

GWYNEDD COUNCIL CABINET



Report to the Cabinet

Meeting Date:	13 September 2022
Cabinet Member:	Councillor Menna Jones
Contact Officer:	Geraint Owen
Contact Number:	01286 679335
Item Title:	Annual Report – Health, Safety and Wellbeing

1 DECISION SOUGHT

Approval of the annual report for 2021/22

2 REASON WHY DECISION IS NEEDED

Presenting this report to the Cabinet annually is part of the health and safety management arrangements within the Council. It is essential that Cabinet members have a full overview of the Council's position in this important area.

3 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this report is to outline the main issues that arose in relation to Health, Safety and Wellbeing during the year.

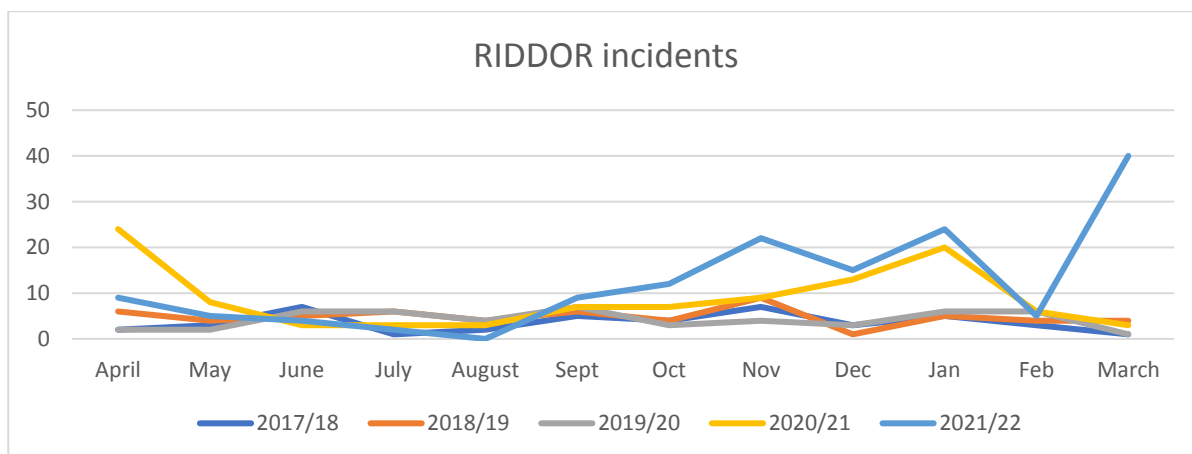
For the second year in a row, COVID, and the strict Government guidelines have dominated the health and safety agenda for each Department again this year, and had to be a priority for the Health, Safety and Wellbeing Service corporately. We saw another year where there was a legal requirement for staff who could work from home to do so, and a host of restrictions and requirements on other Council sectors, such as Education and Care. High rates of COVID were seen in the County over the Winter (the highest in Wales at one point) and that at a time when schools had reopened. 2021/22 was therefore another challenging year in terms of keeping staff and the people of Gwynedd safe.

Accident figures

The table below provides an overview of RIDDOR reportable incident and accident figures for the last 5 years. These are the most serious incidents that have occurred internally involving Council staff, or where members of the public have been injured on the Council's premises, which required reporting to the Health and Safety Executive (HSE). Last year, the RIDDOR regulations were amended to make it a requirement to report cases of staff contracting COVID at work (or where

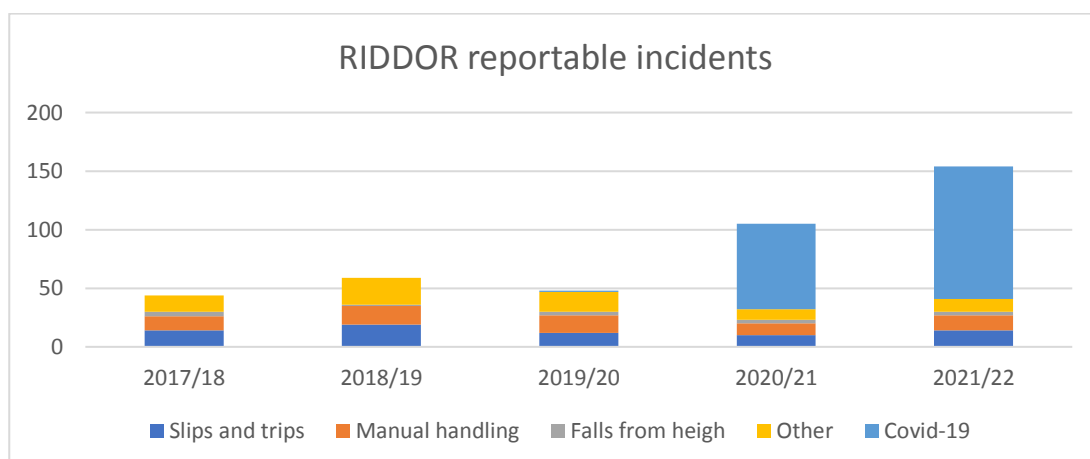
there were reasonable grounds to believe this to be the case), and that is the reason for the significant increase in figures over the last two years.

