

# Health & Safety

Annual Report 2025/26

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# Introduction

Oxfordshire County Council values its employees, service users, pupils and others affected by its operations and is committed to protecting their health, safety and wellbeing. It therefore continues to develop and improve its arrangements for managing health and safety.

This annual report contains information about the work of the Health and Safety Team and functions, the council's health and safety performance over the year and its plans for the coming year.

The Health and Safety Team provides advisory and support services across all the council's services.

## Building a positive health and safety culture

By implementing our health and policy we want to create a safety culture that relates to the council's values and behaviours that will determine our commitment to health and safety management.

The principles we follow are:

**Leadership Commitment** – Leaders set the tone by actively prioritising and investing in workplace safety.

**Employee Involvement** – Workers at all levels take ownership of safety and feel responsible for their well-being and that of their colleagues.

**Open Communication** – Employees feel comfortable reporting hazards, incidents, or safety concerns.

**Continuous Learning** – Safety training, incident investigations, and lessons learned are integrated into daily operations.

**Proactive Approach** – The organization actively identifies and mitigates risks before they lead to accidents.

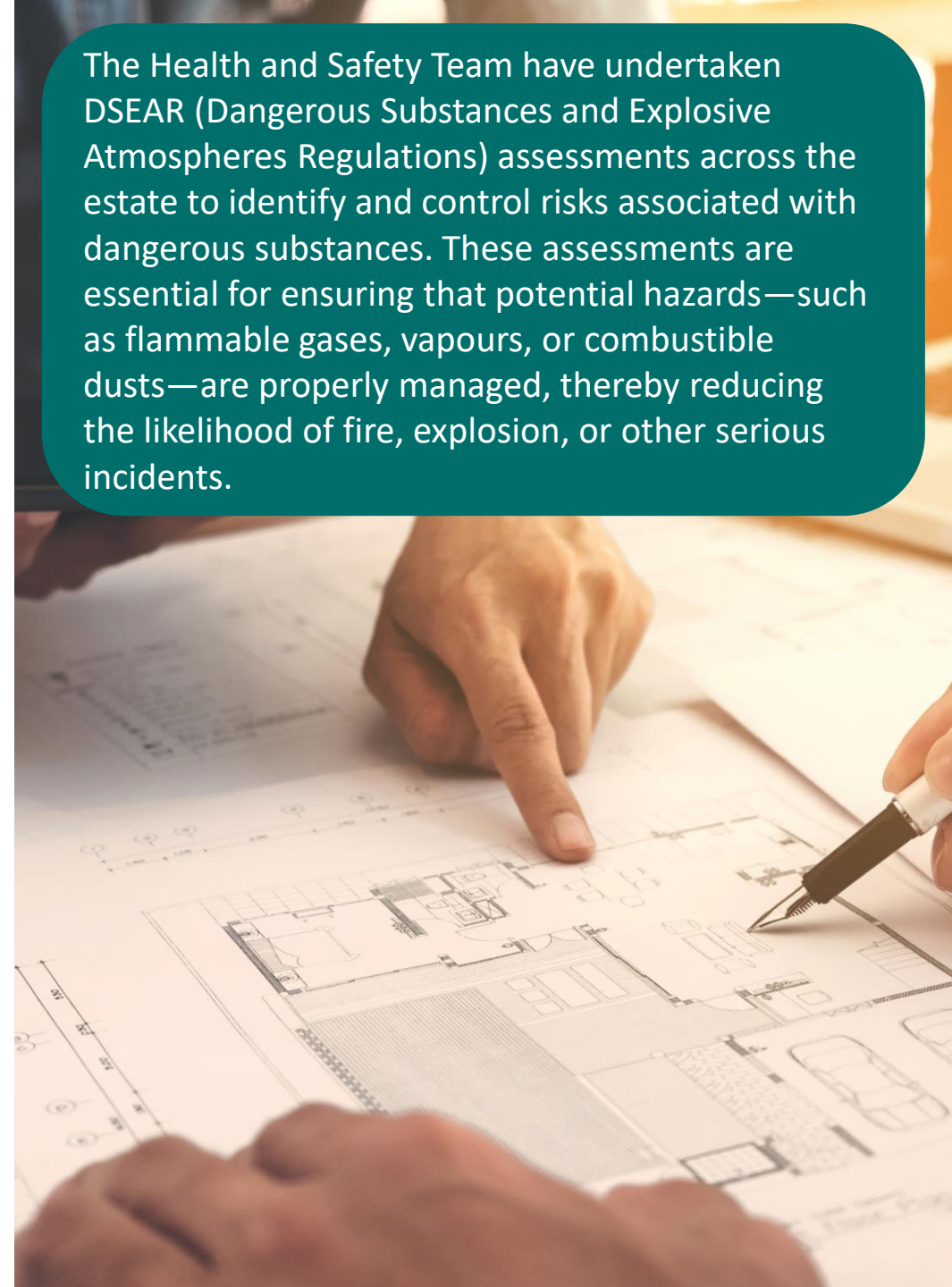
# Fire safety in council buildings

Property and Assets are implementing a multi-year investment programme to improve fire safety and ensure compartmentation meets required standards across the estate.

The programme includes inspecting and upgrading fire stopping and barriers, sealing service penetrations, repairing or replacing fire doors and hardware, enhancing compartment lines in roof voids and risers, and completing testing and certification to confirm compliance with fire safety legislation.

These measures are crucial because they directly protect the safety and wellbeing of all occupants, staff and visitors within the estate. Proper fire safety and compartmentation help to prevent the spread of fire and smoke, providing vital time for evacuation and allowing emergency services to respond more effectively. Adhering to fire safety legislation also reduces the risk of legal liability and financial loss due to damage or non-compliance. Ultimately, these improvements ensure a safer, more resilient environment for everyone.

The Health and Safety Team have undertaken DSEAR (Dangerous Substances and Explosive Atmospheres Regulations) assessments across the estate to identify and control risks associated with dangerous substances. These assessments are essential for ensuring that potential hazards—such as flammable gases, vapours, or combustible dusts—are properly managed, thereby reducing the likelihood of fire, explosion, or other serious incidents.



## Safety in social care accommodation



The council has improved residential facilities for adults and children, working with designers, safety experts, and social care professionals to minimise risks and install effective safeguards.

