

WEST MIDLANDS FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

4 FEBRUARY 2013

1. HOME SAFETY CHECKS

Report of the Chief Fire Officer

RECOMMENDED

THAT the Scrutiny Committee notes the impact of the revised approach to the West Midlands Fire Service (WMFS) Home Safety Check (HSC) policy in identifying eligible vulnerable persons (Appendix 1 Targeting Vulnerable Persons guidelines).

2. PURPOSE OF REPORT

This report has been prepared to outline to the Committee the methodology used in identifying the level of vulnerability of members of our community and to determine eligibility for a HSC.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 In 2011, WMFS reviewed the HSC process. The HSC process identifies potential causes of accidental fires in the home and educates occupiers on how to make changes to their property and their behaviours in order to reduce risk of a fire occurring. HSCs were previously targeted at properties, not the individual. The review concluded that an improved targeting of resources to risk would be more appropriate. The outcome of the review resulted in the introduction on 28 November 2011 of the current HSC points system.
- 3.2 The current HSC process moved away from completing high numbers of HSCs (targeted around 45,000 HSCs per year) to using a point allocation system based on an individual's risk. If the individual is deemed to be minimal risk and does not achieve any points, they are sent a Home Safety Information Pack. If the individual is identified to be of a higher risk they will be offered a full HSC. If the individual is vulnerable and

requires specialist services, they may be referred to a Vulnerable Persons Officer.

This approach encourages more effective engagement with partner organisations working with the most vulnerable people within our communities. Examples of vulnerability include those over 65 years of age, evidence of disorganised living and those who may have difficulty in escaping the property in the event of fire.

Historically, fatal accidental dwelling fires occurred across a range of Mosaic Groups might need a brief description. Following the change to the points system, elderly people reliant on state support are now specifically targeted. The 80-85 age band is the peak age for people fatally injured, accounting for 21% of all accidental dwelling fire fatal casualties for WMFS.

- 3.3 An annual points total for WMFS was set at 150,000 based on assumptions around the average expected points per HSC of 5. These points were established by Community Safety and Statistics using data from previous HSCs. The actual average number of points being achieved is 2.9 which has resulted in the total number of points this financial year so far of 47,258. It is anticipated that the total point score for the financial year will be 76,566 (51.24% of the target) which includes those referrals yet to be completed.
- 3.4 The Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 5 November 2012 asked for further information regarding evaluation of the new HSC points system.
- 3.5 Within the Level 2 Vulnerable Persons Plan there is a requirement for a review to be undertaken of the new points process to ensure WMFS maintains targeting of services to high risk groups. This has been ongoing (asset out in the following paragraphs, 3.6, 3.7, 3.8, 3.9 and 3.10) with a task and finish group established to develop changes to the current HSC workbook.

- 3.6 Further evaluation of the HSC points system has been undertaken by the WMFS Data Team (Appendix 2). It has been recognised that the point scoring system is a critical toolkit in the development of a robust system to deliver home safety messages to individuals. Ongoing collaboration involving the Data Team is an example of how HSCs will be further targeting high risk groups and individuals. A measure of this success is:
- To date during 2012/13 the number of preventable fire deaths is 1 which compares very favourably with the figure of 14 for the same period last year,
 - Accidental dwelling fires are below the long term 3 year average with a 6% decrease for years 2010/11 and 2011/12.
- 3.7 The Contact Centre undertakes a quality assurance process by contacting 5% of individuals who have received a HSC to ascertain if they regularly test their smoke alarm and have changed their behaviours. This information is compared to data identifying areas where there are a high number of accidental dwelling fires. The outcome is the delivery of evaluated targeted prevention campaigns undertaken in specific Wards which reinforce the home safety message and supports the prevention agenda (Appendix 3).
- 3.8 The task and finish group have also reviewed the points allocated against specific risk and determined that some of the risk criteria points should be adjusted to give greater weighting against specific risk. For example currently an individual who smokes receives 0.1 points whilst an individual who is in rented property receives 0.5 points. The proposed change would result in the smoker receiving 1.0 point. The point allocation changes are to be agreed at the next task and finish group meeting which is to be arranged for January 2013.
- 3.9 A recent review of partnership working has identified that there were previously 367 partnerships on the database of which many were no longer current. Following the review there are now 72 current partnerships. This work has encouraged Station Commanders to work more effectively with local partners to assist in the identification of high risk individuals within their community. The focus is on

developing a sustainable HSC referral scheme with more strategic partnerships being generated to share data concerning vulnerability. The Standing Order and associated guidance documents are currently being rewritten to give clarity in developing effective partnership referrals to assist in this process.

- 3.10 In addition to the point scoring refresh, serious incident reviews will continue to identify and shape how points are allocated in the future as part of the ongoing targeting of vulnerable persons Level 2 planning.
- 3.11 The Level 2 Vulnerable Persons Plan identifies that the focus is on achieving 80% of HSC referrals from partners. Currently Station Commanders and Local Area Liaison Officers are working with partners to increase the referral pathways which should ensure that the HSC budget profile will be more realistic next year.
- 3.12 This report identifies the evaluation that has taken place and has provided the opportunity for the Community Safety Section to be more focused on evaluation in the future. Greater collaboration with stakeholders, internally and externally is planned which should assist in the increase in the number of points being achieved, specifically those deemed as at high risk.

4. **EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

In preparing this report an initial Equality Impact Assessment has been carried out. The initial Equality Impact Assessment did not raise any issues which required a full Equality Impact Assessment to be carried out the matters contained within the report do not relate to a policy change.

5. **LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no legal implications arising from this report.

