



REPORT TITLE:

Scrutiny meeting	Fire and Rescue Scrutiny Committee 17 November 2023
Chair	Cllr Hilton
Presenting Officer	Chief Fire Officer Mark Preece
Item Type	Information Paper
Purpose of Report	Provide analysis of accidental dwelling fires in Gloucestershire during 2023/24 and outline the activity underway to achieve sustainable improvement.
Recommendations/ Action sought	The Committee members are invited to note the report and to support home fire safety activity in their communities, where possible.
Forthcoming Decisions	
Background Documents	
Appendices	
Contact Information	Donna Potts, Prevention Manager Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Service.

1. Background

- 1.1. Concern was raised at a previous Fire and Rescue Scrutiny Committee meeting that the number of accidental dwelling fires had been consistently above target. This report sets out the causes and known trends of accidental dwelling fire in Gloucestershire, and what steps Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Service is taking to reduce such incidents.
- 1.2. Whilst the number of accidental dwelling fires in 2022/23 was worse than target for three of the Quarters, prevention activity and community engagement to address this has begun to have a positive impact. There has been a reduction in accidental dwelling fire this quarter from 71 in Q1 to 66 in Q2, which is on target.
- 1.3. Achieving a year-on-year reduction in accidental dwelling fires continues to remain a challenge both nationally and locally. Generalist prevention activity focuses on fire knowledge and risk awareness. Targeted activity aims to reduce the likelihood of fire and severity of injury, often affecting people that have poor fire safety awareness or who have experienced a previous fire. The most intensive activity aims to prevent fire fatality, by applying the new person-centred framework and through improving the safety of homes, furnishings and equipment. Therefore, reducing accidental dwelling fire demands a multi-faceted approach and our community fire safety activity is specifically planned to address this.

2. Analysis of Accidental Dwelling Fires in Gloucestershire

- 2.1. Numbers and trends. The trend in Gloucestershire for causes of fires and who they affect is in line with the reported data for England. We attended 66 accidental dwelling fires in Quarter 2 of which 46% were related to cooking or cooking appliances, including having combustible items close to cookers and ovens; around 28% were caused by faulty equipment or the misuse of equipment. The remainder had a variety of ignition causes such as overheating white goods, carelessness with candles or smoking materials, or the cause remains unknown.
- 2.2. Rates of injury. There were 12 people with reported injuries in Quarter 2. Where the victim went to hospital, the injuries appeared to be slight (6) and for the remainder, first aid was given at the scene (4) or a precautionary check was recommended (1). The main causes of injury for those 12 people were overcome by gas or smoke, breathing difficulties or burns. This mirrors consistent trends for England.
- 2.3. Risk categories. We have seen a generally reducing trend in accidental dwelling fires, those that do occur often take place between 16:00 and 19:00 and involve cooking or faulty use of equipment. We target person-centred Safe and Well visits on preventing accidental dwelling fires for people who are at high or very high risk of being involved in a fatal fire, by eliminating or mitigating as many of the personal, behavioural or home risk factors as possible. Fatal fires occur at any time and nationally around a quarter of them

are started by smoking materials. Poor mobility is an identified risk factor in Gloucestershire.

- 2.4. Gaps in data. There is too little known about people who have an accidental dwelling fire but are not injured. This is a consequence of the way information is collected in the Incident Recording System (IRS) and there are plans by the Home Office for this to be addressed with improvements to IRS.
- 2.5. Improving our intelligence. A recent improvement in the way that Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Service identifies important factors in serious accidental dwelling fires has been the introduction of the Significant Fire Incident Review Policy and a new Post Incident Prevention Review (PIPR). The review process enables the Service to gather information about who has been involved in an incident that could have resulted in a fatality, whether we or any other agency knew about the risks, what action we are taking to reassure the community and what steps we are taking to learn from the incident or to follow-up with other agencies. This is adding qualitative data to the metrics that are collected in IRS and draws together information from a variety of sources such as health and social care, emergency services and our fire investigators.

3. Activity to Reduce Likelihood and Severity of Accidental Dwelling Fire

- 3.1. Local and National Campaigns. The Service has increased its campaign coverage over the past 10 months, on social media, radio and in print. This publicity has been more creative with video and accessible content to meet the needs of our diverse communities. Our campaign engagement follows the National Fire Chiefs Council and Home Office planned calendar but also responds quickly to local issues. The Home Office has announced intensive home fire safety television and radio advertising beginning in November 2023 and continuing in one week bursts until March 2024. The primary message of this advertising will be to encourage people to have a smoke alarm on every level of their home, with a focus on cooking, candles and combustible materials. The Service will deliver focused activity in the community during these bursts, to emphasise home fire safety and to increase Safe and Well checks.
- 3.2. Online home fire safety check self-assessment. The Service has now added the Safelincs online home fire safety self-assessment check link to its website and fire safety materials. This new tool is helping to increase inward referrals for people who are at high or very high risk of fire fatality, which supports Safe and Well performance. The tool has also increased the number of people who have received tailored advice on how to reduce the risk of fire in their home. Safelincs is monitored nationally and a report is expected in spring 2024 about its impact on home fire safety.
- 3.3. Partnership Activity. Achieving a sustainable downward trend in the number and severity of accidental dwelling fires requires a multi-agency approach. Our joint work with health and social care, housing providers and voluntary and community sector groups has increased awareness of the people most at risk from accidental dwelling fire. Support such as providing replacement electric blankets, slow cookers and heated throws will continue this winter; helping to eliminate known fire risks whilst directly supporting local people to manage the cost of living.