



THEMATIC REVIEW OF DEATHS FOLLOWING ACCIDENTAL DWELLING FIRES IN CHESHIRE EAST (FEB 2020 TO MARCH 2021)

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Safer Cheshire East Partnership (SCEP) Strategic Intelligence Assessment (SIA) aims to inform a plan, using intelligence, data, and analysis to identify root causes, areas of risk and identify challenges for the next 12 months. Based upon these factors, the assessment highlights existing or emerging risks, threats or harm to direct strategic prioritisation and decision-making.

Fire and the risk of serious injury or death from fire is one such risk which has been identified for assessment and further consideration. Cheshire Fire Authority (CFA) is dedicated to providing the communities of Cheshire with a fire and rescue service that is committed to saving lives, changing lives, and protecting lives to achieve its vision of no deaths, injuries or damage from fires or other emergencies.

In 2018/19 Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service (CFRS) recorded no fire deaths in accidental dwelling fires in line with its vision as detailed above. In 2019/20 CFRS recorded a total of 3 fatalities resulting from accidental dwelling fires they attended. The incidents occurred in quarter 4 in February 2020. With 2 deaths in the same incident at a property in Nantwich and 1 in the Crewe Fire Station area.

In the current year 2020/21 to date, there have been a further 3 deaths resulting from fires within the Cheshire East unitary area. As with the previous year, 2 of these deaths occurred in the same incident in Alsager during quarter 1 in May 2020, with the third occurring more recently during quarter 4 in an incident in Macclesfield in January 2021.

Each of these incidents were attended by a fire investigation officer to establish the cause of the fires. Of the 4 fires resulting in the 6 deaths that have occurred in the Cheshire East Unitary area since 2018/19, 2 are believed to be accidental involving smoking materials and one is believed to be accidental with the most probable cause of the fire being combustible materials placed too close to a two bar electric heater whilst it was switched on. The fire investigation has concluded that the cause of this fire is believed to be accidental caused by an unattended cooking involving a chip pan. It is important to note that at the time of writing this report, not all of these incidents have been subject to a coroner's inquest.

2. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The main aims of this review is to consider all the information relating to those fire incidents and work collaboratively between partners to identify any learning which can be derived to mitigate the risk of similar incidents occurring in the future.

This will be achieved through considering existing working practices and looking at the ways any improvements to service delivery could be adapted to improve conditions for both staff and residents of Cheshire East.

Having considered all the information, the following outcomes will provide a basis for future work to be included as a way of addressing gaps in current service provision to improve processes for staff and reduce the risk to residents.

- To develop an 'Action Plan' which can be utilised by partners in offering practical steps to mitigate the risk of accidental fires in the home.
- To identify opportunities to share information with partners at the appropriate time as a means of prevention.
- To identify areas in which partners can offer intervention opportunities through raising awareness and training to further reduce the risks associated with keeping residents safe from fire in their homes.
- Sharing the findings of this report and communicate outcomes through the management of the appropriate Strategic Boards within Cheshire East Council and the internal groups of Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service.

3. INFORMATION GATHERING

(Set out below is the information relating each of the incidents followed by a summary table on page 6)

Incident 1

An accidental dwelling fire took place on the 9th February 2020 at a private bungalow in Nantwich, Cheshire. The fire started in the bedroom and the cause of the fire was confirmed to be as a result of accidental smoking, the property was reported to be in good condition.

The fire resulted in the deaths of M1 and F1 both aged 80. M1 last had contact with adult social care on 19th March 2019. A carers assessment was offered but was declined. F1 had an adult needs assessment carried out on the 11th February 2019 having last had contact with Adult Social Care also on the 18th March 2019. F1 received 7 half hour morning calls from Acesco homecare. Telecare had been offered but had also declined.

The occupiers were visited on 3 occasions by CFRS with the last visit by CFRS on 24/10/2017 through a risk based agency referral. Smoking was highlighted and occupier hearing impairment was noted. The occupiers would have received a further visit during the year 2021/22 as the address was on the CFRS High Risk Data set.

Further details of each visit below:

24th October 2017

Referral from Health Care

Female on 4 or more medications occupier hearing impairment advice given.

11th September 2014

Equipment installed/faulty detector replaced

16th December 2009

No identified risk recorded

Section 8 question one states both occupiers were smokers.

Incident 2

An accidental dwelling fire took place on the 25th February 2020 in a privately rented end terraced property in Crewe, Cheshire. The fire started in the downstairs living room of the property and the most probable cause of the fire was combustible materials placed too close to the two-bar electric heater whilst it was switched on.

