

Resources and Fire and Rescue Overview and Scrutiny Committee

13 September 2017

Fire Deaths in Warwickshire between 3 January and 24 February 2017

Recommendation

That the Resources and Fire and Rescue Overview and Scrutiny Committee receive and note the contents of this report.

1.0 Introduction

1.1 During the first two months of 2017, Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service (WFRS) attended a number of accidental dwelling fires, three of which had fatal consequences for the occupants of the properties. This increase in fire fatalities was in contrast to the performance data available for the previous four years which showed that the County had only one fire related death during that time.

1.2 There are many Communities and Local Government publications, as well as independent research documents, which demonstrate the value that the preventative work carried out by fire and rescue services nationally has had on the impact of reducing fire deaths. It is also firmly believed, and recognised by Government, that the proactive community fire safety work undertaken by fire and rescue services (FRSs) has helped to reduce these numbers significantly. It is also worth noting that WFRS has undertaken this proactive approach with a prevention department which is operating from a limited position. This has inhibited the department's ability to carry out further proactive work in the delivery of community safety to those most vulnerable in the community. However, this was recognised by Warwickshire County Council (WCC) who awarded an additional £200k for the prevention department in its 2017/18 budget to assist with development and delivery in this area. Following the three fatal fires, and to ensure that the increased funding is used appropriately, WFRS invited Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) to undertake a review of its prevention department. SFRS is recognised as a good performing service in community safety and WFRS has a strong regional relationship with them. The scope of the review was four fold:-

- The overall structure, roles and governance for prevention and community safety;
- WFRS's direction of travel and to test how the corporate vision and business plan is embedded throughout the Service (with particular emphasis on practitioners);
- WFRS's use of data as a means of intelligence to drive priorities and the delivery of outcomes;

- The identification of opportunities to improve the delivery of community safety by WFRS and its partners.

1.3 The summary of findings of this review in conjunction with the outcomes of the investigations into the three fire related deaths, has assisted the Service in ensuring the additional funding will be used in the most appropriate way to support partnership working and to further improve the delivery of community safety to those most vulnerable.

1.4 It is unfortunate that, in the space of a few weeks, Warwickshire had three fire fatalities in separate accidental dwelling fire incidents. However there are similarities in each of the incidents. This report will identify the similarities and the concerns that these raise and identify a way forward for the Service and its engagement with other agencies.

2.0 Background

2.1 Between 3 January 2017 and 24 February 2017, three fatal accidental dwelling fires took place in three separate districts of the County, namely Stratford, Warwick and Rugby. The incidents all took place in daylight hours and the first fire engine was in attendance within ten minutes of the initial calls being received by Service Control. Following each incident, the fire officer with responsibility for that geographic area undertook a review of the incident and prepared a short report with a number of recommendations. Due to the fatalities, a full fire investigation was also undertaken by a specialist Fire Investigation Officer and a report written detailing the cause of the fire. The Fire Officer is then required to attend Coroner's Court and present the findings of the report, this assists with the Coroner's determination as to the cause of death. The following areas of concern were highlighted within the reports:-

- All three casualties lived alone;
- All three casualties were trapped and unable to self-rescue, due to either mobility issues and/or alcohol/drug dependency
- All three casualties lived in council, district, borough or housing association properties;
- All three properties had smoke detection facilities which were not linked or monitored;
- Two out of the three casualties were known to other agencies and classed as vulnerable;
- All three casualties were known to be heavy smokers;
- All three casualties suffered with ill-health;
- As vulnerable persons, only one property had received a Home Fire Safety Check (HFSC) a number of years previously.

2.2 These issues can be clearly linked to the following factors which have been identified nationally as increasing an individual's risk from fire in the home:-

- Smoking;
- Living alone;
- Alcohol/drugs dependency;
- Lack of mobility;
- Elderly.

