

REPORT REFERENCE NO.	CSC/24/5
MEETING	COMMUNITY SAFETY COMMITTEE
DATE OF MEETING	26 APRIL 2024
SUBJECT OF REPORT	HOME FIRE SAFETY VISITS - BACKLOG
LEAD OFFICER	ACFO Gerald Taylor, Director of Service delivery
RECOMMENDATIONS	<i>That the report be noted.</i>
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	This report explains actions being taken to address the current backlog of home fire safety visits, including a temporary pause of incoming referrals and additional resources to help mitigate risk until a new IT solution is in place.
RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS	As referred to in paragraph 6.3 of this report.
BACKGROUND PAPERS	None.

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. The Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue Service (“the Service”) prevention activity is designed to help mitigate risk to communities and to operational crews by reducing the number of emergency incidents and the severity of these incidents through various interventions.
- 1.2. One such intervention is the Home Fire Safety Visit programme (HFSV). This is where the Service is invited into people’s homes to help identify fire risk and educate the occupant on actions they can take to reduce the risk of a fire or actions to take if a fire occurs. The Service also supply equipment such as smoke detection.
- 1.3. Performance against the HFSV Programme is measured through a key Performance Indicator and, where a KPI has a target of “requiring improvement”, this triggers an exception report that provides an analysis of what further action might be required to address any issues identified.
- 1.4. Performance as of Quarter 3 of the 2023-24 financial year (to December 2023), against the appropriate KPIs for this area is set out in the table below:

KPI	Period	Actual	Target	% Diff.	Aim
1.1.4. Number of home fire safety visits completed	Annual (√)	15081	13500	11.7%	Higher is better
1.1.6. Percentage of targeted home fire safety visits completed to households with two or more risk factors	Annual (√)	62.4%	60%	4% Diff.	Higher is better

- 1.5. Whilst performance against the KPI is on target, the Service had a backlog of 7388 cases that required a Home Fire Safety visit. Whilst plans are in place to mitigate against further backlogs happening in future such as issuing of work to Wholetime Crews and the procurement of a new IT system, these will take time to embed and the Service will not see a significant improvement until the latter part of 2024. This should not impact on the target number of visits delivered at the year end, however.
- 1.6. This paper explains the current actions being undertaken to reduce the backlog and to enable us to mitigate the risk of a further build-up of cases. The paper also provides information on a request for additional resourcing, supported by underspend within the department.

2. FACTORS IMPACTING THE BACKLOG ON HFSV

2.1. Several challenges during and since the Covid 19 pandemic in 2020 have resulted in a build-up and backlog of Home Fire Safety Visits. These include:

- not being able to undertake visits during Covid 19 pandemic;
- performance issues with Information Technology (IT) systems;
- IT systems that are unable to provide adequate management information and reporting;
- an increase in the number of referrals being received; and
- recruitment challenges and high levels of staff turnover.

2.2. Each of these areas is addressed in the following sections of this report.

3. COVID 19 PANDEMIC

3.1. The inability of the Service to gain access to domestic premises in the community for the purpose of conducting Home Fire Safety Visits during the Covid 19 pandemic has already been reported to the Authority and is well documented.

4. IT CONSIDERATIONS

4.1. Recommendations for changes to the IT system were identified as part of an external review undertaken by DELT in 2022. These recommendations are being progressed currently. The procurement of a new IT system, Civica Community Fire Risk Management Information System (CFRMIS), is currently in progress (planned for delivery in the latter part of 2024) which will help to address the backlog of HFSV and improved functionality to manage risk.

4.2. CFRMIS is widely used by other Fire and Rescue Services and, whilst the requirements of the Service are yet to be scoped out, early system demonstrations and feedback has shown that reporting information is more readily available and fit for purpose which will enable efficiencies in work output and better prioritisation of cases to be assigned.

4.3. As it will take time to fully implement, perform user acceptance testing and train staff in the use of CFRMIS, we have agreed to some interim measures to help reduce the current risk of a further backlog of cases building up.

5. REFERRALS

5.1. The Home Safety and Partnerships team generate home safety referrals within local communities and work with various partner agencies and community groups and initiatives to ensure we will reach the most vulnerable communities to provide support and advice. The team have been trained to exercise professional judgement when assessing and providing home safety advice and booking a home safety visit.

