

## Scottish Resilience

Scottish Fire and Rescue Advisory Unit

Brian Fraser QFSM, MIFireE, Head of the Fire and Rescue Advisory Unit



T: 0131-244 2342 F: 0131-244 2564

E: Brian.Fraser2@scotland.gsi.gov.uk

Chief Officers

23 February 2010

Dear Chief Officer

### **DEAR CHIEF OFFICER (SCOTLAND) LETTER 4/2010 CARE HOME FIRE SAFETY – CORONER’S INQUEST IN ENGLAND**

#### **Introduction**

1. The following information relates to a Coroner’s Inquest in England. The case has highlighted some issues regarding the interaction of health and safety with fire safety and the giving of advice by inspecting officers. I am circulating these brief details only so that you have an awareness of the case and the circumstances.

#### **Information**

2. The Coroner’s Inquest followed the death of a care home resident.
3. The manager of the care home had fitted a plastic strap around the handle of a door which gave access to an escape stair. This was in place to prevent an accident by discouraging elderly residents from trying to open the door inappropriately.
4. During an inspection of the premises, a Fire and Rescue Service (FRS) inspecting officer removed the strap because it was considered an obstruction to the door. At the Coroner’s Inquest, the care home manager advised that previous officers had accepted this long standing arrangement.
5. No alternative control was adopted by the manager to prevent inappropriate egress through the door, the inspecting officer having allegedly offered no advice on suitable alternatives.
6. Some months later an elderly resident left her bedroom in the care home in the early hours, passed along a corridor, opened the door and fell on the escape stair. She died in hospital.

7. The Coroner noted that there was a distinction between the lack of advice offered by the inspecting officer to the care manager at the time of strap removal, when this is compared to the FRS response after the accident, at which time an inspecting officer visited the home and gave advice on a suitable method of egress control.
8. The FRS involved has written to all care homes in its area reminding of the need to ensure exit control while also complying with fire safety legislation, and giving information on possible options which could be considered.
9. The English Fire and Rescue Advisor has responded to the Coroner and has also passed relevant information to Chief Fire Officers in England, referring to the balance between a FRS giving advice, and the compliance role of a responsible person (dutyholder).

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'B Fraser', written in a cursive style.

**BRIAN FRASER**  
**Head of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Advisory Unit**