2.3 Fire Service Investigators and insurers both concluded that overloaded power sockets caused two of the fires and carelessness with smoking materials was identified as the cause of the third fire. This shows a similarity to the previous fire death in the County which was also caused by carelessness with smoking materials.

3.0 Current position

3.1 It was WFRS's aim to undertake a combined review with other partners; unfortunately an appropriate opportunity to meet did not arise which was disappointing as this would have been an ideal opportunity to review a partnership approach to such incidents. WFRS are still committed to moving this forward, encouraging a review to take place and any lessons learned to be recorded and acted upon. Indeed, the summary of findings from SFRS's review identifies the need to refresh and implement a policy that outlines and supports this approach to reviewing fatal fires in order to gain more understanding about the root causes involved and to identify actions to reduce the likelihood of further re-occurrence. This would also act as an enabler to promote engagement with partners and Fire Authority members.

3.2 WFRS delivers a Fire Safety in the Home programme to all school children in Warwickshire. These sessions are conducted in Years 1, 5 and 7 and move progressively from a basic home fire safety message to developing a fire escape plan, undertaking a self-assessed home fire safety check and fire prevention in the home. The Service also delivers a programme of targeted Safe and Wellbeing Checks. These checks should be delivered to those most vulnerable in our community, not just the elderly but also those known to be living on their own with health and wellbeing issues such as illness, alcohol/drug addiction and mobility problems.

3.3 However, these incidents have highlighted that there are gaps around data sharing related to vulnerable people. This data, which may be held by partner agencies, is one of the keys required to reaching those most vulnerable within the community. This was highlighted within the SFRS review as an area which should be explored further in order to achieve a more targeted response to and delivery of the Safe and Wellbeing checks; in particular the opportunity to increase the number of referrals from domiciliary care companies, particularly those commissioned by the County Council, to identify fire risk and refer to WFRS for a Safe and Wellbeing visit.

This arrangement could be considered as a specification of any contracts awarded; however, there would need to be a commitment from WFRS to undertake a training programme to care companies in order to achieve this.

- 3.4 The vast majority of fire deaths throughout the UK have the same profile; elderly, living alone with mobility and potential health issues, smoker or substance dependency issues. It is these individuals who are usually known to one or more agencies and the sharing of this information is seen, nationally, as vital in supporting the future reduction of fire deaths in accidental dwelling fires.
- 3.5 The SFRS review highlighted the need for WFRS to undertake further work to enable them to enhance engagement with partner agencies and encourage an increased amount of Safe and Wellbeing visits, which could be tailored to the needs of key health partners such as the Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs), Public Health and other partners within the County Council. In order for this to take place an appropriate resource needs to be identified, funded and established.
- 3.6 The SFRS review reported that WFRS is delivering good overall outcomes with the resources available to them. This includes its commitment to education through the schools education programme, the Junior Fire Safety Champion scheme and the Heart Shield scheme which has been commissioned in partnership with Public Health. The Integrated Risk Management Plan 2017/20 (IRMP) has clear direction around supporting the delivery of community safety and the wider health agenda to those most vulnerable in Warwickshire. In order to achieve these outcomes, the Service has developed a suite of local business plans which should assist these outcomes to be measured and achieved.

4.0 Conclusion

- 4.1 WFRS has one of the smallest Prevention teams in the Country but continues to perform well and there are many positive aspects in the way in which the community safety programme is delivered. Three fatal fires in a very short space of time is not a crisis; however it does warrant the Service undertaking a review of how its prevention message is highlighted and delivered.
- 4.2 In order to ensure that the work of the Service maintains a positive impact upon Warwickshire's communities, WFRS needs to focus further on how it evaluates the impact of its community safety work to demonstrate its value and to ensure that opportunities are identified to improve both the quality and quantity of interventions such as school visits, Safe and Wellbeing visits and partnership working. There is a need for this to be properly resourced and funded.
- 4.3 The Service needs to consider how and where to concentrate its efforts to ensure that it is working as effectively as possible, ensuring that information sharing, tasking, resourcing, delivery and partnership working is maximised to improve outcomes across organisational and possibly geographical boundaries.