Designing safe environments is crucial, as it impacts residents' and staff's sense of security and well-being. Thoughtful design prevents injuries, supports safeguarding, and encourages positive behaviour, allowing staff to focus on care rather than constant risk management.

Features such as good sightlines, sturdy fixtures, quiet spaces, non-ligature fittings, window restrictors, and well-designed communal areas help reduce harm and anxiety without making homes feel institutional, enhancing both care quality and resident wellbeing.

## Woodeaton Special School



As a Grade II\* historical building, extensive works have been completed to upgrade safety and security measures whilst complying with complex planning and heritage requirements.

Fire safety systems now include modern alarms and signage for quick emergency response. Internal changes enhance pupil movement and evacuation flow, promoting a safer learning environment.

Conservation efforts have included the installation of new roofs and the careful rebuilding of stone walls and features to preserve the building's historic character. To ensure a more secure boundary, fencing and access points have been strengthened, with additional steps taken to safeguard local wildlife.

# Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service

During 2025/26, the Health, Safety & Wellbeing Team focussed on working with partners and enhancing systems. This included supporting safety event investigations and upgrading the Visor reporting system to cover more events, address workplace violence, and improve RIDDOR identification.

To strengthen assurance methods, all fire stations and workplaces will be thoroughly inspected every two years. Operational training activities will also undergo audits to systematically evaluate practices and identify ways to improve safety and wellbeing. These initiatives are intended to maintain safe and supportive work environments for everyone.

Following an assessment of high-risk equipment for vibration hazards, further individual monitoring and equipment labelling is now being trialled and will provide visual warnings and awareness amongst firefighters to take necessary precautions.

Our qualified occupational noise assessors have continued their work during safety visits and assessments, including:

- Compliance checks on appliance warning devices after safety concerns regarding noise levels.
- Broader evaluations of warning devices across the emergency fleet, including radio systems.



In June 2024, Health & Safety colleagues from the southeast region conducted a service review of Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service. An action plan was developed to tackle the audit findings. By 2025/26, most issues, including all high-risk items, have been resolved.

# Reducing the risk to firefighters from contaminants



Managing firefighter exposure to contaminants is vital because they regularly face hazardous substances like smoke and chemicals. Without proper protection, these exposures can increase the risk of serious health issues, including cancer. Effective safety measures help protect firefighters' health and support their essential work in the community.

