



**LONDON FIRE
AND EMERGENCY
PLANNING AUTHORITY**

Hoarding: a Progress Update and view from the Borough Commanders

Meeting	Date
Strategy Committee	11 July 2014
<hr/>	
Report by	Document Number
Third Officer	FEP 2263
Operations, Prevention and Response	
<hr/>	
Public	
<hr/>	

Summary

This report summarises the discussions on hoarding which were held with Borough Commanders in family groups during April and May 2014, and provides an update on progress to resolve the fire risk associated with hoarding behaviour.

Recommendations

1. That the efforts of Borough Commanders to engage proactively with local partners be endorsed, and Members assist in this process by raising the issue with Chief Executives and relevant cabinet members where appropriate; and
2. That actions by officers to further develop the good practice identified in this report and investigate the potential for wider application across London be supported.

1. Borough Commanders are regularly brought together where their boroughs share similar attributes such as deprivation and geography to share ideas and discuss their own approaches to common issues. These meetings are known as family groups (listed in Appendix A). The most recent round of meetings have focused on reducing the fire risks associated with hoarding, which is a chronic and progressive disorder if left unaddressed.
2. Brigade data has highlighted that hoarding behaviour has been a contributory factor in 20 fire deaths occurring in London over the past three years. The fifth London Safety Plan 2013 – 2016 (LSP5) acknowledges the importance of building relationships and working with others to help identify vulnerable members of society. It states the Brigade's intention to begin a wider communications strategy to raise awareness of the dangers of hoarding, both to members of the public and our firefighters. The following information provides an update on Brigade wide and borough level progress in addressing the risks associated with hoarding behaviour.

3. Strategy Committee Members received a report entitled 'Hoarding and its Impact on Fire Safety (FEP 1981) in November 2012. This report highlighted the fire risks associated with hoarding and the prevalence of hoarding disorder in fire fatalities. Hoarders become known to the Brigade through a variety of different routes including Home Fire Safety Visits (HFSVs), operational incidents or local multi-agency partnership working.

4. The complexities around why a person hoards and their emotional attachment to the items hoarded means that simply ordering or telling a person to clear their home is likely to have little effect and may increase the person's anxiety, potentially exacerbating the problem. This emphasises the importance of working with appropriate local partners to set goals and offer support for identified hoarders through appropriate risk assessment and communication with the individual, their carer/family (if any) and any responsible local agency.
5. During 2013, crews received familiarisation on how to recognise, respond to, and record instances of hoarding when visiting premises and/or attending fires. This consisted of:
 - a. A policy to ensure that the Brigade's handling of identified hoarding is managed in a consistent way through a risk based approach;
 - b. A DVD to raise awareness of hoarding disorder and the most effective communication styles to adopt with those affected. It also familiarised crews on how to identify hoarding risk utilising the Clutter Image Rating scale, an internationally recognised assessment tool used by psychologists working with people with hoarding tendencies.
 - c. A process to record premises where hoarding exists and the associated tactical plans on the Operational Risk Database, which records risks/hazards beyond that normally expected, as well as any particular tactical plans or command and control procedures.
6. Concurrently, at national level the Chief Officers Fire Association recognised the fire risks associated with hoarding and set up a Hoarding Sub Group to explore a national strategy on hoarding for the fire and rescue service. The Brigade were invited to present their hoarding policy and its supporting tools to the forum who were very positive at the progress being made. Subsequently, the Brigade's policy and supporting tools have been shared and adopted by other fire and rescue services around the country.

7. Officers are also currently working with the Building Research Establishment to investigate the effectiveness of Automatic Fire Suppression Systems within a hoarded environment. Outcomes will be communicated on completion of this formative investigation work.

Enforcement and Regulation

8. There are no legislative or enforcement powers which exist for fire and rescue authorities to manage hoarding behaviour in the home. Although hoarding may be viewed as a mental health disorder, many people with hoarding tendencies have full mental capacity and will adopt this behaviour as a lifestyle choice. It is only when the hoarding causes a risk to public health and an environment is deemed 'filthy' and/or 'verminous' that enforcement to clear the property can be invoked under the powers held by the local authority under the Public Health Act 1936.
9. The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 (RRO) applies to non-domestic premises, and therefore does not cover fire safety within the individual home. The RRO requires the 'responsible person' for the premises to carry out an adequate risk assessment covering common parts and communal areas of the building only. Therefore legislative action can only be taken when hoarding is identified in these areas.
10. Officers are exploring ways in which the RRO can be used to influence the reduction of fire risk within private dwellings in blocks of flats and sheltered housing. The 'responsible person' has a duty to identify significant risks of fire in their fire risk assessment and reduce them or put in place appropriate control measures. Officers are also investigating the potential to enable the 'responsible person' to highlight increased fire risk within the individual homes in their premises when excessive levels of hoarding may compromise the passive fire protection in a premises. In these cases increased fire loading may result in rapid fire spread which in turn could lead to other dwellings, escape routes and people being compromised by fire. Officers will explore this in more depth as well as the impact of any anticipated support of this approach by community safety teams.

