



**NOTTINGHAMSHIRE**  
**Fire & Rescue Service**  
*Creating Safer Communities*

Nottinghamshire and City of Nottingham  
Fire and Rescue Authority  
Community Safety Committee

# Vulnerable Persons Update

Report of the Chief Fire Officer

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**Agenda Item No:**

**Date:** 10 January 2014

**Purpose of Report:**

To provide an update to Members regarding the Service's targeting of those most vulnerable to fire in the communities we serve.

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## **1. BACKGROUND**

- 1.1 Nottinghamshire Fire & Rescue Service (NFRS) defines a vulnerable person as “Any person(s) that we, as a Service, consider to be at increased risk of death or injury from fire”.
- 1.2 It is a fundamental aim of NFRS to target vulnerability by working across individual agency boundaries, collecting data to identify risk and engage with these groups as a risk reduction priority.
- 1.3 Home Safety Checks were introduced into NFRS in 2002 as part of the Service’s Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP). Since then Home Safety Checks (HSCs) have become the best tool available to the Service in targeting and reducing fire deaths and injuries in the home.
- 1.4 Upon completing a HSC, the household is given an over-all risk-rating based upon the visual safety check that the firefighters complete. Risk levels can be low, medium, high or very high; and this equates to the likelihood of a fire occurring within the property.
- 1.5 In November 2011 the Service launched a new Vulnerable Person’s policy, targeting the way HSCs are delivered, ensuring NFRS is reaching those most vulnerable to fire.
- 1.6 To-date, NFRS has conducted over 68,000 HSCs in Nottingham and Nottinghamshire. In the last year the percentage of highly vulnerable households NFRS has visited through this scheme has risen from 4.5% to 24%, of all HSCs.
- 1.7 Since 2006 NFRS has experienced 38 fire deaths; of these 4 were known to the Service through HSC visits, 3 had refused visits and 31 were unknown.
- 1.8 Whilst NFRS is steadily improving interaction with vulnerable households it is recognised that the most vulnerable and most likely to experience a fire are the hardest for the Service to reach.

## **2. REPORT**

### **Introduction**

- 2.1 The establishment of the Vulnerable Person’s policy in 2011 has seen the number of referrals from other agencies rise by 45% in the last 2 years.
- 2.2 The involvement the Service has with these agencies will vary on a case by case basis; from the initial referral to joint visits and changes in social care (incorporating fire safety considerations into everyday care) to changes in the home environment itself and on occasion re-location to a safer environment and increased levels of care for the individual. Agencies NFRS regularly work with range from Occupational Therapists, Mental Health Teams, Hospital Discharge Teams, Stroke Support Units, Domiciliary Care Teams to Women’s

Aid, The Police, The Red Cross and many different housing providers and support associations.

- 2.3 Streamlining the referral and targeting process has seen NFRS's involvement with extremely vulnerable individuals increase. Through experience and as the Service's knowledge increases it's appreciated that a standard approach to home safety checks is not always appropriate. NFRS has since changed this response to a more tailored and bespoke service for the individuals who need it the most.
- 2.4 NFRS has learnt from local and national statistics that the most vulnerable to fire are the elderly (the risk significantly increases over the age of 85 or with conditions like dementia), individuals with mental health issues (including hoarders) as well as those living in deprived or socially isolated communities.
- 2.5 Through the establishment of a Serious Incident Review Panel, NFRS is bringing together internal departments with external partners to look at each fire death or fires causing life changing injury to establish whether there are lessons to be learned from the circumstances of the case.

## **Targeting**

- 2.6 To ensure the Service is receiving the correct referrals and allowing us to target the most vulnerable, a strategic approach is necessary.
- 2.7 One of the most effective tools the Service has is the 'Vulnerable Person's Awareness Training' that has been delivered to over 5000 frontline workers and carers across Nottingham and Nottinghamshire. This helps other agencies identify those at risk from fire and gives them the tools to make a referral to NFRS in a robust and timely manner.
- 2.8 As well as referrals, data-sharing agreements are forged between NFRS and key agencies to allow data about at risk individuals to be shared in a robust manner.
- 2.9 NFRS is continuing activities to target individuals that become disengaged with mainstream providers. Many of the more vulnerable and socially isolated individuals do not always engage with community activities and support services. Reaching these individuals and the few partners that do work with them is a continuing challenge.
- 2.10 Solely targeting high risk individuals would be a short-sighted approach for the Service to adopt. NFRS recognise that they have a major part to play in early intervention with those that have the potential to become the high risk of the future. Much of the Service's early intervention work is done in partnership with other agencies to promote a holistic approach. This is in-keeping with recommendations from the impending Care Bill. Schemes such as First Contact and City Signposting support this work.

- 2.11 Through partnerships and experience NFRS now recognises that identifying dementia or long-term health condition is more effective than intervening once someone has become high-risk or even had a fire.

