

Fire service substituting hot water bottles for electric blankets

Fire crews have been handing out blankets and hot water bottles as part of efforts to help vulnerable people deal with the rising cost of living.

A recent council meeting heard that the measures were part of home visits and are designed to keep people safe by removing faulty electric equipment such as aged electric blankets and heating appliances.

In his year end report to West Lothian Council's Public and Community Safety Policy Development and Scrutiny Panel (PDSP) the local Area Commander for Scottish Fire and Rescue Service William Pollard told councillors: "The Community Action Team are working with organisations to support those most affected by the cost of living crisis."

He told the meeting that fire officers had carried out more than 1,200 home safety visits, primarily to those people considered medium and high risk either through age or vulnerability.

He said: "We have engaged with individuals and households who are struggling financially due to the cost of living or are using potentially unsafe electrical equipment. Oil filled radiators have been exchanged for older, potentially unsafe heaters, which may present an electrical or CO hazard. "

He added: "Remote control plugs have been provided to remotely isolate sockets to assist the elderly or individuals who have mobility issues making it more difficult to reach and unplug electrical items that are on standby.

"We have provided hot water bottles and fire retardant blankets which is an economical and safer alternative to using older un-serviced electric blankets or other forms of potentially unsafe heating."

Mr Pollard told councillors that the Fire Service had a limited fund for such items and was keen to discuss partnership working with other agencies.

Cllr Alison Adamson asked if these items were funded directly by the SFRS adding: "Is this something that we as a council could be helping with?"

Mr Pollard replied: "We do fund them currently, however those funding streams are very limited. If there is funding we would welcome that. We would certainly welcome conversation."

SFRS first began to look at safety issues around the cost of living crisis last Autumn after incidents of fires caused by use of inappropriate cooking methods and equipment and heating appliances as energy bills soared.

The report to the PDSP added: "A primary activity related to improving the safety of our communities is delivering home safety visits (HSV).

"Fires occur more frequently in those premises that are occupied by the more vulnerable members of our community such as the elderly and those with substance and alcohol dependencies.

"SFRS continue to deliver HSV and continue to develop information sharing protocols with partners and increase the safety of residents with all agencies making appropriate

referrals. Home Fire Safety Programme visits completed in the year to date is 1269, which is comparable with the same period last year. With 80 per cent of our visits within high and medium risk properties this demonstrates the quality of visits undertaken as we strive to reach those most vulnerable.”

by Stuart Somerville Local Democracy Reporter

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