

Report of the Head of Community Risk & Training

8. Houses of Multiple Occupation

Purpose of report

1. This report presents a proposal to target additional resources to Houses of Multiple Occupation type premises, regarding fire safety matters, to the Policy and Resources Committee.
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Recommendation

It is recommended that Members endorse the proposal to release £60,000 of resources to enable a 12 month project to be completed, targeting fire safety within Houses of Multiple Occupation type premises.

Introduction and Background

2. At the full FRA meeting on 17th February 2016 Members requested that a proposal considering fire safety matters within Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMOs) be brought to the Policy and Resources Committee. The following report presents a proposal to conduct a twelve month fire safety project relating to HMOs and similar properties, targeting vulnerable people living in areas of social deprivation and non-compliant landlords.
3. A House of Multiple Occupation is a property that is shared by three or more tenants who are not of the same family. HMOs are regulated by Local Authorities, who are responsible for enforcing HMO standards, including fire safety provisions in accommodation and common parts using the Local Government Regulations. Fire safety in the common parts of a HMO are regulated by the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005, which defines the landlord as the responsible person.
4. At present, fire safety officers inspect HMOs when Local Authority Housing Officers request advice. The Community Risk departments current fire safety risk based audit programme (RBAP) shows 72 HMOs, 28 Other Sleeping (residential), and 21 Hostels, which equate to approximately 0.7% of the total RBAP. This comprehensive inspection regime, completed by trained experienced staff, clearly identifies that there are very few fire safety issues identified within our two counties concerning HMOs.
5. However, evidence suggests unlicensed HMOs are present within the two counties, with residential accommodation above commercial properties also becoming common place. Recent activity between the UK Border Agency, Police, Local Authority and HWFRS fire safety officers has identified breaches in fire safety matters by rogue landlords. Having the opportunity to investigate this area of fire safety, specifically targeting these types of premises will

provide additional research and evidence, which may inform future fire safety strategies.

Proposal

6. It is proposed that £60,000 of Service Reserves are made available to be used in a project led by the Community Risk Department that encompasses its primary functions of focusing upon both educating and engaging with responsible landlords, and where necessary targeting enforcement action towards the growing number of unlicensed HMOs.
7. This will be achieved through the temporary transfer of a Crew Commander into the department and the creation of two temporary Community Risk Technician posts for a period of twelve months. The three posts, a Crew Commander and two Community Risk Technicians will work directly with both Fire Safety and Local Authority Housing officers to identify potential unlicensed HMOs. Other premises of interest in areas of social deprivation will include residential accommodation above commercial properties where potential fire safety issues may be present, and vulnerability of tenants be higher.
8. The proposed twelve month project staffing on-costs are based upon the Service currently having a wholetime uniformed firefighter establishment above its authorised levels whilst it reduces its overall number of uniformed personnel through early retirements and voluntary redundancies. Therefore the temporary promotion of a Firefighter to a Crew Commander will cost an additional £4,320 and two Community Risk Technicians cost £42,366 (£21,168 per post); totalling £46,656. It should be noted by the Authority that once the Service has reached a point of equilibrium with its authorised establishment levels the cost of an additional Crew Commander would be £42,963.
9. The remaining allocation of resources of approximately £13,000 will be used to purchase additional smoke alarms and develop specific media campaigns to raise the level of awareness of HMO tenants and landlords.
10. Following the twelve month period a project report will be prepared and presented, it will review the findings and thus inform Community Risk strategy and resourcing in the future.

Conclusion/Summary

11. Whilst HWFRS's existing RBAP is a robust inspection regime, a proposal to carryout a twelve month fire safety project relating to HMOs and similar properties was requested by the Authority during their meeting held on 17th February 2016. This targeted project proposes embedding two temporary staff within Local Authorities and existing fire safety teams. The project will attempt to identify fire safety issues in unlicensed HMOs and residential above commercial premises, exposing non-compliant landlords, where vulnerability of tenants maybe considerably higher.

Corporate Considerations

Resource Implications (identify any financial, legal, property or human resources issues)	The proposal requires £60,000 of resources to be allocated to the Community Risk Department for a twelve month period.
Strategic Policy Links (identify how proposals link in with current priorities and policy framework and if they do not, identify any potential implications).	The proposal will help to demonstrate how the Service delivers the Core Purpose of 'Our Strategy'.
Risk Management / Health & Safety (identify any risks, the proposed control measures and risk evaluation scores).	None.
Consultation (identify any public or other consultation that has been carried out on this matter)	None.
Equalities (has an Equalities Impact Assessment been completed? If not, why not?)	No, the report concerns additional resources being allocated to enable a targeted fire safety project to be carried out.

Supporting Information

None

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