

LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND HOUSING COMMITTEE:

COMMUNITY FIRE SAFETY WORKING GROUP REPORT

Purpose

1 To update on the progress of the work of the Community Fire Safety Working Group and taking the recommendations contained in 'Wired for Safety' forward.

Summary

2. Under the terms of Standing Order 9.7, each subject committee has the responsibility to contribute to the development of the Assembly's policies within the fields for which the relevant Assembly Secretary is accountable and to keep under review the expenditure and administration connected with policy implementation.

Background

3 The Community Fire Safety Working Group (CFSWG) was set up following discussions with representatives of the three Welsh Fire Services over the mutual concern, to ensure the Government, public sector organisations and private sector bodies work jointly to reduce the numbers of deaths and fire related injuries, and to protect domestic and public property in Wales. The remit of the Group was to examine the scope for the widespread adoption in Wales of hard wired smoke alarms in social housing; the installation of domestic sprinkler systems and their extension to other multiple occupation and public buildings; and to examine options for managing and controlling the incidence of arson.

4. The 'Wired for Safety' report was endorsed at the LGH committee in November 2001.

Consideration

5. The report makes a number of recommendations for the installation of hard wired smoke detectors, domestic sprinkler systems and awareness raising activities as part of a comprehensive fire safety strategy for Wales. To implement this, a budget of £3 million has been established. The implementation of the installation of hard wired smoke

detectors in social housing is underway and bids from social landlords have been invited.

6. Update on taking the recommendations forward

1. Recommendation

Subject to satisfactory technical scrutiny, the National Assembly amends its Development Quality Requirements, so that all new social housing in Wales have domestic sprinkler systems installed during construction.

Update

There are technical issues relating to water supply for domestic sprinklers. These are being discussed with Dwr Cymru in conjunction with representation of the Fire Service. Meanwhile, a pilot project in Neath Port Talbot for 9 new bungalows with sprinklers is being taken forward. In addition, proposals may come forward soon for a similar scheme in Merthyr Tydfil.

2. Recommendation

All Social Housing without hard wired smoke alarms to have hard-wired smoke alarms connected to the domestic lighting circuit with a sealed lithium battery backup by the end of 2005 and bring Social Housing in line with domestic standards in the Building Regulations.

Update

'Wired for Safety' established that 114,000 social housing homes do not have a hard-wired alarm. Applications seeking bids for funding for the installation of hard-wired smoke alarms have recently been distributed to all LA's and RSL's in Wales. The bids offer Assembly funding for up to 50 per cent of the cost of the installation of hard-wired alarms, up to a maximum grant of £50 per unit (£100 for disabled provision). The closing date for receipt of bids is 7th June and early indications are that the offer is likely to be well received by social housing providers.

3. Recommendation

The National Assembly to provide funding to assist with the cost of the provision of sprinkler systems in HMO's and cost of installation of fire alarm and smoke alarm systems appropriate to the category of HMO's.

Update

It is difficult to progress due to the Assembly's limited statutory powers in relation to HMO's. The Housing Bill has yet to materialise, thus limiting the Assembly's powers to influence this area. However, this is currently being taken forward by the DTLR in relation to the Des Turner's Private Member's Bill, which is currently working its way through Parliament. If the Bill becomes law, it will provide powers in relation to the mandatory registration of HMO's which could assist with the implementation of this recommendation. The introduction of the new Renovation Grants system which gives LA's freedom to prescribe the conditions attached to grants, could also be used. However, this would only apply to those HMO's landlords applying for grants.

4.Recommendation

The National Assembly provides advice and information to private landlords, outlining their duties and funding available on the requirement for hard wired smoke detectors to the appropriate standard in houses in multiple occupation (HMO).

Update

This recommendation to be linked with recommendation 7 publicity campaign. We propose to use the standard requirements detailed in the Home Office 'Fire Safety Management in Hotels and Boarding Houses' paper.

5. Recommendation

The National Assembly endorses the targeting of HMO's as a priority.

Update

This has now been agreed.

6. Recommendation

The National Assembly earmarks an element of its Community Fire Safety budget to fund an innovation programme to enable housing providers to bring forward initiatives that meet the objectives of the Group.

Update

Bids for the Innovation Programme have been sought at the same time as bids for hard-wired

smoke alarms, with the same deadline of 7th June for responses. Guidance has been kept broad to encourage as many bids as possible to come forward.

7. Recommendation

The National Assembly earmarks an element of its Community Fire Safety budget to fund publicity and awareness raising campaigns to promote fire safety issues taking into account not just housing but Care Homes, Community and Educational buildings etc.