Prior to the incident and starting in 2008, CFRS tried to engage with the occupier on a total of 9 occasions, sometimes several times each year. On each occasion the attending CFRS staff received a refusal from the occupier or were unable to get a response from the occupier after knocking on the door and therefore leaving a card for the occupier to make contact if the offer of a visit was required. CFRS policy stipulates that crews must visit on two separate occasions before they post a card with details of how to make contact and request a return visit to complete the safe and well visit. After this CFRS wait for a period of time before trying to re-engage again on a risk based approach. This is balanced against being a nuisance to someone who does not wish to engage. The address would have been visited again as the address was on CFRS high risk data set.

26/02/08 Green Watch - refused (verbal),
13/03/12 – Advocate - letter sent to occupier
25/10/12 – Green Watch – knocked & carded,
26/07/13 – knocked & carded – Red Watch,
11/02/15 - Refusal - Blue Watch,
22/06/15 - Refusal - Red Watch,
21/01/16 - Refusal – Green Watch,
21/01/18 – Refusal - Red Watch,
15/11/18 – knocked & carded - White Watch.

Incident 3

An accidental dwelling fire took place on the 29th May 2020 in a private mid terraced property in Alsager, Cheshire. The fire started in the bedroom with the cause being accidental due to smoking. The property had been reported to be in good condition.

The fire resulted in the death of M3 aged 82. M3 was known to services having had occupational therapist (OT) involvement from 2018 following an initial assessment in June of that year. Records show the last home visit by the OT was made on the 20th February 2020, Three months prior to the fire.

The occupiers were engaged with by CFRS on 16/09/2009 when a Home Safety Assessment (HSA) was completed and 2 smoke detectors were fitted. During this visit smoking was recorded as a vulnerability and an age UK referral was made.

A further engagement with the occupiers took place on 10/07/2014. It was noted at this visit that the occupiers could hear standard smoke detectors. This was recorded as a HSA from the Heightened Risk Data set. An age UK referral was declined by the occupiers.

The occupiers would have received a further visit during the year 2020/21 as the address was on the CFRS High Risk Data set.

Incident 4

An accidental dwelling fire took place on the 22nd January 2021 at a privately rented flat located on the second floor of a block in Macclesfield, Cheshire. The fire resulted in the death of M4 aged 49.

The property was reported to be in a poor and untidy condition. Records identified M4 had been supported by alcohol services back in 2017.

CFRS had no previous interaction with the individual prior to the fire.

Due to the age of the occupier he was not part of CFRS high risk data set.

Additional information

In addition to the above incidents, CFRS attended a further 2 accidental house fires within Cheshire East during the period involving the death of 2 people. However, upon investigation it was concluded that the loss of life in both incidents took place prior to the fire taking place and therefore did not meet the criteria for inclusion in this report.

Telecare:

In Incident 1 within the table below reference is made to the offer of Telecare Services. Assessment for the service is free. However, if the service is obtained privately a regular payment will be required to the organisation.

If technology is recommended as part of a social care needs assessment, then the Cheshire East Council's Adult Social Care Charging Policy will apply. This will mean a flat rate charge is applied for the service.

https://www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/pdf/care_and_support/adult-services-pricing-charging-policy-care-act-compliant-without-discretionary-change.pdf).

Gender	Age	Location	Type of property	Tenure	Home conditions	Lives alone?	Date and location of fire	Cause of fire	Known to services	Date of last assessment or contact	Care at home?	Smoker
M1	80	Nantwich, Cheshire	Semi-detached bungalow, owner occupied	Owner occupied	Good condition.	No	09/02/2020 Bedroom	Accidental smoking	Only as associated person to F1	Last contact with adult social care March 2019.	No – carers assessment offered and declined. Declined Telecare.	Yes
F1	80	Nantwich, Cheshire	Semi-detached bungalow, owner occupied	Owner occupied	Good condition.	No	09/02/2020 Bedroom	Accidental smoking	Yes	Adult Needs Assessment Feb 2019. Last contact with adult social care March 2019.	Yes – 7 x 30 minute am calls, Acesco homecare. Declined Telecare.	Yes
M2	86	Crewe, Cheshire	End terraced house, private rent	Private rented	Poor condition	Yes	25/02/2020 Downstairs living room	Accidental	Yes	Safeguarding referral from landlord 06/03/2019. Visited 06/03/2019.	No.	Yes
M3	82	Alsager, Cheshire	Mid-terraced house, owner occupied	Owner occupied	Good condition.	No	29/05/2020 Bedroom	Accidental smoking	Yes	OT involved 2018-2019. Last contact OT home visit 20/02/2020. OT Assessment completed 11/06/2018.	No	Yes
F2	74	Alsager, Cheshire	Mid-terraced house, owner occupied	Owner occupied	Good condition.	No	29/05/2020 Bedroom	Accidental smoking	Yes	OT home visit 20/02/2020. OT assessment completed 08/02/2017.	No	Yes
M4	49	Macclesfield, Cheshire	2 nd floor flat	Private rented	Poor condition	Yes – other residents in the building as flats.	22/01/2021		Historically, last known contact 2017	Alcohol services in 2017. Richmond Fellowship in 2017.	No	Yes - when last in contact with services in 2017.

