

REPORT REFERENCE NO.	CSC/22/4
MEETING	COMMUNITY SAFETY COMMITTEE
DATE OF MEETING	9 FEBRUARY 2022
SUBJECT OF REPORT	HOME FIRE SAFETY VISITS
LEAD OFFICER	ACFO PETER BOND, DIRECTOR OF SERVICE DELIVERY
RECOMMENDATIONS	<p><i>That the Committee notes the contents of this paper as suitable evidence to support scrutiny of strategic objective 1a as agreed by the Fire & Rescue Authority namely:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Deliver interventions and education events to reduce the risk of fires in the community</i>
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	<p>Home Fire Safety Visits are part of our Prevention strategy to reduce accidental dwelling fires, injuries and fatalities.</p> <p>Since the 1990's the emphasis on preventing fires has become the priority for all Fire and Rescue Services due to the identified socio-economic benefits.</p> <p>The Service has a planned approach to targeting the most at-risk members of our communities and different methods of resourcing the visits to ensure that the highly vulnerable receive priority attention. This is being delivered along with improvements in order to align with the Fire Standard for Prevention and the National Fire Chiefs Council Person Centred Framework.</p> <p>An overview of the number of visits carried out each year and why this may fluctuate year on year is provided, and why it is important to not compromise the quality of the visits in favour of quantity.</p>
RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS	Business as usual. No resource request
EQUALITY RISKS AND BENEFITS ANALYSIS	Complete
APPENDICES	None
BACKGROUND PAPERS	None

1. **INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 This Committee is tasked with reviewing the following strategic priorities and objectives as approved by the Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue Authority:

Strategic Priority 1 Our targeted prevention and protection activities will reduce the risks in our communities, Improving Health, Safety and wellbeing, supporting the local economy.		Strategic Priority 2 Our Operational resources will provide an effective emergency response to meet the local and national risks.	
1a	Deliver interventions and education events to reduce the risk of fires in the community	2a	Provide response resources at times and in locations relevant to identified risks of fires and other emergencies
1b	Develop and deliver initiatives to support children and young people in making safe lifestyle choices	2b	Ensure that we continue to meet our obligations under the Civil Contingencies Act and the National Resilience Model and continue to develop plans and capability to respond to major emergencies in line with changing threat and risk levels
1c	Target risk-based inspection processes and enforcement activities towards the highest risk and ensure that they are effective and properly resourced	2c	Explore and develop opportunities to work with other agencies where the Service can add value to community outcomes

- 1.2 This report on home fire safety visits presents evidence to support scrutiny of objective 1a as noted above.

2. **BACKGROUND**

- 2.1. The culture of the fire and rescue service saw a paradigm shift in the late 1990's. The focus within fire and rescue services up until this point had been on responding to fires and other incidents, with fire safety being directed towards businesses such as hotels and factories under the statutory responsibility of the Fire Precautions Act 1971, (Now superseded by the Fire Safety Order 2005). There was very little focus on preventing domestic fires in the home, consequently, fires and fire fatalities were about three times higher than they are today.
- 2.2. With a rise in fires and fire fatalities through the 1980's and early 90's an Audit Commission report, 'In the Line of Fire' was published in 1995. A section of the report focused on fire prevention and recognised lessons learnt from the USA, that the most effective way to save lives is to prevent fires and other emergency incidents from occurring.

- 2.3. By understanding risk and devising strategies to mitigate that risk, lives could be saved. From the 1970's to 1990's, fires in the USA reduced by 40% and fatalities by 37%. This was largely attributed to a campaign of fire safety education and increased ownership of smoke alarms and domestic sprinkler systems. The 'In the Line of Fire' report was closely followed by the 'Safe as Houses' report in the late 1990's which focused solely on prevention and provided a blueprint on how fire and rescue services could reduce accidental dwelling fires, injuries and fatalities.

