Summary
This report provides an overview and analysis of accidental dwellings fires, including the fatalities and injuries that occurred, in 2014/15. It brings together statistical data with the outcomes of Fatal Fire Reviews and the Accidental Dwelling Fire Review process. It highlights focus areas for community safety work and initiatives whilst also acknowledging work already underway, and is intended to support continued work at all levels to reduce fire risk to Londoners.

Recommendations
That members support the Brigade’s approach to addressing accidental dwelling fires and fire fatalities by:

1. Continuing action to encourage partner organisations, especially those that work in the homes of the vulnerable, to include fire risk awareness training and fire risk control measures within their core training programmes; and

2. Working with partners and the fire industry to highlight:
   
   • The conditions, behaviours and personal characteristics that increase the risk of having a fire and/or be harmed, such as smoking
   • The need to provide fire detection, fire detection combined with monitoring and/or, fire suppression equipment with monitoring to a level that addresses the fluctuating fire risk associated with changing occupiers, and escalating support needs of occupiers.
Introduction

3. This report reviews accidental dwelling fires in 2014/15, together with fatalities and injuries from those fires, and brings together outcomes from fatal fire reviews and from review of accidental dwelling fires as well as statistical information. In 2014/15 there were 5,567 accidental dwelling fires\(^1\) reported. This report concentrates on accidental dwelling fires as they make up the majority of London’s fires, and are considered to be largely preventable.

4. The conclusions in this report have been reached by a full exploration of the characteristics of the person, circumstances of the fire and the Brigade’s response. This paper is based on reviews over one year and although this annual report enables us to identify current issues, it is only when this information is integrated with longer-term data that trends can be identified and tracked. Longer-term analysis forms the basis of the assessment of risk that underpins each London Safety Plan. The Brigade’s research shows that sadly, many of the people involved in fatal fires appear to be within the relatively easy grasp of better safety and protection, as most are in regular contact with a public agency at some level.

Fire deaths in London

5. London fire deaths dropped considerably in 2014/15 and 39 people died at fires (46 in 2013/14). Thirty deaths were as a result of fire (43 in 2013/14). Chart 1 below shows the different numbers, including 23 deaths (77 per cent of all fire deaths) in accidental dwelling fires, which is the focus of this report.

Chart 1: Fire deaths by type, 2014/15

6. This report focuses on fatalities as a result of accidental dwelling fires as this is the area where the Brigade can make the most impact. However, of the fire deaths not in dwellings, two were outdoors and one in an allotment shed (not designed for use as a dwelling). Community safety activity after these fires led to the discovery of other people living in unsafe conditions in sheds on an allotment and further action to reduce fire risk. The Brigade’s Reducing Fire Risks in Buildings used as Unsuitable Accommodation toolkit released in June 2014 was produced to aid Borough Commanders (BCs) and partners to address the risk associated with these living arrangements and has been recognised as a model of best practice by CFOA (Chief Fire Officers Association).

---

\(^1\) Includes ‘late calls’. A ‘late call’ is a call to a fire which is out at the time the call was made to Control.
Accidental dwelling fire reviews and fatal fire reviews

7. Fatal fire reviews were introduced in 2010, and in 2012 a borough-based version of the process was introduced for qualifying accidental dwelling fires. These reviews support Authority headline targets to reduce fires and fire related casualties (both deaths and injuries). The outcomes from both review processes influence and support work at all levels by the Brigade to improve fire safety, build effective relationships with partners and share the Brigade’s fire safety messages more widely. All accidental dwelling fire deaths in 2014/15 have been subject to a fatal fire review.

