Self-Immolation
Learning Review

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Contents

1. Background

In November 2021, Warwickshire Partnership received a referral for an Adult Safeguarding Review (SAR) following an incident where an adult with poor mental health sadly died in hospital with life threatening injuries, after setting themselves alight within the family home.

A further referral was received regarding an elderly adult who died as result of their poor mental health. The adult's living environment would have met 4 out of the 5 risk categories for Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Services to complete a safe and well visit to identify risks, as the adult would not have been able to evacuate their home if there had been a fire.

Though the panel agreed that these cases did not meet the criteria from S44 of the Care Act (2014) to undertake a SAR due to there being no evidence of abuse or neglect, it did highlight a number of generic issues associated with fire risks i.e:

- A focus on fire risk assessments.
- A need for increased fire safety awareness across the partnership

The panel were also aware of an increasing concern relating to self-immolation due to a number of recorded fatalities locally and nationally in the twelve months prior to the above case.

2. Methodology

A task and finish group were convened to explore whether fire risk management is robust across the partnership, scrutinise existing pathways of support, and review any areas of practice which may need to be further strengthened to support individuals with complex needs in different ways. Membership of the group comprised of the following agencies:

- Coventry and Warwickshire Partnership Trust
- Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service
- Adult Social Care and Support
- Integrated Care Board
- Public Health, Warwickshire County Council
- Suicide Prevention, Coventry and Warwickshire

Prior to meeting, the current fire and safety guidance for professionals document was circulated to members of the task and finish group.

Methodology was agreed to develop a benchmarking audit tool to measure front-line practitioner awareness of support through the Fire and Rescue Service and whether fire risks are factored in assessment. A questionnaire was devised and circulated to the partnership for completion.

3. Agency Audit

The questionnaire was completed by partner agencies responding to the following key questions:

- Is consideration given to fire risks as part of your current assessments and reviews of individuals?
- Does your organisation know how to make a referral to Warwickshire's Fire and Rescue Service for a safe and well check?
- Is the assessment of fire risks currently embedded within any organisational safeguarding training in relation to working with vulnerable individuals?
- Is your organisation aware of the offer of other services currently available via the Warwickshire's Fire and Rescue Service which extend beyond the emergency response to incidents of fire?
- How can Warwickshire Safeguarding support your organisation to ensure fire risks are clearly embedded within assessment/review and referral pathways?

Seventeen agency responses from the audit were returned from across the following sectors:

- Borough and District Councils
- Health
- Social Care
- Police
- Voluntary sector

4. Audit Results

Fire risk consideration in assessments

When asked if consideration was given to fire risks for an individual as part of current assessments and reviews, 47% of those who responded answered yes. 29% answered no and 24% answered not sure.

Yes responses highlighted that fire risk consideration was not always standard practice within assessment but rather if it was identified that living conditions or an individual's behaviour could lead to potential harm:

"Assessments made on certain owner occupiers where vulnerable/filthy & verminous properties"

"Would be considered but generally only where there is a fire risk/threat identified"

<u>Partnership knowledge of how to make a referral to Warwickshire's Fire and Rescue Service for a safe and well check</u>

65% of responses answered yes to this question. Of this 65%, when asked to provide details of who they would contact, there was clear indication that the referral pathway was not always known.

"It is apparent that certain departments have more knowledge and experience of how to make a referral to WFRS"

"I am aware how to do this, but I think this is patchy across the work force"

<u>Organisational safeguarding training in relation to working with vulnerable individuals</u>

Responses to the question of whether fire risk was embedded in safeguarding training indicated that only 18% were aware of training of this nature within their organisation. With one responder commenting that training is 'occasionally' delivered.

The other responses were split; 41% not sure and 41% indicating that fire risk is not embedded into organisational safeguarding training.

<u>Partnership knowledge of services offered by Warwickshire Fire and Rescue beyond emergency responses to incidents of fire</u>

59% indicated that yes, they are aware of what services are provided by Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service and were able to demonstrate this knowledge well.

It was highlighted by one agency that staff turnover is high within their organisation and therefore regular communications about what services are available is important.