3. THE IMPACT OF PREVENTION ACTIVITY AND THE HOME FIRE SAFETY CHECK

- 3.1. Fires and fire fatalities in the UK have reduced dramatically since the mid 1990's, from around 600 fire fatalities a year in accidental dwelling fires to around 200 a year currently. In the late 1980's, smoke alarm ownership was below 10%. This has increased over the years with ownership now reaching 90%. The prevention activity undertaken by fire and rescue services contributed to the reduction in fires and fatalities and the increase in smoke alarm ownership. However, it is recognised that this is not the only reason that has contributed to this reduction.
- 3.2. Various other factors have helped to reduce fires and fire fatalities, such as improved furniture regulation, increased regulation for electrical installation and a reduction in the use of chip pans (in 1994 chip pans accounted for 20% of accidental dwelling fires, by 2017 this had reduced to 6%). A dramatic reduction in the number of people who smoke (in 2001 this was 27% of the population, reducing to 16% by 2016). There has also been an increase in fire prevention activity in the home by fire and rescue services. Fire prevention activity is now a statutory responsibility for fire services with the introduction of the Fire Services Act 2004 following the Bain report recommendations to Government in 2002.
- 3.3. From 2004-2008, the Government funded the home fire safety visit for fire and rescue services through a grant of £25 million over 4 years. This front loaded the ability for fire and rescue services to introduce the home fire safety visit where firefighters would visit people's homes to talk about how to reduce the risk of fire and fit a smoke alarm. Independent research has suggested that there was a 57% reduction in accidental dwelling fires during this period. This highlights the benefits of fire and rescue services carrying out prevention work in the form of a home fire safety visit and the real value that can be added to our communities through this prevention activity.
- 3.4. London Fire Brigade undertook an evaluation study using an independent consultant in 2013. This used 6 years data with over 400,000 home fire safety visits. It compared rates of dwelling fires as a proportion of those that had received a visit against those that had not received a visit.
- 3.5. The rate of dwelling fires for those that had received a visit was 2 fires per 10,000 households compared to a rate of 20 fires per 10,000 households for those that had not had a visit.

4. HOME FIRE SAFETY VISITS IN DEVON AND SOMERSET

- 4.1. The home fire safety visit has been in operation to some degree within Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service (the Service) since the late 1990's and early 2000's. However, the way this has been delivered and the form of a home visit has changed over time. The basic concept is that a fire safety check takes place in the home to:
- identify risks of fires starting;
 - identify how to reduce these risks;
 - ensure a smoke alarm is present to alert the residents along with a clear escape plan should a fire occur; and
 - show how to call the fire and rescue service.
- 4.2. Over the past 20 years, the Service's delivery model has included using fire crews to undertake this work, also using specialist staff known as home fire safety technicians, or a combination of both.
- 4.3. In 2015, there was a switch from using fire crews to deliver home fire safety visits, to only using specialist staff. However, this model changed in the summer of 2021 from using only our specialist staff to carry out visits, to using a combination of specialist staff and our wholetime fire crews. This was identified by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Service (HMICFRS) as a model that improves efficiency and increases public safety as a greater number of visits can take place. In effect, crews can carry out a standard visit leaving home safety technicians to concentrate on the very high-risk groups. In 2022, the Service will also be using some on-call operational staff to carry out home fire safety visits.

5. TARGETING AT RISK GROUPS

- 5.1. It is important that the Service targets its resources to the most at risk and vulnerable people in our communities. It is clearly not possible or efficient to visit every home in Devon and Somerset in a timely manner with the resource available, and therefore, a targeted approach allows the Service to focus on those most likely to either have a fire or become a fire fatality.
- 5.2. Through various national studies and regional studies, the Service is aware that some groups are more likely to have a fire. It is also aware of the groups more likely to die in a fire. It is important that these groups are targeted with resources to drive down injuries and fatalities within Devon and Somerset.
- 5.3. The number of fires and fire fatalities in Devon and Somerset fluctuates from year to year but would average in the region of 1000 fires, and up to around 10 fatalities a year. For example:
- 2016/17, there were 925 accidental dwelling fires;
 - 2020/21, there were 795 accidental dwelling fires;
 - 2016/17, there were 202 casualties requiring hospitalisation; and

- 2020/21, there were 148 casualties requiring hospitalisation

- 5.4. Since the start of April 2021, there have been four accidental fire fatalities up to the end of 2021. However, performance is measured up to the end of the financial year (March 2022).
- 5.5. In the financial year 2016/17, there were five accidental dwelling fire fatalities plus one deliberate.
- 5.6. In the financial year 2020-21, there were five accidental fire dwelling fatalities plus five deliberate (there is some complexity when differentiating between deliberate and accidental).
- 5.7. The aim is to have zero accidental fire fatalities in Devon and Somerset. The Service will always investigate any fatality to see if there is more to be done or learned to prevent future fire fatalities.