8. Each review discusses the fire, the characteristics of the people involved, their living conditions, detailed scrutiny of the circumstances leading up to the fire including any previous interventions that the Brigade had carried out, identified regulatory fire safety issues, the Brigade’s subsequent fire investigation and follow-up community safety action to reduce fire risk. A significant amount of organisational learning has resulted from the reviews and they have influenced the priorities and direction of strategic and borough based preventative work. The fatal fire review process is led by the Director of Operations and the accidental dwelling fire review process is led by the BC. Both follow a similar format, with the objective of identifying opportunities for fire risk reduction. To inform the review processes, officers produce:

- A fire safety regulation post fire audit report. The audit is undertaken by fire safety regulation inspecting officers in order to quickly gather and record information relating to compliance with fire safety law. The audit does not apply to single private dwellings.
- A fire investigation report. This is a comprehensive report produced by the Brigade’s Fire Investigation Team on every fire death. This report is also provided to the Coroner.
- A Borough Commander fatal fire report that brings together all of the circumstances around the fatal fire including; information about the deceased, interagency involvement, incident management and post fire community safety interventions.

9. Examining a range of information helps officers to draw conclusions about the key contributory factors that feature in fires in the home that result in casualties (whether fatal or not), and to gain an insight into the characteristics and circumstances that make the difference between people that survive fires, and those who do not.

10. Accidental dwelling fire reviews have resulted in several referrals to partner agencies including 13 adult safeguarding, one to the Brigade’s Juvenile Firesetters Intervention Service (JFIS) which works with children and young people displaying firesetting behaviour, and six hoarding. The accidental dwelling fire review process also led to the initiation of borough based partnership initiatives and regular meetings with housing associations, mental health services, telecare providers, care providers, oxygen suppliers, and residents groups. Topics covered included cooking safely, high-rise safety, the risks associated with hoarding, and tracking the movement of people with a high fire risk between boroughs. Individual case referrals included topics such as

---

2 A fatal fire review panel is convened by the Director of Operations for fires involving fatalities. The review panel consists of a range of officers including the Director of Operations, the relevant Borough Commander, and Area Deputy Assistant Commissioner, together with officers representing community safety, fire safety regulation, and information management. The review considers a range of information gathered regarding the person who died in the fire and the circumstances of the fire, in order to identify organisational learning points that can be implemented either internally or with external partners.

3 To qualify for an accidental dwelling fire review a fire must result in both a member of the public being taken to hospital as a result of injuries sustained at the incident and, in officers’ opinion, the fire having made the dwelling uninhabitable for a minimum of 24 hours. A review can also be initiated at the request of the Area Deputy Assistant Commissioner.
as the need for smoke detection with telecare monitoring, the risk of smoking when using oxygen equipment and other health equipment, the need for home suppression equipment such as sprinklers, the need for greater support, and vulnerability to fire. Four cases were also referred to our Fire Safety Regulation teams for follow-up work.

11. Accidental dwelling fire reviews documented the impact of fires that often left homes uninhabitable for some time. Members of the public sustained injuries at fires ranging from shock to severe burns. Precautionary health checks were undertaken for the young and old and included two pregnant women and an older man with a heart condition. At two fires previously undiagnosed mental health conditions were identified. Five fire victims had experienced previous fires, and two had not reported these fires. As with fatal fires many of the homes of those experiencing accidental dwelling fires exhibited evidence of the careless disposal of smoking materials prior to the fire. Information obtained from accidental dwelling fire reviews contributed to area seminar’s on vulnerability in the North on 24 March 2015 and the South on 30 June 2015, and presentations to Adult Safeguarding Boards across London.

Accidental dwelling fires

12. As shown in chart 2 below, there were 10,815 primary (serious) fires in London in 2014/15 and just over half (55 per cent) were in dwellings (5,989). The vast majority of dwelling fires (92 per cent – 5,567) were of accidental rather than deliberate motive (i.e. accidental dwelling fires).

**Chart 2: Primary fires in 2014/15 with breakdown by property type**

- Outdoor fires 414
- Other residential building fires 386
- Vehicle/transport fires 2,054
- Non-residential building fires 1,972
- All primary (serious) fires 10,815
- Dwelling fires 5,989
- Deliberate dwelling fires 422
- Accidental dwelling fires 5,567

Note: Primary fires and dwelling fires include ‘late calls’.