Update

Officials are currently liaising with the Fire Service safety officers, to produce two fire safety awareness supplements for inclusion in all the major welsh newspapers during the course of 2002.

8. Recommendation

The National Assembly organises, during 2002, fire safety awareness conferences (one each of the three Fire Authorities), promoting the benefits of hard wired smoke detectors and domestic sprinkler systems to social housing providers and private landlords.

Update

Conferences will be held early in 2003.

9. Recommendation

The National Assembly works in partnership with LAs and the three Fire Services to define future statistical needs to target resources and action, more appropriately.

Update

The University of Glamorgan has compiled a research paper for the South Wales Fire service to consider. If implemented, this would comprehensively map fire and fire related issues in the area, enabling the effective targeting of resources and funding in the future. This issue is to be further examined at a meeting of Assembly and Fire Service statisticians.

10. Recommendation

Multi-Occupational Public Buildings. The Group was unable to fully consider this aspect of their work. This will be covered in part 2 where this relates to issues of arson However, the Group

believes that these buildings – e.g. schools, residential care homes, would also benefit from the installation of sprinkler systems and that the National Assembly should further consider how it can extend the installation to such buildings.

Update

At present this is ongoing in the Arson Working Group whose report is expected later in the summer.

11.Recommendation

The National Assembly explore the potential to incorporate the provision of hard wired smoke alarms into its new Home Energy Efficiency Scheme, as a means of extending the use of hard wired detectors to vulnerable people including the blind, partially sighted and deaf, living in predominantly private housing.

Update

It has been agreed to incorporate long life 10 year battery smoke alarms to the HEES Plus Scheme. Hard-wired alarms could not be undertaken within the existing HEES Plus grant maximum of £2,700.

12. Recommendation

The National Assembly research and develop opportunities for the provision of curriculum based fire safety education in schools.

Update

To be further developed in association with recommendation 7.

13.Recommendation

The National Assembly looks to enforce a requirement for sprinklers in new schools, student halls of residence, nurse's homes and residential homes.

Update

Linked to earlier recommendation 1 on sprinklers.

COMMUNITY FIRE SAFETY TRUST

A Community Fire Safety Trust for Wales has been proposed by and has the full support of the Fire Service in Wales. The Minister has agreed that the Welsh Assembly Government should provide financial support for the establishment of the Trust and be represented on the governing body. The Trust's overall remit is to improve the quality of life in Wales by reducing the numbers of preventable fire deaths and injuries. It will do this by pursuing three distinct areas of activity, promotional campaigning and public education; research to better understand the causes of fire death and injury; and grant giving to support local fire safety initiatives.

As an all-Wales body the Trust will cut across the three Welsh Fire Brigades, as such it will prove more economically viable than any combination of regional alternatives and will benefit from economies of scale. While the three Welsh Fire Brigades have distinct organisational structures, there is increasingly a need for strategic and functional collaboration, a trend that is likely to increase and be facilitated by the Trust.

The Trust would champion aspects of community fire safety on behalf of the three Brigades. Although there are obvious differences in the incidence of aspects of the community fire safety agenda between different parts of Wales, there are equally many similarities across the country. Furthermore, there are already examples of community fire safety matters being taken forward on an all-Wales basis, particularly in relation to the Assembly's success in the production of its 'Wired for Safety' report examining hard wired smoke detectors and domestic sprinklers and the Assembly's sponsored work in the field of Arson.

Financial Implications

7. The £3 million budget for 2002/3 will meet all the commitments detailed in this paper during the current year. Though if the Groups full recommendations are to be met, this level of funding will need to be maintained and increased in future years.

Compliance

8. In developing a community fire safety programme, the Assembly would be exercising powers under the S.40 of the Government of Wales Act 1998 – the power to do anything which facilitates, is conducive or incidental to, the exercise of any of its functions. As far as requirements for social housing providers arising out of the Report, these would be exercised under S. 18(2) of the Housing Act 1996 – powers of the Assembly to determine procedures to be followed in relation to applications for grant. For the implementation of the Community Fire Safety Trust and including 10 year battery smoke alarms to HEES Plus, would be exercised under S. 126 of the Housing Grants Construction and Regeneration Act 1996 – assistance can be given to any person in respect of '.....expenditure incurred in connection with activities which contribute to the

regeneration of an area.

Action for Subject Committee

9. The Committee is asked to note and comment on the update of the Community Fire Safety Working Group – ‘Wired for Safety’ recommendations.

Construction and Domestic Energy Branch – Housing Directorate