OFFICIAL-SENSITIVE Residents

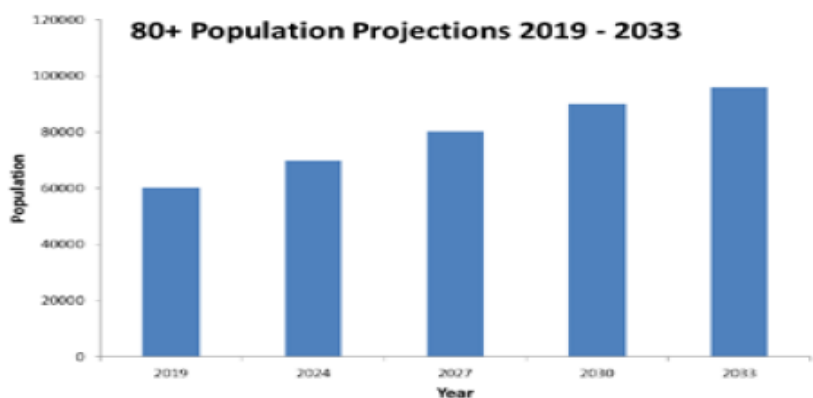
4. RISK FACTORS & KEY FINDINGS

With the exception of incident 4, the accidental fires all occurred in properties in which the occupants were aged between 74 and 82.

Cheshire East has an ageing population. At the time of writing this report, 21% of residents in Cheshire East are aged 65 or over and the elderly population is expected to continue to increase with more than double the current number of residents aged over 80 by 2030.

There is a clear link between old age and vulnerability, particularly from fire. Those over 80 are significantly more likely to die in the event of a fire than any other age group. Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service research shows that properties where people are either living alone or are lone parents are most likely to experience a fire in their home.

Population projections from the Office for National Statistics show that the overall population of Cheshire is likely to increase by 1.65% by 2024. However, the population of people aged 80 plus is expected to increase by 16% to nearly 70,000 residents over the same period. Cheshire East is predicted to have the largest population of 80 plus residents at nearly 29,000 (Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service, 2020).



Above: Projection graph for Cheshire East for those of 80 years of age and above.

Data published by the Home Office ¹ shows that between March 2019 and April 2020 forty-six per cent of all fire-related fatalities in England (105 fatalities) were 65 years old and over in year ending March 2020, compared with 21 per cent (1,451) of all non-fatal casualties; these proportions are similar to the previous year, with 42% for all fire-related fatalities and 20% for non-fatal casualties; the figures for dwellings show a similar story.

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/detailed-analysis-of-fires-attended-by-fire-and-rescue-services-england-april-2019-to-march-2020/detailed-analysis-of-fires-attended-by-fire-and-rescue-services-england-april-2019-to-march-2020>

Housing Tenure

The incidents occurred in various dwelling types and across different types of housing tenure resulting in home safety responsibility falling to varying parties. Incident 2 was a privately rented property and it was noted that the original landlord was elderly (aged 80+). He had made a safeguarding referral due to concerns about the living conditions at the property. The property had been sold to a new landlord shortly before the fire and improvements to the property were being undertaken just prior to the fire.

Further information identified within the fire report showed that despite efforts by the new landlord to improve the property, the dwelling was in poor condition. There was bathroom, only an outside toilet. The living conditions were sparse with a 2 bar electric fire as the main source of heating, large amounts of paper were also reported in the property and a motorbike was stored in the living room. *(Incident 2 is the subject of a separate Safeguarding Adults Review SAR)*

The fire reports recorded that the properties in incidents in 1 and 3 were both owner occupied and in good condition. Incident 1 identified services were last provided to the occupiers 11 months prior to the fire. In incident 3, there was a three month period which had lapsed between services entering the property and the actual incident which would have made it difficult to have predicted a fire risk at that time. In the absence of any further requirement for services being provided in the home, opportunities for identifying fire risk are restricted to the occupants or regular visits by family and friends.

Incident 4 provided a different challenge linked to lifestyle choices and non-engagement with services. Providing information to communities on how best to report concerns about local residents can mitigate risks and the Standards Team's role in Cheshire East does offer opportunities to ensure all housing is safe to live in, and that landlords carry out their legal responsibilities to maintain the property.

Consideration needs to be given to those occasions where a risk assessment can be provided outside of a period when visits by services take place within the home.