6. CAPACITY TO DELIVER HOME FIRE SAFETY VISITS

- 6.1. The Service's current capacity to deliver home fire safety visits is based on having 25 full time equivalent technician posts to deliver specialist home fire safety visits to the most vulnerable people likely to die in a fire. The home safety technicians can deliver between 1000 to 1200 visits a month. However, this depends on many factors, for example, if staff leave the Service, or move to new posts, there is a need to recruit and train new people. The Service has also noticed following the Covid-19 pandemic that there are more complex cases due to mental health issues and the physical effects of lockdown on those that were already vulnerable. The more complex cases take more time and, therefore, the average number of visits can decline.
- 6.2. The Service also utilises its whole-time fire crews to target those most at risk of having a fire. Crews were trained during the summer in 2021. It is estimated that in 2021-22, each whole-time watch will be able to deliver 20 home fire safety visits a month. However, this can vary for various reasons. The Service is currently looking at performance as the average delivery is below 20. For example, it has been found that some crews are finding it difficult to get people to engage with them, not wanting the contact due to the risks from the pandemic. Other activities also impact on time available to carry out the visits, for example, operational incidents and core skills training. The understanding of capacity will increase as more information becomes available, so that in the future the Service will be able to make an accurate forecast of delivery capacity.
- 6.3. The Service aims to understand how many people are at very high risk of being injured or killed in a fire. A re-visit strategy is being developed so that those that are identified as needing further support will be visited again within an appropriate timescale. For example, if a person is elderly, their risk profile will change with time, or if they have an illness such as dementia, the risk will increase as the illness evolves and therefore, there will be a need to revisit to ensure the correct level of intervention is available to prevent a fire.

- 6.4. Based on a full establishment of home safety technicians and crews being able to deliver five home fire safety visits a week, it is estimated that capacity for this year is 18,000 visits. For the reasons mentioned above it will be challenging to achieve this number. It is important that the Service continues to seek out the most at risk and not just look for easier visits just to get the numbers up to reach a target. The quality of the visit is the most important aspect in reducing fires and saving lives.
- 6.5. From April to December 2021, over 9,000 home fire safety visits have been carried out. It is estimated that the Service can deliver 13,500 visits this financial year (to March 2022) if this rate of delivery is continued. However, the Service is also looking at increasing capacity in January through to March using newly trained casual staff, and through performance management with our whole-time watches, so the expectation is that the actual number of visits will be higher than 13,500 by year end. In 2019/20, the Service carried out 16,697 home fire safety visits.

7. RISK FACTORS TO TARGET THE MOST VULNERABLE

- 7.1. Of the 16,697 visits carried out in 2019/20, 47% had two or more risk factors. This year to date (to December 2021) of the visits carried out by HFSV technicians, 52.9% had two or more risk factors. The Service aims to target 60% of visits by our home safety technicians at people who have two or more risk factors.
- 7.2. The following risk factors are used for targeting:
- Previous research into fatal fires has shown that those aged over 85 have a much higher rate of fatal fires. This increase starts to rise dramatically for the over 65's and increases with age. Men are twice as likely to die in a fire than Women.
 - In 2020-21 for every million people in England there were 4.2 fire related fatalities.
 - The rate for men aged 65 to 79 is 8.8 per million, rising to 27.5 per million for men over 80.
 - The rate for Women aged 65-79 is 6.3 per million rising to 10.1 per million for Women over 80.
 - The population rise in over 85's is estimated to increase by 34% over the next ten years within Devon and Somerset so this is an increasing risk group that will need to be targeted and resourced.
- 7.3. Other risk factors that have been shown to increase the risk of fire deaths include:
- Limited mobility and disability;
 - Living alone, especially men who drink and smoke;
 - Alcohol and drugs (illegal and medical);
 - Poor housekeeping and hoarding;

- Mental health; and
- Smoking.