In March 2026, the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) announced an audit of Fire and Rescue Services to review fire contaminant risk management. Preparatory measures include review of procedures, assessing zoning and signage, implementing a new Respiratory Protection assurance programme, and improving hygiene at stations and incidents.

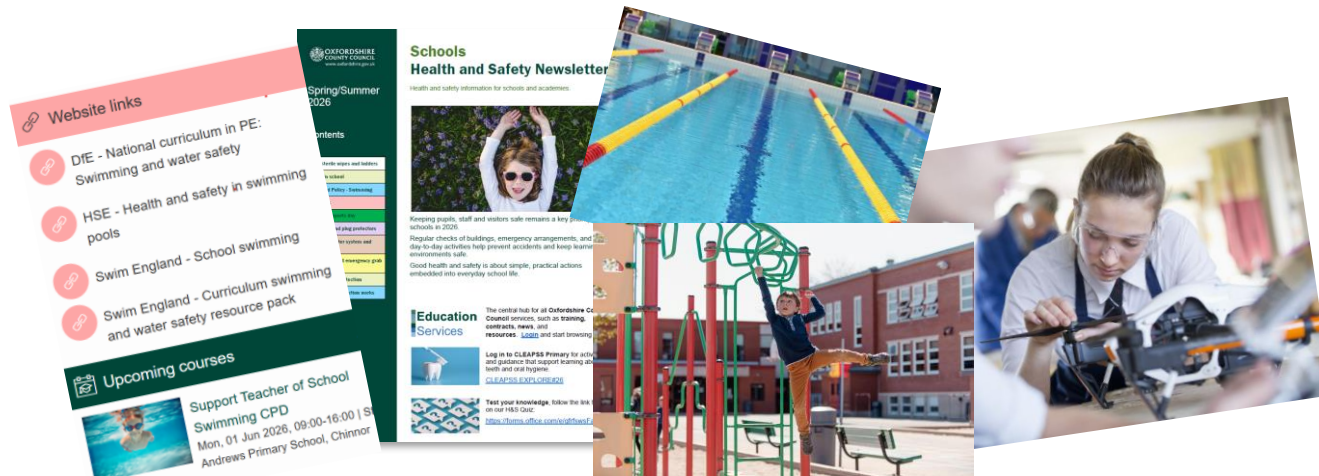
Hazardous substance controls were reviewed to ensure compliance with the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health (CoSHH) Regulations. This involved a thorough review of all work materials and substances used within the service, as well as updating CoSHH risk assessments. This action will ensure that operational procedures keep firefighters safe by identifying and mitigating risks associated with exposure to hazardous substances.

