

REPORT REFERENCE NO.	CSC/24/12
MEETING	COMMUNITY SAFETY COMMITTEE
DATE OF MEETING	4 SEPTEMBER 2024
SUBJECT OF REPORT	HOME FIRE SAFETY VISITS BACKLOG
LEAD OFFICER	ASSISTANT CHIEF FIRE OFFICER - SERVICE DELIVERY
RECOMMENDATIONS	<i>That the report be noted.</i>
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	This paper explains actions being taken to provide an update on the current backlog of home fire safety visits, since the last update to the authority in April 2024.
RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS	As referred to in section 4.0
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. In December 2023, a report was submitted to Executive Board (EB) providing an update on the backlog of Home Fire Safety Visits, which at the time was c.7000. That report requested additional resources (equating to c. £0.090m) utilising departmental underspend and gave a recommendation to temporarily ‘pause’ incoming referrals to allow the backlog to be addressed effectively. Consecutively, a ‘data cleanse’ was underway to support the allocation of targeted Prevention work to Wholetime crews from the backlog of cases.
- 1.4. This report outlines the current status of the HFSV backlog since the last update in April 2024 (Minute CSC/23/xx refers) and the proposed next steps for reopening referrals.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1. The temporary pause on referrals was implemented on 12 January 2024 with the support of the partnerships and communications team. At this time and following a successful data cleanse, approximately 1,500 visits were issued to Wholetime crews, leaving the number of unbooked visits required from a technician totalling 5,717.
- 2.2. The Community Safety Committee was updated in April 2024 that, as of Monday 18 March 2024, the number of cases awaiting a Home Fire Safety visit was 2935. Whilst the forthcoming months were due to bring challenges due to further staff turnover, recruitment for further administration staff was under way.
- 2.3. Although recruitment activity and timescales proved challenging, new staff have been appointed and the administration team should be back to previous capacity by the end of September 2024.

3. REFERRALS

- 3.1. High risk referrals received from Partners have continued to be triaged by the Partnerships team during the temporary pause.

- 3.2. Work undertaken by the business analyst in May 2024 has resulted in the identification of an additional 8,640 unbooked visits. The majority of these visits have originated from external referrals including National Grid and Air Liquide. This had been following a pause 8-month prior of these particular referrals.
- 3.3. Further progress has been made with the issuing of other multiple workstreams including Multiple fire data, dwellings that have had a fire after a HFSV, Air Liquide and National Grid referrals and further partner referrals to both technicians and Wholetime Crews. Please see the table below for further detail.

Unbooked Backlog	Issued to Wholetime Crews	High Risk referrals with Technicians
1375	3097	901
(all dwellings within Home Safety App)	(all dwellings issued to WT crews to complete. Includes Air Liquide, National Grid, Partnership referral)	(includes dwellings that have had multiple fires, fires after HFSV, high risk referrals etc)

- 3.4. The data provided from National Grid and Air Liquide is under review as this is significantly out of date and has resulted in challenges within the community due to inappropriate visits taking place (i.e.. Deceased individuals).
- 3.5. As of 29 July 2024, the number of unbooked HFSV's is 998.

4. CAPACITY ISSUES

- 4.1. As indicated in paragraph 2.3. above, the team has seen continuing challenges in terms of capacity to meet the referral demand.
- 4.2. The backlog of unscheduled visits has continued to track down. Continuing recruitment challenges within the Home Safety administrative team and ongoing demand for other administrative tasks remains high. This may result in the rate of unscheduled visits decreasing at a slower pace. In order to mitigate this, a request was made for two additional administration staff within the Home Fire Safety Team and subsequently authorised by the Executive Board.
- 4.3. This will alleviate the issue that concern, because of reduced capacity within the administrative team, HFS Technicians have been booking their own visits, subsequently reducing their capacity to undertake visits.
- 4.4. The Partnerships team has been triaging and supporting the booking and processing of Partner referrals due the ongoing high demand of very high, and high-risk referrals. This has had a direct impact on the Partnership Teams ability to undertake BAU work.

5. REOPENING REFERRALS

- 5.1. An interim communication has been sent to Partners with the support of the Service's Internal Communications team thanking them for their understanding during the temporary pause and providing them with updates around planned reopening of referrals.
- 5.2. It is imperative that returning to Business as Usual (BAU) activity is carefully managed to both maintain good relationships with partners and to continue to manage volumes of incoming work.
- 5.3. The reopening of referrals will be a staggered approach, with partners taking priority subsequently followed by public self-referral, and volumes will be closely monitored to ensure demands are met
- 5.4. It has been agreed by the Executive Board that the opening of referrals is anticipated to commence from the 2 September 2024, with a completion date of October 2024.

6. IT CONSIDERATIONS

- 6.1. Good progress has been made with colleagues in DDaT which has led to improvements with the performance of the Home Safety app. Testing stages have commenced on receiving referrals from partners, once implemented, this will lead to less duplication of work for the admin team and create some small efficiencies.
- 6.2. An updated on the CFRMIS timeframe will not be available until Project Manager resourcing can be resolved, but once in place 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.

7. LESSONS LEARNED

- 7.1. The key learning points during the period of pause were:
 - Capacity within the team was not adequate to process the referrals within Devon and Somerset.
 - Interpretation of the data remains a challenge
 - There was a period of high turnover and it proved difficult to recruit into the team on a temporary basis.

8. CONCLUSION

- 8.1. The temporary pause on referrals has had a positive impact on the backlog of unbooked Home Fire Safety visits, however, the key to continued success is ensuring that we have a robust and adequately resourced Home Safety team in place to ensure an efficient and effective flow of work.

- 8.2. The Community Safety Prevention team will remain in Business Continuity, however 'business as usual' will resume once satisfaction in the clarity and accuracy of data and delivery is achieved.
- 8.3. The opening of referrals is anticipated to commence from the 2 September 2024, followed by website and self-referral channels in October 2024.

ACFO GERALD TAYLOR
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