- 7.4. Evidence shows that in more than 50% of fatal fires, at least two of these risk factors were present. Other studies have also identified that single parent households and young people aged 16-24 (including students) are also at higher risk of having a fire.
- 7.5. Evidence suggests that people who have had a fire, are at more risk of having another fire, and therefore the risk escalates. The Service has business analysts who work on risk escalation to understand how the risk increases once somebody has had a fire. This information can be factored into the Service's Delivery Strategy for 2022-2025.
- 7.6. After every fatal fire, the Service carries out a review to understand if more could be done to prevent fatalities. Recent emerging evidence is showing a high proportion of fatalities occurring where elderly people who use emollient creams and have mobility issues. In response to this, the Service is running a campaign and changing the way it approaches this risk in home fire safety visits.
- 7.7. The largest cause of accidental domestic fires in England is cooking, accounting for 46% in 2020/21 but only accounting for 10% of fatalities.
- 7.8. Smoking materials accounted for 8% of fires in 2020/21 but 32% of fatalities.
- 7.9. It is also known that, in 2020/2021, 42% of fires occurred in 25% of the day between the hours of 16:00 and 20:00. Fatalities were reasonably evenly distributed throughout the day with the highest number of fatalities occurring between the hours of 10:00-11:00 (8.8%), 05:00-06:00 (6.3%) and 07:00-08:00 (5.8%). *(Source: National Statistics: Detailed analysis of fires attended by fire and rescue services in England April 2020-March 2021).*

8. COMMUNITY SAFETY STRATEGY 2018-2022

- 8.1. The Service's current strategy from 2018 to 2022 identifies four levels of intervention.
- 1) Universal preventative services aimed at low risk people. This takes the form of reminders and low-level campaigns for example to remember to test the smoke alarm or carry out a night time routine.
 - 2) Early Support Services are for people who are generally safe but may require some help for example carrying out a risk assessment in their home to identify and reduce fire risks. This group would normally have working smoke alarms and be able to exit a property in the event of a fire.
 - 3) Targeted Services. This group require a home safety visit and possibly the fitting of an alarm. They would normally have one or more risk factors. Our Fire Crews are able to carry out the visits for this group

- 4) Specialist Services. This group generally would have two or more risk factors and require a more in depth bespoke home fire safety visit that may include working with partner agencies or issuing specialist equipment to reduce risk.

- 8.2. For 2022-2025, the Service will be reviewing the Community Safety strategy to ensure it is aligned with the Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP), the Service Delivery Strategy and other changes that have been brought in since 2018, including the Fire Standard for Prevention and the National Fire Chiefs Council Person Centred Framework for Home Fire Safety Checks. These last two items will be essential in any future HMICFRS inspections as a benchmark against which to grade performance. We will publish a new Community Safety plan for 2022-2025 by the end of March 2022.
- 8.3. The Service's focus from 2022 will be to ensure it has defined the risks correctly using evidence and data to target the people most at risk of fire or dying in a fire. The Service must have the right partners to ensure clients are referred to the home safety team. This involves working closely with the care industry, National Health Service (NHS), social services and other partners.
- 8.4. The Service targets partners that can refer people who have risk factors that indicate they are most likely to die in a fire. Further data will be available in 2022 using census data, NHS health data and information such as areas of deprivation. By overlaying this data, the Service will be able to target the most vulnerable people in the communities within Devon and Somerset.
- 8.5. The Service intends to use its definition of risk to place people into three risk categories as follows:
 - Very high will be those that are known to need extra specialist support - this risk category will be visited by home safety technicians;
 - High risk will receive a visit from operational crews both wholetime and on call; and
 - Medium and low risk will be referred to an online home safety check if they are able to access digital services or will receive further support if not.
- 8.6. The Service will be introducing the 'Safelincs' on-line home fire safety check to signpost our low and medium risk members of our community. This methodology is being supported through the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) which is promoting the use of 'Safelincs' as an option for low and medium risk clients. This will allow the Service to focus its resources on the high and very high risk groups, using fire crews and specialist staff.