13. The number of accidental dwelling fires (including late calls) in 2014/15 was slightly higher (+19) compared to 2013/14 (5,548). The data for dwellings fires and casualties (fatal and non-fatal) is set out in table 1 below.
Table 1: Dwelling fires, deaths and casualties 2013/14 and 2014/15

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2013/14</th>
<th></th>
<th>2014/15</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Accidental</td>
<td>Deliberate</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Accidental</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dwelling fires</td>
<td>5,548</td>
<td>446</td>
<td>5,994</td>
<td>5,567</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deaths in dwelling fires</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serious injuries in dwelling fires</td>
<td>462</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>536</td>
<td>428</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fire size

14. The Brigade has developed a fire size methodology in order to provide some clarity about the different types of action taken by crews on arrival or where there are exceptional resources required (five+ pumps). Using this methodology, the size of a fire and the Brigade resources required do not correlate consistently with the likelihood of fire injuries or fatalities, nor the numbers involved. People can die or be injured in relatively small fires, ones which do not require any firefighting action when the Brigade arrives.

15. Chart 3 (Fire size) shows that 4,060 (73 per cent) accidental dwelling fires in 2014/15 required ‘small means’ or no firefighting by the Brigade. This proportion is slightly higher than in 2013/14.

Chart 3: Fire size – Accidental dwelling fires (ADFs), 2014/15

Note: Fire size is based on the action taken by crews on arrival or where there are exceptional resources required (5+ pumps). The use of a hose reel attached to a fire engine represents a fire of medium size, and a fire that required the use of a main jet supplied from a fire hydrant is a large fire. Small means minimal firefighting required, extinguished by physical means (e.g. stamping, smothering or immersing in water), or a small portable extinguisher. None is where no firefighting was carried out.
Delay in calling for Brigade assistance

16. Of interest to Members will be whether the person who was a fire fatality was likely to be alive at the point when the Brigade was called. It is a reasonable assessment that 17 of the 23 fire fatalities (74 per cent) had already sustained life threatening injuries by the time the Brigade was called.

17. Delay in calling the Brigade to a fire resulted from one or more of the following:

- Being overcome by smoke and fire
- Stopping to fight the fire
- Lack of fire detection within the premises
- Lack of fire detection in the room where the fire started
- Lack of any way of automatically calling the Brigade
- Telecare monitoring being present but there being no linked smoke detection in the room where the fire started
- Telecare monitoring being present but there being a delay in passing the call to the Brigade.

18. In five cases, where there was a delay in calling the Brigade the person was overcome by smoke and fire, and the fire was only discovered by neighbours once it had taken hold and there were visible smoke and flames outside the property. In two cases the fire fatality was discovered when visitors arrived, and discovered there had been a fire.

19. In 2014/15, there was a delay in calling the fire brigade after ignition of the fire of 10 minutes or more in just under half of all accidental fires in the home (44 per cent or 2,271 fires). Whereas for fire fatalities in accidental fires in the home there was a delay of 10 or more minutes on 87 per cent of occasions (20 fatalities). Table 2 shows the numbers of incidents and casualties together with percentages.

### Table 2: How quickly the Brigade was called* (in London), 2014/15

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Called immediately</th>
<th>Called within 10 mins</th>
<th>Called in more than 10 mins</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All accidental dwelling fires (ADFs)*</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>807</td>
<td>2,342</td>
<td>2,271</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ADF serious injuries**</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>33</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>193</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ADF fatalities</td>
<td></td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*estimated time between ignition and calling the Brigade | * no data is available for 147 fires | ** no data is available for 27 injuries


21. A key Brigade message must continue to be calling the Brigade as soon as a fire is discovered must be one of the first actions of those involved in fires and those responsible for their safety, or alternatively where there are vulnerable people there must be a resilient method of automatically summoning assistance. If assistance is not readily available for those with severe mobility
impairment, automatic fire suppression such as sprinklers should be considered. Staff availability on-site must be taken into account when deciding whether a monitored fire alarm system is an adequate safeguard.

