

# Home Fire Safety Visits Programme

## Report of the Chief Fire Officer

For further information about this report please contact Paul Raymond, Chief Fire Officer, on 01743 260205 or John Redmond, Deputy Chief Fire Officer, on 01743 260278.

### 1 Purpose of Report

Members will be aware of the outcomes of the Public Value process and the changes that need to be made to meet the reduction in the Service budget in the coming years. This report is intended to inform Members of the future policy with regard to Home Fire Safety Risk Visits (HFSRVs).

As part of our Public Value approach we are looking to maximise the use of our resources to match the reduction in funding in future years. This means that, although the objective of "Putting Shropshire's Safety First" remains our principal aim, we will be focusing more strongly on our highest risk populations, which will in turn mean a more focussed "precision prevention" approach. We will be advising people in our communities to take more responsibility for their own fire safety, for instance people assessed as being low risk will be advised to purchase their own smoke alarms.

The ultimate aim is to meet our planned reductions in the smoke alarm and HFSRV budget in the next two years. It is important that we reassure our communities that we still see their safety as paramount and give them ample notice of the change in emphasis to a policy that has, for the last ten years, advocated free smoke alarms for all who request them.

### 2 Recommendations

The Fire Authority is asked to note the contents of this report.

### 3 Background

Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) has been very successful in delivering effective community safety initiatives for a number of years. These initiatives have led to a steady decline in the numbers of fires and other emergencies that the community has had to deal with.

The principal method, by which the Service has delivered education in prevention, detection and escape, has been through the Home Fire Safety Risk Visits (HFSRVs) programme. Over the last ten years the Service has completed over 75,000 HFSRVs in the communities of Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin, fitting in the region of 80,000 smoke alarms in the process. HFSRVs have been delivered by both full-time and part-time staff on a risk-assessed approach.

The Programme generated HFSRVs amongst those at risk in the local community in a variety of ways:

- Self referral by individuals via a phone number or leaflet provided by SFRS
- Referral from partner organisations, such as Age Concern
- Referral by local station personnel, based on local knowledge
- Cold calling on properties in areas that research shows are likely to contain populations at higher risk of fires in dwellings.

The aim is still to ensure that every dwelling in SFRS area has a working smoke alarm.

## **4 Target Groups**

We know from research that we can target those people in the community, who are most at risk from fires and other emergencies. So, although every dwelling needs a working smoke alarm, SFRS will use its resources to target these groups of people.

The annual UK fire statistics show that older people have a much higher death rate from fire and so are at a much higher risk. The trend in Shropshire has mirrored the national picture.

Other priority groups are:

- Lone parents with dependent children
- People who have never worked
- Single person households
- People from poor socio-economic backgrounds, on low income, in poor health etc.
- People with lifelong mobility-related illnesses.

Changes in funding to deliver HFSRVs are not planned to take place until 2013/14. Our overall strategy remains unchanged, however, our targeting within the strategy will ensure that we reach those most at risk but least able to help themselves and move away from the universal distribution of free smoke alarms paid for by the Service.

## **5 What Will this Mean?**

The changes we are introducing will mean that, whereas in the past we have been focussing on a free smoke alarm in every home in our area even if it meant that we delivered it as part of a HFSRV, in future we will expect those people in our communities that can afford to buy a smoke alarm (they cost less than £10 per unit) to purchase one and then fit them in their own homes. SFRS will still provide advice on prevention, detection and escape, if they request it. The intention is to use the next two years to gradually educate the population to be more self reliant with regard to their own safety. We are particularly keen to get the message across to the “worried well” in our society, i.e. people who are actually living lives with relatively few low level risks but are convinced they are at a higher risk.

## **6 Focussing on Risk**

The strategy is being supported by a communications strategy to inform the community of our continuing focus on those most at risk. Apart from the need to make the best use of SFRS resources, national and local statistics show that, of the dwelling fires we attend, only 40% of them have a working smoke alarm fitted. This means that, of those dwellings actually having a fire, only 40% of them have early warning via a smoke alarm. This is an area we need to improve on via the HFSRV programme.

It must be emphasised that the strategy is intended to be wholly fail-safe in that we will always deliver HFSRVs, if there is any doubt about people’s safety and their ability to help themselves

## **7 Activities to Support the Approach**

We are reviewing our communications strategy to ensure we are focussing on those most at risk and least able to help themselves. This is best achieved by working with partners, e.g. the local health services, who are already dealing with “at risk” people, whether due to physical or mental infirmity. We have a number of existing partnerships, e.g. with local health providers, and we have recently added the Primary Care Trust to this group.

We are piloting a scheme in Ludlow at present that will access those people, who we know are at risk, based on national statistics of those involved in fires. Our aim is to provide this group with an HFSRV and smoke alarm, if required.

## **8 Conclusion**

It must be emphasised that this is not a fundamental change to our HFSRV programme. Indeed, all we are actually doing is refining it in the light of ten years of experience. This experience shows us that there are a large number of people, who are at low risk from fire and are capable of looking after their own safety, assisted by the information we provide via the website and community events.

In future our policy is to direct them to local providers of smoke alarms and sources of information such as the guidance that comes with the smoke alarm and also fire safety web sites.

The message to our staff and the public is that the policy is not rigid and staff are encouraged to use their discretion in providing information and free smoke alarms to those, who they feel need them. We will always err on the side of caution, when receiving requests or identifying people who feel they need help.

## 9 Financial Implications

The policy supports the Medium Term Financial Plan through the Public Value process.

## 10 Legal Comment

There are no direct legal implications arising from this report.

## 11 Equality Impact Assessment

An Initial Equality Impact Assessment has been completed.

## 12 Appendices

There are no appendices attached to this report.

## 13 Background Papers

There are no background papers associated with this report.

Implications of all of the following have been considered and, where they are significant (i.e. marked with an asterisk), the implications are detailed within the report itself.

Business Continuity Planning		Member Involvement	
Capacity	*	National Framework	
Civil Contingencies Act		Operational Assurance	
Efficiency Savings	*	Public Value	*
Environmental		Retained	
Financial		Risk and Insurance	
Fire Control/Fire Link		Staff	
Information Communications and Technology		Strategic Planning	
Freedom of Information / Data Protection / Environmental Information		Equality Impact Assessment	*
Legal			