9. THE NFCC PERSON CENTRED FRAMEWORK

- 9.1. An important factor to consider is the quality of the visits undertaken. The NFCC has undertaken research and introduced a consistent framework as a benchmark for undertaking home fire safety visits by fire and rescue services nationally.

“The person-centred home fire safety visit should include risk reduction measures around the health, behaviour and wider needs of the individual; not solely the type of premises in which they reside. As it is these underlying causes that can increase an individual’s exposure to fire and can also reduce the chance of them surviving a fire in the home”.

- 9.2. If services are to provide a person-centred home fire safety visit, then the following characteristics should be evident:
- Being person centred means affording people dignity, respect and compassion. These ‘experience standards are basic human rights’.
 - Being person centred means offering coordinated support. This means not just one-off encounters but multiple episodes over time if needed.
 - Being person centred means offering personalised support. This means bespoke interventions tailored towards the individual and discussed and agreed with the individual and family.
 - Being person centred means being enabling. This means seeing people as assets not burdens, to enable them to develop their sense of resourcefulness and build on their range of capabilities to live independent and fulfilling lives.
- 9.3. The home fire safety visit should recognise personal factors, behaviour factors and home factors.
- 9.4. The framework also looks at risk stratification including:
- Who is most likely to have an accidental dwelling fire;
 - who is likely to be injured; and
 - who is likely to be killed in the fire as well as standardising data recording and the core components of a visit. There is a requirement for quality assurance and evaluation.
- 9.5. When the Service first introduced the home fire safety visit, there was a tendency to push for high numbers of visits which often came at the expense of quality. What is now realised is it is the quality of the visit to the most vulnerable that will save lives. We still need to provide capacity to ensure we offer our services to enough people to make a difference. But the quality of the visit should never be compromised in favour quantity.
- 9.6. Recent reviews of fire fatalities have shown that if a bespoke intervention is offered, this could save more lives. This may require working with other partners for the individual such as care providers or offering bespoke equipment either with our partners such as housing providers or encouraging individuals to purchase equipment if they are able. The Service will also supply equipment if the circumstances show that this can stop a fire or fatality and the individual is unable to help themselves.

- 9.7. In addition to the standard equipment of smoke alarms, hard of hearing alarms and fire retardant blankets, the Service is also looking at opportunities to supply various other items such as electrical heaters to replace naked flame heaters and mini-induction hobs to replace gas hobs. The list of equipment the Service is looking to provide is based on evidence from previous incidents.

10. CONCLUSION

- 10.1. Prevention activity is a statutory duty for fire and rescue services. The home fire safety check is a significant tactic in the toolbox that can be utilised to reduce accidental fires and fire fatalities within the home. It is known from experience that people still have fires and die in fires, sometimes even after they have received a visit from the fire service, so there is a need to develop the home fire safety visit to become more person centred and bespoke if we are to further reduce fatalities.
- 10.2. Data analysis is crucial in targeting the right people for home fire safety visits. The Service also has to quality assure and evaluate this work to provide continuous improvement.
- 10.3. The current home safety database that is used for booking visits will soon be replaced by new technology in the form of the Management of Risk Information App (MORI). This, along with good data analysis from our strategic analysts team and business analyst and quality evaluation, will help the Service to understand risk stratification to improve the design and delivery of the home fire safety visit programme along with a revisit schedule based on risk.
- 10.4. A re-structure within the Prevention Department is scheduled for completion by April 2022 and this will create capacity for staff to be able to focus more on risk within the communities of Devon and Somerset. Nationally, the Fire Standards Board and National Fire Chiefs Council are providing support and guidance to fire and rescue services to improve and become better at delivering our services.
- 10.5. As the approach improves, the Service will be able to save more lives. A recent post on social media thanked one of our technicians for saving their mother's life. The technician had fitted a smoke alarm following a home fire safety visit that had alerted her of a fire, enabling the occupant to escape the fire. This is just one example of many, where prevention work and home fire safety visits have saved lives. It is generally accepted that Prevention activity saves more lives, is better for the economy and reduces human misery rather than waiting to respond to an incident. This is why for Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service Prevention and Protection activity is the number one priority.

ACFO PETE BOND
Director of Service Delivery