

## **Report of Area Commander, Community Risk & Training**

### **Houses of Multiple Occupation: Project Update**

#### **Purpose of report**

1. This briefing paper provides a twelve month update on the Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMOs) project being delivered by the Community Risk Department.
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#### **Recommendations**

##### ***It is recommended that:***

##### ***i) The success of the project to date be noted***

- ***an additional 526 business fire safety checks have been completed, resulting in enforcement action being taken against 91 premises; and***
- ***358 residents are now living in safer conditions where the risk of harm or injury from fire has been considerably reduced.***

##### ***ii) The continuation of the project for a further 12 months at a cost of circa £73,000, which would be met from the Organisational Development Reserve be approved.***

#### **Introduction and Background**

2. In March 2016 the Fire Authority Policy & Resources Committee agreed to release £60,000 from reserves to fund a twelve month project targeting fire safety in Houses of Multiple Occupation and residential accommodation above commercial premises.
3. The aim of the project has been to expose fire safety issues in unlicensed HMOs and residential accommodation above commercial premises where the vulnerability of tenants may be considerably higher, leading to non-compliant landlords being identified.
4. Due to the recruitment and training of staff the effective start date of the project was August 2016.
5. In March 2017 the Fire Authority Policy & Resources Committee received a six month update.

## Twelve-Month Update

6. The project team have continued to proactively target mixed use premises (residential above commercial) in order to tackle potential fire safety issues created by rogue landlords and unlicensed HMOs.
7. Based upon the emerging trends that have been identified through the delivery of this project, the Service is planning to examine its current approach to regulatory services which is delivered through the Risk Based Audit Programme (RBAP).
8. Some aspects of the initial scope of the project have not been achieved as planned, such as embedding staff into local authority offices. This was deliberately not progressed further as it was identified as being too onerous and granular in its approach as it took the focus away from targeting relevant premises in local communities across the Service area. However, the work undertaken by the project team is naturally developing much stronger and wider partner relationships with the police, trading standards and housing authorities.
9. As a direct consequence of the project there has been a significant increase in fire safety enforcements meaning that affected residents are living in safer conditions where the risk of harm or injury from fire has been considerably reduced or eliminated by this project.
10. The table attached to this report as Appendix A provides a summary of the project activities and outcomes for the twelve month period.
11. 17% of the Business Fire Safety Checks (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 358 residents living within those HMOs to a greater risk of injury or harm from fire (based on the number of sleeping facilities prohibited).
12. 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 341 homes. This has resulted in the HMO project team completing 17 ad-hoc visits (further HFSCs are being dealt with directly by central Community Risk staff).
13. Generally across the pilot the uptake of HFSCs was poor and the team were unable to influence this. As the project matured, less importance was placed on this because where business premises were considered to be a danger to the occupants living above the commercial premises enforcement action was taken.
14. Areas for inspection were identified by the project team liaising with local fire crews, examining incident data or applying their professional judgment and knowledge. Through this process the *total number* of business premises in the relevant area was identified.

15. The *actual number* of premises to be targeted was identified by conducting a desktop survey which removed those premises considered to be low risk, e.g., those premises covered by the scope of the Primary Authority Scheme or recently inspected through the existing RBAP.
16. All of the target premises within a relevant area received a Business Fire Safety Check (BFSC) and, where necessary, a full fire safety inspection.
17. As a consequence of the number of audits which led to a full fire safety inspection and subsequently enforcement action being required, it became evident an experienced Business Fire Safety Risk Assessor (non-uniformed post) would need to be temporarily moved across into the project from within the Community Risk Department. This resulted in a vacancy arising in the department as the post was not back-filled for the period of the project.
18. From the original budget allocation of £60,000 the project has used circa £56,000, the underspend equates to a crew commander vacancy which was unused as it was originally intended to temporary promote a firefighter to crew commander to provide managerial oversight of the project.
19. Other significant benefits of this project being delivered include the premises database (CFRMIS) being updated in each area to accurately reflect the geography and the strengthening of relationships with partner agencies leading to shared intelligence and joint working.
20. The project has achieved its objective: *'to provide additional research and evidence which may inform future fire safety strategies'*.