Map 1: Borough location of accidental dwelling fire deaths, 2014/15

Age and gender of fire deaths

Table 3 below shows the age and gender of those who died in accidental dwelling fires. The youngest person to die in an accidental dwelling fire in 2014/15 was a 32 year old woman and the oldest person to dies was a 91 year old woman. Twenty-one fatalities were over 50, of which 16 were over 60.

Table 3: Age and gender of accidental dwelling fire fatalities, 2014/15

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under 30</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-40</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41-50</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51-60</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>61-70</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 70</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>8</strong></td>
<td><strong>15</strong></td>
<td><strong>23</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Location of accidental dwelling fires

Type of dwelling

Chart 4 shows accidental dwelling fires and casualties in 2014/15 by type of dwelling. The 2011 Census recorded that half the population of London lived in flats and maisonettes. Dwelling fires by property type show that a slightly higher proportion of dwelling fires start in flats and maisonettes (56 per cent) with 41 per cent in houses; the remaining three per cent happen in
other dwelling types. This does not mean that people who live in flats or maisonettes are at a
greater risk of fire due to the type of dwelling but is because the majority of these property types
are in P1 areas with higher social housing and links to deprivation. These proportions are the
same as in 2013/14.

**Chart 4: Accidental dwelling fires and casualties, by type of dwelling, 2014/15**

Room of origin
24. When looking at total numbers for all accidental dwelling fires, the room where the fire started
most often was the kitchen, at 61 per cent (3,404 fires). Nine per cent of fires started in the
bedroom (496 fires), and five per cent in a living room (306 fires). These proportions are similar to
those in 2013/14.

25. When it comes to fatalities, 43 per cent (10) occurred in the bedroom, with 26 per cent (6) in the
living room and 9 per cent (2) in the kitchen. The majority of fires involving non-fatal casualties
(49 per cent) started the kitchen (362) but 20 per cent started in the bedroom (146) and 14 per
cent started in the living room (103). Chart 5 shows the comparative percentages.

**Chart 5: Room of origin, accidental dwelling fires and casualties, 2014/15**
How fires start in dwellings

26. Given that 61 per cent of all accidental dwelling fires start in the kitchen, it is not surprising that 63 per cent of fires (2,500) were caused by cooking. Two of the fire fatalities were as a result of a fire caused by cooking or cooking appliances. One of these fatalities was the result of cooking in a conservatory. A breakdown of the four main causes of accidental dwellings fires is shown in chart 6 below. Smoking materials were the cause of 9 per cent of accidental dwelling fires (483), whereas they are the predominant cause of fatalities (39 per cent) in accidental dwelling fires (9). However, cooking is the main cause of 45 per cent of fires (2,500), and 34 per cent of injuries (253), but only nine per cent of deaths (2).

Chart 6: How accidental dwelling fires start, and casualties, 2014/15

Cooking

27. As cooking is the biggest cause of accidental dwelling fires at 63 per cent, the Brigade has continued to focus media campaigns on the risks associated with cooking, especially when under the influence of alcohol. Officers have worked with the British Standards Institute, DCLG and the fire industry to support the development of a British Standard for automatic cooker shut-off and fire suppression equipment. A standard for electrical cookers has now been published and work continues to develop a standard for gas appliances. Manufacturers have struggled to overcome technical difficulties in ensuring that detection actuates early enough to prevent fires, is resilient enough not to cause false alarms and is reliable in the harsh cooking environment. Later this year the Brigade will trial a cooker fire alarm designed to actuate before a fire develops.

Electrical supply/items

28. Electrical supply, domestic appliances and electric lighting caused 16 per cent of accidental dwelling fires (644) and also resulted in five accidental dwelling fire fatalities (22 per cent of fatalities). Domestic appliance fires due to faults (rather than ‘user error’) continued to rise in 2014/15 with refrigeration being a particular concern due to the unprotected highly flammable insulation, and that these appliances are switched on all the time. Officers continue to use the evidence of our fire investigations to identify patterns and work with regulators and the industry to improve safety standards.

