

REPORT TO: COMMUNITY PLANNING BOARD – 27 MAY 2010

SUBJECT: SCOTTISH COMMUNITY FIRE SAFETY STUDY

**BY: GROUP MANAGER, SERVICE DELIVERY (MORAY COMMAND),
GRAMPIAN FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE**

1. REASON FOR REPORT

1.1 To inform The Community Planning Board on the themes and key outcomes of the Scottish Community Fire Safety Study report and to note the links to risk reduction activity in Moray by Grampian Fire and Rescue Service and its Partners.

2. RECOMMENDATION

2.1 Members of The Community Planning Board are asked to discuss and note the content of the report and are invited to ask Rae Cameron any questions.

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 In 2008 Fergus Ewing MSP commissioned work in relation to this study in a response to a 62% increase in fire deaths in the previous fiscal year across Scotland. Strathclyde Chief Fire Officer Brian Sweeney championed the study team and was tasked with investigating how fire deaths and injuries could be reduced.

3.2 The study examined evidence and statistics from all of the 8 Scottish Fire and Rescue Services and focused on the following four key areas:

- i. Identify why Scotland faces a disproportionately high number of primary fires (involving property), fire deaths and fire casualties when compared to other parts of the UK and Europe.
- ii. Consider why Scotland suffers a high number of secondary fires (refuse, grass, derelict vehicles and derelict buildings)
- iii. Review the community safety initiatives currently in place to combat these issues and determine the impact they are having locally and nationally to reduce fire-related deaths, injuries and damage.
- iv. Determine how Scottish Government and Local Government can work collaboratively to develop and implement good practice to improve community fire safety in Scotland.

3.3 It should be noted that Grampian Fire and Rescue Service has and continues to be proactive in a wide and diverse range of risk reduction, prevention and intervention initiatives, many of which are active in Moray and are made mention of in Appendix 1 this report.

4. Study Conclusion and Recommendations

- 4.1 The Study noted that although there had been sustained reductions in fire deaths in Scotland since 1990 (due to a variety of reasons such as Fire and Rescue Service free home fire safety visits, legislation being introduced relating to issues such as foam filled furnishings and the provision of hard-wired smoke detectors in dwellings), Scotland's rate of fire deaths was still **double** the UK average.
- 4.2 The survey shows that of 171 fatal fire incidents analysed (occurring over a 3 year period) 131 were recorded as accidental dwelling fire deaths.
- 4.3 The most common causes were smokers' materials (54) and cooking appliances (28). Alcohol was involved in 81 of the 131 domestic dwelling cases. Most fires started in living rooms (59), followed by kitchens (37) and bedrooms (22).
- 4.4 The study found that 47 per cent of dwelling fire death victims were aged 60 or over. Victims were more likely to live in the poorest parts of Scotland – 31% of accidental dwelling fires were in the 15 per cent most deprived areas.
- 4.5 The most deprived areas also suffer some 46 per cent of secondary fires, mainly started deliberately. The study says that “the visible scars left by secondary fires can blight local communities, cause considerable harm to the environment and encourage other forms of anti-social behaviour which, in turn, can create a downward spiral of events leading to more serious fires and criminality.” It is estimated that it costs the Scottish Fire & Rescue Services almost £61 million to attend the average of over 30,000 secondary fires that occur each year.
- 4.6 The Study praises the achievements of the Scottish Fire & Rescue Service in its contribution to the major reduction in fire deaths, and examples of good practice are highlighted in the report.
- 4.7 The Study did however find evidence to show that Fire and Rescue Services could be working more efficiently with other agencies such as council social work and housing departments. In addition, Fire and Rescue Services require to work closely together with the Health Service to identify people most at risk from fire.
- 4.8 Among a list of 37 recommendations, the Study highlights how fire deaths and injuries could be reduced. For instance,
 - i. a greater sharing of information by local authority Social Work, Housing services and the Health Service with Scottish Fire and Rescue Services could identify groups or individuals most at risk from fire in their homes.
 - ii. Care service alarm systems that link the homes of vulnerable people could also alert call handlers to fire in the home.
 - iii. a more joined-up approach to community safety would allow the services to share good practice and improve efficiency and effectiveness.
 - iv. The Scottish Government issues a “sprinkler challenge” to academic institutions to produce an affordable domestic sprinkler system
 - v. The study adds that duplication of effort is evidenced in the delivery of community fire safety activities or initiatives across Scotland's Fire and Rescue Services.

4.9 The final recommendation is for a “Safer Scotland Unit” which would provide a central body to assist in simplifying and coordinating the delivery of community safety, create better joint working between key agencies and assist in ensuring all agencies are aware of people most at risk.

5. CONCLUSION

5.1 **It is clear from this report that fire deaths are more likely to occur in areas of high deprivation or where individuals are particularly vulnerable due to age or other factors such as alcohol addiction. This issue cannot therefore be addressed by Fire and Rescue Services alone and is an issue which the local government family needs to work jointly to resolve. Social work, housing and other CPP partners such as NHS have a vital role to play in better protecting communities from fires and fire deaths. Better collaboration could also not only decrease the number of people affected by fire but could also limit duplication and lead to a more efficient way of working.**

Author of Report: Rae Cameron
Background Papers:
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