



Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Fire Authority

Meeting and date: Fire Authority, 8 December 2021

Report title: Health, Safety and Wellbeing Annual Report 2020/21

Lead Member: Councillor Keith McLean

Report sponsor: AC Calum Bell, Head of Protection, Assurance and Development

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Action: Noting

Recommendations: That the Authority note the health, safety and wellbeing performance as detailed in the Health, Safety and Wellbeing Annual Report for 2020/21.

Executive summary: The Health, Safety and Wellbeing Annual Report covers the period 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021 including:

- COVID-19 pandemic
 - Statistical overview
 - Employee Wellbeing
 - Risk Management
-

Financial implications: If risks are not managed and controlled effectively, they can potentially lead to serious injury and breaches of legislation which can have significant financial implications by way of claims or fines for the Authority. In terms of the pandemic, should the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) conduct a spot COVID audit which finds failings or if they receive a complaint from an employee, they will carry out an investigation and will issue fines to organisations who do not have the required social distancing, personal hygiene and cleaning regimes in place. There is also the potential for reputational damage.

Risk management: Risk management involves understanding, analysing and addressing risk to ensure the Service can achieve its objectives. The COVID-19 pandemic has presented many challenges in terms of managing the associated risks especially as some of the additional activities carried out by employees have been outside of their usual role. Robust measures remain in place across all authority sites to mitigate the risks to staff, visitors and contractors and to protect our staff when they are in the community, so far as is 'reasonably practicable'.

Legal implications: The safety management system is well embedded throughout the Service and its performance is subject to regular audit by peer fire and rescue

services to ensure it remains fit for purpose, as well as ensuring compliance with legislation. If this scrutiny does not take place, it is possible that breaches of health and safety legislation may occur. The pandemic initiated the implementation of additional legislation by the Government which the Service has and will continue to comply with. It has also highlighted the importance of adherence to Section 2 (Employer responsibilities) and Section 7 (Employee responsibilities) of the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974.

Privacy and security implications: A Data Protection Impact Assessment for this report exists and has been reviewed. There are no personal details provided in this report and statistical data is generic rather than specific to protect the identity of those involved. The data collected as part of personal injury safety events is name, date of birth, gender and home address when required for Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations (RIDDOR) reporting – a legislative requirement.

Duty to collaborate: The additional activities undertaken by employees in the response to the pandemic have been part of wider collaboration between partner agencies and local authorities, these include South Central Ambulance (SCAS), Buckinghamshire Council and Milton Keynes Council. Additionally, a mutual assistance agreement was set up between the three Thames Valley fire and rescue services Health and Safety departments in terms of business continuity in the event of a loss of staff due to the pandemic.

Health and safety implications: Since the start of the pandemic the primary focus has been to mitigate the risks associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. Procedures and guidance for staff have been implemented based on the Government’s ‘Working Safely with COVID-19’ documents. Risk assessments have been written and existing ones reviewed, and additional measures have been put in place to support staff in terms of mental health and wellbeing. Normal work activities and existing projects have continued wherever possible.

Environmental implications: N/A

Equality, diversity, and inclusion implications: The data collected as part of personal injury safety events is name, date of birth, gender and home address when required for RIDDOR reporting. Where the number of personal injury safety events is so low that there is the potential for affected individuals to be identified, they are reported generically rather than specifically.

Consultation and communication: As this is a report on Health, Safety and Wellbeing for the year 2020/21 there is no requirement to consult with other stakeholders.

Background papers:

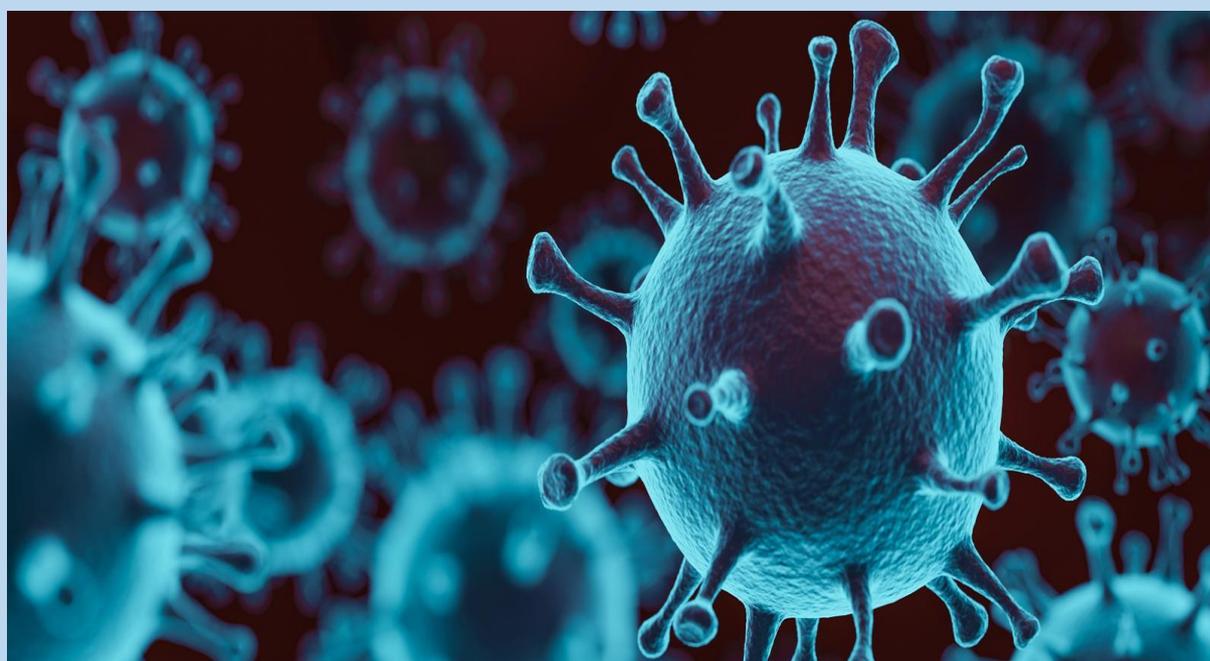
Appendix	Title	Protective Marking
1	Health, Safety and Wellbeing Annual Report 2020/21	