### **Other Considerations**

21. The current HMO project team are currently employed on lower pay scales than the actual substantive posts are anticipated to require, based upon similar roles within the existing Community Risk Department structure.
22. It is anticipated the appropriate scale posts for the project would be 1 x Business Fire Safety Regulator (Level 4 Diploma) PO1 post costing £41,680 and 2 x Business Fire Safety Risk Assessor (Level 4 Certificate) posts costing £58,140. The cost of these three posts would be off-set by transferring an existing Business Fire Safety Risk Assessor (£29,070) post within the Community Risk structure into this project, resulting in an overall additional salary cost of circa £71,000.
23. The extension of the project would require the department to continue hiring an additional vehicle to support its delivery across the Service at a cost of £2,000.
24. There is early evidence to suggest greater risk to both staff and the organisation in terms of aggressive behaviour towards, and complaints made against, inspectors. The Service is exploring how this risk may be reduced or mitigated by

the introduction of body worn video and personal safety training, the cost of which is being identified.

## **Conclusion/Summary**

25. This paper provides a twelve-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 during the project.
26. Headline figures demonstrate the value of the project: 17% of BFSCs have resulted in enforcement, and 358 residents are now living in safer conditions where the risk of harm or injury from fire has been considerably reduced through this pilot.
27. Based upon the findings of this update report it would be sensible to continue with this pilot for a further twelve months; this would allow the Service to review the current structure of the Community Risk Department in order to consider permanently embedding this activity.

## Corporate Considerations

<b>Resource Implications</b> (identify any financial, legal, property or human resources issues)	The initial funding of £60,000 will be utilised by the end of the twelve-month period (end July 2017). To continue the project additional resources need to be approved.
<b>Strategic Policy Links</b> (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 Community Risk Strategy 'business fire safety' objective.
<b>Risk Management / Health &amp; Safety</b> (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).
<b>Consultation</b> (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 Representative Bodies, and potential job description alterations.
<b>Equalities</b> (has an Equalities Impact Assessment been completed? If not, why not?)	No, the report concerns a twelve-month project update on the HMO initiative, where additional resources have targeted fire safety issues identified in HMO type premises.

## Supporting Information

**Appendix A:** Summary of project activities and outcomes for the twelve month period.

### Background Papers

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

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# Twelve Month Summary

# APPENDIX A

Town	Area	Date From/To	Total business premises identified	Actual business premises targeted (BFSCs)	No. of BFSCs requiring full inspection	No. of full inspections leading to enforcement	Rate of enforcement (% of actual)	Residential premises identified	HFSCs completed	Potential lives saved
Kington	Bridge St, Church St & High St	15/05/2017 – 17/05/2017	36	22	13	7	31	77	10	16
Worcester	St Johns	24/10/2016 – 25/11/2016	59	41	18	5	12	68	4	21
	Lowesmoor	22/05/2017 – 01/06/2017	41	36	13	7	19	16	0	22
	Sidbury	02/06/2017 – 09/06/2017	21	18	7	5	28	3	0	18
	The Tything	13/06/2017 – 31/07/2017	138	102	33	18	18	37	0	45
Evesham	Port St & High St	12/12/2016 – 26/01/2017	134	102	46	12	12	65	3	81
Droitwich	High St, Queens St & Friar St	13/02/2017 – 02/03/2017	69	55	29	8	14.5	20	0	27
Kidderminster	Horsefair, Comberton Hill Mill Street	06/03/2017 – 28/04/2017	98	74	29	17	23	27	0	70
Stourport	High St, York St & Bridge St	20/03/2017 – 13/04/2017	85	76	35	12	16	28	0	57
TOTAL			681	526	223	91	17% (Average)	341	17	358