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To all Chief Fire Officers & Chairs of Fire and Rescue Authorities

With the support of the National Fire Chiefs Council's Home Safety Committee and Fire Investigation Group, the Home Office is undertaking research into fire-related fatalities and seeks involvement from fire and rescue services in England.

Background

In 2006 the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) published research based on analysis of fire investigation reports, collected from fire and rescue services, to identify groups at greater risk of dying in a dwelling fire. This research is now around 12 years old and there have been significant societal changes since it was completed (e.g. decrease in the proportion of adults who smoke) and it is therefore timely to update the analysis. In our updated analysis we will extend the scope of DCLG's/previous work to focus more on the circumstances of the fires which lead to fatalities. Additionally, we are hoping to include fatalities from 'other building' fires. Analysis of the Incident Recording System (IRS) data will supplement the analysis of fire investigation reports and also include analysis of victims who attended hospital with severe injuries.

The research is planned to have two parts:

- 1) Analysis of IRS data** will include IRS data from 2010/11 to 2016/17 focussing on both fatalities and hospital severe casualties. This will provide a data set of around 2,000 fatalities and 4,500 severe casualties. Therefore, analysis will provide the bigger picture with numbers large enough to draw meaningful conclusions over time. We intend to look at themes such as; the common sources of ignition, causes of death and victim characteristics (e.g. age, gender) as well as the circumstances of the fire. The end product would be a report that supplements the in depth research described below and will examine differences between fires that result in a fatality and those that result in a severe casualty.
- 2) In depth analysis of fire investigation reports** aims to draw out a richer, deeper narrative about the circumstances of fire-related fatalities. It is not the intention that this part of the work will be quantifiable in the same way as part one as we will be looking at only one year (2016/17). Instead, this will complement the IRS analysis, and provide a much richer and deeper understanding of the circumstances of fire-related fatalities than is possible using only the IRS data. It is also important to note that we will not be referring to any individuals but reporting themes revealed by the analysis.

Specifically, the in depth focus on fire-related fatalities intends to look at:

- descriptive information about the incident (e.g. time of day, motive);
- the premise (e.g. tenure, type of property);
- smoke detection (e.g. whether a smoke alarm was present and operated);

- the discovery of the fire and subsequent behaviour;
- victim profile (e.g. their age, whether they suffer from any impairment);
- contributing factors (e.g. alcohol consumption); and
- previous history with FRSs and other agencies (e.g. care providers).

While we are aware that a number of individual fire and rescue services have completed similar work, we hope that undertaking the analysis at a national scale will be beneficial for a number of reasons. Updating and up scaling the work will provide a robust and more current evidence base for the fire sector and policy makers. We have developed the work with input from the sector, with the aim of making it as useful as possible so that it can provide fire and rescue services with evidence to inform prevention activity on the ground, and provide a strong rationale to encourage the input/collaboration of other agencies where relevant. As we intend to read through a large number of fire investigation reports the work will also provide a better understanding of how consistently fire investigation reports are completed and provide suggestions for improvement. In addition we will ensure that the learning from the research is fed back into Home Office data collection processes to ensure that our data is as useful and relevant as possible.

In order to complete part two of this research in a consistent way, whilst minimising burden on services, the Home Office would like access to the fire investigation reports held by fire and rescue services in England for fire-related fatalities that occurred in the financial year 2016/17.

We would like to collect from fire and rescue services the fire investigation reports for all dwelling and other building fire-related fatalities that occurred in 2016/17. It is also recognised that individual fire and rescue services may have supporting documents detailing the victim profile that would also be beneficial for this research and so we also welcome any other documents that are seen to be relevant and which you are able to share with us.

Sharing the fire investigation reports

We are aware that there may be issues with transferring the fire investigation reports and we would be keen to work through any issues with you. There will be different ways for us to access the information from fire and rescue services, including:

- via a secure government internet email address;
- using MoveIT – the Home Office’s secure online file transfer system; or
- for the Fire and Rescue Analysis Programme to visit a fire and rescue service to access hard copies of documents – this might be most appropriate for fire and rescue services with a higher number of fatalities.

We are also aware that fire investigation reports will contain personal information and fire and rescue services might find it appropriate to redact this information from reports. We note that this will be more burdensome for services with a larger volume of documents. Again we are happy to talk through any potential issues.

It would be useful to have a point of contact from each service with whom we can discuss data transfer, security and any potential problems further.

I'd be grateful if you could email Isabel Preston (Isabel.preston@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk) with the email address and telephone number of your chosen point of contact. I'd like to thank you in advance for your input into this valuable work and please do not hesitate to contact me with any queries. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Isabel Preston

Research Officer, Fire and Rescue Analysis Programme, Home Office