# Schools

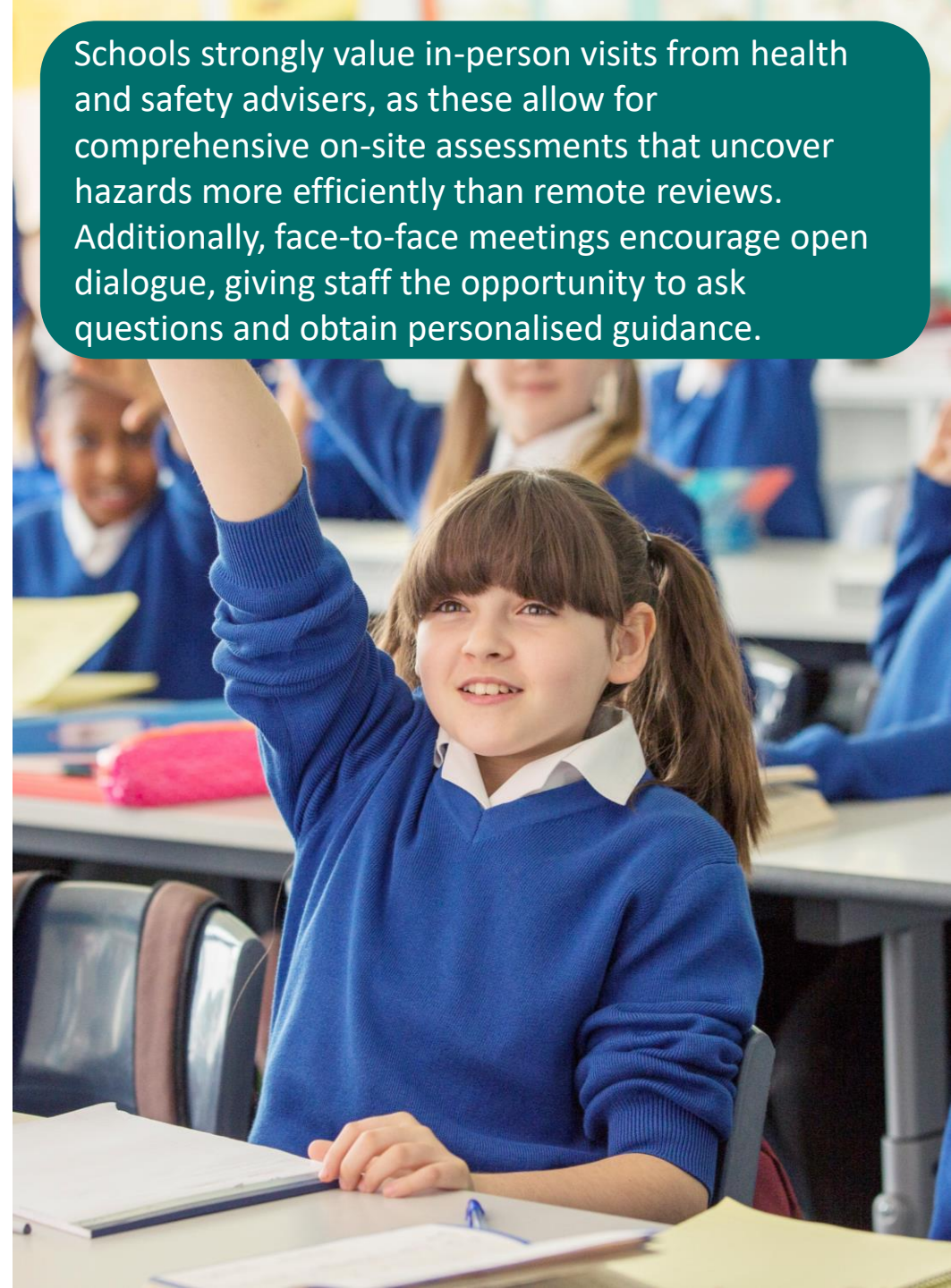
The Health and Safety Team provides comprehensive support to Headteachers and School Business Managers by offering practical guidance, conducting on-site assessments, and ensuring safety for staff, pupils, contractors, visitors, and the public. The team carries out annual H&S compliance visits and organises equipment inspections. Additionally, they deliver technical advice for specialist curriculum areas, manage emergencies and accident investigations, and provide a range of training opportunities.

For the academic year 25/26 we launched our new online toolkit which gives schools easy access to essential safety documents, templates, advice, and training resources, helping maintain compliance and manage risks efficiently.

We have also been providing on-site support to School Business Managers to use their safety systems more efficiently to manage compliance tasks.



Schools strongly value in-person visits from health and safety advisers, as these allow for comprehensive on-site assessments that uncover hazards more efficiently than remote reviews. Additionally, face-to-face meetings encourage open dialogue, giving staff the opportunity to ask questions and obtain personalised guidance.



## Playground Safety



Playgrounds inherently involve certain risks associated with energetic activities and elevated equipment. Common incidents, such as falls, slips, or collisions, can result in injuries ranging from minor abrasions to severe fractures. These occurrences have led to a number of personal injury claims.

To ensure safe and engaging play environments, it is essential to provide age-appropriate equipment, closely supervise, and promptly address any defects. The Health and Safety Team assists schools by conducting regular inspections to identify and mitigate potential hazards, thereby maintaining the safety of playground equipment for all children.

## Hand-Arm Vibration Syndrome (HAVS)



To enhance our ongoing efforts to prevent Hand-Arm Vibration Syndrome (HAVS) and meet regulatory requirements, it is essential for workers to understand vibration levels to better manage their exposure. We have partnered with services to introduce HAVS tags—safety labels on handheld tools that monitor vibration exposure. These tags employ a color-coded system (green, orange, red) to signify different vibration risk levels.

Additionally, we will focus on workers at risk to ensure they receive proper information and training on recognising symptoms and how to protect themselves.

# Zero Tolerance



The council has signed the UNISON charter to end violence at work as part of its ongoing commitment to fostering a safe and supportive workplace for all employees. By endorsing this charter, the council demonstrates its dedication to protecting staff from threats, abuse, and physical harm, ensuring that everyone can carry out their duties without fear.