Health, Safety and Wellbeing



Annual Report

2020-21



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Forewords

"I am very pleased to be writing my second foreword to the annual Health, Safety and Wellbeing report. Whilst I wrote last year's foreword it related to the year with only 2 months of Covid-19; this year the whole year has been overshadowed by Covid-19. You will read in the report how well the Service always coped with limited Covid-19 cases due to robust procedures being speedily implemented and being fully operational throughout the year. The external work carried out by some firefighters to support others, including driving ambulances and delivering PPE, along with the dedication from Support staff to ensure operations continued, exemplifies the ethos of the Service. I am proud the Health, Safety and Wellbeing statistics continue to demonstrate how importantly we all treat these matters; however, we should not be complacent and must continue to reduce risks to our employees and the public we serve".

Councillor Keith McLean
Lead Member for Health, Safety and Wellbeing
Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Fire Authority

"As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic the way in which we work has changed significantly, with operational staff having to adapt to working with their communities and partner agencies virtually rather than face to face and support staff taking a blended approach of home and office working. Staff across the Service have gone above and beyond to ensure resources remain available to respond to emergency incidents and visit those members of our communities most at risk. Some have also volunteered to serve with South Central Ambulance Service in their hour of need. I am delighted to say that cases of COVID-19 amongst staff have remained low throughout, and this is due to the commitment of our staff in adhering to the rules implemented by the Government. "

Jason Thelwell
Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive
Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Fire Authority

Executive summary

COVID-19 Pandemic: With the advent of the first lockdown in March 2020, much of the year has been devoted to managing the pandemic internally and supporting the communities we serve. All stations/sites remain COVID Secure. The total number of COVID-19 cases for the year 2020/21 is 38 which includes four cases of long COVID.

Our performance: The safety event statistics for the year 2020/21 identify that there has been a decrease in the number of events in five of the seven areas. This is a pleasing result. There has been an increase of 18% in the number of equipment damage safety events; more detail is provided in the report.

Employee Wellbeing: Sickness absence **reduced by 36.4%** and **33%** respectively for Wholetime and On Call employees in 2020/21 when compared to 2019/20. Support staff employee's sickness levels saw an **increase of 18.2%** for the same period. This was mainly due to an increase in *long-term* sickness.

Blue Light Hub: Crews from Great Holm and Bletchley fire stations moved into their new home at West Ashland fire station within the Blue Light Hub on 30 June 2020. The move went well and alerting crews to emergency incidents during the switch was seamless. Overall, they were very happy with their new facilities and have settled in quickly.

Protecting Firefighters against contaminants: Back in 2019, the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) commenced a contaminants project, in conjunction with Professor Anna Stec from the University of Central Lancashire, which involves the analysis of blood, urine and hair to determine if and at what level contaminants are present. As a result of this research the FBU published an interim report - "Minimising firefighters' exposure to toxic fire effluents". We have reviewed the recommendations contained within this interim report and we continue to take all reasonable steps to protect the health and wellbeing of our staff.

Working with others: The pandemic has necessitated the requirement for departments to work more closely together. The Pandemic Response and Recovery groups comprise middle managers and department heads who have worked tirelessly to respond to and recover from COVID-19 throughout the past 18 months.

COVID-19 pandemic

With the advent of the first lockdown in March 2020, much of the year has been devoted to managing the pandemic internally and supporting the communities we serve. Throughout the year the Service has assisted partner agencies and local authorities in a variety of ways from training care home staff in infection control to setting up and managing COVID-19 mass vaccination centres. Other examples, both internal and external are detailed below.

Internally – With the introduction of COVID-19 specific legislation by the Government, it was necessary to ensure that the Service implemented appropriate measures to ensure compliance and to continue to protect employees whilst at work. To achieve this all stations and sites were and remain COVID Secure with the following in place:

- social distancing of two metres
- robust cleaning regimes of stations, sites and vehicles
- personal hygiene – hand washing and the use of hand sanitiser on entry and exit of premises
- reduced maximum occupancy of rooms across the estate
- 50% occupancy of vehicles with the exception of fire appliances
- Face masks to be worn in vehicles
- Face masks to be worn during training activities and incidents
- Appropriate level of PPE to be worn when working in the community and especially when working with people who have COVID-19
- “Working Safely with COVID-19” risk assessments

The Health and Safety team have conducted several reviews of existing COVID-19 risk assessments to ensure they remain suitable and sufficient, reflect the Government’s changes to restrictions imposed and the requirements of the Service.

Regular communications to staff have been issued in the Pandemic section of the intranet and via poster campaigns displayed on stations and sites acting as a reminder to staff to adhere to the COVID Secure measures in place.

A [joint statement](#) signed by all Representative Bodies was issued in October 2020 which set out the five steps to ensuring stations and sites remain COVID Secure. This is an excellent example of working together for the greater good of all employees and the communities we serve.

Early in the pandemic the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) went on record stating that, should they receive a complaint from an employee concerned about COVID-19 in their workplace, they would carry out an investigation. Their main focus would be the monitoring of ongoing compliance with the measures. To

ensure this was in place, the Health and Safety team developed a monthly inspection form, an extension of the COVID-19 audit form, which is completed by the Station Commander/site manager and returned to the Health and Safety department. Any breaches and findings are highlighted to the Station Commander/site manager for rectification. This provides evidence and an audit trail should the HSE wish to come into the Service. It also provides assurance to the Authority that the Service is doing all it can to ensure compliance.

