



# DEVON & SOMERSET FIRE & RESCUE AUTHORITY

<b>REPORT REFERENCE NO.</b>	<b>CSCP/10/1</b>
<b>MEETING</b>	<b>COMMUNITY SAFETY AND CORPORATE PLANNING COMMITTEE</b>
<b>DATE OF MEETING</b>	<b>29 JANUARY 2010</b>
<b>SUBJECT OF REPORT</b>	<b>TECHNICAL FIRE SAFETY CHECKS BY COMMUNITY SAFETY RESPONSE STAFF</b>
<b>LEAD OFFICER</b>	<b>ACFO (SERVICE SUPPORT)</b>
<b>RECOMMENDATIONS</b>	That the Service wide implementation of the current pilot scheme of requiring operational crews across the Service to undertake Fire Safety Checks as part of their daily work routines be endorsed.
<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</b>	Post the introduction of the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005, operational crews ceased the practice of fire safety re-inspections of commercial premises. This paper recommends that fire safety checks are reintroduced for Community Safety (CS) Response crews using a simplified version of the current fire safety audit process. There are clear benefits for the community, the organisation and our staff. There are, however, re-training and up-skilling considerations to be taken into account. The activities proposed are fully compatible units FF1 and FF8 of the Firefighter and Crew Manager role maps. The process has been trialled previously in Western Command (Plymouth and Torbay) and the FBU has been consulted. A detailed policy/process document (based on the pilot process) is currently being prepared to facilitate Service wide implementation.
<b>RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS</b>	None, this will result in more effective use of the core working hours as described in the Work Routine Service Policy Document issued in October 2008 for CS Response staff.
<b>EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT</b>	This proposal will facilitate local delivery of actions contained within the Making the Connections Action Plan.
<b>APPENDICES</b>	None
<b>LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS</b>	None

## 1. **BACKGROUND**

- 1.1 Prior to the Introduction of the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 (FSO) which came into force in October 2006, whole time response crews traditionally completed routine re-inspections of premises that had a fire certificate issued under the Fire Precautions Act 1971. This involved checking that the premises were maintaining the fire precautions stipulated within the Certificate and on a plan drawing.
- 1.2 The FSO revolves around risk assessment principles and goal based outcomes, this and the Chief Fire Officers' Association (CFOA) standard audit process, which has been adopted by DSFRS, was at the time of the FSO implementation considered to be too onerous when combined with the growing CS Prevention agenda.

## 2 **CURRENT ISSUES**

- 2.1 It has been recognised by many across the Service, and indeed nationally, that over the past few years, the balance between CS Protection and Prevention has been heavily biased towards prevention. This is as a result of the number of fire deaths in dwellings and the numerous reports that have been published advocating this strategy for fire and rescue services. Within Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service (DSFRS) prevention activities are now being delivered increasingly by means other than CS response crews such as Community Safety Action Teams (CSAT) thereby releasing the required capacity to support the wider scale implementation of this initiative.

## 3 **PROPOSAL**

- 3.1 A system of simplified 'fire safety checks' has been developed that will enable personnel completing them to assess how compliant premises/responsible persons are with the FSO, offer advice, signpost to guidance and allow group support teams to target where/how often to send an experienced CS Protection officer. This process has been trialled in the Torbay and Plymouth Groups with success and this paper proposes an extension of the process to all areas of the Service for implementation in April 2010. The initiative has (through the Group Commanders (GCs) CS forum) the full support of the GCs and to that end, is being factored into plans for 2010/11.

## 4 **ADVANTAGES FOR THE ORGANISATION**

- 4.1 Withdrawal of fire safety activities from CS Response crews has been seen as a backward step, but by reintroducing in the format proposed within this paper, numerous benefits will be gained by the community, the organisation as a whole and our partners.
- 4.2 More Response Officers will be visible within the community assessing compliance with the legislation. As well as helping to reduce wider risk in the community this will be reputationally beneficial for DSFRS.
- 4.3 Skill levels of Response staff will be increased and enhanced giving a wider variety of work and greater job satisfaction- this supports issues identified within the staff survey.

