

EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE – 13TH JUNE 2002

FIRE AND SECURITY

Report by Director of Community Services

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To advise the Committee of the findings of an Officer Working Group on Fire and Security issues and to seek endorsement of a series of recommendations suggested by the Working Group.

2. DISCUSSION

- 2.1 In mid March, a Working Group of officers from the Council, Strathclyde Police, and Strathclyde Fire Brigade was established by the Chief Executive. The remit of the Group was to identify the principal fire and security risks facing the Council, examine the options available, and suggest a series of recommendations to minimise the risks and the frequency of incidents.
- 2.2 Whilst the primary focus of the Group related to the financial implications for the Council and the longevity of the existing insurance arrangements, business continuity and the effects of incidents on service were also taken into consideration.
- 2.3 The membership of the Group, the issues identified by the Group and the recommendations can be found in Appendix One to this report.
- 2.4 In addition to this report, discussions are ongoing with Strathclyde Fire Brigade to determine the feasibility of seconding an officer to the Council in the same way as the Local Authority Liaison Officer is seconded from Strathclyde Police, to assist in the implementation of these recommendations and progress community safety and planning issues.

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 Funding of approximately £55,000 has been identified to operate the mobile security patrols and promote the media campaign over the next few months. At this stage it has not been possible to quantify costs further.

4. LEGAL AUTHORITY/IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The implementation of this report will further secure the Council's statutory position particularly in relation to Health and Safety at Work.

5. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

5.1 None arising directly from this report

6. CONCLUSION

6.1 The work of the Officer Working Group on Fire and Security issues has now been concluded and the outcome summarised in the attached report. It is important, for a number of reasons, that the findings and recommendations are taken forward without delay.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 It is recommended that the Committee:-

- (i) consider and, if acceptable, endorse the recommendations of the Officer Working Group on Fire and Security issues; and
- (ii) otherwise note the contents of this report.

William Stafford
Director of Community Services

WS/JS

5th June 2002

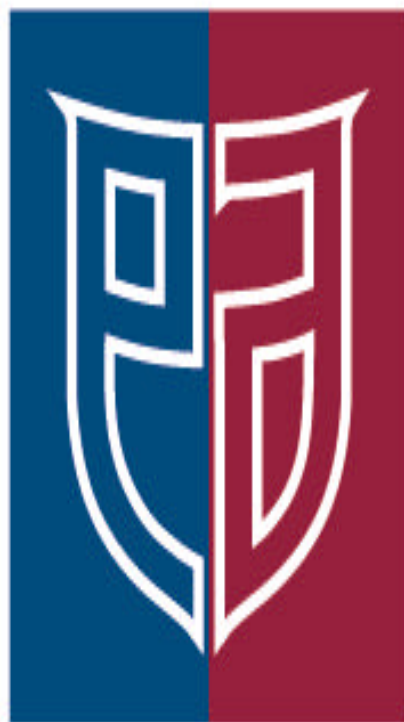
LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

Nil

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EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

**Report of Fire and Security Working
Group**



East Ayrshire

COUNCIL

June 2002

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This report considers the findings and recommendations of an Officer Group which was established in March 2002 to look at fire and security issues affecting the Council.
- 1.2 The report identifies potential threats to the Council's current insurance arrangements, and examines options available to the Council to reduce risks. It also contains a range of recommendations in relation to these options.

2. MEMBERSHIP OF GROUP

- 2.1 William Stafford, Director of Community Services, East Ayrshire Council (Chair)
Chris McAleavey, Head of Homes, East Ayrshire Council
David Morgan, Public Relations Officer, East Ayrshire Council
David Hunter, Risk and Insurance Manager, East Ayrshire Council
Joe Rafferty, Health and Safety Manager, East Ayrshire Council
Margaret Meechan, Office Manager, Educational and Social Services, East Ayrshire Council
David McDowall, Building Control Manager, East Ayrshire Council
Ann Williams, Community Safety Officer, East Ayrshire Council
Jane McGeorge, Emergency Planning Officer, East Ayrshire Council
Janie Stewart, Secretary to Director of Community Services, East Ayrshire Council
Superintendent James Thomson, Strathclyde Police
James Richmond, Local Authority Liaison Officer, Strathclyde Police
Garry Milne, Assistant Divisional Officer, Strathclyde Fire Brigade