To date, the HSE has conducted COVID-19 spot audits at four stations and sites with excellent outcomes at each. There has been no requirement for any further action and comments received from the inspectors have been favourable. This is due to the hard work of all employees in ensuring adherence to the COVID Secure measures.

In certain situations, COVID-19 has been designated as a disease that is reportable to the HSE under the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations (RIDDOR). These situations relate to not wearing the appropriate PPE, a failure of the PPE or a dangerous occurrence such as an unintended incident at work that has led to someone's possible or actual exposure to COVID-19. To manage these eventualities the Service provided guidance to all staff as to the levels of PPE that should be worn according to the level of risk present.

When an employee is confirmed as having COVID-19 they must self-isolate in accordance with Government requirements. Before they return to work the Resource Management Team (RMT) will contact them and work through a set of questions created to determine if the virus was contracted whilst at work. If this is the case, the health and safety team will report it to the HSE under the RIDDOR Regulations. Fortunately, there has only been one instance to date, further testament to the diligence of employees when working face to face with each other and the communities.

The HSE has been instrumental in providing guidance to employers on mitigating the risk of transmission of the virus. An example of such guidance related to adequate ventilation both natural and mechanical. The Service has implemented the requirement that windows on all stations and sites are to be opened when occupied to ensure circulation of fresh air. For those stations and sites that have air handling systems the Property department have maximised the input of fresh air and increased the frequency of filter changes.

One of the biggest risks for the Service was, and still is, meeting members of the community who have tested positive for COVID-19 or those that do not realise they have COVID-19 as they are asymptomatic. Strict protocols have been put in place in terms of managing that risk for all community facing staff. These protocols include the following:

- Minimising face to face contact wherever possible
- Conducting business over the phone or virtually
- Robust call challenging if it is possible that employees need to visit members of the public in their homes
- Creating specific risk assessments for activities that involve interaction with the community
- Appropriate PPE of varying levels depending on the risk of transmission of the virus
- Employees undertaking regular Lateral Flow Testing (LFT) in order to protect the community and colleagues
- Ceasing community-based activities such as schools' visits
- Restricting access to stations/sites with the exception of our trusted partners South Central Ambulance Service (SCAS) and Thames Valley Police (TVP)

An agreement is in place that allows SCAS crews to use certain fire stations for their welfare breaks. This agreement has remained in place throughout the pandemic with additional control measures in place. A "Trusted Partners" form containing information on the implemented COVID Secure measures has been developed, which SCAS crews are required to read, provide their contact details and sign to say that they will adhere to the measures in place at these stations. This also allows the Service to track who has visited these stations as part of the NHS Test and Trace requirements.

Whilst LFT tests cannot be made mandatory, employees are strongly encouraged to test themselves regularly. Test kits are available to employees who can order them via the intranet. Results of the tests are then entered into the NHS portal and internally, again, via the intranet. Take up of these kits has been good and is proving successful.

The pandemic has presented many challenges. The most significant challenge has been the necessary changes in human behaviour. Humans are social beings, and it is alien for them to distance themselves from one another. The wearing of facemasks is also unfamiliar and for many, initially, uncomfortable. It has taken time and effort to constantly remind employees of the requirement to adhere to the COVID Secure measures in place and it has been difficult for employees to adapt.

Balancing 'business as usual' with the ever-increasing workloads created by the pandemic has also proved difficult. It has been necessary to scale back and even temporarily cease some work activities. For the Health and Safety team this has meant that updating the Health, Safety and Wellbeing noticeboards has ceased with the responsibility being deferred to station staff. It should be noted that any work activity that impacts the health, safety and wellbeing of employees or is a legislative requirement has continued throughout. Examples of this are the

Portable Appliance (PAT) testing, lifting equipment inspection and testing and the control of legionella through the weekly flushing of water systems in stations and sites that are not used on a daily basis.

Throughout lockdown, staff working from home and those who were shielding were contacted regularly by their line manager to check on their welfare and reminded of the support networks available to them should they feel isolated or that their mental health and wellbeing may be at risk.

A 'Supporting staff back into the workplace' aide memoire was developed for those who were shielding or returning to the workplace once lockdown had ended, providing the latest position on the measures implemented, adjustments necessary etc. in a bid to allay concerns and reassure staff who could find returning to the workplace difficult after being away for so long. This aide memoire was completed by both the individual and line manager and retained as an audit trail in the event of future challenge.

In November Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) conducted a virtual COVID-19 inspection. The headlines of the findings are detailed below:

Buckinghamshire Fire & Rescue Service has been praised for the way it is coping with the challenges it faces during the COVID-19 pandemic, and for the positive contribution it is making to its community.

The report has been welcomed by Chief Fire Officer Jason Thelwell QFSM and Councillor Lesley Clarke OBE, Chairman of Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Fire Authority, whose members were actively engaged in discussions with officers on the service's ability to discharge its statutory functions.

The report said BFRS had been well prepared, maintained its core functions of firefighting, promoting fire safety, responding to emergencies and rescuing people involved in road traffic collisions, adopted new and innovative ways of working and even managed to provide additional support to a number of other organisations. This included driving ambulances for South Central Ambulance Service, training care home staff in infection control and packing food parcels for vulnerable people.

CFO Thelwell said: "I could not be prouder of the way staff have risen to every challenge with such willingness and commitment. Since this inspection was carried out, they have gone on to help set up three mass vaccination centres in the area we serve. We will continue to work tirelessly to support our partner organisations and the communities of Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes."

Councillor Clarke said: "Emergency service work is challenging at the best of times, so recognition for going above and beyond in such difficult and unpredictable circumstances is a remarkable achievement. It speaks volumes about the men and women who work here, and on behalf of the Fire Authority I

would like to thank them all for their can-do attitude, dedication to duty and willingness to work differently.”