We are currently undertaking a comprehensive review of our zero-tolerance policy to ensure it remains effective, fair, and aligned with our organisational values. This process involves gathering feedback from stakeholders, examining recent incidents, and benchmarking against best practices. By reassessing the policy, we aim to address any concerns, improve clarity, and reinforce our commitment to maintaining a safe and respectful environment for **everyone**. The findings from this review will inform any necessary updates or enhancements to our approach.

In addition to these steps, we have already implemented several practical measures to support our commitment to workplace safety. Staff email signatures now promote clear ways of reporting incidents, making it easier for colleagues to seek assistance or raise concerns. Office and customer signage is being updated to reinforce our zero-tolerance stance and raise awareness among all who visit our premises. Furthermore, we have enhanced our incident data capture systems, allowing us to gather more comprehensive information that helps shape effective prevention and support strategies.

# Headspace



The council is utilising the PAM [Headspace](#) app as part of its employee wellbeing initiative, offering staff access to guided meditations, mindfulness exercises, and stress management tools. By offering the app, the council aims to foster a supportive work environment, encourage positive mental health practices, and provide resources that help employees manage daily stressors more effectively.

# Champion health



Staff also have access to the PAM [Champion Health](#) app, which is designed to further enhance employee health and wellbeing. Through this platform, individuals can benefit from a wide range of resources including personalised health assessments, digital learning modules, and expert guidance on topics such as physical activity, nutrition, sleep, and mental health.

The app offers staff the flexibility to engage with wellbeing support at their own pace, empowering them to take proactive steps towards improving their overall health and resilience.

**The Hive** For more information on health and wellbeing tools and apps visit [The Hive](#)

# Menopause



Our [menopause action plan](#) outlines a series of commitments aimed at supporting colleagues experiencing menopause. Developed by the HR Policy Team with input from inclusion networks, council staff, and external guidance, the plan introduces a new policy, clear guidance, updated training, and safe spaces for sharing experiences.

We held an online ask the ask the GP Clinic regarding Menopause which had a good uptake of colleagues.

Additionally, range of existing resources, including menopause guidelines, eLearning modules, wellbeing support, and The Women's Network, are already available. Further updates and resources will be shared as the plan is implemented throughout the year.

# Free flu jab for staff



The flu vaccine is both safe and effective. It is especially important because, although the flu is uncomfortable for most, it can pose serious and potentially life-threatening risks for individuals with specific health issues.

A total of **458** colleagues accepted the free **flu vaccination** offer from the Public Health team to protect themselves throughout the winter.

# Assurance - Directorates

The health and safety audit programme focuses on high-risk service delivery areas to ensure strong protections against accidents and harm.

In 2025/26, audits covered the following service areas achieving an overall compliance score of 93%:

- Children's homes and residential services
- Children and family centres
- Supported Transport

Contractor audits and site inspections also ensured work was safe, compliant, and high-quality. Contracted services reviewed included:

- Household Waste Recycling Centres
- Facilities Management and Minor Works (cleaning, waste, repairs, construction, decarbonisation)



**Example of a positive audit outcome:** The H&S Audit revealed safety concerns and deteriorating conditions in the external areas at Union Street Children and Family Centre.

The Centre hosts stay and play sessions for numerous families in East Oxford, many of whom are referred by health and social care services.

By collaborating with Facilities Management, we invested in upgrades such as removing old, unsafe play equipment and installing new play surfaces and hard landscaping, all while reducing ongoing maintenance needs.

# Assurance - Schools

The Council has overall responsibility for health and safety in community and voluntary controlled schools.

Our annual H&S compliance visits at schools typically include inspections of buildings and grounds, checks for fire safety and emergency procedures, reviews of first aid provisions, and assessments of equipment and hazardous materials. These visits also look at risk management practices and staff training to ensure the highest standards of safety are maintained.

On completion Headteachers are issued with action plans to address any findings. Overall performance is reported to the Children's Services.

Number of Schools	Compliance % score	Compliance rating
89	95%+	Good
23	85%-94%	Some areas need improvement
4	Less than 85% compliant	Significant issues – requires improvement

Key areas identified for improvement:

**Manual Handling & Working at Height** – School staff lack training in safe work methods for high-risk tasks like caretaking and maintenance.

**Doors & Windows** – Insufficient risk assessment for finger entrapment; missing finger guards, especially after a serious 2024 accident. Increased compliance is expected as schools address this issue.

