

For Publication

**Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Authority
24 March 2022**

REPORT AUTHOR: DCFO CHRIS BIGLAND

SUBJECT: PORTFOLIO LEADS UPDATE (PREVENTION AND PROTECTION)

For further information on this Report contact: AC Ian Evans
Head of Prevention and Protection
Tel: 01234 845000

Background Papers: None

PURPOSE:

The purpose of this report is to update members of the Fire and Rescue Authority (FRA) on key prevention and protection workstreams.

RECOMMENDATION:

That Members acknowledge the content of this paper.

1. Summary

- 1.1. The restructure of our Prevention team represents a step change in improving their capacity and capability and meets our 2021-22 Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) action plan for Action 4 to:

Devise and implement new and innovative methods of delivering our Prevention work, reflecting how the Covid19 pandemic has affected our ability to physically interact with our communities.

1.2. The activity highlighted in this paper also help improve our Areas for Improvement highlighted in our December inspection report by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Service (HMICFRS)

2. Prevention

Prevention Restructure

2.1. Prevention team began a formal restructure process on 15th November 2021 with a target completion date of 1st April 2022. The restructure is a cost neutral exercise to realign posts and resources to deliver:

- Reduced spans of control for the middle managers;
- More focussed thematic 'leads' (e.g. for arson, road safety, home safety, youth development etc) and balanced resource allocation;
- A new Safeguarding Advisor post to ensure that BFRS complies with best practice and NFCC guidance;
- A new Volunteer Manager post to support establishing a team of up to 70 volunteers over three years;
- Administrative support to the Prevention function including for the volunteer scheme, safeguarding process, fire investigation and Safe and Well process; and
- Enhanced engagement and support for vulnerable groups in the community such as those with homelessness, drug and alcohol misuse, contact with criminal justice, and mental health issues.

Web-based Home Fire Safety Visit Form

2.2. Building on 2020's launch of the on-line safe and well portal, Spring 2022 will see the launch of our own new bespoke in-house application and database for home fire safety community activities, including partner referrals. Supporting us to deliver our Safe and Well visit annual targets the new application (app) facilitates robust data collection whilst eliminating paper working. The app is being supported by provision of tablet devices and Mobile Data Terminal enhancements.

2.3. The Safe and Well visit application will deliver:

- Web enabled Safe and Well visits form through Microsoft power app Platform;
- Secure Cloud-based, risk rated database;
- Enhanced alignment to the NFCC Person centred Framework core visit components; and
- Integration of digital technology to enhance our community impact.

Hoarding Panel and Referral Pathway Lunch

- 2.4. December 2021 saw the launch of the new 'Pan Bedfordshire Hoarding Panel' and associated referral pathway. The aim of the Hoarding Panel is to improve our ability to identify who is at risk from hoarding associated issues and subsequently complete a person-centred multi-agency risk assessment to pass onto the appropriate care coordinator.
- 2.5. To launch the Hoarding panel BFRS worked in partnership with Bedford Borough, Central Bedfordshire and Luton Safeguarding Adults Boards to deliver two free webinar events designed to raise awareness of, and confidence to use, the new hoarding pathways. The events were attended by 206 Bedfordshire based workforce and voluntary sector members
- 2.6. Since the launch, the panel chaired by BFRS has received 9 referrals from a range of practitioners. Whilst none of these referrals have been deemed serious enough to be escalated to a Section 42 hearing, the panel has been able to utilise a multiagency approach to advise on best practice remedial advice.

Station Virtual Educational Hubs

- 2.7. The introduction of pandemic restrictions resulted in Year 2 school prevention visits being curtailed. As the pandemic continued, operational personnel based at Dunstable Community Fire Station, supported by the prevention team, pioneered a virtual Year 2 visit 'proof of concept' to deliver virtual lessons for schools.
- 2.8. Capitalising on the success of the prototype virtual setup, Prevention and Dunstable crews completely renewed the year 2 visit product using StayWise resources.
- 2.9. An initial roll out of 6 Virtual Education Hubs to wholtime stations is now underway. This has the potential to increase numbers engaged with whilst reducing Covid risks, costs, and environmental impact .

3. Protection

Inspections of Residential Accommodation

- 3.1. The national Building Risk Review programme of inspections of high-rise residential accommodation initiated by the Government is now formally concluded in line with the original target date of December 2021. As previously reported to FRA, BFRS were provided with a provisional list of 72 buildings, but identified a number of other buildings requiring inspection as part of the programme.

- 3.2. In total 90 premises were given full inspections as part of the programme of which 65 were residential buildings of at least 6 floors in height.
- 3.3. Operational crews were also utilised during 2021 to undertake basic fire safety checks on low and medium rise residential accommodation, with a total of 906 inspections completed. Outcomes from these inspections include:
- 31 premises were confirmed as having external wall systems, of which 8 are over 3 storeys (added to inspection plan for a visit by a Fire Safety Inspector).
 - Approximately 10% of premises visited had combustible items within the staircase (resulting in one Prohibition Notice being served).
 - 26 premises had issues that caused concern and were escalated to a Fire Safety Inspector.

Formal Enforcements and Prosecutions

- 3.4. 2021-22 has seen a continuing increase in enforcement action taken by BFRS. So far BFRS has issued 18 formal notices, comprising 15 prohibition notices and 3 enforcement notices. The number in the previous two financial years were:
- 20-21 – 15 Formal Notices
 - 19-20 – 7 Formal Notices
- 3.5. The bulk of formal action has been taken in Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO's), or where sleeping accommodation was found being provided within shops etc. Two other areas of enforcement are;
- Acceptance of a 'Simple Caution' by a premises in Luton following the offence of failing to comply with an enforcement notice.
 - Guilty plea entered at Magistrates Court 21 January 22 to four offences relating to failure to comply with the requirements of an enforcement notice in respect of fire safety deficiencies at premises in Bedford.

Protection Grant Expenditure

- 3.6. Over 2020-21 and 2021-22 BFRS received a total of £264K grant funding to uplift capacity and competency in protection work. Quarterly reports to Government on grant expenditure have been made and Government is due to make a decision upon the release of a final further instalment of this grant (£86K).

3.7. So far £158K of the allocated grant has been spent with the following main areas of spend being:

- Employment costs for 3 Fire Safety Adviser posts - £71K
- Training and professional development - £46K
- Software and IT - £45K

3.8. Plans and commitments for the residue of the grant include the following main areas of spend:

- Recruitment of a 18 month Fixed Term Office Manager £61K
- Continuation of Fire Safety Adviser posts £91K
- Further Training and professional development £31K

3.9. The planned office manager post will free up fire safety managers to focus on technical areas and support improvements in the administration of protection work.

4. Recommendation

4.1. That FRA members acknowledge the content of this paper.

CHRIS BIGLAND
DEPUTY CHIEF FIRE OFFICER