

CHESHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY

MEETING OF: PERFORMANCE AND OVERVIEW COMMITTEE
DATE: 11TH SEPTEMBER 2024
REPORT OF: HEAD OF PREVENTION AND PROTECTION
AUTHOR: GM DUNCAN PALIN AND JESSICA BURTON

SUBJECT: SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN AND YOUNG
PEOPLE (CYP) AND ADULTS
ANNUAL REPORT 2023-24

Purpose of Report

1. To report the number of safeguarding referrals that have been made by Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service (the Service) between the 1st of April 2023 and the 31st of March 2024. This report focusses on both Children and Young People (CYP) and adults' data. Details regarding improvements that have been made to safeguarding processes as well as plans for future improvements are also included for information.

Recommended: That

[1] the report be noted.

Background

2. The Service has a legal and moral responsibility as a public service, to ensure that all CYP and adults it interacts with are kept safe and free from harm. If concerns do arise then the safeguarding policies provide a clear expectation of what is required to ensure CYP and adults at risk are adequately protected from harm.
3. The Service is committed to ensuring that all CYP and adults who are at risk, whatever their age, culture, disability, gender, language, racial origin, religious beliefs and/or sexual identity, are protected from neglect or abuse. All observations, disclosures and allegations of neglect or abuse must be taken seriously and responded to swiftly and appropriately. All staff and volunteers, working for the Service have a responsibility to report concerns to the appropriate Designated Safeguarding Officer detailed within the policies.
4. The Safeguarding CYP Policy provides a framework to ensure that all staff and volunteers, comply with the requirements of the policy and its associated procedures which support the Service comply with the requirements in the Children Act 1989 and expectations of the Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023 guidance.

5. The Safeguarding Adults Policy provides a framework to ensure that all staff and volunteers, comply with requirements of the policy and its associated procedures which support the Service comply with the requirements in the Care Act 2014 and Mental Capacity Act 2005.

Information

Children and Young People Safeguarding

Overview

6. During this reporting period, there were 39 CYP's safeguarding referrals submitted relating to 49 children. This is due to multiple children residing at the address and the referral process includes all children in one referral. This is an increase of 129% since the last report (previous year 17 CYP referrals). All the referrals made, have complied with service policy.

Reporting data

7. The Service works with CYP to; promote positive safety messages that assist in making them aware of the dangers of fire, arson and road traffic collisions utilising a preventative approach; help re-engage them into their local community allowing them to progress onto positive outcomes e.g. education, employment or training. This work is important and must be done in accordance with the policy. Non-compliance with the policy by staff or volunteers may be considered a serious disciplinary offence.
8. The annual audit shows that the number of referrals has increased during 2023-24 (table 1) when compared with the previous year. Operational crews have referred 74.3% of the reporting period referrals. This figure is higher than pre-pandemic figures for comparison. The breakdown of referrals by activity and Service Delivery Area is highlighted in tables 2 & 3.

Table 1: Number of referrals by year:

Year	2023/2024	2022/2023	2021/22
No.	39	17	21

Table 2: 2023/2024 referrals by area:

Area Referral Split	2023/2024	2022/2023	2021/2022
Cheshire East	12	9	4
Cheshire West and Chester	15	1	6
Halton	6	6	3
Warrington	4	1	7
Other	2*	0	1

** Plus, two children who live out of area in the care system.*

Table 3: A breakdown of the referrals received:

Breakdown of referrals by source	2023/2024	2022/2023	2021/2022
Fire Cadets	1	0	0
Firesafe Scheme	0	1	1
Safe and Well visits	2	4	0
Operational Incidents	29	8	20
Prince's Trust Team	7	3	0
Targeted Youth Support Team	0	1	0
Arson Threat Assessment	0	0	0

Table 4: The causation of child referral by area 2023-24

Unitary Area	Halton	Warrington	Cheshire East	Cheshire West and Chester	None given
Neglect	3	0	12	9	2
Grooming	0	0	0	1	0
Drug related	1	0	0	3	0
Mental Health	0	0	3	2	0
Hoarding	0	0	0	1	0
Sexual Abuse	2	0	0	1	0
Physical Abuse	1	3	0	0	0
Emotional Abuse	1	1	3	0	0
Total number of children	8	4	18	17	2
Total number of referrals	6	4	12	15	2

** Plus, two referrals one attempted suicide and the other category was not obtained.*

Totals overall	49 children	39 referrals
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Referral Case Overview

- The reason for a referral differs from case to case but can include concerns around home conditions, poor mental health, drug and alcohol misuse and neglect. It is positive to note, staff remain pro-active in making referrals following incidents. This demonstrates that recent training, information materials, including safeguarding tool kits, continue to have a positive effect on recognising the signs of young people at risk. Staff respond accordingly following local and national guidance. However, the national picture following the covid 19 pandemic demonstrates higher levels of social isolation, cost of living crisis, poor mental health and other factors which is consistently impacting

higher referral rates to social care. This impacts other multi-agency partners such as early intervention services, emergency services and mental health services. This is a trend which we envisage to continue over coming reporting years with increasing statistics.