113 cases of staff members having contracted COVID at work were reported during 21/22 compared to 73 the previous year. Of course, it's not possible to confirm that definitively, but rather, the requirement is to report when there is a reasonable basis to conclude that they could have caught the virus at work e.g. either through a member of positive staff giving care to a positive patient or working with a positive colleague, or COVID positive children in a class where a teacher then develops the infection. The different waves of COVID hitting the County can be clearly seen in the table below in the blue and yellow lines.



If the COVID figures are put aside, there was an increase in the number of incidents otherwise reported under RIDDOR for last year compared to the previous year. Considering that the majority of Services had recovered this year (whereas a number of them had closed the previous year), no conclusions can be drawn from this. There is also no trend to report on to explain the reason for the increase except to note that the pattern that's existed corporately, and nationally for many years continues, namely that manual handling, and slips and trips are the two main causes for accidents. The incidents categorised as 'other' vary from physical attacks against staff, to health conditions that have been caused by the work, to vehicle accidents.

The chart below outlines the numbers of RIDDOR cases that have been reported to HSE over the last 5 years.



It should be noted that intensive work continues on manual handling matters, specifically so where absence rates are higher due to moving and handling injuries such as the Waste Service. Internal e-learning modules have been developed and the hope is to be able to share these with staff from all Departments to support and reinforce the work of the manual Handling Trainer for whom there is a very high demand for her time, and who has to prioritise her work.

Enforcement and compliance

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) has carried out several inspections of Council buildings and sites this year checking for compliance with the COVID rules. This has included a check on a number of schools as well as the main offices. On all occasions, the Inspectors were satisfied with the arrangements in place.

There was one other inspection by HSE during the year, and that was a visit to Ysgol Friars. This was part of a national program by HSE to inspect secondary schools for compliance on the management of radioactive materials in science laboratories. There were no enforcement actions resulting from the visit.

In August 2021, the Council underwent a risk compliance audit undertaken by Zurich as its insurer for Public and Employer Liability. Generally, the auditor was satisfied and the following report was encouraging with no urgent or mandatory matters to address. Instead, two advisory points were noted, and one of those had already been identified around strategic planning for health and safety. A project to address this is ongoing and included in the Corporate Plan for this year. The second advisory note was relating to pre-employment checks for all new appointees to jobs within the Council.

Work programme

COVID has had a significant impact on the Health, Safety and Well-being Service's work program for the second year in a row as Government guidelines changed constantly during the year, and new arrangements needing to be established almost overnight to respond to those changes. It was necessary to establish our own work arrangements in some circumstances, and schools were one example of that where the County, through the work of the COVID Surveillance Group, established trigger points whereby classes moved to a system of virtual learning if a certain number of positive cases was reached within any one classroom. This was an arrangement that attracted the interest of other Authorities and was in place until rates fell in the Spring of 2022.

Due to the work outlined above, only a small number of proactive inspections were conducted, those being in the Highways and Municipal Department in order to maintain their BSI (British Standards Institution) accreditation. A limited number of Health and Safety courses have been held virtually - mainly Managing Sites Safely. In establishing a new normal, a lot of work has also been involved in the resulting health and safety elements, such as workplace assessments for staff who work from home full time, or for part of their working week, and to this extent, additional resource has been drafted into the central team for a period of one year,

not only to help with this work, but also to help restore and catch up with a significant bulk of work on all the other work streams and training that was in place pre COVID covering a host of other risks that really need addressing by now.

As mentioned above, a project was agreed to be included in the Corporate Plan for the year to fully review the health and safety arrangements and management within the Council. Although the brief for the project was agreed during the year, the bulk of the work has been rolled forward to 22/23 for the reasons outlined above.

The fortnightly meetings established in the first year of the Pandemic between the employer and the Trade Unions continued this year, and now there is open discussion about a range of health and safety issues. This has been one very positive development since COVID and discussions have been constructive and fruitful.