The report said the organisation’s resources were well managed and it effectively managed its low level of staff absences. The inspection also found that BFRS communicated well with its staff, and made staff wellbeing a priority by providing guidance, support and extra wellbeing services. It also made sure they had the resources they needed to do their jobs effectively, including new flexible working arrangements and new technology to facilitate virtual meetings.

The inspection report, which is available on the HMICFRS website, noted that between 1 April and 30 June 2020, BFRS attended fewer incidents than it did during the same period in 2019. The overall availability of fire engines was better during the pandemic than it was during the same period in 2019, partly because on-call firefighters were available to respond to emergencies due to being furloughed from their primary employment.

Absences decreased compared with the same period in 2019, and the average response time to fires improved. This was for several reasons, including lower sickness levels, better fire engine availability and less road traffic during this period.

The service also had good arrangements in place to make sure that its joint control room, shared with Royal Berkshire and Oxfordshire, had enough staff during the pandemic. Additionally, it continued to collaborate with its partners, and provided effective support to the Thames Valley Local Resilience Forum.

It was able to go ahead with its planned move into the new Blue Light Hub in West Ashland, Milton Keynes, in June, and to complete an apprentice recruitment process for operational activity. This followed all government guidance on social distancing and hygiene.

Externally - The Tripartite Agreement/s (agreement between the Fire & Rescue Services National Employers, the Fire Brigades Union and the National Fire Chiefs Council) supported a range of new and additional activities for the Service. Examples of activities undertaken are detailed below:

- Driving ambulances for SCAS
- Training care home staff in infection control
- Packaging food parcels for vulnerable people
- Delivery of NHS ‘Test and Trace’ letters
- Setting up and overseeing the running of mass vaccination centres
- Assisting in the packaging and distribution of PPE
- Collecting and distributing medication to vulnerable shielding people
- Providing station appliance bay space and facilitating the packing and distribution of fruit and vegetables for Buckinghamshire Council at Marlow
- Supporting and chairing meetings within the Local Resilience Forum (LRF)

Operational employees who volunteered to drive ambulances for SCAS were released from their fire service duties for a period of up to six weeks following training. At the end of the detachment, they were required to take a COVID-19 test with a negative result and given 72 hours rest before recommencing their fire service role. Whilst the detachments have now paused the volunteers are ensuring their skills are regularly refreshed so that they are able to assist in the future if SCAS become overwhelmed. This is an area of activity that the Service led on and coordinated across the Thames Valley, Hampshire and the Isle of Wight.

The NFCC produced a suite of 'Working safely with COVID-19' risk assessments for these activities which the health and safety team localised to fit the Service's needs.

From the 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021 there have been 38 cases of COVID-19, which includes four cases of long COVID, in Service. An excellent achievement! This is testament to the diligence and commitment by all employees and contractors to adhere to the COVID Secure measures in place.

Our performance at a glance

HEALTH AND SAFETY

2020/2021

INJURY RATE

14%

Decrease from 94.2 to 89.0 per 1000



ACCIDENT / INJURY

2.27%

Decrease from 44 to 43 reports



RIDDOR

Decrease from 7 to 6 in RIDDOR reportable events.



NEAR MISS

15%

Decrease from 39 to 33 reports



ACTS OF VIOLENCE

Decrease from 1 to 0



VEHICLE DAMAGE

30%

Decrease from 55 to 38 reports



EQUIPMENT DAMAGE

18%

Increase from 39 to 46 reports



Performance overview

In 2020/21 the number of incidents attended was 8,161 and the number of mobilisations was 8,738. These figures do not include co-responding incidents or officer mobilisations.

Overall, there have been reductions in five of the seven categories which is a considerable improvement in performance compared to last year. Personal injury, vehicle safety events, acts of violence and the number of events that come under the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations (RIDDOR) have all decreased. There has been an increase in the number of equipment damage safety events as detailed in "Our performance at a glance" graph above. The number of 'near-miss' reports has decreased this year from 39 to 33. An overview of the figures is provided below.

Personal injury: The *injury rate* is determined by calculating the number of incidents reported; divided by the number of employees and multiplied by 100,000 as set out by the HSE. For the year 2020/21 the *injury rate* is 89.0 per 1000 employees compared to 94.2 in 2019/20 which is a slight reduction. In terms of the actual numbers of personal injury safety events, there has been a decrease from 44 in 2019/20 to 43 in 2020/21.

The severity of a safety event is determined by multiplying the 'likelihood' of the safety event occurring again by the 'severity' of the injury sustained. The resulting figure is known as the risk factor score:

- 1 to 5 is deemed a minor event
- 6 to 12 is moderate and
- 15 to 25 is a major event

Of the 43 personal injury safety events, 29 have been recorded as minor in nature and 14 as moderate.

Serious workplace injuries, occupational diseases and specified dangerous occurrences are reportable to the HSE under RIDDOR.

The number of RIDDOR reportable events for 2020/21 is six, one less than in 2019/20. Analysis of these events resulted in:

- 2 dangerous occurrences
- 4 'over 7 day' sickness absences.

Equipment damage safety events has seen a significant increase of 18 per cent, with 46 safety events compared to 39 in 2019/20. 38 of these were of a minor nature and 8 were moderate. Analysis carried out by the Health and Safety

department identified that the moderate events were isolated incidents with no trends highlighted from them.

2020/21 has seen a significant decrease in the number of vehicle safety events with 38 safety events compared to 55 in 2019/20. 22 were of a minor nature and 16 were moderate. This is excellent news as vehicle accidents, especially slow manoeuvres, is a problem for fire and rescue services nationally. 6 of these moderate safety events were slow speed manoeuvres, 3 were attributable to third parties causing damage to Service vehicles. There were 2 incidents of hydraulic leaks affecting turntable ladders, and 2 appliance diesel leaks. The remaining 3 were separate safety events which cannot be specified due to the requirements of the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR).

