Evaluation of the Home Fire Risk Check and Fire Prevention Grant Programmes

Issued by:
Mike Larking
Fire and Rescue Service Development Division

Addressed to:
Please forward to:
The Chair of the Fire and Rescue Authority
The Chief Executive of the County Council
The Clerk to the Fire and Rescue Authority
The Clerk to the Combined Fire and Rescue Authority
The Commissioner of the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority
The Chief Fire Officer
Heads of Community Safety

Summary
The CLG Home Fire Risk Check and Fire Prevention Grant funding streams ended on 31 March 2008. CLG is evaluating the impact of the £25 million invested in the HFRC programme over the last four years and also the additional investment of £11.4 million in the Fire Prevention Grant programme. As part of this evaluation we are asking fire and rescue services to complete the attached questionnaire by 12 September.

For further information, contact:
Mike Larking
Communities and Local Government
Fire and Rescue Service Development Division
1/A4, Ashdown House
123 Victoria Street
London SW1E 6DE

Direct line 020 7944 5695
Fax 020 7944 5599
E-mail mike.larking@communities.gsi.gov.uk
Website www.communities.gov.uk
1.0 Introduction

1.1 The funding for the Home Fire Risk Check and Fire Prevention Grant programmes came to an end in March this year. Over £36 million was invested in pump priming activity in fire prevention. As a result of this investment, I am pleased to be able to confirm that fire and rescue services in England fitted 2.43 million smoke alarms and carried out 1.98 million Home Fire Risk Checks (HFRC) between 1 April 2004 and 31 March 2008. I would like to take this opportunity to thank you and your staff for their hard work at making this programme such a success.

1.2 However, it is not just about the number of checks and smoke alarms fitted. CLG has commissioned Greenstreet Berman to carry out a detailed evaluation to achieve a greater understanding of what has taken place. Whilst not strictly part of the evaluation of the work that took place, we are also very interested in finding out what happens next: what activities fire and rescue services are continuing, what has worked, what hasn’t and so on.

2.0 Aims of the evaluation

2.1 We are seeking to evaluate how the distribution of grant funding by CLG contributed to:

   i) meeting the Public Service Agreement (PSA) target on accidental and deliberate fires
   ii) the development of partnership working by fire and rescue services to deliver fire prevention programmes
   iii) targeting activity by the Fire and Rescue Service at high risk groups and deprived communities
   iv) embedding of fire prevention work and development of plans from 2008/9 onwards

2.2 The evaluation process began in June/July with nine regional workshops, which were attended by 40 of the fire and rescue services in England. These workshops gave us an excellent foundation for the research project and have helped inform the next stages of the project.

2.3 The first of these stages is the questionnaire. I have attached a rather lengthy questionnaire which looks in depth at your work under the two grant programmes to try to understand what took place within each fire and rescue service. I appreciate it will take you and your staff some time to do this and I am grateful for your time and forbearance. The level of detail we are asking for will contribute significantly to meeting the four aims of the evaluation and provide a rich evidence base of work undertaken with the grant funding.

2.4 The cover sheet of the attached questionnaire provides all the information you and your staff need to complete it, and I would be grateful if you could arrange for our consultants to receive completed questionnaires by 12 September.

2.5 The questionnaire has been cleared by an Advisory Board, comprising senior representatives from four different fire and rescue services.
2.6 Following on from this stage, Greenstreet Berman will be conducting telephone interviews from a sample of 16 fire and rescue services, as well as 16 partner agencies. CLG will shortly contact the 16 fire and rescue services in order to commence this element of the research process. This stage of work will provide further rich qualitative data to enhance the findings from the completed questionnaires.

2.7 The final stage of work is the development of case studies. Initial work on this evaluation project has already revealed some innovative work and CLG is keen to share this with all fire and rescue services. The case studies will be in depth, detailed reviews of particular approaches and will be designed so that other fire and rescue services can take the ideas and implement them locally without reinventing the wheel. I am grateful to fire and rescue services sharing their innovation in this way and hope that it can go a long way to improving approaches to community fire safety work across the country.

3.0 Sharing outcomes of the evaluation

3.1 The evaluation is expected to finish by the end of February 2009 and it is likely that it will be published before the end of the financial year. A further Fire Service Circular will be published to provide high level findings and encourage fire and rescue services to read the report and consider their own approaches in the light of the findings.

4.0 Contacts

4.1 If you have any queries or problems you would like to discuss regarding this piece of work, please contact James Webb, who will be managing the contract on behalf of CLG. James can be contacted at james.webb@communities.gsi.gov.uk or on 020 7944 3326.

Mike Larking

Fire and Rescue Service Development Division