The role of Health

This may include visits made by patients to their GP or a patient being discharged from hospital. Collecting and sharing information through partnership working is key to reducing the risk for residents and the need to be aware of any personal circumstances which may create a potential risk of harm through fire. Health colleagues have a role to play, as patients suffering with cognitive disorders, those living with the use of oxygen cylinders and/or using emollients to treat inflammatory skin conditions can all be considered to pose some risk of fire within the home.

Fire safety is equally as important, as especially due to the number of potentially vulnerable people residing within our communities, some of which living alone. Residents living with alcohol

dependency or experiencing substance misuse are included in those at risk of being involved in an accidental house fire. With the likelihood of many patients struggling with mobility, evacuation procedures become more complex, and being able to understand a number of common hazards in the home become more important.

Assessment of risk of fire can only be carried out based on the circumstances at a given moment in time. Once services are no longer required, or individuals become disengaged, there are clearly not the resources to undertake follow up assessments of care and this provides a focus on the importance of raising awareness to staff, partners and communities as a whole of the potential risks associated with accidental house fires. Providing key messaging and information on fire risks, how and where to refer are crucial in keeping residents and family members informed and best advised on how to signpost for support when required. Consideration also needs to be given on how to best inform GP's of fire risks which they can consider as part of the referral process when identifying patients presenting to them with conditions or behaviour which display vulnerabilities.

Aiming for consistency in the way staff from agencies approach and submit referrals in a timely manner is equally important to further mitigate risks of accidental fires occurring in the home. Within Adult Social Care a dedicated resource is employed to deliver safeguarding training to a range of staff across social care departments, care providers and colleagues within Registered social landlord settings. In order to expand the opportunities to work collaboratively across partner agencies, wider audiences could also benefit from training to both raise awareness and signpost for support.

5. RECOGNISING GOOD PRACTICE

Cheshire East has processes in place to mitigate the risk in relation to accidental fires in the home. Within the CE First Point of Contact Team any risks highlighted for example a resident known to be a smoker or hoarding material would result automatically in a referral being made to Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service. The Contact Team work very closely with the fire service and similarly the fire service would make referrals to Cheshire East Adult Social Care should they receive information for example from a housing provider for someone identified by them as requiring adult support services.

The fire service regularly carry out home visits and complete initial risk assessments. This would include any work carried out by the fire service during their visit, for example fitting a smoke detector or supplying a fire retardant blanket. The risk assessment may also include referral opportunities for adult social care in cases where hoarding has been identified or in cases where the occupier may lack capacity.

CE Front Door will assess all cases irrespective of whether there is a care package already in place. Should an assessment already have been made, the case is transferred to the appropriate

Community Team. All new cases received by CE will receive an assessment at the earliest opportunity to consider intervention and prevention opportunities which includes a fire safety check as it is unlikely this will have taken place previously. These processes require constant review in order to maintain a good standard of professional care and support is provided.

Section 27 of the Care Act 2014 identifies the responsibilities of the Local Authority to:-

keep under review generally care and support plans, and support plans, that it has prepared, and (b) on a reasonable request by or on behalf of the adult to whom a care and support plan relates or the carer to whom a support plan relates, review the plan.

Assessing changes in circumstances and identifying new and emerging risks would fall within the above areas. In the incidents highlighted as part of this review, three cases involved the engagement of services by Adult Social Care for at least some period in advance of the fires.

This report has identified a number of areas where best practice is being operated and there is strong evidence to support how mitigating the risk of potential accidental house fires is already taking place. These processes provide good examples of information sharing and working closely with partners in keeping residents safe. As part of this report it has been necessary to talk to members of staff involved service delivery of adult social care to understand their approaches to making referrals to the fire service in identifying fire risks during visits to residents. In order to attain a level of consistency amongst all staff, the delivery of training to highlight the risks of fire would assist in supporting the referral processes and add value to the information provided around the circumstances of individuals.

An area which can be the cause of some frustration within the referral process ahead of a fire safety visit by the fire service is in respect of obtaining consent from the occupier. This was a particular issue cited in a case in the City of Liverpool and Wirral following a double fatality at a fire in a single private dwelling in February 2017 where hoarding had been identified as a contributory factor in relation to the loss of life.

In the Regulation 28 report the Coroner raised the following matters of concern: "Current Fire Service legislation under the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 applies to non-domestic premises and therefore does not cover people's homes. The legislation values business and industrial premises above citizen's homes. It is brought to your attention that where there are vulnerable people living in their own home, who do not accept advice offered by a Fire And Rescue Service that following risk assessment from neighbours, relatives or other statutory authorities there is currently no legislative or enforcement powers which exist for Fire and Rescue authorities to address the situation in a single private dwelling. The risk to life in this situation arose from hoarding behaviour, of which authorities were aware, but for which they had no enforcement powers to address, even to enter the premises".