In the category "Acts of violence against firefighters", fortunately, there were no incidents to report this year which is a decrease of 1 compared to 2019/20. However, it is important to note that if any act of violence was to take place against any member of staff it would be taken seriously and reported to the police.

For the year 2020/21 there has been a decrease in the number of "near-miss" reports of 33 compared to 39 in 2019/20. This result highlights the need to constantly remind staff to report events that may seem trivial, especially as there is the opportunity to improve performance through investigation where there has been no injury or financial loss.

Working Time Regulations compliance: The Resource Management Team monitor the hours worked by operational personnel focussing on those who have more than one contract with BFRS. This is managed via the resource management system and has proved to be very successful in reducing the number of breaches of the Working Time Regulations.

A breach will occur when a worker does not have a full 24-hour uninterrupted rest break in any seven days or 48 hours in 14 days, or the total of hours worked per week exceeds 84. The Service has implemented a limit on the number of hours worked at 78 per week to build in extra protection against fatigue for staff. Two periods of 24-hour uninterrupted rest are also given in line with the Grey Book.

From April 2020 to March 2021 there were 3822 Bank shifts worked and of those there were seven breaches. This is a significant improvement from the previous year, providing assurance that should the HSE conduct an inspection on the Service there is a robust and effective monitoring process in place.

The performance statistical data received from the Home Office for 2020/21 **relates solely to operational personnel** and is displayed as league tables of

fire and rescue services with similar numbers of employees in order to provide a more accurate comparison of performance between BFRS and its peers.

There has been a significant decrease in the **total number of persons injured** from 38 in 2019/20 to 24 in 2020/21. Of these, 17 occurred at training events, three during routine activities and four at fires.

The total number of **injuries at fires** has decreased from 5 in 2019/20 to four in 2020/21 resulting in BFRS attaining the top position of the National Peer Group Performance Comparison table detailed in Appendix 1.

There were no **injuries at special service calls** in 2020/21 compared to 2 in 2019/20, a good result. BFRS retains its position at the top of the peer table.

In terms of **injuries during routine activities** there has been a significant decrease with 3 in 2020/21 compared to 11 in 2019/20 which is excellent news. This has resulted in BFRS moving from seventh position to second.

Injuries over 7-day absence figures have also decreased from 6 in 2019/20 to 3 in 2020/21 which places BFRS in third position in the peer table.

There has been a decrease in the total number of **injuries during training events** from 20 in 2019/20 to 17 in 2020/21. Despite the decrease BFRS hold eighth position in the league table as 7 other Services had less injuries in this category compared to last year.

Finally, there were no *major injuries* for the year 2020/21.

Health and safety performance is reported quarterly at the Health, Safety and Wellbeing Committee chaired by the Deputy Chief Fire Officer. Key stakeholders, the representative bodies and the Representative of Employees are invited to attend these meetings. Governance is via the Performance and Senior Management Boards on a six-monthly basis. The reports include statistical data on the number and type of safety events occurring at operational incidents, training and routine activities and the number and types of safety events involving Support staff.

Employee Wellbeing

Attendance Management

All long-term sickness absence cases are flagged within Human Resources, who then work with the line manager, employee and Occupational Health in managing the employee's absence and return to work. All employees with over 28 days sickness absence are managed under the Attendance Management procedure and referred to Occupational Health.

For any sickness due to stress, anxiety or depression, the employee is automatically referred to Occupational Health regardless of the length of their absence. Occupational Health determines how work, or the workplace might impact on an employee, as well as how health or lifestyle may impact on their ability to attend work or to return to work. The Service will seek advice from Occupational Health to guide in the management and progression of an attendance management case, ensuring employees receives appropriate support.

All employees have access to the employee assistance programme, a free confidential 24/7 service, offering expert advice, guidance and support to help resolve a wide range of issues, including face to face and telephone counselling support.

The Service's Welfare Officer is an additional point of contact for an employee during periods of long-term sickness absences and is available to offer guidance and advice to employees if they are experiencing health related difficulties at work. The Welfare Officer, along with members of the Service's mental wellbeing support network (another source of support) can signpost employees to appropriate wellbeing support.

Measures are in place to support employees and a safe place of work is provided, however muscular skeletal sickness absence resulting away from the workplace cannot be mitigated by actions taken by the Service. Working with Occupational Health, the line manager and employee, every effort is made to get the employee back to work as soon as reasonably practicable. Where appropriate and when recommended by Occupational Health, physiotherapy is provided to the employee. For cases of long-term sickness absence relating to stress, anxiety and depression, and when recommended by Occupational Health, specialist counselling can also be provided.

The Service's Attendance Management procedure has been updated for 2021 and training is being rolled out to line managers to assist with the knowledge and understanding of this document, with the aim of ensuring the effective management of sickness absence and maximising attendance at work, ensuring

timely interventions to provide appropriate support and minimise the disruption to service delivery caused by sickness absence.

Blue Light Hub

Crews from Great Holm and Bletchley fire stations moved into their new home at West Ashland Fire Station within the Blue Light Hub on 30 June 2020. The move went well and alerting crews to emergency incidents during the switch was seamless. Overall, they were very happy with their new facilities and settled in quickly.

In October 2020 South Central Ambulance Service (SCAS) moved in and were joined by Thames Valley Police (TVP) in February 2021. Having all three emergency services under one roof has proved very beneficial as crews are able to train together regularly with each gaining a greater understanding of the way each service works which can only be advantageous in delivering shared objectives. Another benefit realised is the ability to network and collaborate. An example being the procurement of tri service COVID signage displayed throughout the blue light hub. All services agree this is an effective and cohesive way of working.

Bletchley fire station has been sold and Great Holm has been sold subject to contract and planning approval.

