

Derbyshire County Council

Meeting with Cabinet Member, Health and Communities

21 January 2014

Report of the Strategic Director, Health and Communities

ELECTRIC BLANKET SAFETY CHECKS PROJECT

1. Purpose of the report:

To inform the Cabinet Member, Health and Communities of the results of a recent project to check the safety of electric blankets in use in Derbyshire.

2. Information and analysis:

2.1 According to information from the Fire Service, each year faulty electrical blankets are responsible for causing injuries and domestic fires. Electric blankets tend to be used by older persons who are thus at greater risk of harm. All electrical items have to be safe and comply with specific electrical safety regulations when sold, but electric blankets can be inadvertently damaged in use and when put away at the end of winter. Manufacturers recommend that electric blankets are checked periodically. Previous safety checks organised by Derbyshire County Council have revealed a disturbingly high level of faulty blankets.

2.2 This year, electric blanket checks were once again carried out by the Division in partnership with Derbyshire Fire and Rescue Service and the Library Service; and in particular the Home Library Service who offered to collect blankets from housebound residents. The results of this year's checks together with previous surveys is as follows:

- 2004 - 1,356 electric blankets were tested and 44% found to be faulty
- 2006 – 971 blankets were tested and 38% were found to be faulty
- 2011 – 157 blankets were tested and 43% were found to be faulty
- 2012 – 357 blankets were tested and 19% were found to be faulty*
- 2013 – 206 blankets were checked and 41% were found to be faulty

*This was a project led by Derbyshire Fire and Rescue Service conducted in January and February 2012.

2.3 The faults detected were many and varied and included the use of 'bell wire' which is not double insulated and potentially unsafe. Some blankets were worn with a risk of exposing live parts and others were scorched from over-heating.

Others had incorrect plugs, missing fuses, no fuses, switches which did not work correctly, or scorched controllers. All of these faults could potentially have resulted, immediately or during further use, in a fire or electrocution of the owner.

2.4 Those local residents whose electric blanket failed the safety test were invited to receive a 'mattress topper'. This is a type of fleecy/padded min-duvet under-blanket which is intended to be used as a 'low carbon' alternative to an electric blanket. The advantage of replacing electric blankets with a fleece mattress topper can be summarised as follows:

- a reduction in risk of accidental fires
- a reduction to the risk of falls/trips due to no electrical cables required
- the added bonus of them being more environmentally friendly, as there is no electricity there is also no ongoing costs
- peace of mind for the elderly/disabled persons knowing they are warm, no using electricity and not worried about managing their electric blanket

3 Other considerations:

In preparing this report the relevance of the following factors has been considered; financial, legal, prevention of crime and disorder, equality of opportunity; and environmental, health, human resources, property and transport considerations.

4 Background papers:

CabCo Report on Electrical Blanket Safety Checks 14th February 2011

5 Key Decision:

No

6 Call-in:

Is it required that call-in be waived for any decision on this report?

No

7 Strategic Director's recommendation:

That the Cabinet Member, Health and Communities notes the report.

**David Lowe
Strategic Director
Health and Communities**