29% of responses were not sure and 12% answered no. One agency commented:

"It would be useful to know exactly what additional services WFRS provide"

<u>Warwickshire Safeguarding support</u>

When asked how Warwickshire Safeguarding can support organisations to ensure fire risks are clearly embedded within assessments and improve partnership awareness of referral pathways, the following was identified:

- Fire risk assessment training
- Suicide awareness training
- Awareness raising of referral pathways
- Development of 7-minute briefing documents

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- Easy access to support, such as an easy referral method
- Fire risk assessment information

5. Key Points of Learning from the Audit

The audit provided a baseline for the review identifying partnership gaps in knowledge and the barriers for fire risk being considered in assessments for individuals with complex needs.

Consideration of fire risk within assessments

The findings indicated that less than half of Warwickshire agencies assess potential fire risk within their assessments. It was also clear that of those who do consider fire risk, this would only be if living conditions or behaviour could lead to harm. Identifying that this is an inconsistent approach across the partnership.

Inconsistent knowledge of agency referral pathways

The findings indicated that awareness raising of the referral pathways to the Fire and Rescue Service needs to be undertaken, particularly for agencies with a high staff turnover. Making this a clearer process could lead to earlier intervention from the Fire Service to safeguard an individual and their family from fire risk.

Organisational safeguarding training

Over 80% of the agencies who completed the audit indicated that fire safety is not completed within organisational safeguarding training. This is a significant gap in knowledge.

Non-emergency services offered by Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service

The findings identified that over 50% agencies had a good understanding of the non-emergency services offered by Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service.   Dissemination of what services are available to practitioners and the public to boost awareness would be beneficial.

6. Further Consideration by the Panel

Hoarding

Individuals who hoard, can present a fire risk due to the nature of the home environment. Warwickshire Fire and Rescue convene a monthly hoarding meeting where professionals

can share concerns about individuals in a multi-agency forum. Panel members from the health sector agreed to provide representation from their services to attend these meetings.

What a good assessment of fire risk looks like

Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service have developed a universal template with Social Care and Support with a standard set of person-centred questions to triage the immediacy in which the service needs to respond to an individual to support them. This consistent approach identifies an individual as low, medium or high. The questions are:

1. Does the person have smoke alarms?
2. Can the person hear the smoke alarms?
3. Would the person know what to do if the smoke alarm went off?
4. Does the individual have any disability/condition that may hinder their escape?

These questions have also been embedded as part of the agency safe and well check referral form.

Use of terminology when speaking with patients and families

Members of the panel highlighted that services can often not be clear with the reasons for mental health services referrals when speaking with patients and/or their family. It cannot be assumed that medical terminology is universally understood.

Consideration of an emerging trend

Due to the frequency of fatal incidents of self-immolation in Warwickshire in a 12-month period, the panel investigated if there should be concerns that this is an emerging trend. Following consultation with NHS England, it was identified that the nature of these deaths did not meet the cluster response criteria[1] as they did not influence further deaths.

7. Conclusion

The purpose of the task and finish group was to identify any barriers in recognising fire safety risk and, if so, what more can be done to raise awareness across the partnership to safeguard individuals with complex needs.

The panel agreed that steps can be taken to further raise awareness of the importance of fire risk consideration, within the partnership, especially when working with individuals who present with a heightened risk.

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[1] https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/839621/PHE_Suicide_Cluster_Guide.pdf

It was agreed that a number of awareness raising briefings are to be developed to be disseminated to the partnership including:

- Developing a briefing on the importance of language particularly when using mental health terminology
- Developing a 7-minute briefing on mental health section definitions
- Develop and disseminate an expected template of information for partner websites on Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service
- Developing an easy-to-follow flowchart for agencies to make a referral to Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service

Since this review commenced, a programme of work has been underway to address the identified findings. Of note, Warwickshire Safeguarding Partnership has run a programme of multi-agency training which has included fire safety and hoarding awareness. These sessions have been delivered by Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service and have been well attended and received positive feedback from participants. Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service have also been proactively working with agencies to put a continued focus on fire prevention and help raise awareness amongst partners to safeguard adults and improve referral pathways.

8. Action plan

	Action	By Whom	Expected Completion Date
1.	Develop and publish 7-minute briefing on 'Mental Health Sections'	WS Business Team	November 2023
2.	Develop and circulate briefing on Mental Health Sections Guidance for Professionals.	WS Business Team	October 2023
3.	Develop and publish a briefing on the importance of language.	WS Business Team	October 2023
4.	Develop and circulate a flowchart and briefing document on the expected level of information on organisation's websites in reference to fire safety guidance.	WFRS & WS Business Team	October 2023
5.	Partners to update their websites to reflect fire safety guidance information.	All Partners	December 2023