5.0 Way forward

5.1 Following the recent fire deaths, the Service has reflected on its current delivery and priorities for community safety. This is further enhanced by the review undertaken by a recognised good performing neighbouring fire and rescue service. The key findings from this have led the Service to introduce a number of changes to the way it structures and delivers community safety to the most vulnerable persons in the community. The following four areas will see the Service invest the additional £200,000 allocated within the 2017/18 budget to improve the service we provide to the residents of Warwickshire:-

- **Capacity and priorities.** The size, shape and capacity within the team has been reviewed to identify gaps and opportunities to invest in further skills, knowledge and resources;
- **Use of data.** Greater use of data and intelligence is fundamental to delivering the ambitions set out in the IRMP and the Service is recruiting a dedicated Prevention, Partnership and Policy manager. Working with partners will enhance the Service's ability to more accurately target the most vulnerable people in the community;
- **Increase the number of Safe and Wellbeing Checks.** Linked to the better use of data is the requirement for an appropriate number of technicians who can deliver more enhanced interventions to support the universal Safe and Wellbeing visits currently undertaken by frontline staff. The Service is recruiting a number of new technicians to fulfil this role. Assuming that appropriate data is available, this will enhance the Service's ability to reduce the risk of fire to those who are deemed to be most vulnerable from such risk;
- **The use of local resources to deliver Community Safety.** The ability to deliver community safety in the more rural areas of the County is a challenge when only utilising whole time firefighters located in the larger towns. The Service aims to make better use of retained firefighters to deliver community safety in their local communities. The recruitment of a Retained Duty System (RDS) Development Officer will allow for the upskilling of operational RDS fire fighters to deliver all aspects of community safety work, including safe and wellbeing visits, to members of the community in the most rural parts of the County.

5.2 The items above have been funded by an additional £200,000 allocated by the County Council to the Fire and Rescue Service in 2017/18. The Service will invest this funding in extra capacity during 2017/18 to develop and implement partnership arrangements, policies and processes with the aim to improve the level of community safety delivered by WFRS. The success of this investment will be measured by specific outputs and outcomes, including an increase in the number of safe and well visits delivered to vulnerable members of the community, a reduction in the number of preventable fire deaths and the number of accidental dwelling fires and introduction of a more robust targeting and delivery process through partnership working. None of the outcomes can

be truly quantified until the processes have been fully developed and introduced, in line with the partnership approach. Only then can the margin of the expected outcome be appropriately reviewed and analysed. These will be measured at business unit level and reported through the One Organisational Plan Quarterly report.

- 5.3 The Prevention, Partnership and Policy manager will be responsible for looking at ways to mainstream the new work processes through the many different ways of partnership working, grant funding and sharing of resources.

	Name	Contact Information
Report Author	AC Bruce Nichol	brucenichol@warwickshire.gov.co.uk Tel: 01926 423231
Head of Service	DCFO Rob Moyney	robmoyney@warwickshire.gov.uk
Strategic Director	CFO Andy Hickmott	andyhickmott@warwickshire.gov.uk
Portfolio Holder	Howard Roberts	howardroberts@warwickshire.gov.uk

The report was circulated to the following members prior to publication:

- | | |
|------------------------------------|--|
| Councillor Howard Roberts - | Portfolio Holder for Fire and Community Safety |
| Councillor Heather Timms – | Chair for Resources and Fire & Rescue OSC |
| Councillor Parminder Singh Birdi – | Vice Chair for Resources and Fire & Rescue OSC |
| Councillor Sarah Boad - | Party Spokesperson for Resources and Fire & Rescue OSC |
| Councillor Maggie O'Rourke - | Party Spokesperson for Resources and Fire & Rescue OSC |