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The insurance claims experience of Councils has been a cause for concern for some time with increasing losses in the areas of fire, public liability and employers' liability. It was likely that insurers would be looking to increase premiums to reflect losses and risks.
- 3.2 Following events of 11th September 2001, it was evident that the costs of insurance policies in all sectors would rise sharply, due to: -

- The underlying cost of claims
 - The lack of re-insurance capacity
 - The reduction in the number of primary insurance carriers in the market place
- 3.3 What was generally predicted has come to fruition and many clients in both the private and public sector alike have faced significant premium increases and reduction in the level of cover available, as their insurance covers have become renewable from December 2001.
- 3.4 Notice was given by Zurich Municipal following events of 11th September 2001 that premiums would be undoubtedly increased at renewal in September 2002, and that even with a favourable claims record, Councils could expect rates to rise by at least 30%. In circumstances where the claims experience had deteriorated, any terms offered would be subject of a higher premium increase, higher excesses and a need to demonstrate a significant commitment to improving risk management practice throughout the authority.
- 3.5 Unfortunately, whilst a concerted effort has been made to further improve the Council's commitment to risk management in the areas of Property, Liability and motor Vehicle insurance, arson attacks and accidental fires experienced in major service locations since 1st October 2001 have undermined the Council's strategic efforts somewhat.
- 3.6 There have been some 23 fires since 1st October 2001. The most significant of which are:-
1. Dalsalloch Centre, Auchinleck
 2. Western Road Building and Works Depot/Store, Kilmarnock
 3. Kilmarnock Academy Changing Rooms
 4. Seven lock-ups, Barshare, Cumnock
 5. Damage to 6 houses, Galston

Our loss experience in this regard is likely to be significantly worse than other similar Councils over this period.

- 3.7 Already the potential cost of property losses alone total some £3.6m. The combined premium paid to insurers for all of the Council's risk exposures is approximately £1.71m. Therefore, 5 months into the insurance year we are effectively a "loss leader" to Zurich Municipal. The financial position does not reflect the collective efforts that have gone into improving risk awareness and risk management within the Council. The current insurance market may not acknowledge such efforts however and may simply look at the historical cost of claims, the frequency of losses and the contributory causes.
- 3.8 The insurance market for the Public Sector is currently limited to Royal and Sun Alliance and Zurich Municipal. Some tenders issued in respect of March renewals received only one response for property insurance risks. In two cases where the holding insurer was CGNU, renewal terms were not offered at all.
- 3.9 Further efforts to reduce the Council's exposure to fire damage are clearly required.

4. DISCUSSION

- 4.1 Whilst the primary focus of the work of the group related to insurance and financial issues arising from a poor history of insurance claims, other issues such as business continuity were also considered. The disruption to Council services arising from a property fire or theft or vandalism cannot be underestimated.
- 4.2 The initial reaction following a fire or damage to a property is to consider the extent of the damage and the cost of repair. However, the potential disruption to service particularly where the location and/or the nature of the premises is crucial to service delivery must be a factor. Council properties, particularly offices, have very little spare capacity and therefore any major event could result in an adverse effect on services.
- 4.3 In the preceding paragraphs the physical aspects of incidents have been mentioned but it would be remiss not to highlight the adverse emotional effects of any incident on staff and service users. These are of particular concern where service users are weak or vulnerable.
- 4.4 A wide range of issues aimed at fulfilling the objectives of the group were considered and due to the adoption of a multi-

agency and multi-professional approach various perspectives have been taken into consideration prior to making the recommendations on a number of specific issues.

- 4.5 A number of publications from a variety of sources have also been taken into consideration. These include: -

A Safer Place – Accounts Commission

A Safer Place Revisited – Accounts Commission

Security Alarms – Association of Chief Police Officers (Scotland)

Fire: Raising the Standards - HM Inspector of Fire Services for Scotland and HM Inspector of Constabulary for Scotland

5. OPTION APPRAISAL AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- 5.1 The Group considered a wide range of options to minimise the service and financial impact of fire, vandalism and breach of building security issues. The options and brief précis of the matters considered as well as the appropriate recommendation are outlined in the following sections: -

5.1.1 Establishment of a Telephone 'Hotline'

It was recognised by the Group that some residents or individual members of the community may be reluctant to report incidents or potential incidents to the Police or Fire either through the 999 system or through contact with local Police Offices because of the perceived fear of retribution. It was therefore suggested that a telephone 'hotline' could be established for members of the public to report incidents.