### **Strategic Approaches to Data-Sharing**

- 2.12 In order to seek partnerships at a strategic level it is essential for senior NFRS employees to promote risk reduction activities to policy makers, ensuring consideration is given to FRS agenda and performance indicators as well as ensuring NFRS is seen as a key partner to keeping people safe and well.
- 2.13 In September 2012 NFRS began a data-sharing pilot with Nottinghamshire County Council (NCC) Social Care. This scheme saw every 85 year old living alone accessing their services contacted by NCC and offered a home safety check from NFRS. This trial scheme started in the Ashfield district and saw 11% of individuals contacted referred for a HSC, whereby 20% of these consequently came out at medium or high risk. Research shows that over 85's are the least likely to respond to generic fire safety campaigns and one of the most likely groups to have a fire, therefore data-sharing is the most effective way NFRS can reach these individuals. This pilot has since been expanded and the same exercise is being repeated to include all of the county's districts. The age group has also been lowered to 65 in order to achieve an early intervention strategy agenda too.
- 2.14 Since 2012 NFRS has been working with social housing providers to gain lists of all their properties and data on tenants as well as exact locations and addresses. This has led to the creation of 'Memorandums of Understanding' to assist data-sharing as well as promoting best practise in fire safety among the different associations. NFRS host a quarterly meeting to facilitate sharing of best fire safety practise among the associations.
- 2.15 Gaining data on housing stock has proved an extremely beneficial exercise; for instance the Service now knows that 40% of all fires within Nottingham City occur in Nottingham City Homes (NCH) properties. This has allowed NFRS to work very closely with NCH on new initiatives and home improvements as well as targeting their tenants for different safety campaigns. Through NFRS's partnership work with NCH they are now looking into fitting heat detection and sprinkler systems into their sheltered housing and many new build properties.
- 2.16 In January 2013, Manton in Worksop had a rise of accidental dwelling fires in the homes of over 65's, caused by cooking. Through cross-referencing the data it was identified that all of these households were tenants of A1 Housing. Working with A1 Housing, NFRS was able to identify all of their elderly tenants with cooking facilities and invite them to a Safety Day organised by the Service. Joined by The Red Cross and Trading Standards, NFRS spent a day with local people talking to them about fire safety with particular reference to cooking. In the quarter following the event, fires in Manton had reduced by 42%.

## The Elderly

- 2.17 There has been an improvement in health over recent decades and, as a result, a growing number of people over 65 are expected to remain fit and active for years to come. However, the benefits of good health can slip away quickly and failing health decreases an individual's ability to survive an injury or cope with a traumatic experience such as fire.
- 2.18 Nottinghamshire has a higher proportion of older people than the national average with 18.1% of the population being over 65 years and 13,420 individuals living with dementia. The forecasted growth for older people in the County shows a predicted increase of 31% among those aged 65 and over by 2020, as well as the over 85 age group set to increase by 39% in the same period.
- 2.19 The fact that someone is twice as likely to die in a fire after the age of 50 means that this forecasted rise could have quite an impact on fire deaths and casualties unless action is taken now.
- 2.20 Research by the Chief Fire Officers Association (CFOA) informs FRS's that making contact with people from the age of 50 has considerable advantages, as early intervention may prevent the person becoming a fire risk. At this point individuals can make decisions and changes to their current lifestyle which will have greater impact in later life. Therefore educating this group on the dangers of fire and how they can keep themselves safe and independent is becoming a risk reduction priority.
- 2.21 NFRS recognises that our interventions, smoke detectors, flame retardant safety equipment and deep fat fryers to name a few, have limitations. For example, there is little benefit fitting a smoke detector in the home of an individual with advanced dementia as they would be unable to understand the implications of a detector activating. NFRS recognise that fire prevention advice can only be effective if it is communicated to the target audience in a way that can be understood and acted upon. This is why partnership working across individual agency boundaries is paramount to achieving successful risk reduction.
- 2.22 Last year a group called Positive about Fire Prevention was established. This group brings together NFRS and Occupational Therapists (OT's) from Mental Health Services for Older People who meet on a quarterly basis to discuss challenging cases and safety interventions. Most recently the group has developed a fire safety in the home booklet for people in the early stages of memory difficulties. Future projects include the secondment of an Occupational Therapist into NFRS as well as trialling new technologies to help keep people with dementia cooking independently and safely.
- 2.23 NFRS is an active member of external partnerships such as Dementia Action Alliance and Age Action Alliance as well as CFOA's Dementia Research Group. Membership of these groups helps NFRS maintain relationships with key agencies and carers. Working with other fire and rescue services through

CFOA ensures NFRS are at the forefront of developments in technologies and strategy.

- 2.24 To assist crews and risk reduction teams in targeting this group, a new elderly person's fire safety presentation has been developed. Smoke alarm testing sticks, cooking timers, oil filled radiators and electric blankets are also available as interventions for households at risk.
- 2.25 A post incident review for fires in the homes of over 65's has recently been piloted. The qualitative data collected is already proving extremely beneficial for the Service in understanding how and why fires start in the homes of over 65's. This work will form the basis of future safety campaigns targeted at this group.
- 2.26 In Bassetlaw, the Service has a Service Level Agreement with the Royal Voluntary Service (RVS). RVS support the Service's work through their Home from Hospital, Befriending and Shopping services. Each service-user is assessed for a home safety check, smoke alarms are tested on a weekly basis and fire safety advice is reiterated and practised with elderly clients.