There is no evidence in relation to the 4 Cheshire East incidents that obtaining consent had been a factor but this report does recognise the difficulties in being able to establish consent and the

potential risk this could pose to residents. This report would support any efforts the fire service make in obtaining enforcement powers to enter private addresses. There are opportunities to obtain support in this area, particularly working closely with housing partners and GP's to potentially encourage residents to provide access to private dwellings.

CFRS offer a wide range of services, in particular to reduce risks, on of which that has proved to be very beneficial is the use of a free **'Safe and Well Visit'** for people who are aged over 65 and for people who are referred to the Fire Service by partner agencies because they are considered to be at a particular risk. The total number of 'Safe and Well' visits completed during the period of this review are captured in the table on page 12.

The visits will still incorporate the traditional fire safety advice and information (and the fitting of specialist equipment as required), but will also offer additional health intervention advice on slips, trips and fall prevention and affordable warmth. The safe and well visit also includes additional support to those who wish to stop or reduce smoking, or their alcohol consumption, an offer of support to those experiencing social isolation and the offer of blood pressure and Atrial fibrillation screening.

A comprehensive Fire Service Risk Assessment form (inserted below) is used to provide information relating to the circumstances of the individual householder.



Fire Safety Risk
Assessment Form.doc

The Fire Service use an internal data recording system known as SAFFIRE and included within the database are those agencies identified as potential sources of referrals include, Care Providers, Charity and Third Sector, Domestic Abuse and Coalition Against Violence and Abuse (CAVA), Drug & Alcohol, Health Care, Hospital Discharge, Mental Health, Police, Private Landlord, Social Care - Adult Services, Social Care - Family Services, Social Landlord.

A booklet produced by the Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service entitled **'If only we'd known'** has been produced to provide information to professional services highlighting the benefits of Partnership working, sharing data and advice on how to make referrals.

The booklet also identifies a number of risk factors and vulnerable groups including case studies. The booklet is a further example of raising awareness to reduce risk of fires and keep residents of Cheshire safe.



If only we known -
Booklet.pdf

Please see below the SAFFIRE Agency referral figures for Cheshire East recorded between the dates of - 01.02.2020 to 01.02.2021 which account for the period of this review.

	Cheshire East
Falls Referral	3
Smoking Referral	1
Alcohol Referral	1
Affordable Warmth Referral	1
Atrial Fibrillation Test	8
Atrial Fibrillation Referral	0
BP Taken	0
BP Signposts	0
Loneliness Isolation Screening	50
Loneliness Referral	1
Total Referrals	65
Visits Completed	2872

It should be noted that the data in the above table was captured during the Covid-19 pandemic which had a significant impact on the normal delivery of the safe and Well programme and onward referrals. *(65 referrals were outbound referrals from CFRS following 'Safe and Well' visits)*

Whilst every effort is made to safeguard those individuals at risk of fire, it must be recognised that there is a balance to be struck with some individuals who choose not to engage with services. This was evident in incident 2 of this report and whilst the outcomes were tragic, it is important for partners to maintain their professional approach to offer support without appearing to be overpowering as circumstances and attitudes can change which may result in further lives being saved.

As referenced above the agencies included on the SAFFIRE database are shown in the table below which provides a breakdown of the number inbound referrals made to CFRS over a 2 year period between CE 01/02/2019-31/01/2021.

The table acts as a good reference to where raising awareness training could be targeted though it is evident that the referral process is being effective across many agencies, in particular within the voluntary sector.

Agency referral	Number
Care Provider	280
Charity/Third Sector	463
Domestic Abuse/CAVA	203
Deaf Support Network/Deaf Resource Centre	43
Health Care	262
Hospital Discharge	19
Mental Health	70
Other	146
Private LandLord	27
Police	165
Social Care - Adult Services	165
Social Care - Family Services	89
Social Landlord	157
	2089

For professionals working with a vulnerable client, a landlord with tenants at risk or those who look after a friend or family member in their home, Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service currently provide a wider range of support measures. The following list highlights several of the risk factors that may be apparent.

- Targeted arson attack, or threat of arson.
- Fire-setting activity within the household.
- Unsafe cooking practices such as pans, or grill being left on when not in use.
- Unsafe smoker, overflowing ashtrays or cigarettes lying discarded around the property.
- Burns to the person, clothing, bedding, carpets, or furniture.
- Reduced mobility affecting the ability to escape in a fire.
- Impairment due to alcohol consumption, drugs and/or prescribed medication.
- Dementia, Alzheimer’s disease, or other memory loss.
- Repeated slips, trips or falls.
- Home oxygen user.
- Air-filled pressure relieving mattress user.
- Emollient cream user.
- Candle use for economic reasons.
- Hoarder.
- Repeated “near misses” from tele care linked smoke alarms

The Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service website has further information available relating to a range of safety material to further support residents to stay safe in their homes.