- 5.2. In addition to the backlog referred to at paragraph 1.4 above, the team's business as usual activity includes an average of 1200 referrals a month. Data shows that approximately 75% of our referrals come from Partnership Agencies such as South West Ambulance Trust, the Police, Age Concern, Demetia UK and Housing Associations whilst the remainder come from public self-referral.
- 5.3. To help enable the backlog to be tackled and focus resource on the oldest cases contained within, a decision has been made to temporarily 'pause' incoming referrals for a maximum period of six months.
- 5.4. This excludes any referrals that come in from blue light services such as the Police, Fire and Ambulance Service, and also excludes any cases where Safeguarding concerns are identified, and these will continue to be supported as usual.
- 5.5. The rationale behind the temporary pause was well considered and thought through – we are confident that current resourcing levels can meet our Business as usual activity, but as this means the team working at maximum capacity, it does not allow any time to focus on decreasing our backlog of cases, many of which are old and high risk.
- 5.6. The temporary pause on incoming referrals came into effect on Friday 12 January 2024 and an explanation on the rationale of this has been communicated to all referring agencies via a central email communication, and followed up by Partnership Leads in the respective command areas. This communication included a central point of contact should any of our referring Partners wish to speak to us or discuss any cases of concern. This has worked well, and our Partnerships team continue to triage any urgent or concerning cases that may arise.
- 5.7. As at December 2023, the number of cases within the backlog was 7388. Approximately 2000 cases were identified as being suitable for a Home Fire Safety Visit from Wholetime Crews, meaning at the time of the temporary pause on Friday 12 January 2024, the number of cases awaiting a Home Fire Safety Visit from a Home Fire Safety Technicians was 5295.
- 5.8. As of Monday 18 March 2024, the number of cases awaiting a Home Fire Safety visit is 2935. Whilst the forthcoming month brings further challenges due to further staff turnover, we have recently completed a successful recruitment process and have new colleagues starting with us from mid-April.

6. CAPACITY ISSUES

- 6.1. The Home Safety team is made up of c.25 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) Home Safety Technicians and an administration team of 6 FTE's supported by a Team Lead and a Team Manager. The administration team are primarily responsible for triaging multiple enquiries and queries that come into the team via various channels and responding to telephone calls, emails and booking Home Fire Safety visits.

- 6.2. An annual target of 18,000 visits has been set and agreed as set out at paragraph 1.4 above. This was calculated on the delivery capacity of Home Safety Technicians and our Wholetime (WT) crews.
- 6.3. To further support reducing the backlog, the following additional resource has been agreed utilising current department underspend and via an Earmarked Reserve for six months into the 2024/25 financial year to expediate working through the backlog of cases.

1. Fixed term contracts for six months for Home Safety Technicians

An additional 2 x Home Safety Technicians. This will allow further capacity for Home Fire Safety Visits to be conducted.

2. Additional admin support for six months

Addition of 2 x administrative members of staff on a fixed term contract to focus on backlog cases.

3. £30,000 overtime budget for technicians to potentially increase visits by up to 800.

- 6.4. Whilst the Service has been able to recruit initially to the Fixed Term Technician roles, successful colleagues have since obtained permanent roles backfilling vacancies within the Technician team. The Service has unfortunately been unable to recruit to the administrative posts and the appetite for overtime has remained low given the current financial position.

7. CONCLUSION

- 7.1. Whilst ongoing resourcing provides challenges, the Service has seen a reduction in the backlog of over 2000 cases. The Service is confident that the temporary pause in referrals to all but the most vulnerable individuals identified by key partners will continue to support us in being able to reduce the backlog. Business as usual should be recommenced by the Summer of 2024. The approach to reopening referrals will be on a staggered approach, with partners taking priority subsequently followed by public self-referral, and volumes will be closely monitored to ensure we can meet demand.
- 7.2. The introduction of a new IT system in late 2024 will further enhance our ability to manage risk and provide a good service to our communities with regards to identifying the most at risk people in the community and providing appropriate interventions.

ACFO GERALD TAYLOR
Director of Service Delivery