

Case study: Reducing the risk of hazards in flats above shops

As part of our commitment to drive up housing standards in line with our strategic priority of 'homes for our communities', West Suffolk councils took the lead on a Suffolk-wide project with the Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service in order to reduce the hazards in flats above shops.

We had the opportunity to send an officer on secondment for the project which was initiated after a high profile fire in Sudbury town centre in 2015. We have worked with Babergh and Mid Suffolk District councils and used our own expertise and experience around fire safety in houses of multiple occupation to develop and manage this project.

The project involved visiting over 300 commercial and domestic premises in five towns to look at fire safety and housing standards. We ensured 73% of commercial premises visited had adequate fire separation/additional fire safety works by the end of the project, 28% of which were improvements following direct action by the councils and fire service. Housing and health and safety hazards were identified in 39% of residential premises inspected. Furthermore, 26 Category 1 hazards were found, these are serious hazards where there's a risk of harm to health (48% removed by the end of the project) and 46 Category 2 hazards were found, which are less serious (removed 63% by the end of the project).

The joint working with Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service officers has led to a greater understanding of hazards in flats above shops and greater overall consistency across the county.

We aim to use this as a template to continue the project in West Suffolk to reduce the risk of fire and other hazards. In addition, we have successfully completed two impact days in Newmarket, Haverhill and Ixworth, highlighting a number of fire safety and housing issues at premises in each location.