**Water Hygiene/Legionella & Asbestos** – Schools often lack current risk assessments and delay remedial works due to limited site management resources and unclear requirements.

**Risk Management** – Not all hazards are identified; risk assessments may be inadequate or outdated and are not consistently shared with relevant staff.

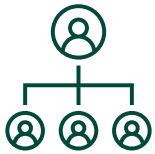
**Fire** – Fire safety checks are sometimes delayed because of limited caretaking and management capacity. Even when fire risk assessments are conducted, follow-up actions are frequently unplanned or ignored, and upgrades like new fire doors or alarms are often deferred due to budget issues.

## Corporate health and safety training

Health and safety is part of our essential learning and development programme.



↑**96%** Completion – Introduction to H&S for all staff



↑**81%** Completion – H&S for managers

Ensuring health and safety when working with contractors is essential, especially on construction sites and during repairs. This protects everyone, reduces accidents, prevents service disruptions, and ensures legal compliance. In 2026, **new training** will be introduced for managers who oversee or work with contractors.

## Peoplesafe lone working app



**947** protected users  
↑**81%** take up of 1163 assigned licences



**328** alarms raised, all of which were precautionary, tests or accidental  
**0** triaged alarms required emergency services escalation



**4959** user actions including timed activities

There is a sustained increase in the use of the lone worker mobile application 'Peoplesafe'. The H&S Team continue to promote its use and run regular user workshops and provide face to face support. The app is assigned on a priority basis to those undertaking higher risk lone working such as social workers.

# Safety Event Statistics



## Directorates

Reported safety events

Category	FY 24/25	FY 25/26	% Change
Accidents with injury	215	<b>230</b>	+7%
Near miss / unsafe condition	290	<b>275</b>	-5%
Violent or threatening behaviour	206	<b>181</b>	-12%
Work-related ill health	7	<b>6</b>	-14%
<b>Total</b>	<b>718</b>	<b>692</b>	<b>-4%</b>

RIDDOR Reportable incidents

Category	FY 24/25	FY 25/26
Death due to work-related accident		
Specified injury to worker	3	<b>1</b>
Over 7-day incapacitation of a worker	2	<b>2</b>
Non-fatal injuries to non-workers	2	<b>2</b>
Reportable occupational diseases		
Dangerous occurrences		
<b>Total</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>5</b>

## Schools

Reported safety events

Category	AY 23/24	AY 24/25	% Change
Accidents with injury	339	<b>456</b>	+35%
Near miss / unsafe condition	59	<b>67</b>	+14%
Violent or threatening behaviour	433	<b>437</b>	+1%
Work-related ill health		<b>3</b>	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>831</b>	<b>963</b>	<b>+16%</b>

RIDDOR Reportable incidents

Category	AY 24/25	AY 25/26
Death due to work-related accident		
Specified injury to worker		
Over 7-day incapacitation of a worker	8	<b>2</b>
Non-fatal injuries to non-workers	33	<b>57</b>
Reportable occupational diseases		
Dangerous occurrences		
<b>Total</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>59</b>

## Fire and Rescue

Reported safety events

Category	FY 24/25	FY 25/26	% Change
Accidents with injury	51	<b>58</b>	+14%
Near miss / unsafe condition	56	<b>64</b>	+14%
Vehicle incident	38	<b>56</b>	+47%
Work-related ill health	2	<b>4</b>	+100%
<b>Total</b>	<b>147</b>	<b>182</b>	<b>+24%</b>

RIDDOR Reportable incidents

Category	FY 24/25	FY 25/26
Death due to work-related accident		<b>2</b>
Specified injury to worker	4	<b>3</b>
Over 7-day incapacitation of a worker	13	<b>10</b>
Non-fatal injuries to non-workers	1	
Reportable occupational diseases	1	
Dangerous occurrences	5	
<b>Total</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>15</b>

# Safety Event Insights



## Directorates

For Directorates the total number of reported safety events showed a slight decline compared to the prior year.

### **Near misses/unsafe conditions (Leading indicator)**

- Near miss reports made up 40% of all safety event reports, primarily involving risks related to falls or slips, violations of safety procedures, and issues with vehicles and transport.

