

REPORT REFERENCE NO.	DSFRA/21/23
MEETING	DEVON & SOMERSET FIRE & RESCUE AUTHORITY
DATE OF MEETING	29 SEPTEMBER 2021
SUBJECT OF REPORT	AMENDMENT TO FINANCIAL REGULATIONS
LEAD OFFICER	Director of Governance & Digital Services
RECOMMENDATIONS	<i>That the Authority approves an amendment to its Financial Regulations providing for delegated authority to the Chief Fire Officer to award grants of up to £0.100m (and the Resources Committee up to £0.500m), in conjunction with local housing providers, for matched funding to facilitate the fitting of domestic sprinklers and/or other fire suppression systems.</i>
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	<p>Domestic sprinklers are reasonably inexpensive if fitted at the time of build (circa. £2.5k each). They have a proven record of reducing fatalities, injuries and damage in fires. The match funding of domestic sprinklers in conjunction with local housing providers in accordance with the Chief Fire Officer's existing delegated authority was considered by the Community Safety Committee at its meeting on 26 July 2021.</p> <p>In order to ensure an agile approach to the match funding of grants (in a partnership approach with local housing providers) for domestic sprinklers and/or other fire suppression systems, the Committee agreed that the Authority be recommended to approve an amendment to the Chief Fire Officer's delegated power to enable the authorisation of grants specifically for this purpose of up to £0.100m.</p>
RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS	The award of any grants made for the purposes set out in this paper would be met from within budgetary provision available at that time.
EQUALITY RISKS AND BENEFITS ANALYSIS	To be completed on a case by case basis.
APPENDICES	None
BACKGROUND PAPERS	Report to the Community Safety Committee (CSC/21/2) - 26 July 2021

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. 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.
- 1.2. The fitting of sprinklers has a proven track record of preventing fire fatalities and reducing damage to property as well as increasing firefighter safety.
- 1.3. 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).

2. OPPORTUNITY FOR PARTNERSHIP WORKING TO REDUCE RISK

- 2.1. 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.
- 2.2. 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.
- 2.3. 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 (circa. £2.5k). 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.
- 2.4. The Community Safety Committee considered this matter at its meeting on 26 July 2021 (Minute CSC/2* refers) and agreed wholeheartedly that this approach should be supported. Additionally, the Committee recognised the benefit of exploring other fire suppression systems in conjunction with local housing providers through grants on a match funded basis.

3. AMENDMENT TO FINANCIAL REGULATIONS

- 3.1. In order to ensure an agile approach to the making of such grants, the Community Safety Committee agreed to recommend an amendment to the Authority's Financial Regulations to provide for delegated authority to the Chief Fire Officer to award grants of up to £0.100m, in conjunction with local housing providers, for matched funding to facilitate the fitting of domestic sprinklers and/or other fire suppression systems.

- 3.2. The suggested amendment to Financial Regulations following a discussion between the Chief Fire Officer, Treasurer and Director of Governance & Digital Services is as follows:

“the Chief Fire Officer (in consultation with the Treasurer) be delegated power to approve grants specifically for the fitting of domestic sprinklers and/or other fire suppression systems in conjunction with local housing providers of up to £0.100m (and the Resources Committee up to £0.500m)”;

- 3.3. Such grants could be used to support both new build and retro fitting projects.

4. BENEFITS

- 4.1. There are clear benefits both financially and on life safety grounds for fitting domestic sprinklers and other fire suppression systems. Any projects supported by the Service will provide valuable case studies for best practice within the housing sector and wider fire prevention and protection.
- 4.2. 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).
- 4.3. This approach would remove the need to delay any future projects pending a meeting of the Resources Committee to approve such grants for match funding that might exceed the existing delegation of the Chief Fire Officer of up to £0.100m.

5. CONCLUSIONS

- 5.1. 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. It will also 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 in an agile approach to reduce fire fatalities.

MIKE PEARSON

Director of Governance & Digital Services