29. The Brigade is also working with partner agencies, industry and stakeholders to improve the effectiveness of product recalls, which are often at best, only 10-20 per cent effective at reaching product owners and ensuring identified safety issues are rectified. The Brigade’s web pages
contain information and links to product recall pages. Officers have submitted evidence to a government inquiry into the effectiveness of product recalls led by Lynn Faulds Wood⁴.

30. A breakdown of the causes of accidental dwelling fire fatalities is set out in chart 7 below.

Chart 7: Causes of accidental dwelling fire deaths, 2014/15

31. Smoking materials were the cause of eleven accidental dwelling fire deaths (48 per cent) in 2014/15. Despite the introduction of fire safer cigarettes in November 2011 (sometimes called reduced ignition propensity (RIP) cigarettes), smoking materials remains the most common cause of fires involving fatalities. Fire-safer cigarettes were identified as the cause of seven accidental dwelling fire fatalities. It is clear that cigarettes and smoking continue to pose a serious fire risk, and that fire safer cigarettes continue to be involved in fire deaths. Similar to cooking, reducing fires and deaths caused by smoking remains a key priority and the Brigade has promoted a number of high profile media campaigns to raise awareness.

32. In ten cases there was clear evidence of previous careless disposal of smoking materials. Six of these people were in receipt of care, and partner agencies had the opportunity to see evidence of previous careless disposal of cigarettes that could have resulted in fires – yet the risk was not addressed.

⁴ Broadcaster and leading consumer campaigner Lynn Faulds Wood is leading a review of the UK’s system for the recall of unsafe products. This was announced by the former Consumer Affairs Minister Jo Swinson on 13 March 2015. The independent review will focus on how we can make enforcement more effective and explore consumer understanding of the process.[https://www.gov.uk/government/news/consumer-champion-lynn-faulds-wood-to-lead-product-safety-review]
Candles
33. Candles were the cause of fires involving four accidental dwelling fire fatalities and continue to feature as a significant cause of all accidental dwelling fires. Candle safety is featured across the Brigade's community safety materials and officers continue to use all forms of media to get safety messages to the public.

Fire detection and suppression

Fire detection
34. In 2014/15, 52 per cent (2,895) of homes where there was an accidental dwelling fire attended by the Brigade did not have a working smoke alarm (in 2010/11 this was 63 per cent). The declining proportion of homes without a working smoke alarm where there was an accidental fire is shown in chart 8.

Chart 8: Accidental dwelling fires with no working smoke alarm, 2010/11 to 2014/15

35. Whilst the proportion of homes without a working smoke alarm is still too high, the proportion of dwellings fires attended without a working smoke alarm has been falling over time. This is due to a combination of factors, not least the Brigade’s programme of home fire safety visits. In the last five years the Brigade has fitted nearly 350,000 smoke detectors, with 80 per cent fitted in homes of those at greatest risk of from fire. When looking specifically at accidental dwelling fires where injuries occurred, the proportion of incidents without a working smoke alarm was lower (44 per cent). Of concern are the significant number of fires where smoke alarms did not raise the alarm.

36. Chart 9 below highlights that smoke alarms only raised the alarm in 38 per cent of all accidental dwelling fires (1,886) and evidence from fire reviews supports the case for increasing smoke alarm provision to cover all areas of fire risk rather than providing only a base level of cover in circulation spaces.
37. Where there are vulnerable people it is important that as a first step in reducing fire risk, linked smoke detection is fitted in all rooms where a fire could start, and that the resident is made aware of the fire regardless of where they are in the property, yet this was seldom the case. This is particularly pertinent where someone meets any of three following criteria:

- they have behaviours that increase the risk of a fire starting
- they are unlikely to react quickly to a smoke alarm
- they cannot move quickly to escape.

