

Report of Area Commander, Community Risk & Training

Houses of Multiple Occupation: Project Update

Purpose of report

1. This briefing paper provides a six month update on the Houses of Multiple Occupation project being delivered by the Community Risk Department.
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Recommendations

It is recommended that:

- i) Members note the success of the project to date:***
 - ***an additional 157 business fire safety checks have been carried out so far;***
 - ***a third of which resulted in further enforcement action; and***
 - ***112 residents are now living in safer conditions where the risk of harm or injury from fire has been considerably reduced.***
- ii) A full evaluation report be produced at the conclusion of the 12 month project.***

Introduction and Background

2. At the Policy and Resources Committee meeting on 21 March 2016, approval was given for the funding of a twelve month project focussing on Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMO) type premises. The approved funding of £60,000 from Service reserves is being used to employ two additional temporary Community Risk (CR) technicians (£42,366), with the remaining funds allocated to project costs, and a temporary promotion.
3. The previous report provided evidence that whilst HMOs were present in the two counties, it was residential accommodation above commercial properties that presented potential fire safety issues. Breaches in fire safety by rogue landlords had been identified as a concern by HWFRS fire safety officers, Local Authorities, the UK Border Agency, and the Police.
4. The aim of the project is to identify fire safety issues in unlicensed HMOs and residential accommodation above commercial premises, exposing non-compliant landlords where vulnerability of tenants may be considerably higher. HWFRS have been involved nationally, working with other Services on behalf of CFOA, regarding revisions to the LACORS guidance (fire safety within HMO type premises). This project will therefore provide valuable evidence, which may be used to support recommended national guidance.

- The twelve-month initiative links directly to the **Community Risk** department strategy *Business Fire Safety Objective* - “to work with our businesses to ensure they are properly protected.”

Six-Month Update

- The project started in August 2016, following an external recruitment process, training, and handover with existing Community Risk department staff. A desktop review was completed for the following areas: Kington, St Johns (Worcester), Evesham and Droitwich. The review focussed on existing Fire Authority data for each area, Google mapping, and street observations and identified potential tenanted residential properties above commercial premises.
- Business Fire Safety Checks (BFSCs) revealed that the main fire safety risk concerned the means of escape from residential accommodation into business areas. Other concerns included inadequate fire detection and warning systems, and excessive fire loading (for example the storage of retail stock in escape routes).
- To date the following outcomes have been achieved:

| | Kington | St Johns | Evesham | Droitwich | Total |
|--|---------|----------|---------|-----------|-------|
| Properties identified | 34 | 44 | 107 | 49 | 234 |
| Business Fire Safety Checks completed | 22 | 32 | 70 | 33 | 157 |
| Enforcements / Prohibitions / NODs issued | 4 | 12 | 33 | 2 | 51 |
| Potential number of lives protected | 8 | 21 | 77 | 6 | 112 |
| Residential only properties contacted whilst in area | 77 | 78 | 65 | On-going | 220 |
| HFSCs completed by HMO project team | 9 | 4 | 3 | On-going | 16 |

- 32% of the BFSCs undertaken during the pilot have resulted in further fire safety officer intervention and/or enforcement action in respect of circumstances which had the potential to expose the 112 residents living within those HMOs to a greater risk of injury or harm from fire (based on the number of sleeping facilities prohibited). In addition, whilst on site, the team identified other residential properties not linked to businesses and delivered Home Fire Safety Check (HFSCs) information to approximately 220 homes. This has resulted in the HMO project team completing 16 ad-hoc visits (further HFSCs are being dealt with directly by central CR staff).

Look Forward

10. Following the completion of inspections at identified properties in Droitwich, the project team will commence work in Kidderminster based upon historical incident trends and local inspecting officer's knowledge, focussing initially in the Horsefair area. Further locations will be targeted during the remaining months of the project.
11. An additional benefit of having two extra CR department technicians is the ability to support community risk initiatives currently being delivered, providing greater departmental resilience, and contributing to the wider health and wellbeing agenda.

Conclusion/Summary

12. This paper provides a six-month update for the HMO project, which identifies fire safety issues in unlicensed HMOs and residential accommodation above commercial premises, and highlights the significant fire safety intervention that has been achieved in the first six months. Headline figures demonstrate the value of the project: 32% of BFSCs have resulted in enforcement, and 112 residents are living in safer conditions where the risk of harm or injury from fire has been considerably reduced through this pilot.

Corporate Considerations

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| Resource Implications (identify any financial, legal, property or human resources issues) | The initial funding of £60,000 will be utilised by the end of twelve-month period (end July 2017). To continue the project additional resources need to be approved. |
| Strategic Policy Links (identify how proposals link in with current priorities and policy framework and if they do not, identify any potential implications). | The project has demonstrated how the Service delivers the Core Purpose of 'Our Strategy', and meets the CR Strategy 'business fire safety' objective. |
| Risk Management / Health & Safety (identify any risks, the proposed control measures and risk evaluation scores). | Whilst the risk based audit programme (RBAP) will continue as core fire safety business, this targeted project approach is based on an intelligence led audit programme (ILAP). |
| Consultation (identify any public or other consultation that has been carried out on this matter) | Potential new working arrangements for CR Dept. technicians will require consultation with RBs, and potential job description alterations. |
| Equalities (has an Equalities Impact Assessment been completed? If not, why not?) | No, the report concerns a six-month project update on the HMO initiative, where additional resources have targeted fire safety issues identified in HMO type premises. |

Supporting Information

Background papers – Policy and Resources Committee report: Houses of Multiple Occupation, dated 21 March 2016.

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