### **Accidents with injury**

- In the first quarter, there was a noticeable rise in reported accidents, which was followed by a steady decline for the rest of the year.
- Overall, the total reported accidents reached 692, marking a slight increase of 7% compared to the previous year.
- Slips, trips, and falls continue to be the leading cause of accidents.
- 54% of all accidents involved workers, while nearly 30% involved service users.
- Five incidents were classified as reportable under RIDDOR.

### **Violent and threatening behaviour**

- Reported cases of violence and threatening behaviour have remained at same level.
- Physical violence towards staff made up 36% of all reports, mostly occurring in adult and children's social care residential and frontline services.
- Libraries accounted for 40% of reported incidents, mainly involving antisocial behaviour and verbal abuse.

# Safety Event Insights



## Schools

For schools the total number of reported safety events rose by 16% compared to the previous year.

### **Near misses/unsafe conditions (Leading indicator)**

- Near miss reporting has increased, primarily involving risks related to falls or slips, violations of safety procedures.

### **Accidents with injury**

- Overall, the total reported accidents reached 456, a notable increase of 35% compared to the previous year.
- Slips, trips, and falls continue to be the leading cause of accidents.
- 52% of all accidents involved workers, while 44% involved pupils.
- Fifty-nine incidents were classified as reportable under RIDDOR, the vast majority of these involving injuries to pupils requiring treatment.

### **Violent and threatening behaviour**

- Reports of physical violence made up 95% of all reports with 40% of these occurring in two special schools.
- Analysis indicates an increasing proportion of reports associated with pupils with SEND in mainstream schools

# Safety Event Insights



## Fire and Rescue Service

For Fire and Rescue Service the total number of reported safety events rose by 24% compared to the previous year.

### **Near misses/unsafe conditions (Leading indicator)**

- Near miss reporting made up 35% of all safety event reports.

### **Accidents with injury**

- There were 58 total reported accidents with injury, an increase of 14% compared to the previous year.
- 26% of reported injuries related to lifting and handling and 30% relating to sprains and strains.
- Of all reported injuries to firefighters, 47% were to on-call and 43% to wholetime.
- 15 incidents were classified as reportable under RIDDOR, this included the death of two firefighters.

### **Work-related (Occupational) ill health**

- Causes for 4 ill health reports, all minor in nature.

### **Work-related (Occupational) ill health**

- 47% increase in reported vehicle-related safety events compared to the previous year.
- Over half of reported vehicle incidents occurred during slow speed manoeuvres, when not on emergency response.

# H&S Priorities 26/27

<b>Corporate H&amp;S audit programme</b>	The Corporate Health and Safety Team conducts audits and inspections to verify effective preventative and protective measures. We are reviewing and streamlining audit processes, including updating data collection tools and forms to focus on key risks.
<b>Safe and compliant buildings</b>	Responsible Premises Managers (RPMs) oversee the day-to-day running of buildings, acting as the main contact for Property Services and completing key tasks such as reporting faults, maintaining emergency procedures, and carrying out routine compliance checks. We will continue to review and introduce processes to improve compliance task reporting as well as specific training to develop competence in building management.
<b>School estate</b>	After the release of the <a href="#">School estate management standards - GOV.UK</a> , and Audit of Repairs and Maintenance in schools the Health and Safety Team will work with Property and Assets, Education, and Schools to ensure statutory requirements and best practices are consistently met across school estates. This collaboration helps create a safe learning environment and enables ongoing improvement and compliance.
<b>Systems and data</b>	H&S data is stored across several systems, limiting insight and reporting. A project is underway to assess and implement improved digital H&S tools for better engagement, oversight, and assurance.
<b>Zero tolerance</b>	After reviewing the council's Zero Tolerance Policy, recommendations have been made to enhance its clarity and enforcement. The council will implement these by providing extra training, updating guidance, and monitoring effectiveness to ensure a safe and respectful environment.
<b>Wellbeing - Stress</b>	H&S law requires employers to assess and manage workplace stress. Stress is a leading cause of sickness absence. HR and Cultural Change is leading on creating a simplified self-service stress risk assessment and reorganisation toolkit to help managers support staff.
<b>H&amp;S Training – Managing contractors</b>	Develop training to equip managers to effectively manage the health and safety aspects of working with contractors. This training typically covers topics such as risk assessment, legal responsibilities, safe systems of work, and communication between all parties involved. The aim is to ensure that contractors operate safely on-site, comply with relevant legislation, and that both the client and contractor understand their respective duties to prevent accidents and promote a safe working environment.



Health and Safety

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