After considerable discussion it was agreed not to develop this possibility further since it was felt that it would complicate lines of communication and could delay reporting of emergencies to Fire and Police.

It was also agreed that the public should be encouraged to report incidents or potential incidents to the appropriate emergency service and to highlight the possibility of anonymous reporting. It was also agreed to promote the Council's existing Helpline and develop appropriate protocols for staff on the handling of incidents.

Recommendation

Not to establish a telephone 'hotline' for the reporting of incidents but to actively encourage reporting of incidents to emergency services and to further develop the use of the Council Helpline and to highlight the possibility of anonymous reporting.

5.1.2 Publicity/Awareness/Education Campaign

Positive publicity on fire and security issues being protected by the Council can only be beneficial in that not only does it give public reassurance but also sends out a strong message to potential criminals and wilful fireraisers. It may also promote a sense of community ownership for public buildings.

Education, particularly targeted at young people, also has positive benefits and in many respects both positive publicity and education on the cost of vandalism etc. will go a long way in the prevention of incidents.

The Group, therefore, considered how to take these objectives forward and agreed that, subject to funding being available, a radio campaign targeted at various age groups be run during the summer and early autumn. It was also agreed that fire and security issues should form part of the curriculum in schools along with other Community Safety issues and that promotional material be purchased to complement this activity.

In the short term, suitable posters would be obtained and distributed to schools, libraries and public offices.

Recommendation

That a publicity campaign be instigated through the local media to raise awareness of fire and security issues and that promotional material be purchased to complement an educational programme in schools again designed to raise awareness of key issues. The scale of implementation of both of these recommendations will be subject to appropriate funding being available.

5.1.3 Mobile Security

The Council has a considerable property portfolio which contains a number of high value properties. Whilst the majority of these properties have fire and security alarms and other security devices, there is a genuine concern over these premises. The concerns have been substantiated in a number of recent incidents where despite alarms being triggered major losses still occurred. This suggests that further steps are required to improve security and tackle problems before they arise. For example, some public buildings are used as a congregating point for youths and young adults, and through high spirits or whatever, vandalism or more serious incidents can occur.

In summer 2001, security teams were contracted to cover a number of premises and this pilot project was very successful in protecting property outwith normal hours when the premises are unoccupied. In view of the success of this pilot, the Group felt that the project should be continued and extended beyond the summer period. Funding has been identified to run the project in areas where there is a density of high value and at-risk properties, until the end of October.

Recommendation

That the existing security contract be extended to provide out of hours security for specified premises in the Kilmarnock and Cumnock areas from 1st July until 31st October. An evaluation on this project will thereafter be submitted to the Senior Staff Management Team for consideration.

5.1.4 Community Support/Intelligence

This facet of reducing risk is linked in many ways to education and awareness. However, the Group felt that it was of sufficient importance to be considered separately. Community involvement through Community Councils, Elected Members and residents who may overlook Council properties is important and therefore the Group felt that all Community Councils and Elected Members should be written to advising them of this initiative and requesting that they also take whatever steps they can within their own community to highlight the risks and the steps being taken by the Council to minimise them.

The business community may also have a role to play and the Group felt that contact should also be made with organisations such as the Town Centre Management Initiative.

The school watch programme which has been run successfully for a number of years in some schools should be extended to all schools. Where opportunities exist to promote similar initiatives for other Council buildings consideration should be given to taking advantage of these.

Through active promotion by Community Councils and Elected Members it is also hoped that local intelligence will identify potential risks and perhaps allow steps to be taken to prevent incidents before they develop.

Recommendation

That all Community Councils, Elected Members and business organisations be made aware of this initiative and their support in furthering the objective sought.

5.1.5 Fire Sprinkler Systems

As part of the Community Safety programme for this year, and also as part of the Housing Capital Programme, a small number of domestic properties are being fitted with sprinkler systems. The Group felt that in view of the increased reliability of these systems, which can now be installed at a reasonable cost, where new public buildings are being constructed or significantly altered or extended, fire sprinkler systems should be installed. The Group, having heard the views of the representative of Strathclyde Fire Brigade, were convinced that sprinklers would considerably reduce the extent of damage in a fire. The installation could therefore be seen to be a potential spend to save item.

Recommendation

That all new public buildings and public buildings that are being significantly altered or extended be fitted with fire sprinkler systems. Consideration should also be given to retrofitting systems in high risk/value and key properties, subject to the availability of resources.