Risk Management

Health and Safety audits – these are carried out across all stations and sites on an annual basis and cover the following:

- Policies and procedures
- Premises
- People
- Plant
- Working safely with COVID-19
- Question set designed to test health and safety knowledge amongst employees

These audits are conducted by the Station Commander or site manager who must be NEBOSH General Certificate qualified. On submission of the completed audit both the Health and Safety and Property teams devise an action plan to remedy any issues that have been highlighted. Outcomes and progress on the identified actions are discussed at the quarterly Health, Safety and Wellbeing Committee meetings.

Risk Assessments – Following the recent firefighter fatalities in Mid and West Wales and West Midlands whilst conducting training, the HSE have commenced a year long period of inspecting fire and rescue services. Their main focus is to observe internal and external training activities and to scrutinise the associated risk assessments to determine if they are suitable and sufficient. If FRSs are found lacking enforcement action could be taken.

The health and safety team have communicated this to all stations and have instructed that there must be a suitable and sufficient risk assessment in place whenever training activities take place. Completed risk assessments come into the health and safety team for approval and sign off and to date the Service has a very good record in this area.

Fire Risk Assessments – in the last year Station Commanders and site managers have undertaken fire risk assessor training. Whilst the Fire Authority is the 'responsible' person under the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 the Station Commanders and site managers are the 'duty holder' and as such are required to complete a suitable and sufficient fire risk assessment. These assessments are then reviewed either on an annual basis or whenever there is a change in circumstances such as a refurbishment of the premises or a 'sleeping risk' is introduced.

In September 2020 a new fire risk assessment template was trialled with pleasing results. Users found it to be simple to complete and the guidance provided helpful. This year a review of the existing risks and control measures will be carried out.

First Aid kits – on occasions crews and officers will, whilst out on the roads in small vehicles, come across incidents such as road traffic collisions. If they arrive before any emergency services are on scene, there has been little first aid provision in the vehicles that they can use at the scene. Following suggestions from several crews and officers a decision was taken to put first aid kits and associated PPE in station vehicles and Officers cars. The rationale for placing them in these vehicles is that the drivers will be first aid trained with some having the Immediate Emergency Care qualification.

Other vehicles such as the pool cars could be driven by any employee who may not be first aid qualified so it was deemed necessary to discount these vehicles in order to eliminate risk and the potential for reputational damage.

Protecting Firefighters against contaminants – Whilst there is no case law or confirmed evidence that the products of combustion from a fire lead to an increased risk of cancer in firefighters in the UK, it is recognised that this is a risk which needs to be mitigated so far as is reasonably practicable.

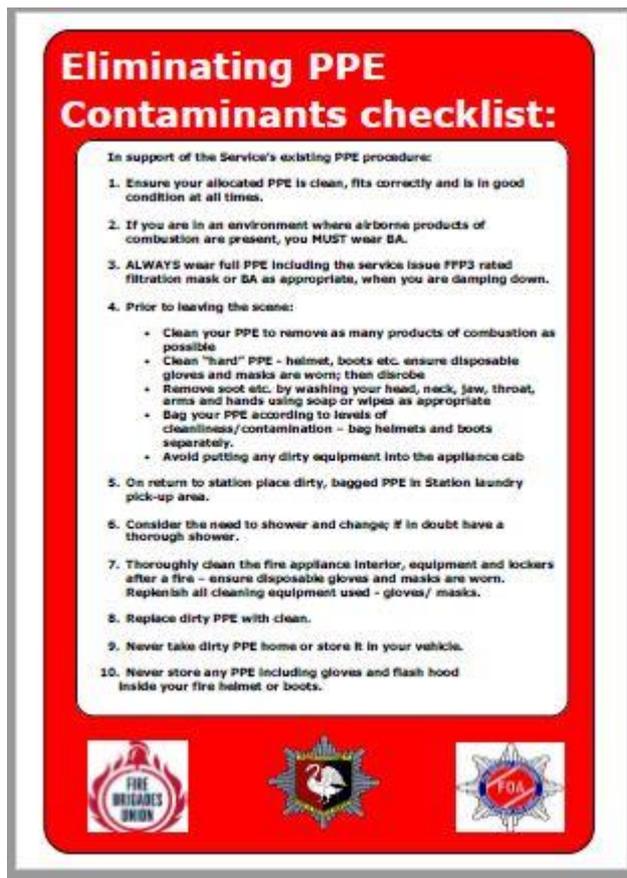
The Fire Brigades Union (FBU) commenced a contaminants project, in conjunction with Professor Anna Stec from the University of Central Lancashire, which involves the analysis of blood, urine and hair to determine if and at what level contaminants are present. As a result of this research the FBU published an interim report - "Minimising firefighters' exposure to toxic fire effluents".

A gap analysis has been carried out and it is pleasing to note that there was nothing in the report that the Service was not already aware of. The gap analysis identified that control of contaminants is a large project, however the Service is well ahead in terms of local control measures. Work is ongoing in the South East region on developing a training package for decontamination which features as a recommendation in the report.

Locally, the Service has introduced a range of measures to protect firefighters against the risk of contamination which include:

- PPE and 'Clean cab/vehicle' procedure
- 'Clean' and 'dirty' areas on stations to limit where PPE can be worn
- Blue Light Hub – designed to 'flow' from 'dirty' to 'clean' areas and a lecture room capability in the appliance bay which removes the requirement to remove PPE before attending a lecture
- A robust process for dealing with contaminated PPE including boots, helmets and gloves
- Issue of kit bags to all operational personnel to store clean PPE
- Issuing of 'wipes' which will remove contaminants from exposed skin on all appliances and stations
- Provision of washing machines on all stations for washing working rig and bedding etc. so there is no risk of cross contamination
- 'Eliminate contaminants' checklist prominently displayed in main areas of fire stations as a reminder to crews of the actions they need to take – please see example below.

This checklist was developed and agreed by the Service, the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) and The Fire Officers Association (FOA).