6. **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

The profiled underspend on the HSC budget in the current year was as a result of a number of partnership referrals not being fully created and stock levels being high at the end of the last

financial year. It is anticipated that once these referral pathways are generated, the spending profile will be in line with the budget.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Targeting Vulnerable Persons document 28 November 2011

Accidental Dwelling Fires and Home Safety Checks in the West Midlands April 2009-July 2012.

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VIJ RANDENIYA
CHIEF FIRE OFFICER

TARGETTING VULNERABLE PERSONS

Please see separate report

APPENDIX 2

Accidental Dwelling Fires & Home Safety Checks in the West Midlands: April 2009 – July 2012

Accidental Dwelling fires have been following a decreasing trend over the past 3 years, though levels of fatal accidental dwelling fires have not followed the trend. The Ladywood and Hockley Flyover areas of Birmingham and the Hillfields area of Coventry are the long-term threat areas for accidental dwelling fires, with Home Safety Checks also concentrated around the Birmingham risk areas. Fatal accidental dwelling fires also tended to be scattered across the Birmingham area. Hotspot mapping reveals that there are specific areas within the West Midlands where some of our most vulnerable residents live and can be targeted accordingly. Young people, urban, rented or social housing, diverse communities, vulnerability and state support are all key themes within the Mosaic profiles for dwellings affected by accidental dwelling fires. This profile differs slightly for fatal accidental dwelling fires, where elderly people reliant on state support emerge as one of the prevalent Mosaic groups and the 80-85 age band is the peak age for fatal casualties. Following the change to the Home Safety Check points system, this particular Mosaic group now fall within the top 50 per cent of groups targeted, highlighting how the new system can identify those who are most at risk..

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Levels of Accidental Dwelling Fires

Between the 09/10 and 10/11 financial years, accidental dwelling fires in the West Midlands remained at similar levels with a slight increase of 0.5 per cent (10 incidents). In line with a general decreasing trend seen across a range of incident types, accidental dwelling fires decreased by 6 per cent (121 incidents) between the 10/11 and 11/12 financial years. As at July 2012, levels of accidental dwelling fires were below the long-term three year average:

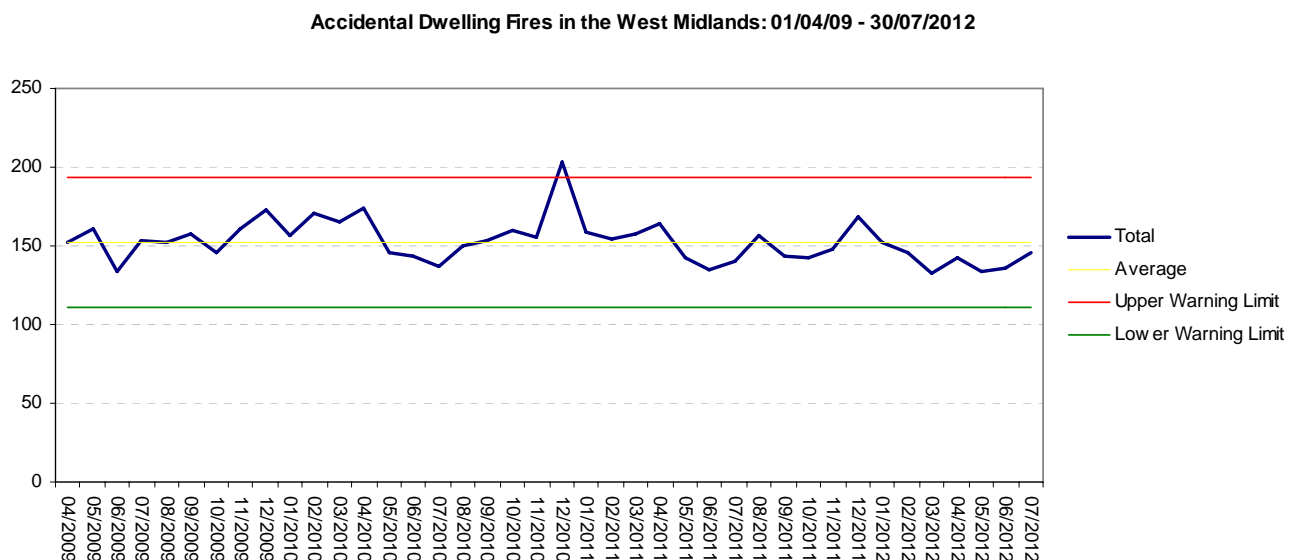


Figure 1 – Accidental Dwelling Fires in the West Midlands: 01/04/09 – 31/07/2012

1.2 Levels of fatal accidental dwelling fires

There were 45 fatalities that occurred as a result of 42 accidental dwelling fires during the period under review. Fatal incident levels have not displayed the same decreasing trend seen across accidental dwelling fires as a whole, with an initial decrease during 2010/11, followed by an increase during 2011/12. The table below shows the number of fatal accidental dwelling fires for each of the financial years under review:

Financial Year	Total No. of Fatal Accidental Dwelling Fires	% Change on previous Year
2009/10	16	-
2010/11	11	-31% (5 less fatalities)
2011/12	18	+64% (7 more fatalities)

Figure 2 – Fatal Accidental Dwelling Fires in the West Midlands by Financial Year

APPENDIX 3

Examples of local campaigns undertaken in areas identified by HSC quality assurance process where individuals are at increased risk.

Photo 1 – example of pharmacy bags which are provided at specific pharmacies in areas where accidental dwelling fires have occurred.



Photo 2 –Bus/Train posters displayed in areas where accidental dwelling fires have occurred.