38. Of 23 fire fatalities resulting from accidental dwelling fires, 21 had smoke detection (74 per cent), yet working smoke detection was only fitted in the room where the fire started on one occasion, in four cases the batteries were missing, and in three other cases the alarm failed to operate.

39. The Brigade has been successful in promoting smoke detection but a clear picture is emerging that linked detection is needed in all areas of risk as a base standard. Where detection is installed it is often to a basic standard and is not augmented when the resident changes or their support needs, and associated fire risk, rise. The Brigade’s Home fire safety visit training package includes a clear message that detection must be fitted in all areas of risk. The Brigade’s fire awareness package for carers contains the same message. The Brigade continues to promote this message with partners however, work must continue to ensure that domestic fire alarm systems take account of the fire risk profile of the occupier. Officers will be undertaking a small scale heat and stove top alarm trail during quarter two, 2015/16 (July-September 2015).

40. During 2015/16, officers will prepare a domestic smoke alarm strategy which will consider whether it is time to campaign to have smoke alarms with removable batteries phased out, as batteries continue to be removed, and the working life of the detector element of a fire alarm is now equal to the length of time that a sealed battery operated smoke alarm can continue to work. The report will consider whether there is a need to fit wirelessly linked smoke alarms in all rooms (heat alarm in the kitchen) as a standard practice, rather than single independent smoke
alarms, and whether there is a need for British Standards to be amended to allow for battery powered alarms rather than mains powered devices.

Telescare

41. The Brigade’s project on reducing fire risk to vulnerable people through telecare has engaged with telecare commissioners, manufacturers and installers, and feedback from Borough Commanders supports the view that partners are recognising the need for telecare installations to include linked fire alarms. However it is clear that it will take time for custom and practice to reach the standard required. Telecare fire detection must be designed, installed, maintained and monitored in accordance with the appropriate British (or EU equivalent) Standards.

42. Telecare equipment was installed in five fire fatality cases (22 per cent) but it only raised the alarm in one case and in this case there were delays during call management. In only one case was linked smoke detection fitted in the room where the fire started.

43. Although monitored telecare systems can speedily summons assistance they are of limited use if the detection is not fitted in the room where the fire starts and assistance is not readily available on site. The working hours and arrangements of site wardens/carers must be taken into account when assessing the need for fire suppression systems. Where someone meets the Authority’s ‘priority person’ criteria in terms of limited mobility, aged over 60 and continues to smoke, automatic monitored fire suppression systems must be recommended.

Person profile and care

44. The percentage of people recorded as casualties that survived an accidental dwelling fire and had a vulnerability (as identified during accidental dwelling fire reviews) was 33 per cent – 43 out of 132 casualties. The percentage of people with a vulnerability that became a fire fatality (as identified during fatal fire reviews) was 74 per cent – 17 of 23. This reinforces the priority person approach to risk but also supports the case for the Brigade’s work targeting people who are less likely to die in a fire but are still at risk of having a fire.

45. Data shows that the majority of people who die from accidental dwelling fires regularly share a number of similar characteristics such as:

- age (16 people – 70 per cent were over 60 – see table 3),
- lack of mobility (12 people – 52 per cent),
- often living alone (13 people – 57 per cent), and
- vulnerability due to illness (Nine people – 39 per cent) had a significant influence on risk.
- Alcohol or drug use (prescription or otherwise) featured in 11 fire fatalities (48 per cent).

46. It is the combination of a range of factors that will determine whether or not a person becomes a casualty of fire. Those with reduced mobility and have high risk habits such as smoking in bed or not disposing of cigarettes properly, are particularly at risk from fire but the effect of serious or long-term illness on survival cannot be underestimated, with nine people suffering from a range of conditions including Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease, Gout, Multiple Sclerosis, Cancer and Crohn’s disease.