Family Group Findings

11. To inform the discussions held at family group meetings, Borough Commanders were directed to consider the impact in several areas via the following questions:
 - a. Explain the approaches you have put in place to address the fire risks associated with hoarding disorder within your borough? What works well and what doesn't work?
 - b. Are your partners open to providing information on hoarding cases, and where it is shared en masse have you been able to manage Brigade intervention successfully? If data has not been shared in this way, what alternative approaches have you adopted to reduce hoarding fire risk in your area?
 - c. How have your hoarding interventions, or partnership work led to improved outcomes for the person(s) affected or the neighbouring community? Where you are unable to improve the outcome and/or reduce risk, what have you done?
 - d. What other ways have you positively affected the fire risks associated with hoarding disorder within your borough?

Partnership Working and what works well

12. Every Borough Commander is working with partners in their boroughs to achieve a reduction in the risk of fire to those who hoard. The following paragraphs provide examples of the range of prevention work currently in progress.
13. The Borough Commander in Redbridge, alongside his counterpart in the Met Police and the borough's Head of Community Safety, have been integral in the establishment of a new multi

agency scheme entitled Redbridge First Response Service. This service brings a range of vital services and support networks to vulnerable adults. The service reports to the Safeguarding Adults Board and provides an opportunity for all local authority departments to engage with other blue light emergency services and third sector organisations such as Age UK and Victim Support as a single point of contact for vulnerable adults in the borough. Any partner who becomes aware of a vulnerable adult has a single point of contact referral form to complete which will generate multiple referrals to all the relevant partners within the scheme who can provide an intervention to support the person at risk. All the partners have received training on the support services that each partner agency can provide including the Brigade's training on identifying fire and hoarding risk. The Brigade have received a significant number of referrals to those with our high risk characteristics including those with hoarding tendencies, which allow us to reduce fire risk and complement a holistic intervention for the vulnerable person. Although the First Response Service isn't the first example of a multiagency referral hub its focus on ensuring that all partners know what the others can offer has potential to significantly improve the quality of partnership work to reduce risk to the vulnerable and is worthy of investigation on a wider basis.

14. In the London borough of Southwark the Borough Commander works in partnership with the local authority, sharing information on residents in the borough with a hoarding profile. A jointly funded (LFB and the London Borough of Southwark) community safety post in the borough has provided a consistent link between the Brigade and borough with an understanding of both organisations roles. A draft multi agency hoarding protocol is in place which recognises the increased fire risk in hoarded properties. The Borough Commander is aware of 150 identified hoarders mainly located in social housing properties, at least 50% of which have hoarding at level 5 (out of a maximum of 10) or above on the Clutter Image Rating Scale. Achieving consent to conduct HFSVs with this group has proved challenging as those who hoard are often resistant to visitors entering their homes, although the Brigade has gained access where others have failed. The Borough Commander has worked with the local authority's pest control service, who have a much higher engagement rate due to their legislative powers, to assist in reducing fire risk in these properties. The training of four pest control officers to carry out HFSVs has proved invaluable to ensure smoke detection and fire safety advice specific to hoarding risks are provided to these residents. The Borough Commander has provided specialist advice to partners on the fire risk associated with hoarding behaviour in specific cases.
15. In Camden, the Borough Commander sits on the High Risk Panel, a multi agency forum (including adult social care/mental health trust) with the remit of identifying vulnerable, high risk residents to deliver a joined up approach to health and wellbeing interventions. This approach has been adopted in other boroughs based on core terms of reference. The Borough Commander utilises this group to discuss the vulnerability and raise the fire risks associated with hoarding. Partners can then agree a range of actions from organising a thorough clean to moving a resident into hostel accommodation to limit the opportunity to hoard. Whatever intervention is decided upon the Brigade ensures that the fire risk within the properties is reduced by providing HFSVs and smoke detection. The main approach seems to be to 'clear' the property, which means that in the longer term the hoarding behaviour is likely to return, and become a concern to the Brigade again.
16. In Haringey a High Risk Panel approach is also used and the borough actively engages in identifying hoarders through this forum. Partners including adult social care, the mental health trust and other agencies are trained to identify hoarding risk and refer to the Brigade. A hoarding protocol detailing the individual responsibilities of partner agencies is currently in draft which includes a framework to develop action plans based on individual's needs. When consent is received from a vulnerable resident, the borough's Integrated Access Team will utilise partners,

