

REPORT REFERENCE NO.	CSC/21/2
MEETING	COMMUNITY SAFETY COMMITTEE
DATE OF MEETING	26 JULY 2021
SUBJECT OF REPORT	MATCH FUNDING OF DOMESTIC SPRINKLERS
LEAD OFFICER	DIRECTOR OF SERVICE DELIVERY
RECOMMENDATIONS	<p><i>That the report be noted as evidencing a different approach to supporting the following of the Authority's approved Strategic Policy Objectives:</i></p> <p><i>Strategic policy objective 2(a) - Provide response resources at times and in locations relevant to identified risks of fires and other emergencies; and</i></p> <p><i>Strategic policy objective 2(c) - Explore and develop opportunities to work with other agencies where the Service can add value to community outcomes.</i></p>
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	<p>Domestic sprinklers are reasonably inexpensive if fitted at the time of build. They have a proven record of reducing fatalities, injuries and damage in fires. The Service has a fund available to match-fund bespoke equipment. There is an opportunity to match-fund the fitting of sprinklers in a new build to use as a case study and to promote domestic sprinklers throughout Devon and Somerset.</p> <p>The Service recognises the benefit of retro-fitting domestic sprinklers in a small number of high risk cases where other mitigation options have been exhausted in order to protect life. There is the possibility of working with housing providers to match fund retro fit sprinklers where it is identified that individuals are at risk. This report sets out a proposal to achieve this.</p>
RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS	The 2021/22 Prevention budget had an additional £50,000 assigned from 2020/21 underspend to fund bespoke equipment to reduce risk for high risk individuals. This is held in the 'Joint Working Initiative' budget within Prevention. Section 4 of this report sets out the specific resource implications.
EQUALITY RISKS AND BENEFITS ANALYSIS	To be completed on a case by case basis.
APPENDICES	None
BACKGROUND PAPERS	None

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Fire and Rescue Service has been undertaking fire prevention work for many years in order to reduce fire fatalities, injuries and incidents in accordance with the National Framework.
- 1.2 The National Framework for Fire & Rescue Services provides:
- “2.4 We expect fire and rescue authorities to target their fire safety, prevention and protection resources on: those individuals or households who are at greatest risk from fire in the home; those most likely to engage in arson or deliberate fire setting; and on those non-domestic premises where the life safety risk is greatest. Consideration could also be given to non-domestic premises which are at risk from fire in order to mitigate loss to economic wellbeing.
- 2.5 To identify those at greatest risk from fire, we expect fire and rescue authorities to work closely with other organisations in the public and voluntary sector, as well as with the police and ambulance services. Wherever appropriate, we expect fire and rescue services to develop partnerships to support risk reduction services to those identified as vulnerable, including from exploitation or abuse, and wherever possible to share intelligence and relevant risk data”.
- 1.3 The Service instigated a Community Safety Strategy which uses four levels of intervention to reduce risk. This ranges from Universal Preventative Services such as social media messaging up to Specialist Services that are designed for high risk individuals to reduce risk to an acceptable level on an individual basis.
- 1.4 This approach also aligns with the National Fire Chief Councils’ Person Centred Framework and the Fire Standard for Prevention. Interventions may include providing specialist equipment to an individual to reduce risk. This can range from fitting a smoke alarm or hard of hearing alarms or even individual misting systems where appropriate.
- 1.5 Even with our current Prevention efforts and interventions the Service still has fire fatalities every year in Devon and Somerset. A high degree of work has been undertaken, therefore, to explore innovative ways of locating high risk individuals and providing services to protect those most at risk. This report sets out a proposal to mitigate the risk with individuals at greatest risk of fire.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1. It is recognised that, in very high risk situations where an individual is unable to exit a property due to mobility and if the risk of fire is so severe and cannot be mitigated against, then the installation of domestic sprinklers may be an option to prevent a fatality should a fire break out.
- 2.2. The fitting of sprinklers has a proven track record of preventing fire fatalities and reducing damage to property as well as increasing firefighter safety.

- 2.3. In the UK, there has never been a fire death in a building with a fully maintained sprinkler system. Fires are extinguished or controlled in 99% of sprinkler protected properties. Average property loss is reduced by 70%. (National Fire Sprinkler Report, 2017).