<https://www.cheshirefire.gov.uk/>

Housing Standards

Should a Cheshire East resident be concerned about their living conditions or the living conditions of another resident, the Housing Standards team are available to offer advice and assistance.

In relation to tenants, the team can:

- Provide advice about how to resolve the issues with a landlord
- Guide social housing tenants to their landlord's complaints process
- Inspect the property and rate any hazards using the Housing Health and Safety Rating System
- Liaise with a landlord to get the repairs carried out
- Take enforcement action to get the repairs carried out under the Housing Act 2004.

Typical things which residents may be worried about include damp and mould, no heating, fire safety risks, dangerous electrics, concerns about gas safety, and other safety issues in the home.

Cheshire East would advise any tenant to firstly report the repairs to their landlord or letting agent before contacting the local authority. It is advised for tenants to put their concerns in writing directly to their landlord. A reasonable period of time to carry out the repairs would be given, with access being granted to the property to inspect the problem and carry out any necessary repairs. 'Reasonable time' is dependent on the type of repairs needed. Should a tenant not be satisfied with their landlord's response, Cheshire East Housing Team would encourage the tenant to complete a Property inspection request which is available online.

Currently and consistent with the timing of writing this report, due to the Covid-19 pandemic the Cheshire East Housing Team have made temporary changes to the way they deliver services. An initial telephone discussion to obtain information would take place, and the tenant may be requested to share photos, video, or other ways to identify what the problems are in the home. This will help the team to assess the level of risk, so the team can decide the most appropriate course of action.

The Housing Standards Team have a number of enforcement routes they can also take in relation to disrepair within rented accommodation for example Hazard Awareness and Improvement notices. If the property is in a significant state of disrepair which constitutes a high risk to the occupant, then a Prohibition or Emergency Prohibition Order can be issued.

Further information can be found on the Cheshire East website

https://www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/housing/private_sector_housing/privately_rented_homes/housing_standards/housing_standards.aspx

Housing Standards Team - Powers of access

Section 239 of the Housing Act 2004 gives a local authority power of entry to properties in pursuance of its duties under Part 1 of the Act when certain conditions are met. In particular, this enables authorities, where it is necessary to carry out an inspection under section 4, to see whether a category 1 or 2 hazard exists.

Representatives of the authority must have written authorisation which sets out the purpose for which the entry is authorised and must give at least 24 hours' notice to the owner or occupier of the premises they intend to enter. Authorisation must also be given by the appropriate officer of the authority.

Permission under this section does not include a power to use force to obtain entry. Section 240 enables a justice of the peace to issue a warrant for admission to premises. This includes power to enter by force if necessary. This power is only applicable, however, when entry under section 239 has been refused; or the property is empty and immediate access is necessary; or prior warning of entry is likely to negate the purpose of access.

Local authorities also have powers in section 235 to require the production of documents reasonably required to enable them to carry their enforcement functions.

Landlords Responsibility

Working alarms save lives – in the event of a fire in your home you are at least 4 times more likely to die if there is no working smoke alarm.

The Smoke and Carbon Monoxide Alarm (England) Regulations 2015 have been approved by Parliament and came into force as planned on 1 October 2015.

Private sector landlords are required from 1 October 2015 to have at least one smoke alarm installed on every storey of their properties and a carbon monoxide alarm in any room containing a solid fuel burning appliance (e.g, a coal fire, wood burning stove). After that, the landlord must make sure the alarms are in working order at the start of each new tenancy.

The requirements will be enforced by local authorities who can impose a fine of up to £5,000 where a landlord fails to comply with a remedial notice.

A booklet has been produced with information about the requirements and who they apply to. It is designed as a Q&A to cover the most common situations and can be found on the link below.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/smoke-and-carbon-monoxide-alarms-explanatory-booklet-for-landlords/the-smoke-and-carbon-monoxide-alarm-england-regulations-2015-qa-booklet-for-the-private-rented-sector-landlords-and-tenants>

Owner Occupiers

The primary responsibility for maintaining and improving housing rests with the owner, however there are occasions where it is necessary for the Council to intervene, including where vulnerable people are unable to afford to carry out urgent repairs that are affecting their health and safety, and to support disabled people to overcome difficulties created by an unsuitable home environment.

If a resident is over state pension age or has someone in the household who is disabled and is struggling to carry out essential repairs or adaptation within their homes, then there is help available. Care and Repair is a service for older, disabled, and vulnerable people, guiding them through the often complex or daunting process of carrying out repairs and adaptations in their own home. The Council can offer help with many types of work around the home, from replacing a window to building an extension.

