

CHESHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY

MEETING OF: PERFORMANCE AND OVERVIEW COMMITTEE
DATE: 6TH SEPTEMBER 2017
REPORT OF: HEAD OF PROTECTION AND ORGANISATIONAL PERFORMANCE
AUTHOR: IAN KAY

SUBJECT: SPRINKLER UPDATE

Purpose of Report

1. To provide an update on the work of the Service with regards to sprinklers.

Recommended that:

- [1] the report be noted.

Background

2. The Service has a vision of 'a Cheshire where there are no deaths, injuries or damage from fires or other emergencies'. Sprinkler systems are proven to save lives and property; they improve firefighter safety, minimise environmental damage and reduce economic loss. In support of the vision the Authority proactively endorses the installation of sprinkler systems in domestic, educational, industrial, commercial and residential premises.

Information

3. The Service has set up an officers' and a separate Members' sprinkler group. The officer group delivers on sprinklers locally and the Service is an active members of the National Fire Sprinkler Network (NFSN) and the British Automatic Fire Sprinkler Association (BAFSA).
4. BAFSA's primary objectives include providing authoritative information on the benefits of sprinkler systems and how sprinklers can play a significant role in saving life and property from the devastating effects of fire. BAFSA works closely with the government, fire and rescue services, building control officers, insurers, architects and town planners.
5. NFSN members are actively committed to effectively working with both internal and external 'Key Influencers' to introduce standards and legislation that will safeguard people and the community from the threat of fire.
6. The benefits of sprinklers are promoted throughout protection activities e.g. consultations on building regulations, planning applications and presentations to stakeholders. This includes taking every opportunity to share our sprinkler successes.

7. Our sprinkler delivery is subdivided into working categories which include:
 - Schools
 - Residential care
 - Domestic premises
 - Commercial premises
 - Major new developments and future proofing
 - Refurbished buildings
 - Design freedoms
 - Preventing damage to the environment.
8. The Service has promoted the benefits of sprinklers through a number of media and communication channels. We have a section dedicated to sprinklers on our website. We carried out a live fire/sprinkler demonstration at a disused social housing block in Crewe. ITV's (Granada) coverage of the demonstration made television. The event was supported by Ann Jones, the Welsh Assembly Member responsible for the change in legislation requiring all new-build homes in Wales to be fitted with sprinklers. We have also filmed the effects of a sprinkler activation following real incidents. The associated footage from these events/incidents are used to support our campaigning.
9. The Service has been campaigning for the installation of sprinkler systems in high-rise residential premises for a number of years. As part of its campaign, the Authority set aside £160,000 which has been offered to housing providers/duty holders to part-fund the retro-fitting of sprinkler systems in the high-rise blocks. To date, 60% of the flats in Joseph Groome Towers, Ellesmere Port and 20% of the flats in Rowland Heights, Chester have had residential sprinklers retrofitted. Since the Grenfell Tower fire a number of housing providers have shown a renewed interest in the campaign. Going forward the protection team will continue to liaise with these stakeholders to encourage the fitting of sprinklers.
10. Representative Members took a Notice of Motion to each of the unitary authorities in the Service area highlighting the work of the Service in encouraging homeowners and businesses to install sprinkler systems. The motion called for officers to: establish a policy on the installation of sprinklers in Council owned buildings; and work closely with the Service, particularly when considering planning proposals, to ensure that where sprinklers can reduce risk, they are promoted. Each unitary authority adopted the motion either in full or in part and our fire safety officers continue to lobby local authority partners and other key stakeholders as part of their protection activities.
11. The importance of sprinklers in schools has been recognised for many years. The latest reports suggest that these fires are getting bigger and more costly. The impact of these fires is significant, not just in financial terms, but also in terms of the devastating effect on the communities they serve, the environment and the disruption to students, teachers and families. The effects on children's education are not confined to lost course work, but often include longer travelling times, disrupted social groups and poorer facilities.

12. If sprinklers are considered at the design stage of building a new school or the refurbishment of existing buildings, the costs can be kept to a minimum (as low as 1% of build costs). By engaging with designers and architects, schools could be designed innovatively to inspire learning, safeguarding the broadening requirements being placed upon them as community resources as well as incorporating this essential fire safety system as standard.
13. The Service has worked with schools, colleges and education authorities to ensure that the benefits of sprinklers are fully considered in new and refurbished schools. Part of this work has included lobbying locally and nationally regarding changes to national guidance.
14. The Service is currently developing an Ultimate Protection Policy which will propose the use of sprinklers in the protection of vulnerable persons. This will be presented to Members at a future meeting.

Financial implications

15. Currently the Authority has committed to spend £160,000 to part fund the retrofitting of sprinklers in high-rise residential tower blocks. To date, some of the funds have been allocated to Cheshire West and Chester Council and Sanctuary Housing for such projects in Chester and Ellesmere Port. Following the Grenfell Tower fire there may be further requests for funding.

Legal implications

16. There are no legal implications associated with this report.

Equality and Diversity implications

17. There are no Equality and Diversity implications associated with this report.

Environmental implications

18. The installation of sprinklers will reduce the environmental damage from fire. Sprinklers are known to use less water than fire hoses to extinguish the same sized fire.

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BACKGROUND PAPERS: NONE