Covid pandemic impacted the health & safety service in quite dramatic ways, we now believe we are largely “back to normal”, albeit many of the ways we work and deliver the service have changed
- Our audit, FRA and training programmes are now fully back on track, although some of the practical changes we made as a result of the pandemic have remained in place – especially where these changes improved the efficiency of our work or saved resources
- We will continue to work with key service areas to better understand their accident and incident data – the recently introduced Accident Dashboard is proving a very valuable tool in spotting trends/hot spots and highlighting where questions need to be asked to get reassurance that our systems remain robust or to prompt a review of the controls already in place
- 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)
- We will look to refresh the health & safety for leaders training that most members of CMT and a number of their direct reports have previously attended, to reinforce the senior accountability for health & safety

## 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 complement 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.

<b>SMS</b>	<b>Issued</b>
<b>Accident and Incident Reporting</b>	November 2019
<b>Aggression &amp; Violence</b>	March 2021
<b>Asbestos Safety</b>	March 2021
<b>Contractors – Selection and Control</b>	November 2020
<b>COSHH</b>	August 2020
<b>Driving*</b>	
<b>DSE</b>	September 2022
<b>Electricity &amp; Gas</b>	September 2022
<b>Fire and Evacuation</b>	January 2019
<b>First Aid</b>	April 2022
<b>Health Surveillance and Assessment</b>	August 2021
<b>Infection Control</b>	August 2021
<b>Legionella</b>	January 2022
<b>LOLER (Lifting Operations)</b>	December 2022
<b>Lone working/Home working</b>	November 2020
<b>Managers' Responsibilities</b>	November 2019
<b>Manual Handling</b>	September 2017
<b>New and Expectant Mothers</b>	December 2022
<b>Noise</b>	April 2022
<b>Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)</b>	September 2022
<b>Pressure Systems</b>	March 2021
<b>Radiation</b>	December 2022
<b>Risk Assessment</b>	April 2022
<b>Safety Signs</b>	December 2022
<b>Stress</b>	January 2022
<b>Training &amp; Competence</b>	August 2020
<b>Vibration</b>	March 2021
<b>Work at Height</b>	November 2019
<b>Work Equipment/PUWER</b>	January 2022
<b>Working Conditions</b>	August 2021
<b>Workplace Inspections</b>	January 2022
<b>Young Workers</b>	September 2022

\*Review awaiting finalisation of Management of Occupational Road Risk Policy before publication

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

