

Hampshire Fire and Rescue Authority

Performance Review and Scrutiny Committee

Item

1 July 2010

Evaluation of Thatch Project

Report of the Chief Officer

Contact: Jason Avery Telephone: 07918 887 850

1 Summary

- 1.1 This report details the outcomes following the first year of a Service Delivery Medium Term Plan project to eliminate thatch fires in Hampshire by 2012. Senior Management Team has signed off the project as completed and has transferred the responsibility of prevention, protection and response to each Group Manager.
- 1.2 There has been a 75% reduction of thatch fires in the first eight months of the project, and an effective cost saving of approximately £300K. All desired outcomes will have been met on time as specified by the Project Initiation Document (PID).

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 That the positive outcomes achieved in the first year of the project be noted.
- 2.2 That a further evaluation be undertaken in twelve months, and the results reported to the Committee.

3 Evaluation Findings

3.1 Objectives of the evaluation/project

The objective of the project was to deliver:

- A community safety communication strategy
- A package of community safety literature which will be aimed specifically at owners and residents of thatched properties
- A Home Fire Safety policy and procedure which meets the specific needs of owners and residents of thatched properties
- An operational response policy that is adopted as best practice across the South East Region and potentially nationally

- Delivery of a response training package to HFRS Service Delivery personnel
- Risk mapping of thatched properties within the county
- An up to date operational response formula which sits within the regional approach as determined by the 'Ways of Working' project.

3.2 The target population has been:

- Owners and residents of thatched properties in Hampshire (primarily residential dwellings)
- HFRS Response personnel (WDS and RDS)
- Service Delivery Group Managers and Station Managers
- Other fire and rescue services
- English Heritage
- Local Authority Building Control
- Insurance companies
- Manufacturers and suppliers of fire-fighting equipment
- Chief Fire Officers Association
- Fire protection industry
- Construction industry
- Thatch industry representatives
- HFRS Community Resilience (Self-help) Strategy

3.3 Evaluation Measures

- All deliverables from the project initiation document (see 2.1 above) have been completed within the project timeframes
- Analysis of incident data during the period July 2009 and March 2010
- Cost savings have been calculated based on the reduction in response activity
- Working with our communities to make sure that we are better prepared to deal with major threats and emergencies
- Being recognised by our partners for the work that we do to reduce the risks people in the community face
- Future provision of new firefighting equipment
- Regular (monthly) project team meetings

4 Methods used to collect data/ information

- ### 4.1
- Audit of incidents and analysis of incident debriefs
 - Collation of community safety literature

- Incident data from HFRS Firecat database
- Feedback from MarCom activities
- Analysis of records following presentations/home fire safety visits

5 Collect data/information

- 5.1 During the period December 2008 to March 2009 HFRS attended eight thatched roof fires. The average response cost for each incident was estimated at around £45,000. This equates to £360,000 and in addition each fire costs the insurance companies approximately £250,000.
- 5.2 This project has resulted in significant community safety activity, co-ordinated through the project manager but delivered by individual group managers as part of their risk reduction plans.
- 5.3 The result has been only one roof fire where 50% of the roof was saved. Another incident occurred where the roof suffered minor external damage, mainly due to the quick response and prompt actions by local crews.

6 Risk analysis

- 6.1 It was identified in early 2009 that the number of chimney fires and fires involving thatched roofs had significantly increased. Failure to tackle this rise would have led to a similar level of response costs in 2009-10 and therefore the overall service budget. The current financial climate and the pressures this brings on public services could be alleviated via an effective prevention strategy.
- 6.2 It was estimated at the start of the project that there are approximately 3000 thatched properties within the county border. Although statistically the chances of having a fire in a thatched property is lower than compared to more traditional structures, the negative effect these types of incidents has on service delivery, budgets and the continuity of community life is high.
- 6.3 It was also observed that the use of solid fuels had increased over 2008-09 and this brought an increase in the number of chimney fires throughout the county. Given that 90% of all thatched fires originate from heat transfer from the flue to the dry reed, and with the observed trend of more incidents occurring, it was felt that if no action was taken to combat thatch fires we would see an ongoing rise of these incident types.
- 6.4 The risk to firefighters attending fires in thatched properties could not be ignored either and so an associated training package has been developed to improve health and safety, and command on the fire ground.

7 Analysis of the data/information

- 7.1 The net effect of the work carried out in the project has been a 75% reduction of fires involving thatched roofs¹.
- 7.2 A gross saving of £300,000 was made in the first year due to the reduction in retained response costs and time made available to wholetime personnel to undertake additional prevention and training activities. Approximately £3,500 has been spent on printing the associated literature, posters, postcards and information packs.
- 7.3 During the project 63 press releases were generated, either as part of the communications strategy or in response to incidents attended.
- 7.4 Community engagement (talks, presentations and home fire safety visits) has been accommodated within existing group budgets and managed locally by group managers. Typically attendance rates have been around 16%; however the uptake for Home Safety Visits has been 75% of those who attended.

8 Evaluation conclusions

- 8.1 The outcome of the project has been a significant reduction (75%) in the number of fires involving thatched properties within the first year. This work provides a solid base for group managers to work from in further reducing the risk of fire in these types of properties.
- 8.2 In addition there have been significant cost savings to both the service, Hampshire council tax payers and the insurance industry.
- 8.3 The purchase and provision of a compressed air foam system on two new rescue pumps (to be delivered summer 2010) will also enhance any response activity and will be underpinned service wide by a reviewed training package.
- 8.4 Project reports have been submitted and accepted by SEFIP and CFOA as notable practice.
- 8.5 Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service has contributed to the production of literature with NFU Mutual. Other neighbouring FRS have adopted the Hampshire Thatch Information Pack/Fire Safety Guide². Both of these partnerships have allowed the safety message to be spread wider than Hampshire and the South East Region.

¹ In the first eight months of the project

² Wiltshire and Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Services