



# DEVON & SOMERSET FIRE & RESCUE AUTHORITY

<b>REPORT REFERENCE NO.</b>	DSFRA/09/28
<b>MEETING</b>	DEVON & SOMERSET FIRE & RESCUE AUTHORITY
<b>DATE OF MEETING</b>	14 DECEMBER 2009
<b>SUBJECT OF REPORT</b>	SMOKE DETECTION IN RENTED ACCOMMODATION
<b>LEAD OFFICER</b>	Deputy Chief Fire Officer
<b>RECOMMENDATIONS</b>	<i>That the Authority be asked to support the undertaking of a campaign, as envisaged in Section 3.1 of this report, with the intention of securing legislative change to introduce a statutory requirement for smoke detection systems to be fitted in the premises currently not covered by legislation.</i>
<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</b>	Certain types of rented accommodation premises have no statutory requirement for potentially life saving smoke detection equipment to be fitted. As a result, some of society's most vulnerable people are exposed to risk that could be considerably reduced with the installation of "hard-wired" smoke detection systems. This report seeks Authority support for a planned campaign seeking to change the relevant legislation by introducing a mandatory provision for the type of premises concerned to be fitted with smoke detection systems compliant with British Standard 5839 Part 6 thereby reducing risk and loss within the community.
<b>RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS</b>	Nil.
<b>EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT</b>	An initial assessment has revealed that there are no equality issues arising from this report.
<b>APPENDICES</b>	Nil.
<b>LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS</b>	Nil

## **1. BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

- 1.1 The Authority may be aware of the the recent tragic fire fatalities in Ellacombe Church Road, Torquay (17 October 2009). This has attracted considerable media coverage and was discussed at the last meeting of the Authority's Community Safety and Corporate Planning Committee. Sadly, despite the best efforts of all fire and rescue authorities around the country, incidents of this nature are still all too common.
- 1.2 In 2007, for example, there were 331 fire fatalities and 9937 non-fatal casualties due to fires in dwellings throughout the UK. There was no working smoke alarm in the properties where 222 of these people died. It remains a fact that 20% (1 in 5) of households in the UK have no working smoke alarm and there is a growing body of evidence to indicate that the most vulnerable people in our society are those least likely to have a working smoke alarm.
- 1.3 The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 is the major fire legislation in England and Wales. It does not, however, apply to dwellings but only to the common parts of flats and Houses in Multiple Occupation (HiMOs). This presents the situation where dwellings owned and "rented out" by a landlord have no statutory requirement to have smoke detectors of any form fitted within the dwelling spaces. Whilst there are good examples of landlords and social housing providers fitting smoke detection of their own free will, there are significant numbers of properties with no detection therefore potentially exposing the most vulnerable of our society to risk from injury or death in the event of fire.

## **2. PURPOSE OF PAPER**

- 2.1 The Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue Service considers that action needs to be taken to address this situation and to that end, the support of the Authority is sought to support an initiative aimed ultimately at achieving a change to current legislation and making the installation of smoke detectors a statutory obligation in the premises concerned.

## **3. HOW THIS CAN BE ACHIEVED?**

- 3.1 By working together with professional bodies, representative associations, key partners, legislators and, where relevant, politicians, a planned campaign will be implemented with the aim to bring about a change in the relevant legislation (the Fire Safety Order and/or the Housing Act) making it a statutory requirement for smoke detection systems to be fitted in the premises currently not covered by legislation.
- 3.2 The current cost of a fire fatality to the community is in the region of £1.7 million pounds, with each fire event costing in the region of £32,000. Information provided recently by a number of accredited fire alarm installation companies has indicated that the installation of fire detection systems compliant with British Standard (BS) 5839 part 6 would cost in the region of £200 to £300 for the average 2 storey property.
- 3.3 This type of installation would provide for reliable "hard-wired" mains powered systems, with detectors professionally sited and installed (traditional stand alone smoke detectors are subject to abuse, tampering and battery removal etc). This would provide the most satisfactory method of early warning of fire to families and people asleep, as well as reducing loss and damage to properties, thereby reducing the financial and humanitarian consequences for all concerned.

3.4 It is interesting to note that on average there are between 40 and 50 accidental deaths and 200 serious injuries from Carbon Monoxide (CO) poisoning and gas explosions each year in the UK. The vast majority are due to CO poisoning. Landlords currently have a statutory duty to arrange an annual gas safety check on appliances in rented accommodation.

4. **SUMMARY**

4.1 Certain types of rented accommodation have no statutory requirement for potentially life saving smoke detection equipment to be fitted. As a result, some of society's most vulnerable people are exposed to risk that could be considerably reduced with the installation of Hard Wired smoke detection systems. The Service considers that this situation needs to be addressed and consequently the Authority is asked to support a planned campaign with the aim of bringing about a change in the relevant legislation and making it mandatory for the type of premises concerned to be fitted with smoke detection systems compliant with British Standard 5839 Part 6 thereby reducing risk and loss within the community.

**NEIL GIBBINS**  
**Deputy Chief Fire Officer**