including the Brigade, to access the home and deliver any interventions designed to reduce risk, including the relevant agencies clearing hoarded materials when appropriate. The Brigade's partnership work on highlighting the dangers of hoarding has influenced Homes for Haringey, a major social housing provider in the borough, to enforce hoarding restrictions within their tenancy agreements. The outcomes of dealing with hoarding in this way are mixed, but Homes for Haringey recognise that intervention is part of a wider mental health solution. Subsequently they work with mental health charities to address the underlying hoarding behaviour through Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, an approach which is proving successful in addressing the resident's hoarding behaviour in the long term. If ultimately re-housing is necessary, the Brigade is also influential in minimising the relocation of risk e.g. not placing the hoarder within high rise/sheltered housing.

17. Following a fatal fire in the borough of Enfield, involving hoarding, the Borough Commander has worked with partners to establish a multi agency hoarding protocol with the local authority and all registered social landlords in the borough. A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in which all partners will quantify their contribution to reducing the risks associated with hoarding is due to be signed shortly setting out this approach. A similar MoU approach is also being pursued in Barnet where the Brigade have worked with Barnet Homes to deliver HFSVs to 18 hoarding premises and agreed forward strategies to ensure the fire risks are managed.
18. Oxleas Mental Health Trust operate in a number of London boroughs in the South East Area and have featured in cases where the Brigade had not been made aware of the risk of fire prior to a fatal fire or near miss. A draft MoU has been developed detailing the actions and interventions provided by each partner agency to reduce fire risk to residents with mental health issues. As part of the MoU approach, the Brigade will offer fire awareness training to Oxleas staff to raise awareness of the fire risk prevalent with some mental health issues such as hoarding.
19. In the borough of Lewisham a multi agency hoarding protocol has been in place since 2012 between the Brigade, local Environmental Health, Metropolitan Police, voluntary organisations, local health and social care providers and housing associations. A hoarding panel meets quarterly to discuss hoarding cases, particularly those which are complex or where the member organisation has exhausted its own options and would benefit from the involvement of other agencies.
20. The City of Westminster has a dedicated Hoarding Advisory Panel on which the Brigade has a seat. The local authority takes the lead and a referral system has been established through which all local agencies, including firefighters, can make referrals. It is envisaged this approach will become a tri- borough arrangement rolling out across Kensington and Chelsea and in Hammersmith and Fulham, where adult social services are working in partnership with the Brigade and borough health, environmental health, mental health and housing teams on a Multi Agency Hoarding Case Management and Panel Process. Following a fatal fire involving hoarding in March 2014, the Borough Commander of Westminster has reported an increased level of engagement and information sharing on vulnerable adults where previously the process felt that it was more Brigade led in referring hoarding cases to the Panel. This increased engagement has resulted in the Brigade carrying out joint visits with the Environmental Health team. Additionally, in Hammersmith and Fulham the Brigade will be supporting a borough led Hoarding Event on 15 October 2014. The event will target those who hoard, those affected by hoarding or those who know someone with hoarding behaviour. The event is designed to reach out and offer support to the target groups above who may not know how to access support.

21. In Hillingdon the Borough Commander sits on a multi agency Vulnerable Persons Panel to which hoarding cases are referred. All persons referred are subject to an 'information check' by all partners and that information is brought to the next meeting to inform discussions on an action plan of intervention involving all partners. In a specific case where a Hillingdon resident with hoarding tendencies was resistant to intervention from any agency or person of authority, non uniformed personnel were utilised to build rapport and gain consent for a HFSV to be conducted so the person could receive advice and protection from fire.
22. The Brigade's partnership approach in Waltham Forest with vulnerable adults is well established with the Borough Commander having an influential role on the Adult Safeguarding Board. All fire fatalities invoke a multi agency review which the Borough Commander will chair and monitor agreed actions for Board Members. Following two high profile fires involving hoarding in Waltham Forest the Brigade encouraged the development of a High Risk Panel approach. Adult Social Services set up a 'Risk Enablement Panel' which partners have used to address hoarding risk alongside other fire safety projects including the risk reduction benefits of semi permanent domestic sprinklers due to report imminently. The Brigade have worked proactively in building rapport with a known hoarder residing in a disused shop with the only access being through an outside window. Crews have completed a HFSV at the premises, fitting vital smoke detection and ensuring the resident is made aware of fire prevention and the importance of having an escape plan. The Brigade have also raised awareness with partners to ensure his health and wellbeing is addressed as part of that holistic approach.
23. In Croydon the Brigade have engaged in a two way referral process with the departments responsible for Adults Services, Housing and Health (DASHH). This multi agency forum allows any person who is vulnerable or at risk to be referred for any reason, including hoarding. Information is shared at a Joint Agency Group (JAG), members of which include the Brigade, Metropolitan Police, local authority departments and Department of Health.