Whether a resident can afford to pay for the work themselves or they need help with the cost of repairs and adaptations, or you just want some advice, the Housing Team may be able to help. The following services are provided free of charge by Cheshire East Council:

- Offering technical advice and information about repairs and adaptations
Helping to find ways to pay for the home repairs and adaptations, and checking any entitlement to benefits
- Assisting with the completion of forms for funding applications
- Providing information about other service to help residents live independently in their own home.

Assistance can be given with the following as well, but there is a charge.

- Drawing up plans and specifications so contractors know exactly what is required
- Completing planning, building control and highways applications as part of your building work
- Helping to employ reputable contractors
- Inspecting completed work

Where there is a high risk to the homeowner and there is a legal reason a loan cannot be offered, consideration will be given to the use of enforcement powers. This is usually undertaken in agreement with a home owner, but can be used without their consent if the risk is so great.

Other Assistance:

The Housing Standards and Adaptations team can assist residents in a number of ways and are responsible with the following:

Financial assistance for home repairs and adaptations

https://www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/housing/private_sector_housing/financial_assistance/financial_assistance.aspx

Licensing Homes in Multiple Occupation

https://www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/housing/private_sector_housing/houses_in_multiple_occupation/houses_in_multiple_occupation.aspx

Disabled Facilities Grants

https://www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/housing/private_sector_housing/disabled_facilities_grants/disabled_facilities_grants.aspx

Help with heating in the home

https://www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/housing/private_sector_housing/help-with-heating-your-home.aspx


Bringing empty homes back into use


https://www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/housing/private_sector_housing/empty_homes.aspx

6. LEARNING & DEVELOPMENT

The priority within this report is to identify any learning that can be derived from the circumstances relating to the fire incidents and introduce or develop work streams to improve the conditions for staff, partners agencies and residents.

Whilst good working practices have been identified amongst partners, the report has been able to highlight a number of areas where improvements could be made which have been incorporated and agreed by those working as part of this report included in the 'Action Plan' on page 19 and 20.

No	Recommendation	Key Actions	Evidence	Key Outcomes	Agency & Lead Officer	Target date to complete
1.	To update the SAB Level 1 Safeguarding training to include key fire prevention safety messages.	To ensure all Level 1 safeguarding training references basic fire safety messaging.	Number of training sessions delivered, numbers attending. Data recorded quarterly.	To raise the awareness to all audiences receiving Level 1 safeguarding training of basic fire safety messages.	Paul Broadhurst	Complete
2.	To ensure that during all Level 1 Safeguarding training key fire prevention safety messages are delivered during the session relevant to the audience.	Inclusion of Fire Safety Messages to be included bespoke to audience.	Number of training sessions. Number of those receiving.	Raising awareness of fire safety messages in context with the audience.	Paul Broadhurst	Ongoing
2.	The provision of a regular Newsletter/Bulletin' produced by the Fire Service for distribution to partner agencies.	Fire Service to provide an information bulletin on fire safety for distribution to Single Point of Contacts (SPOCs) within partner agencies to cascade to their colleagues and networks.	SPOCS to advise on number of bulletins provided for their agency. Record number of referrals and identify referral source. Fire Risk Bulletin examples:  fire-risk-information-bulletin-health-sector  Fire Risk Bulletin (June 2014).pdf	To keep partners informed of emerging themes, risk and threats of fire safety. Provide information on how to make referrals to the Fire Service. Share outcomes with Strategic Boards.	Matthew Barlow Lorraine Page	September 2021
3.	Utilise 'Safety Central' as a training venue for attendees to recognise hazards and risks.	Planned bookings to Safety Central for key workers of partners crossing thresholds to showcase the venue and expand learning on fire safety and other risks and hazards.	Numbers attending Safety Central. Feedback comments on experience.	Improve knowledge and awareness upskilling staff attending	Lorraine Page	To be implemented subject to visitor restrictions post Covid-19
4.	Provide information to Key Workers of the Housing Standards Team.	The provision of a briefing leaflet designed for Social Work Teams on the role and responsibility of the Housing Standards Team and key contacts for Registered Social Landlords to notify of identified risks to tenants.	Number of Social Workers receiving the briefing.	To provide information to Social Workers on the support which can be derived from Housing Standards and signposting to Registered	Karen Carsberg	July 2021