Looking forwards, the Service has commissioned scientific advisors Bureau Veritas to conduct a programme of air monitoring in the crew cabs and lockers of appliances to determine whether contaminants are present and at what levels. The outcomes of this work will inform future activities in managing the risks posed by contaminants.

Working with others

Internally

The pandemic has necessitated the requirement for departments to work more closely together. The Pandemic Response and Recovery groups comprise middle managers and department heads who have worked tirelessly to respond to and recover from COVID-19 throughout the past 18 months.

Managers from Property, Health and Safety, Procurement and Response have been working together on the viability of an Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) training rig which will replace the traditional drill tower. As this project progresses there will be a requirement to continue to work together until the project comes to fruition and the rig is installed.

Externally

Health and Safety business continuity – as part of the response to the pandemic the three Thames Valley Service Health and Safety Managers set up a mutual assistance programme in preparation for the possibility of a team being depleted through COVID-19. Fortunately, so far, it has not been required.

Working with other agencies – the response to the pandemic saw Service employees working with partner agencies and local authorities in ways that were very different – see the range of activities in the *COVID-19 pandemic section – page 7*. Whilst some of these activities presented challenges the commitment to achieving them never wavered and the completion of each was recognised and celebrated by all parties.

NHS mass vaccination centres – with the NHS being tested in these unprecedented times, the Service was asked for assistance in the setting up of mass vaccination centres. Once venues were determined – one each in Milton Keynes, Aylesbury and High Wycombe, operational officers were assigned to work with NHS staff in the setting up of the vaccination centres and once established, the facilitation of the vaccination programme. Another example of positive working relationships with partner agencies with the success of the centres being acknowledged at Government level.

Health and Safety training

A level of Health and Safety training is provided to all employees as part of an induction programme when joining the Service and regularly for Manual Handling and Display Screen Equipment as a legislative requirement.

Additionally, any health and safety training relevant to role is ideally provided as acquisition training prior to an individual going into role. This has been one of the objectives set by the Health and Safety Manager over the past two years and it is pleasing to confirm that this is now routinely the case.

The procurement of Health and Safety training proved difficult during the pandemic as the Government restrictions and the Service's own COVID Secure measures did not support face to face training. Training providers had to adapt and introduce virtual training courses which was challenging for both the trainer and delegates. It is fair to say that this method of learning did not suit everyone so it is hoped that a return to face to face training will be possible in the next financial year.

Funding of £25,000 was allocated to Health and Safety training and was used to provide the following courses.

External providers

Two virtual **Control of Substances Hazardous to Health (COSHH) Assessors** courses took place as with staff moving stations/sites and retiring the pool of qualified assessors had been depleted.

It was only necessary to run one **Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (IOSH) Managing Safely** course this year which took place in February 2021. Now that all staff in the Supervisory Manager pool have completed their acquisition training there is the potential that in future years, only one course will be needed thus allowing the funding to be utilised for other training requirements.

This year, as there were only a small number of employees who needed to undertake the **National Examination Board in Occupational Safety and Health (NEBOSH) General Certificate**, BFRS delegates were able to attend a course which was procured by Oxfordshire FRS. This enabled costs to be kept to a minimum as there were no tutor or catering costs involved. The course was run virtually in February and coincided with NEBOSH changing the examination process to 'open book' which proved challenging as this was a wholesale change and these delegates were the first, nationally, to go through the new process. Feedback at the end of the course highlighted the fact that delegates were not able to optimise the opportunity to learn from one another as they would have been in a face-to-face scenario.

Level 2 Accident Investigation training took place in November 2020 and January 2021. These courses were virtual with the provider delivering the training via Teams from his home in France due to lockdown.

All new Station Commanders and Support staff equivalents have now been trained to undertake Level 2 Accident Investigations which has eased the pressure on others when moderate safety events occur.

A look forward

The pandemic has provided the opportunity for the Service to review its working practices. With Support staff working from home, productivity increased as employees did not have to commute into the workplace during lockdown and the systems technology available enabled work to be carried out efficiently.

Working from home is not suited to everyone, the lifting of Government restrictions has meant that employees can return to the workplace in a safe and managed way.

Moving forwards, the Service is taking the opportunity to explore the ways in which people work and how they prefer to work. "Work Evolution- work is what WE make it" is the strapline (see image below) for this project which is in its infancy.



The COVID-19 pandemic has prompted us all to adopt different and innovative ways of working over the last 18 months, so a staff survey has been developed to evaluate and learn from staff experiences.

The survey is initially aimed at office-based staff with a separate survey being developed for operational, station-based crews.

Feedback obtained through the anonymous questionnaire will help shape the future of our working environment as we come to live with COVID-19.

Staff sharing their experience will help identify how we can make the workplace function in a better way, contributing to our Work Evolution.

Performance indicators

Budgets

The health and safety budget for the year 2020/21 resulted in an underspend of £6K, this was as a direct result of the pandemic as many courses and conferences normally attended did not take place. It is unlikely there will be an underspend in the financial year 2021/22 as funds have been used to procure a replacement electronic safety event reporting and investigation system.

Health and Safety key performance indicators – 2020/21

2 of the 4 objectives set for the year were achieved with 1(number 3) still in progress. These being:

1. Ensure working hours in Fire Service Rota* are monitored and breaches of the Working Time Regulations are highlighted and actioned
2. Devise and implement an action plan in preparation for the next HMI inspection

3. Work with Human Resources and the occupational health provider to set up a programme of medicals and surveillance for employees who work in Workshops

The remaining objective was not achieved due to the increased workloads associated with the pandemic. This objective was to “implement and embed the next stages of the Health and Safety strategy – apply for a RoSPA Occupational Health and Safety Award and conduct a further Behavioural Safety Culture Survey”.

This objective will be revisited during the financial year 2021/22 with the exception of the Behavioural Safety Culture as, in the current financial climate, it is cost prohibitive.