47. The Brigade held a social care conference in May 2014, which was attended by care providers and commissioning agencies. The conference highlighted the number of people who die in accidental fires who receive care services, and called for closer working between the care and fire profession. As a result of the conference, officers have met with and provided awareness sessions to the Care Quality Commission. Officers have distributed a fire awareness package to
all BCs to aid them in raising awareness of fire risks amongst those receiving care, and ensure that carers know how to recognise the signs of fire risk such as cigarette and match burn marks on furniture, carpets and clothes, and take risk reduction action including a referral for a Home Fire Safety Visit.

Mental Health
48. Mental health issues have previously been recorded as a feature of fire fatalities and in 2013/14 11 fire fatalities had recorded mental health issues. In 2014/15 mental health issues were recorded in five cases. Dementia featured twice, as did depression and schizophrenia. Psychosis was recorded in one case. Fatalities had more than one diagnosed mental health conditions in two cases. Frontline Brigade staff are currently receiving training in understanding the increased risk associated with various forms of vulnerability and all Brigade staff will receive training in mental health awareness during 2015.

Ethnicity
49. Chart 10, illustrates the distribution of accidental dwelling fire fatalities by ethnicity. The Brigade collects ethnicity data about those people who die in fires; but does not have this level of data for everyone who experiences a fire. Chart 10, below shows that White British, Irish or Other White people continue to be over-represented amongst fire fatalities (at 65 per cent of deaths, 60 per cent population) whilst London’s Asian and Black populations are under-represented amongst fire deaths (at 26 per cent of deaths, 33 per cent population) when compared to the London population as recorded in the Census 2011.

Chart 10: Ethnicity of ADF deaths compared to London population (Census 2011)
Partner information and property types

Tenure
50. During 2014/15, the majority of accidental dwelling fire deaths were split between privately owned housing (15 deaths or 65 per cent) and social housing (8 deaths or 35 per cent – including four deaths in sheltered housing). Four deaths or 14 per cent were in privately rented housing – including one death in a poorly maintained unlicensed house in multiple occupation with inadequate fire safety measures. One case involved a private rental sector house with fire safety deficiencies that may have led to rapid fire spread.

51. A regular feature of accidental dwelling fire fatalities is that the victim was known to a housing provider and/or partner agency (15) and many (10) displayed easily identifiable signs that there have been near misses with fire, such as burn marks to clothing or furnishings. It is clear that despite work to educate partners in identifying fire risk, partnership fire awareness sessions must continue as a theme for officers. In 10 accidental dwelling fires without fatality there had been a Home fire safety visit. Home fire safety visits had also taken place prior to 11 fatal fires, although some were dated as far back as 2007, or were to previous residents.

Fire safety Regulation
52. Fire safety regulation post fatal fire audit reports have documented a variety of fire safety deficiencies in the premises where fire fatalities occur. Defects have included:

- Defective construction leading to rapid smoke travel between apartments
- Faulty or inadequate fire detection and alarms
- Fire doors and ceilings poorly maintained or not fire resistant
- Evacuation procedures not taking into account the mobility of the residents
- Fire risk assessments not taking account of the tenants’ fire risk profile
- Unsafe electric wiring
- Unsafe gas installation

53. When assessing the building evacuation strategy for residential care homes and sheltered housing, officers continue to work with the responsible person to ensure that fire risk assessments include the risk profile and vulnerability of the residents.

54. The Brigade’s Fire Investigation Team provide an essential forensic fire investigation and evidence gathering capability. The team attended every accidental dwelling fatal fire and submitted reports to the Coroner’s Office. These reports influenced many of the Brigade’s preventative work streams and, working closely with Community and Fire Safety, have made four additional submissions to the Coroner asking for their consideration with regard to making ‘Prevention of Future Death’ reports. Subjects included appropriate risk assessment of higher fire risk people, response to telecare actuations, and electrical safety in the private rented sector. This has led to the issue of one ‘Prevention of Future Death’ notice, whilst others are currently under consideration.