5.1.6 Security Alarms

The Group considered the extent of the provision of security alarms within Council properties and in particular the extent of addressable alarms i.e. those connected to a central monitoring station.

The Group also considered the new policy guidance document recently issued by the Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland since this document specifies the level of police response based on the specification of the alarm system.

Having regard to the above, the Group felt that all new alarm systems should be to the highest possible industry standard and connected to a central monitoring facility. Directors should also give consideration to upgrading existing systems to this standard, subject to the availability of resources and supporting risk assessments.

Recommendation

That all new or refurbished public buildings be fitted with industry standard security alarms and that Directors give consideration to upgrading and extending existing systems in high risk/value key properties where resources allow.

5.1.7 Closed Circuit Television

It is recognised that over one hundred Council properties are protected by CCTV but at the present time there is no active monitoring when the properties are unoccupied.

A separate group will be considering the establishment of a central monitoring station and therefore the Group did not discuss this matter in detail. It was, however, felt that if resources could be identified this development could prove worthwhile.

Recommendation

To support, in principle, the establishment of a centralised CCTV monitoring facility for property protection purposes.

5.1.8 Health and Safety

It was recognised by the Group that individual employees have a key role to play in the improvement of security and fire prevention, for example in respect of daily building closure procedure, and that appropriate training be included in induction training. Further awareness training could also be delivered through "Toolbox Talks". The Health and Safety Manager has agreed to progress this aspect of work.

The testing of portable electrical appliances was the subject of considerable discussion. Whilst it was acknowledged that testing was being carried out in accordance with statutory and Council guidelines, it was felt that further improvement could be secured in the quality of testing across the Council. The Group felt that consideration should be given to ensuring consistency in PAT testing.

Recommendation

That consideration should be given to centralising the testing of portable electrical appliances.

That awareness of fire and security issues form part of induction training and in particular the role of the individual employee in preventing incidents.

That awareness of fire and security issues for existing employees be promoted through Toolbox Talks.

5.1.9 Fixed Wiring Testing

There is an ongoing programme of fixed wire testing for electrical systems. The Group felt that this should be developed.

A new inspection routine has been devised and is being progressed by the Department of Homes and Technical Services.

Recommendation

That the programme of fixed wiring testing of electrical systems be continued and developed within the resources available.

5.1.10 Property Log

Property logs and fire registers are an integral part of fire safety and these documents must be kept current at all times. The Group felt that the existing fire register may require updating and review. The Health and Safety Manager undertook to carry out this review.

Recommendation

That the format of fire registers be reviewed by the Health and Safety Manager.

That all directors ensure that fire registers remain current at all times.

5.1.11 Fire Risk Assessment/Fire Warden Training

In the event of a fire in an occupied building the role of the Fire Warden is crucial. It is therefore essential that they receive adequate training and are fully aware of their role. The Group acknowledged that training was being carried out at present but felt that it should be extended.

Similarly, fire risk assessments should be an ongoing process and subject to regular review.

These matters will be taken forward by the Health and Safety Section and Strathclyde Fire Brigade.

Recommendation

That Fire Wardens receive adequate training to allow them to carry out their duties fully.

That Fire Risk Assessments should be reviewed on a regular basis.

5.1.12 Fire Safety Audits

There is a proven need to establish a programme of fire safety audits for Council premises to determine the physical condition of properties in relation to fire safety issues and in particular at such issues as the integrity of fire walls. At present no such

programme exists and this aspect of prevention is now receiving detailed attention from our Insurers.

This programme could be linked to the ongoing programme of audits on disabled access currently being carried out by Technical Services.

Recommendation

That consideration be given to establishing a programme of fire safety audits.

6. CONCLUSION

- 6.1 It is estimated that the cost of fire raising to the Scottish economy could be as high as £188 million a year. When the costs of theft from properties and vandalism are added to this it is evident that these are a major drain on the economy. Within East Ayrshire, based on current losses and using insurance industry modelling, the estimated cost is likely to be in excess of £20 million. The extent of the effect of the losses on Council services is therefore considerable.

It is clear that we all have a role to play in reducing incidents and the multi-agency approach is to be commended. This was taken throughout group meetings and during the compilation of this report. However, the Council also needs to work in partnership with the communities throughout East Ayrshire to maximise benefits.

It is also important that resources are identified within Council budgets and from whatever external sources might now be available to take forward the recommendations contained in this report.

AGENDA