Health and Safety key performance indicators – 2021/22

The objectives set for the year 2021/22 are in line with the Public Safety Plan in terms of managing risk. They are:

1. Investigations to be completed within the set timeframes of two weeks for a level one investigation and four weeks for a level 2- achieved on 75% of occasions with a 10% tolerance.
2. Health and safety acquisition training to be completed prior to going into role on 85% of occasions and 100% of occasions on substantiation of the role.
3. Health and Safety training packages to be completed on 90% of occasions with a 10% tolerance.
4. Fire alarm, emergency lighting tests and water system flushing to be completed weekly on 90% of occasions with a 10% tolerance.

*Fire Service Rota (FSR) is the electronic resource management system used to track, manage and allocate staff resources

Appendix

National peer group performance comparison tables 2019/20 and 2020/21

The Health and Safety department is required to report on BFRS end of year accident statistical returns to the Home Office on 31 May 2021 for the period 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021.

Summary:

The Health and Safety department provided returns for:

HS1 - injuries during operational incidents, encompassing both Wholetime and On-Call employees and sub-divided into injuries at fires, at road traffic collisions and at other Special Service calls.

HS2 - injuries during training and routine activities also encompassing Wholetime and On-Call employees and sub-divided into injuries during operational training, fitness training and routine activities.

Findings:

HS1 – Pleasingly, the year 2020/21 has seen a significant decrease in the *total number of personnel injured at operational incidents* from 38 to 24. The peer group, with the exception of three Services, has experienced a decrease in the number of injuries sustained, which may be attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent decline in operational incidents and community activities during the lockdown periods.

Outcome: In the national peer group league tables for *total number of injuries*, BFRS has moved from fifth position in 2019/20 to third in 2020/21. For *injuries sustained at fires* BFRS has moved from third position to the top of the table with a reduction of 1 from 5 to 4 injuries. For *injuries sustained at special service calls* BFRS experienced a decrease from 2 to 0 retaining the top position.

HS2- *Injuries at training events* have seen a decrease of 3 from 20 in 2019/20 to 17 in 2020/21. *Injuries sustained during routine activities* has seen a decrease of 8 from 11 in 2019/20 to 3 in 2020/21.

Outcome: BFRS's position in the peer group table for *injuries at training events* has moved from sixth place to eighth which is disappointing however, likely due to the increase in "on station" training activities that took place during the

lockdown periods. For *injuries during routine activities*, BFRS has moved up the league table to second position.

Overall, of the seven categories, the number of injuries sustained to firefighters has decreased in 6 and remained the same in 1 which is a significant improvement on the previous year.

Below are the national league tables which provide a visual image of the overall safety performance of BFRS in the operational arena compared to their peer group. BFRS hold the top position in 3 of the 7 categories; are in the top 3 of 3 is eighth in 1 – a solid performance which is further evidence of the strong and positive health and safety culture alive within the Service.

A detailed explanation of performance can be found in the Performance Overview section of the report on page six.

Total number of persons injured	2019-20	2020-21
West Sussex	28	17
Warwickshire	29	20
Buckinghamshire	38	24
Suffolk	27	26
Berkshire	60	27
Northamptonshire	29	37
Oxfordshire	47	42
Hereford and Worcester	62	46
Bedfordshire	37	47
East Sussex	65	71
Norfolk	86	74
Cambridgeshire	82	76

Total number of injuries at fires	2019-20	2020-21
Buckinghamshire	5	4
Northamptonshire	7	4
Warwickshire	4	4
Suffolk	6	5
Berkshire	4	6
West Sussex	5	7
Bedfordshire	2	10
Oxfordshire	11	10
Hereford and Worcester	12	15
Norfolk	19	16
East Sussex	19	18
Cambridgeshire	34	25

Total number of injuries during routine activities	2019-20	2020-21
West Sussex	5	2
Buckinghamshire	11	3
Warwickshire	8	4
Hereford and Worcester	10	5
Suffolk	5	6
Berkshire	10	7
Northamptonshire	7	9
Oxfordshire	9	9
East Sussex	7	13
Cambridgeshire	14	14
Bedfordshire	4	16
Norfolk	24	17

Total number of over 7-day injuries	2019-20	2020-21
Suffolk	3	0
Warwickshire	2	0
Berkshire	2	2
West Sussex	1	2
Buckinghamshire	6	3
Hereford and Worcester	8	4
Oxfordshire	6	4
East Sussex	10	5
Northamptonshire	3	5
Bedfordshire	7	7
Cambridgeshire	8	7
Norfolk	12	8

**Please note the Services shown in the table below are placed in alphabetical order. There were no major injuries in seven of the 12 Services.*

Total number of major injuries	2019-20	2020-21
Berkshire	0	0
Buckinghamshire	0	0
Cambridgeshire	0	0
Oxfordshire	0	0
Suffolk	0	0
Warwickshire	0	0
West Sussex	0	0
Bedfordshire	1	1
East Sussex	0	1
Hereford and Worcester	2	1
Norfolk	0	1
Northamptonshire	3	1

Total number of injuries during training	2019-20	2020-21
West Sussex	12	3
Warwickshire	14	4
East Sussex	19	9
Berkshire	38	11
Suffolk	14	14
Bedfordshire	20	15
Hereford and Worcester	31	16
Buckinghamshire	20	17
Oxfordshire	20	18
Northamptonshire	12	20
Cambridgeshire	13	26
Norfolk	31	28

Total number of injuries at Special Services	2019-20	2020-21
Buckinghamshire	2	0
Suffolk	2	1
Berkshire	8	3
Northamptonshire	3	4
Oxfordshire	7	5
West Sussex	6	5
Bedfordshire	11	6
Warwickshire	3	8
Hereford and Worcester	9	10
Cambridgeshire	21	11
Norfolk	12	13
East Sussex	20	31