### **Utilising New Technology**

- 2.27 Assistive technology is a device or system that allows an individual to perform a task that they would otherwise have been unable to do. Monitored smoke and heat detectors that if activated alert a call centre, are playing an increasingly vital role in keeping people living independently and safer for longer. NFRS refer hundreds of individuals a year for these services as well as assisting a few local service providers with the installations and maintenance.
- 2.28 Four stand-alone water misting systems have been purchased by the Service for trialling. These systems are activated by a linked smoke alarm. A number of the systems are already in use by other FRS's in the UK, which have proven they are an effective method of risk reduction by saving the lives of four individuals who would have almost certainly been unable to escape from the fire in their home.

### **Mental Health**

- 2.29 Research by CFOA into 211 fire deaths concluded that 75% had a recorded history of mental health problems at inquest.
- 2.30 The link between mental health and fire is complex and internally and externally our understanding continues to develop.
- 2.31 NFRS is working with partners in order to improve awareness of the links between mental ill health and fire. Key to this approach is training partners to recognise vulnerability at an early stage so individuals can be referred and appropriate safety measures put into place.

- 2.32 Newly developed training for crews and risk reduction teams regularly take place to ensure there is an improved awareness of mental health within NFRS. This helps to promote a culture of recognising those at risk and ensuring they receive the right support.
- 2.33 The training developed between NFRS and Nottinghamshire Healthcare NHS Trust around the Mental Capacity Act is the first of its kind and is now being adopted by other FRS's.

### **Commissioning**

- 2.34 In the last five years NFRS has developed a number of commissioning agreements with agencies such as AGE UK, and Framework. NFRS recognise that in some cases other agencies are best placed to provide the pro-active holistic or early intervention support individuals need. These agencies conduct basic home safety checks on behalf of the Service, as well as referring any of the more difficult cases to the local risk reduction team.
- 2.35 During 2012-13, 57% of home safety checks conducted by Framework were for high-risk individuals. When compared against a figure of 24% across the Service, the benefits of this commissioning are evident.

### **Hoarding**

- 2.36 Hoarders pose a fire risk not only to themselves but neighbours and fire crews too. Over the last two years the Service has steadily been receiving increasing amounts of referrals for individuals considered as hoarders.
- 2.37 This has instigated the development of the Nottinghamshire Hoarding Steering Group, chaired by NFRS. This group brings together agencies across the board to work together and support individuals with this issue. NFRS is now working towards encouraging all agencies to adopt a universal clutter rating. This is a scale of 1 – 9 (1 being no clutter to 9 being a room filled completely with clutter) in order to streamline processes and assist referrals.

### **The Future**

- 2.38 Work is already on going within the Service to re-visit the Vulnerable Person's policy. The scoring criteria requires altering to reflect the effect the HSC visit has had upon an individual's safety as well as to ensure the Service is sufficiently targeting those at risk.
- 2.39 Those not meeting the criteria for a HSC visit should continue to be signposted to the Service's website or relevant literature.
- 2.40 In addition to targeting vulnerability, a strategy must be established within the Service to target and record the pro-active early intervention work at groups likely to become high risk in the future. Work such as this will become increasingly prevalent under the new Care Bill, which will change the way agencies work together.

- 2.41 The Service needs to continue promoting the FRS's work to key policy makers in Social Care and Health to ensure data is shared in a robust and timely manner. As well as data sharing, all agencies would benefit from collective knowledge gained through the secondment of fire service and social care or health employees into partner organisations. New partnerships should also be forged with agencies such as Department for Work and Pensions who hold valuable data about vulnerable individuals.
- 2.42 The Service must continue to invest in new technology, trial new interventions and promote their effectiveness to housing providers and those responsible for the care of vulnerable groups. Through current trials and partnership working NFRS will have a range of assistive technologies available to meet the diverse needs of the vulnerable individuals whom they come into contact.

### **3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no new financial implications arising from this report as all expenditure is contained within agreed budgets. However, this front-line service requires continuing resource to ensure that those most at risk from fire receive timely and appropriate interventions.

### **4. HUMAN RESOURCES AND LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT IMPLICATIONS**

There are no Human Resources or Learning and Development implications arising from this report.

### **5. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS**

An Equality Impact Assessment has not been undertaken because this report is compiled to ensure members are updated on our work with vulnerable people.

### **6. CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS**

Under Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act the Service is a statutory partner. It is expected that the Service works in partnership to reduce the number of incidents associated with fire related and other antisocial behavioural incidents.

### **7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no legal implications arising from this report.



## **8. RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS**

Focussing resources on those most vulnerable ensures that the Service is effective as possible in driving down risk in the community.

## **9. RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is recommended that Members note the contents of this report and continue to support the Service's Risk Reduction initiatives aimed at Vulnerable People.

## **10. BACKGROUND PAPERS FOR INSPECTION (OTHER THAN PUBLISHED DOCUMENTS)**

None.

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