Automatic fire suppression systems
55. The annual review of 2014/15 accidental dwelling fire data supports the need to consider personal fire risk profile along with vulnerability when ensuring an adequate level of fire protection. Home fire safety visits including fire prevention advice and the fitting of smoke detection have been proven to reduce fire risk but some people will continue to undertake behaviours that put them at high fire risk. For a proportion of these people specific tailored
advice and the use of fire retardant bedding will reduce the fire risk to acceptable levels, but where these behaviours are combined with a limited ability to respond and/or impaired mobility automatic fire suppression systems offer the only effective risk reduction alternative. For these people automatic fire suppression systems such as sprinklers and water mist systems have the potential to prevent death and injury. Officers continue to work with manufacturers to refine solutions that are not actuated in non-fire situations but activate in time to prevent death or serious injury.

**Partnership working**

56. Working in partnership is acknowledged as the most efficient method to reduce risk. BC briefings to local community safety partnerships and/or Adult Safeguarding Boards on accidental dwelling fires, the factors leading to a fire and opportunities to lower risk have become an embedded feature of risk reduction work. In 2014/15 the circumstances surrounding fatal fires led Officers to recommend multiagency reviews in four cases, and to request a Serious Case Review in one case.

57. The introduction of the Care Certificate in 2015 has provided an opportunity to work with the Care Quality Commission to ensure that the fire safety element is brought to the attention of carers, but it is clear that Officers must continue to focus care organisations on fire risk and the need to conduct regular fire risk reviews as care demands change. To support BCs engagement with care organisations Officers have produced and circulated a *Fire Risk Awareness for Carers* package. The package includes messages around appropriate levels of smoke detection covering all high risk areas, how fire risk should be included in all risk assessments, regular risk reviews and contact visits for the vulnerable.

**Conclusion**

58. This second annual report on the review of accidental dwelling fires and fatalities has increased the information and evidence that the Brigade requires to influence internal and external priorities. Whilst significant progress is being made to target risk and drive it down, it is clear that more can be done to reduce the number of accidental dwelling fires and fatalities still further.

59. Key findings include the need for the Brigade to continue to:

- Build on the fire safety requirements included in the care certificate and support care organisations and carers in recognising and reducing fire risk
- Review current standards and guidance on fire alarm standards in all types of residential accommodation in order to identify opportunities for improvement, and to ensure that the changing fire risk profile of the occupier is central in specifying, fitting and monitoring fire alarm and fire suppression systems.
- Work with partners to ensure that they recognise fire risk and understand fire safety interventions such as fire retardant bedding and automatic fire suppression systems, and the value they have in reducing risk.
- Work with care partners to ensure that they understand that changes in support available on-site may necessitate additional fire safety interventions.

**Head of Legal and Democratic Services comments**

60. The actions which are the subject of this report are in compliance with the Authority’s duties under section 6 of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004, and under the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005. The Head of Legal and Democratic Services has read this report and has no further comments.
Director of Finance and Contractual Services comments
61. The Director of Finance and Contractual Services has seen the report and has no comments.

Sustainable Development implications
62. This report provides an update on actions to reduce the risk of accidental dwelling fires and fatalities. Community safety is recognised as one of the core Brigade activities that can support improved sustainability for the lives of Londoners.

Staff Side Consultations undertaken
63. There are no staff side implications.

Equalities implications
64. The analysis contained within this report better enables the Brigade to target services at those most at risk from fire. This includes, but is not restricted to, people with protected characteristics, particularly older people with health and/or mobility issues.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

List of background documents
Fifth London Safety Plan 2013/2016
LFB "Reducing Fire Risks in Buildings used as Unsuitable Accommodation“ toolkit (June 2014)
LFB Fire Facts “Incident Response Times, 205-2013“ (June 2014)

Proper officer
Dave Brown, Director of Operations

Contact officer
Mark Hazelton
Telephone 020 8555 1200 x31017
Email mark.hazelton@london-fire.gov.uk