IOS 45001 accreditation by BSi

During the year, two Departments of the Council, namely YGC and the Highways and Municipal Department have been successful in obtaining accreditation to a new standard on health and safety, namely the ISO 45001 standard. Both Departments held the previous 18001 accreditation, but the new standard is an international one (ISO stands for International Standards Organisation), and is more robust.

Occupational Health

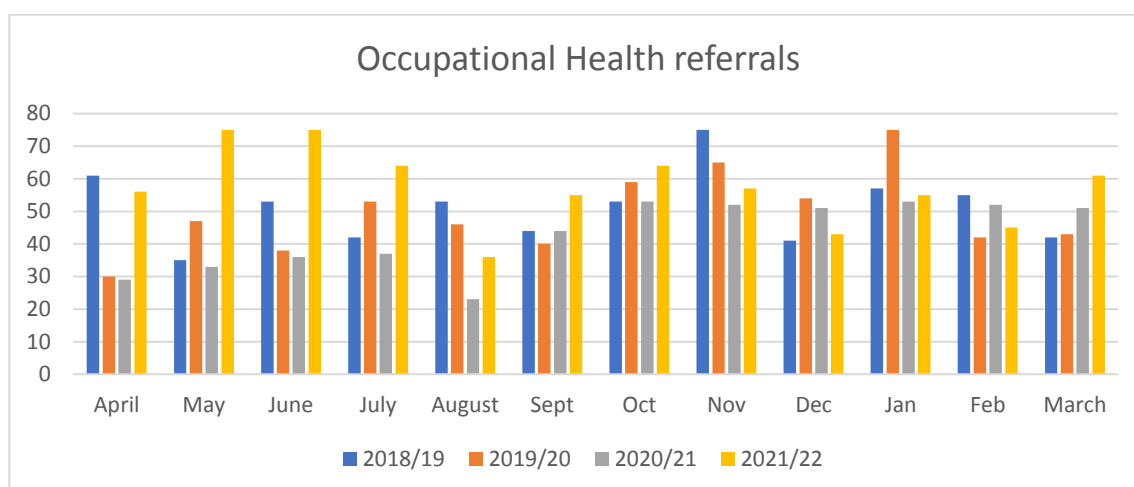
The Occupational Health team has been central to supporting the County's vulnerable workforce throughout the pandemic. This is through having seen all of them (over 600 patients) to discuss their medical conditions and make recommendations on how best to protect them at work. This was particularly challenging for a period this year in school staff where there were high rates of infection. The Unit has kept in constant contact with some of those staff in order to offer support and help maintain their mental health.

By now, the Unit has fully restored its full work programme and restarted the Health Surveillance program after HSE put a stop to the program nationally during the COVID pandemic. These are the tests that are a legal requirement for staff to undertake if they are exposed to health risks at work e.g. hearing / breath or vibration tests. Here again, there is considerable catch-up work to be done and conversations are taking place with front-line Departments about how best to facilitate that. As an example, there is a commitment to invest in an audiometry booth for the Dwyfor area so that hearing tests can be carried out there. This is in addition to booths in Dolgellau and Caernarfon that are already in place. The hope is that the tests can be undertaken out in the regions without the need for staff to attend the Caernarfon office to conduct them.

The well-being support for staff has continued over the period and the past year has seen some of the highest levels of referrals to the Physiotherapy Service and the Medra Counselling Service since they were established, but figures have now levelled off. Work is now underway to re-commence more proactive work in the

mental health field in particular, and a communication plan is now in place for communicating the staff well-being program in order to try to ensure that all of the Council's staff are aware of the support available. The team is also part of a wider team looking to tackle sickness absence within the Council by use of various interventions.

The table below contains the references to the Unit over the last four years and there were almost a 100 more referrals this past year than previous years due to high number of referrals for the first half of the year. Stress continues to be the main reason for referrals, and stress due to the pandemic is specifically responsible for the increase and the start of the year. Referrals for Musculoskeletal problems are also one of the main causes of referral. Many referrals have been due to the after-effect of COVID, whether it's long covid or mental health problems linked to the pandemic, and some of those are severe.



4. VIEWS OF STATUTORY OFFICERS

Monitoring Officer:

The report explains the role of the Cabinet within our health and safety arrangements. It is appropriate that it receive this information which gives assurance in relation to our arrangements in this important area.

Head of Finance:

The report conveys information to the Cabinet and the decision sought does not create a spending commitment. No comments from the perspective of financial propriety.”