- 4.4 Fire fighter safety will be improved as an increased knowledge of station grounds' inherent risks will become evident. This will also link to 7(2)(d) and operational risk inspections and an enhanced knowledge of building construction, fire spread and the value of fire protection systems in buildings will be developed and will support underpinning knowledge and skills.
- 4.5 The training and exposure to fire protection will assist with the recognition of dangerous conditions to occupants enabling earlier interventions by fire safety enforcement officers.
- 4.6 Group Support Teams will be able to target their fire protection activities to those premises that have been identified by the fire safety check as being non compliant, ensuring more efficient use of fully qualified fire safety officers.
- 4.7 Fire safety checks will give an insight into the work of fire protection within the Service and a deeper appreciation of what is expected should they wish to join a Group Support Team on development or promotion.

## 5 **SUMMARY OF PROCESS**

- 5.1 The fire safety check process consists of a pro forma for the inspector to work through as they are assessing the building. There are 18 questions and a judgement is made as to whether the area being checked is broadly compliant, partially compliant or non compliant. A score is assigned that is weighted dependant on the risk importance, for example, a non compliant fire warning system carries more points than if the fire fighting equipment is not being maintained. The points are then added up and the resultant action determined.
- 5.2 Possible actions arising out of the fire safety checks are:
- Broadly compliant letter;
  - Non compliant letter with an appendix setting out the areas that need attention;
  - Non compliant letter with an appendix setting out the areas that need attention and an indication that the premises are being referred to the Group Support team - should the higher levels of expertise/experience be needed.
- 5.3 Warrants – The FSO requires that, on request, an inspector must produce a warrant stating that they have the authority to visit the premises under this legislation. The Services' Legal Advisor, Mr David Stotesbury, has been consulted and has provided a model warrant for the type of work that is being undertaken.
- 5.4 All of the above is detailed in a guidance document that has been produced for the trials and is currently being converted to a policy document.

## 6 **CONSIDERATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION**

### 6.1 Training/development

There will be a training need (that is already being addressed in some Areas) due to the fact that minimal fire protection work has been carried out by response crews for a considerable period of time. A training package has been produced and options for delivery are available to Groups.

### 6.2 Quality Assurance

To ensure quality assurance and consistency of delivery, it is proposed within the process that the first few fire safety checks completed by watches should be accompanied by an experienced fire protection officer. This officer would then be in a position to provide feedback to inexperienced inspectors and give coaching, mentoring and confidence for them in the initial stages. Experience has shown that, in the initial stages of these checks, group support teams were being requested to provide guidance and clarification frequently. This is inevitable and the amount of disturbance to fully qualified fire protection officer's reduces as crews become more confident.

### 6.3 Capacity Planning

Due to the number of premises being visited, it is inevitable (based on pilot outcomes) that group support teams will receive a number of referrals from the checks being carried out (due to poor standards) and will have to visit and conduct a full audit. This will then require a full fire safety audit and more than likely an enforcement notice or possibly a prohibition notice will have to be issued which takes resources away from pre planned work. Although this is unpredictable work, it is targeted at the correct premises, reduces the risk in the area and contributes to the organisational goals and IRMP. As time progresses, it will be easier to predict the referral rate from data and this will assist capacity planning at local level.

### 6.4 Making the Connections

This proposal will facilitate local delivery of actions contained within the Making the Connections Action Plan.

### 6.5 Review

The initiative will be reviewed after 12 months via the GC CS forum.

## 7 **THE FUTURE**

7.1 Although this paper focuses on the use of wholetime response crews for these fire safety checks, there is no reason why it could not be extended to the Community Safety Action Teams (CSATs) or Retained Duty System (RDS) personnel where the wholetime resource is not available.

## 8 **CONCLUSIONS**

8.1 This proposal meets/supports the expectations of several key Service documents most notably:

- The Chief Fire Officers' organisational improvement 100 day report;
- "Rising to the Challenge" (improving fire service efficiency) report produced by the Audit Commission;
- Fire and Rescue Service National Framework Document 2008-11;
- DSFRS Corporate Plan.

8.2 It is also effective and efficient use of a large staff resource that is sometimes perceived as underutilised. It is recommended that fire safety checks are rolled out across the organisation starting in April 2010, this gives the necessary time for training of staff, although should Groups wish they could start as local training is completed.

## 9. **RECOMMENDATION**

9.1 That the Service wide implementation of the current pilot scheme of requiring operational crews across the Service to undertake Fire Safety Checks as part of their daily work routines be endorsed.

**PETE SMITH**  
**ACFO (SUPPORT SERVICES)**