Hoarding in Private Owner Occupier /Private Rented Sector Housing

24. During the family group meetings, one of the major themes to emerge was the difficulty in accessing and dealing with hoarding in privately owned or private rented sector housing. Borough Commanders were optimistic that as a result of the robust partnership arrangements that exist in the boroughs, that these residents would be referred to the Brigade by agencies such as adult social services and mental health charities.
25. A clear example of the referral process working took place in the borough of Barking and Dagenham, where firefighters performed a seven hour rescue operation to extract a bedbound lady and her adult carer son via the first floor window of a flat filled with hoarded material. Social services raised the alarm after becoming concerned about her welfare. After spending time in hospital the lady returned to her hoarded property and denied access to any agency, including the Brigade's offer of a HFSV. Even though it is vitally important that protection is provided by fitting appropriate smoke detection, due to the fact that the property is privately rented, there is little that can be enforced. The local authority are currently working to identify the most appropriate level of intervention to safeguard this resident's health and wellbeing. With no enforcement powers under the RRO, the only solution available to the Brigade was to ensure that the residents on either side of the property had received a HFSV and sufficient detection was in place to provide early warning if a fire occurred, and refer the case to the local authority. On a positive note, the borough have just introduced a Private Rented Registration Scheme for all private rented properties (in excess of 17,000) which stipulates that every property must have at least two working smoke alarms.

Conclusion

31. This report provides a snapshot of activity within all boroughs since the implementation of the Authority's hoarding strategy in 2013. The extent of recent media coverage on the subject of hoarding has raised the profile of hoarding to the public at a national level, and the Brigade continues to raise awareness of the fire risk utilising social media and other opportunities. However, it is close partnership working at borough level which will have a significant impact on reducing the number of fires, fire injuries and fire deaths where hoarding has played a contributory factor. Feedback from Borough Commanders on the information shared at these meetings has been positive. Systems are already being developed to enable Borough Commanders to easily share the best practice tools they have developed, thus supporting effective engagement in reducing the fire risk associated with hoarding disorder.

Head of Legal and Democratic Services comments

32. The statutory basis for the actions set out in this report is provided by the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004, section 6 (Fire safety). Any personal information shared must be done in accordance with data protection legislation. The Head of Legal and Democratic Services has read the report and has no further comment.

Director of Finance and Contractual Services comments

33. The Director of Finance and Contractual Services has reviewed this report and had no comments.

Sustainable Development Implications

34. There are no sustainability implications arising from this report.

Staff Side Consultations Undertaken

35. There are no staff side implications arising from this report.

Equalities Implications

36. The report outlines the range of initiatives and partnership arrangements that are being pursued to reduce the risk of fire for those who have hoarding behaviours. Taking appropriate action to target individuals who by their behaviours pose a specific risk to themselves and the community is an example of how the authority is meeting the requirements of the Equality Act 2010.

List of Appendices to this report:

A. List of family groups

LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985	
List of background documents	
Proper officer	Third Officer Dave Brown
Contact officer	Mark Hazelton
Telephone	
Email	mark.hazelton@london-fire.gov.uk

Appendix A

Family Groups

Group A:

Tower Hamlets
Hackney
Islington
Newham
Haringey
Southwark
Camden
Lambeth

Group B:

Westminster
Greenwich
Barking and Dagenham
Waltham Forest
Lewisham
Hammersmith and Fulham

Group C:

Brent
Ealing
Hounslow
Enfield
Kensington and Chelsea
Wandsworth
Croydon

Group D:

Redbridge
Hillingdon
Barnet
Bexley
Havering
Merton
City of London

Group E:

Harrow
Sutton
Bromley
Kingston upon Thames
Richmond upon Thames

This page is intentionally left blank