		Inclusion of briefing information within Social Worker induction training.		Social Landlords across CE.		
5.	This Review Report to be shared with Strategic Partnerships – SAB, SCEP and Children's' and the Head of Prevention within the Fire Service.	To schedule a presentation of this report and the findings with Strategic Partnership Boards and internally with the Fire Service.	Boards attended	Share information with partners.	Richard Christopherson	To be scheduled in as an agenda item at the appropriate Boards during 2021.
6.	Promotion of Fire Safety Referrals through Safeguarding Adults Board.	To provide information to partners of the SAB in order for them to cascade the fire safety messages to colleagues and networks for signposting on how and where to refer.  V3.0 28.06.18 Heightened Risk Horr	Feedback from SAB members. Case studies. Increased in referrals.	Promote Fire Safety Bulletin as an agenda item on SAB.	Katie Jones	To be added to the agenda at SAB
7.	Constant and ongoing activity in relation to CFRs comms and local stations utilising a range of media and social media to support local and national campaigns	Provide articles to support report findings and publish in local media and on relevant websites.	Capture articles as evidence of communication.	Share information with general public.	Richard Christopherson Matthew Barlow CE Comms & CFRS Comms	On completion of the report and presentations to Strategic Boards.

7. CONCLUSION

The incidents leading to the decision to undertake this review are tragic. The loss of life in any circumstances is very difficult to accept, though if there can be opportunities where any improvements can be made, some comfort can be derived from preventing the same thing happening in the future.

There is strong evidence relating to the benefits of Partnership working and this has been demonstrated in several areas. In particular, the close working relationship between Adult Social Care, Health, Housing and The Cheshire Fire and Rescue Services to share information relating to vulnerable people and how the two services reciprocate to support each other with the priority focus around those people who's needs are greatest residing in our local communities.

The incidents referred to in this report highlight the very difficult job the Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service undertake throughout the course of the year. Incidents of this nature are thankfully very rare within Cheshire East and those being seriously injured through fire is also low. The work of the Fire Service in promoting prevention messages around fire safety is widely available and despite the impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic the service has still manages to achieve just under three thousand 'Safe and Well' visits to Cheshire residents this year.

When dealing with vulnerable people, it is likely however that when problems become more complex the support of other agencies is vital. Opportunities to upskill those professional workers who are regularly crossing thresholds is very important for them to maintain an understanding of the signs of safety and when identified where best to refer and seek appropriate responses.

Training is an area to develop and the use of 'Microsoft Teams' lends itself to opportunities to capture wider and larger audiences in providing key messages to raise the awareness of fire safety. This practice being adopted alongside providing other avenues of communication will be required to reach those professionals who find little time to be away from the workplace e.g. GP's who can also benefit on the messages of fire safety from literature produced by the Fire Service.

Dedicated officers dealing with vulnerable people can often lead to frustration as engagement by some people is rejected. Whilst this is going to happen from time to time, this review has concluded the importance to be professional and persistent as circumstances can change. Providing messages of reassurance of fire safety to members of the wider community (including family and friends) and members of the voluntary sector can often lead to conversations which allow people to think differently.

The review references the need to support wider legislation with regards to 'means of access' for the Fire Service to residential settings which is likely to be a longer term objective. More immediate is the opportunity to share with Social Work Teams the ability of some of our Housing partners to use legal methods to ensure access is equally important.

The recommendations within this review highlight the practical steps which are to be followed in supporting the above areas together with the importance to share the content of this review with Strategic Groups to record the excellent work currently being undertaken by partners across this area and to ensure the referral process for risk of fire safety is promoted with regular feedback on referral rates and indicators to which agencies are being pro-active.

This Review has provided a range of recommendations each designed to improve service delivery but most importantly reduce the risk of accidental dwelling fires and eradicate future deaths.

8. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Information was provided by Matthew Barlow the Service Delivery Manager for Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service to the Safer Cheshire East Partnership (SCEP) informing the Board of the increase in number of deaths resulting from accidental dwelling fires for 2019/20 compared to the previous year.

The Commissioning Authority (Cheshire East Council) appointed an independent officer, to form a sub-group and oversee and compile the Review.

Sub-group members were requested to assist in the review based on their position, knowledge and experience in relation to fire safety and the needs of vulnerable people in representing their partner agency. Their role was to provide background information and supporting evidence, direct resources to the review and contribute to the findings and recommendations.

The table below identifies the officers responsible for their involvement and contributions in the writing of this report.

Richard Christopherson Chair & Author	Locality Manager – Community Safety CE
Paul Broadhurst	Community Safety Development & Training Officer
Debbie Foss	Adult Safeguarding - CEC
Katie Jones	Business Manager CESAB
Matt Barlow	Service Delivery Manager Cheshire Fire
Lorraine Page	Locality Safety Manager Cheshire Fire
Sarah Martin	Associate Director for Safeguarding NHS Cheshire CCG
Karen Carsberg	Housing Options - CEC
Claire Faulkner	Business Support
Lyndsay Ratapana	Designated Nurse Adult Safeguarding NHS Cheshire CCG
Julie Cooper	Lead Advocate – Cheshire Fire Service