

REPORT REFERENCE NO.	CSC/25/4
MEETING	COMMUNITY SAFETY COMMITTEE
DATE OF MEETING	31 JANUARY 2025
SUBJECT OF REPORT	HOME FIRE SAFETY VISITS UPDATE
LEAD OFFICER	Deputy Chief Fire Officer, Director of Service Delivery
RECOMMENDATIONS	<i>That the report be noted.</i>
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	This paper provides an update on the current backlog of home fire safety visits since the last update in September 2024
RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS	As referred to in section 4.0 of this report.
EQUALITY RISKS AND BENEFITS ANALYSIS (ERBA)	None.
APPENDICES	None.
LIST OF 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, the Executive Board (EB) was updated on the backlog of Home Fire Safety Visits, which at the time, was circa 7000. As an immediate action, this was escalated to the Corporate Risk Register. Additional resources were requested (equating to c. £0.090m) utilising departmental underspend together with a recommendation to temporarily ‘pause’ incoming referrals to allow the backlog to be addressed effectively.
- 1.4 The Community Safety Committee was updated in April 2024 that the number of cases awaiting a HFSV as of 18th March 2024 was 2935, and subsequently in September 2024 to advise that plans were in place to reopen referrals to partners.
- 1.5 This report outlines the current status of outstanding HFSVs and provides an update on actions taken since the last update in September 2024.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 In September 2024, the Community Safety Committee were updated that the Business Analyst within Prevention had further identified an additional 8640 unbooked visits requiring action. Of those unbooked visits, 3097 were issued to Wholtime crews with the remainder staying within Community Safety Prevention for action.
- 2.2 The welcome addition of temporary funding from EB had allowed recruitment activity to commence. An additional four full time equivalent (FTE) Home Fire Safety administrators were recruited on fixed term contracts for a period of 12 months from September 2024. These contracts have subsequently been extended to two years.
- 2.3 Throughout the temporary pause on incoming referrals, the Home Safety and Partnerships teams continued to work closely with partners and triage any high risk cases. The number of cases triaged from the implementation of the temporary pause (12th January) to 2nd September was 5837. Of these, 2697 had a HFSV undertaken.

- 2.4 The Service commissioned the Devon Audit Partnership to undertake an audit into Home Fire Safety activity. The findings recognised the efforts of the Community Safety Prevention team in tackling the outstanding backlog of cases and made recommendations to consider permanent staffing, and to continue to look at better IT solutions and systems.
- 2.5 As of Monday ,13th January 2025, the current number of outstanding HFSVs is 667

3. CAPACITY

- 3.1 As indicated in paragraph 2.2 above, the team has seen huge benefits from having a robust resource of capacity to meet the referral demand. Referral numbers remain high and there are no indications to show that this will decrease.
- 3.2 The backlog of unbooked visits has continued to track down, however, ongoing demand for other administrative tasks such as handling of inbound telephone calls, monitoring of inboxes, booking and rescheduling visits and handling of specialist referrals (such as those from South West Ambulance Service Trust) remains high.

4. REOPENING REFERRALS

- 4.1 Referrals to Partners reopened on 12th September 2024 with the support of the Service's Internal Communications team
- 4.2 Referrals to the public reopened on 2nd December 2024. To ensure that activity is carefully managed, this was not widely advertised outside of the Service, however, web pages have been updated to reflect this.

5. IT CONSIDERATIONS

- 5.1 Progress has been made with colleagues in the Digital, Data and Technology (DDaT) team which has led to improvements with the performance of the Home Safety app, particularly around receiving referrals from partners, which has led to less duplication of work for the admin team and created some small efficiencies.
- 5.2 An update on the implementation of a new system, Community Fire & Rescue Management Information System (CFRMIS), is not available as yet as the implementation is still in progress.

6. LESSONS LEARNED

- 6.1 The key learning points during the period of pause were:
- 6.2 Capacity within the Home Safety team was previously not adequate to process the referrals received within Devon and Somerset.
- 6.3 There was a period of high turnover of staff, and it proved difficult to recruit into the team on a temporary basis.

6.4 Additional Home Fire Safety staff have proved integral to ensuring technician diaries remain booked and cases are triaged and worked within expected timescales.

7. CONCLUSION

7.1 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 the Service has a robust and adequately resourced Home Safety team in place to ensure an efficient and effective flow of work.

7.2 Consideration should be given to making the current fixed term positions permanent, to help retain competent and well-trained staff and to prevent staff turnover. This will be subject to identification of funding within the revenue budget in future years.

7.3 Consideration should also be given to the implementation of an ICT solution that is fit for purpose for the organisation in future.

7.4 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 in ICT systems is achieved.

DCFO GERALD TAYLOR
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