10. During the reporting period there have also been several concerns raised relating to young people which did not meet the threshold for Children's Social Care intervention. In these instances, support was identified for the individuals and referrals were made to external services such as mental health, drug and alcohol teams and early intervention services. This is common practice when working with children and young people who often require additional services to meet their complex needs. These cases are recorded separately to safeguarding cases to ensure an audit trail is available should it be required.
11. The referral categories with the most referrals made link to concerns of neglect, poor mental health and drug and alcohol misuse. The top three concern categories accounted for 32 referrals made. These categories of abuse correlate with the referral mechanism of operational crews reporting the largest number of referrals. Operational crews are often the individuals present when adults and families are in trauma and identify the highest levels of concern based on home environments and presentation of adults they are responding to. This has resulted in high referral rates.

Adult Safeguarding

Overview

12. In 2023-24 there were 72 cases where adult safeguarding thresholds were met, and where a referral for additional support was processed. Prevention teams have highlighted that post covid they are seeing an increase in vulnerabilities identified. This has been identified through advocates and Service Delivery staff undertaking safe and well visits and attending operational incidents.

Reporting Data

13. The 72 cases referred in 2023-24, represented an increase from 2022-23, where the Service referred 29 adults at risk. It should be noted though that the figure meeting safeguarding thresholds in 2022-23, is more in line with the pre-pandemic period. In addition to safeguarding adults, the Service also identifies and refers vulnerable persons which is addressed in the 'Referral Case Summary' section below.
14. The Service was able to deliver 25,519 Safe and Well interventions in 2023-24. This compares to 21,861 delivered in 2022-23. Therefore, several of the adult at risk referrals came from direct prevention intervention (delivered through Service Delivery and Prevention teams), but most referrals were generated from attending operational incidents.

15. The number of referrals, referrals by area and causation of referral are shown Tables 5, 6 and 7. Table 7 also shows which part (department) of the Service made the referral.

Table 5: Number of adult referrals by year

Year	2023-24	2022-23	2021-22	2020-21	2019-20	2018-19
No.	72	29	44	28	29	19

Table 6: 2023/24 Adult referrals by area

Are Referral Split	2023-24(*)	2022-23	2021-22	2020-21
Cheshire East	27	12	9	11
Cheshire West and Chester	19	4	11	6
Halton	13	8	8	5
Warrington	12	5	16	6

** Plus, one individual of no fixed abode*

Table 7: The causation of adult referral by area 2023-24(*)

Area Referral split:	Cheshire East	Cheshire West and Chester	Halton	Warrington	Total
Emotional/Psychological	8	8	5	3	24
financial	1	0	2	0	3
Mental health (including capacity and dementia)	0	1	1	1	3
Neglect	13	6	4	8	31
Physical Abuse	2	2	1	0	5
Self-Neglect	0	1	0	0	1
Sexual Abuse	1	0	0	0	1

** Plus 4 safeguarding referrals where the causation of the safeguarding issue was not known to the Fire Service due to suicide attempt*

Table 8: A breakdown of adult referrals received 2023-24:

Unitary Area	Service Delivery referral	Prevention Department referral	Total
Cheshire East	19	8	27
Cheshire West and Chester	17	2	19
Halton	11	2	13
Warrington	9	3	12