3. OPPORTUNITY FOR PARTNERSHIP WORKING TO REDUCE RISK

- 3.1. The Service has an opportunity to work in partnership with housing providers. Where it is recognised that an occupant reaches the criteria of being at very high risk and unable to exit a property, there is an opportunity in a small number of cases to retro-fit sprinklers to protect an individual if all other options for mitigation have been exhausted.
- 3.2. In this situation the Service would look to match-fund the fitting of domestic sprinklers. Conversations with housing providers such as Plymouth Community Homes and Cornerstone Housing have been positive and indicate that there is an appetite to a match funding approach in a small number of cases.
- 3.3. Following a tragic fatal fire and subsequent fatal fire review, Cornerstone Housing in Exeter has been in dialogue with the Service to explore opportunities to protect residents from fire. Cornerstone has offered an opportunity for a new build block of flats that could be used as a trial for the fitting of domestic sprinklers using a match-funding approach. The build is in Beacon Avenue, Exeter consisting of 6 one bed roomed flats. It is generally recognised that people living alone are at higher risk of fire than the general population.
- 3.4. The advantage to match-fund on a new build is the cost of fitting at time of build is significantly lower than retro-fitting sprinklers.
- 3.5. The Service will use this example to demonstrate the low cost of installing sprinklers at time of build along with the benefits that domestic sprinklers bring. The Service can also use this build as a case study throughout the lifetime of the building to promote domestic sprinklers across Devon and Somerset.

4. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1. The Service's Prevention budget currently contains £50,000 in the 'Joint working initiative' for funding equipment to provide bespoke innovative interventions for those most at risk in order to reduce fatalities. This budget would be used to support the new build option and any retro fit projects. Consequently, no further budget requirement is required. This budget is in addition to the annual equipment budget and has been secured as one-off funding from underspend in 2020-21 due to a reduction in face-to-face activity due to the pandemic.

New build option

- 4.2. The cost of fitting a domestic sprinkler system at time of build is far less than retro-fitting sprinklers. The cost for the match-funding of the new build with Cornerstone Housing is £2,500+VAT per flat. The total cost of approximately £18,000 will provide 6 one bed flats with a sprinkler system. The proposal is for the Service to match-fund the cost of the sprinklers, committing £9,000 to this project. Cornerstone would fund the remaining £9,000.
- 4.3. This would be a one-off project and can be achieved within the delegated authority of the Chief Fire Officer.

Retro-fit option

- 4.4. The option to support a small number of individual high risk cases across Devon and Somerset would be considered on a case by case basis for retro-fit sprinkler systems. Retro-fitted sprinklers would only be considered where other mitigation has already been exhausted and the risk of fire and death is still very high.
- 4.5. The cost of retro-fitting sprinklers is unique dependent upon many factors and would have to be reviewed on a case by case basis and considered using a cost benefit approach. Any support for match funding would be met from the current budget allocation.

5. BENEFITS

- 5.1 There are clear benefits both financially and on life safety grounds for fitting domestic sprinklers. Any project supported by the Service will be used to promote the fitting of domestic sprinklers to housing providers and be a valuable case study for best practice within the housing sector.
- 5.2 The proposal fits clearly within the National Framework and also the Authority's Community Safety Strategic Policy Objectives, specifically:
- 2(a) - Provide response resources at times and in locations relevant to identified risks of fires and other emergencies; and
 - 2(c) - Explore and develop opportunities to work with other agencies where the Service can add value to community outcomes (referred to elsewhere on this agenda).
- 5.3 The Chief Fire Officer (in consultation with the Treasurer) has delegated authority to make grants of up to and including £10,000. This has allowed the Service to agree to match-fund the fitting of sprinklers in the new build of 6 one bed flats in partnership with Cornerstone housing.
- 5.4 If the Service was to support any retro-fitting of sprinklers with the same housing provider, this could exceed the Chief Fire Officer's delegated authority. In this event, approval would be required by the Resources Committee in accordance with Financial Regulations and subject to the expenditure being met from the £50,000 budget allocation for 2021-22. Such approvals would also be reported through the Community Safety Committee as part of the monitoring of performance in accordance with the strategic objectives.

6. CONCLUSIONS

- 6.1. The Chief Fire Officer (in consultation with the Treasurer) has delegated authority to award grants of up to £10,000 so can authorise the match funding for fitting of domestic sprinklers in a low number of very high risk cases up to this figure and within the budget for bespoke equipment of £50,000 available, for 2021-22, in the 'joint working initiative'.
- 6.2. Any future opportunities to match fund the fitting of domestic sprinklers from within the budget for bespoke equipment that exceed the £10,000 delegated authority to the Chief Fire Officer would be submitted to the Resources Committee, for consideration in accordance with Financial Regulations.
- 6.3. This approach is consistent with the National Framework and the Authority's Strategic Objectives for Community Safety. This will allow the Service to demonstrate a commitment to innovation and forward thinking in its approach to reducing fatalities, injuries and incidents and allow the Service to explore bespoke solutions for a small number of very high risk individuals in partnership with housing providers across Devon and Somerset to reduce fire fatalities.

ACFO PETE BOND
Director of Service Delivery