** Plus, one individual of no fixed abode*

Referral Case Summary

16. The data above shows that the largest number type of referral was for neglect related issues. Followed by emotional and psychological issues (this will also include attempted suicide). Most of these referrals were generated by Service Delivery staff when attending operational incidents.
17. The Service changed its approach to the way safeguarding referrals were made mid-way through 2023-24. Previously where an operational incident was fire led (e.g. a fire had occurred in an individual's property), then the Service would lead on the safeguarding referral. However, where another emergency service led (e.g. suicide attempt where there was no fire involvement), then this emergency service would generally make the agency referral. However, the Service approach has changed whereby for any operational incident attended where there are any safeguarding concerns, this will result in a safeguarding referral from the Service. This revised approach was determined to be more robust given the number of safeguarding related incidents that the Service was attending.
18. In addition to the 72 adult safeguarding referrals during 2023-24, there have been 157 VP Folders (either newly created or existing folders already created) that required further support from the Prevention department. This is a decrease from the 207 VP folders in the previous year.
19. VP Folders are established where safeguarding thresholds are not met, but further intervention or case management work by the Service is required. Of the VP folders established the most common causation was high risk smoking and lower-level hoarding issues. Other common reasons for VP Folder creation included lower-level self-neglect, and previous history of fire in the home, where the Service has attended multiple fires (more than one) at the same address. The VP folders are managed on a day-to-day basis by the Locality Safety Managers and Lead Advocates in each Unitary area.

Progress and Key Achievements

20. Progress and key achievements implemented or maintained by the safeguarding leads for the Service in 2023-24 include.
21. The Children's and Adults Safeguarding Policy and Equality Impact Assessments have been updated to reflect changes to practices and to ensure that the documents provide clear expectations and guidance to ensure our statutory duty is adhered to.
22. All new wholetime Service Delivery personnel, inclusive of trainees, migration and Apprentice Firefighters received 1-day CYP and adult safeguarding input delivered by Prevention managers.
23. Prevention staff received refresher level 1 and level 2 safeguarding training commensurate with their roles. Ensuring competence is maintained.
24. The Fire Standards Board (FSB) Safeguarding standard self-assessment was reviewed and peer review completed with regional colleagues.
25. Safeguarding is a standard agenda item for quarterly Group Manager meetings, to support a standardised approach for any out of hours safeguarding referrals and to learn from best practice.
26. A safeguarding children and adults training course was provided to all operational supervisory managers and was delivered by prevention managers. This was well received and is a likely causation of the increased referrals made throughout the reporting period. Feedback from internal training has been consistently positive.
27. Protection team received a half day training course in children and adults safeguarding. This is to ensure all staff have awareness of safeguarding concerns whilst undertaking protection activity.
28. Prevention managers maintain attendance at NFCC regional and national safeguarding meetings. This provides peer support, task and finish groups and guest speakers to ensure services remain updated and clear on their statutory responsibilities within the fire sector.
29. Youth mental health first aid was provided for youth staff to enable them to best support young people experiencing poor mental health.
30. Agency referral process reviewed and changed including arson threat and domestic abuse referrals to strengthen the response and approach relating to prevention activity. The process is more efficient and responds effectively to the need of multi-agency partners referring fire related concerns to CFRS.
31. 'Right Care Right Person' monitoring at both strategic and tactical level, and regular reviews have occurred to measure the impact on CFRS relating to

operational response at multiagency incidents. Ensuring service compliance with our safeguarding duties.

Future Developments/Recommendations

32. From the 1st of July, a bespoke persons at heightened risk team have been developed following the prevention review. This was in response to the increasing safeguarding and vulnerable people case files. Also, the national picture of community's poor mental health, cost of living crisis and increased risk-taking behaviours including that of suicide. The team will ensure continuous improvement to the services safeguarding policies and procedures to reduce the risk of fire related risk across Cheshire.
33. Explore the opportunity to utilise a safeguarding theme in a Service Business Continuity/Crisis management exercise.
34. Develop a three-year safeguarding action plan ensure legal and ethical compliance with our safeguarding duty. This will provide a quality assurance audit tool to measure learning and improvement should this be required in any future HMICFRS inspections.
35. Prevention managers have been an active member of Serious Violence Duty working groups across Cheshire. Future development of this work will include the execution of the duty by each Service and multi-agency partners, funding, joint resources and evaluation of serious violence across Cheshire.

Financial Implications

36. The external training courses have been funded through existing Prevention Department budgets. This approach will continue for future courses.

Legal Implications

37. The Service has a legal responsibility under the Care Act 2014, the Children's Act 1989 and the Working together to Safeguard Children 2023, due to our work with Adults at Risk and Children, to safeguard them from harm and risk in the home and community. This involves the implementation of Safeguarding leads, referral systems and staff training and awareness.

Equality and Diversity Implications

38. The Service discharges its duties and functions to all members of the community, including its Safeguarding responsibilities, regardless of gender, age, marital status, gender reassignment, disability, pregnancy or maternity, race, religion or beliefs or sexual orientation.

Environmental Implications

39. There are no environmental impacts to consider in this report.

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BACKGROUND PAPERS: NONE