

report

meeting	NOTTINGHAMSHIRE AND CITY OF NOTTINGHAM FIRE & RESCUE AUTHORITY	
	COMMUNITY SAFETY COMMITTEE	
date	20 October 2006	agenda item number

REPORT OF THE CHIEF FIRE OFFICER

PRIMARY VEHICLE FIRES

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

To inform Members of the performance of the Service in reducing intentional primary vehicle fires.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 Abandoned vehicles are a major problem, with around 10% of vehicles that reach the end of their life being abandoned each year. If not tackled quickly these vehicles soon become at risk of becoming deliberate vehicle fires.

2.2 People abandon vehicles for a variety of reasons, including increased cost of vehicle ownership and fluctuation in scrap steel prices (when the prices are low scrap dealers charge people between £40 - £50 to take vehicles). Equally, issues around road traffic laws and illegally keeping untaxed or unroadworthy vehicles on the highway add to the problem. Criminals disposing of stolen vehicles is also significant. Vehicles abandoned on the street degrade local areas, cause health hazards and become a magnet for anti-social behaviour.

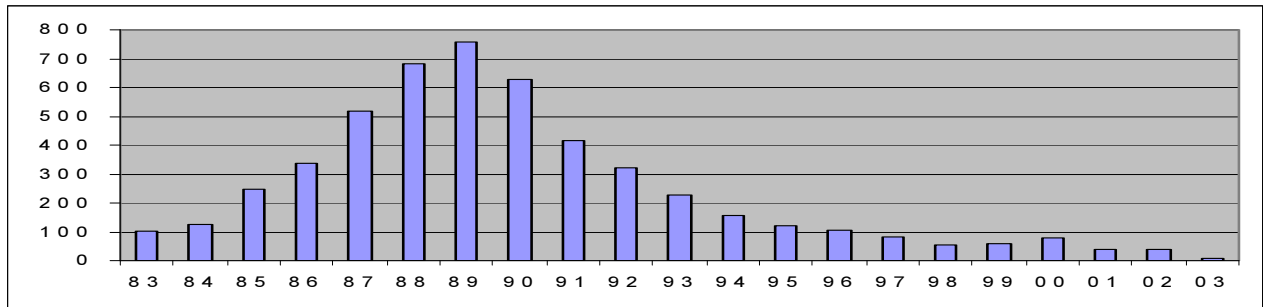
3. REPORT

3.1 Each year nearly two million vehicles reach the end of their useful life with the majority being disposed of legally. In 2002/03 however, nearly 300,000 vehicles were recorded as being abandoned in England, or roughly one car every two minutes. This resulted in 37,300 deliberate fires of vehicles reported as stolen and a further 17,300 derelict vehicle fires. In Nottinghamshire during the same period, the Service attended over 2,500 deliberate primary fires in vehicles and 320 derelict vehicle fires.

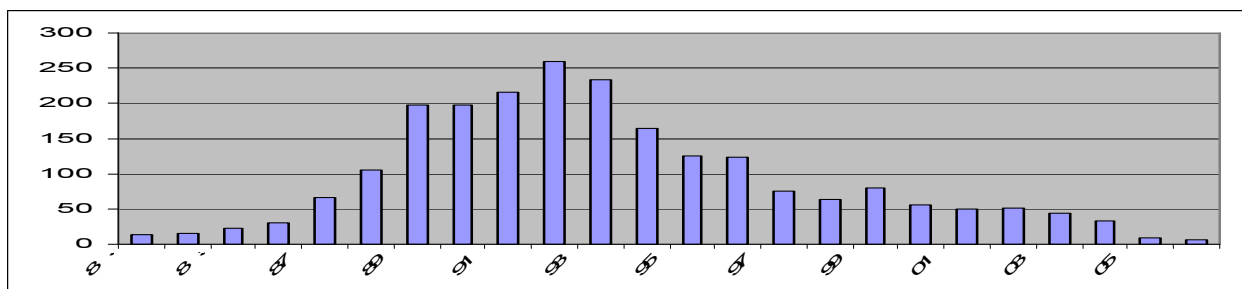
3.2 A study by the Jill Dando Institute identified that vehicles of a certain age were at greater risk, with their research showing that vehicles around 14-years old were most at risk. Further research within the Service's Community Safety Department shows clear correlation between the age of vehicles and the likelihood of them being abandoned and subject to arson.

3.3 The Service study concluded that vehicles 13-years old were at most risk, with vehicles in the age range 12-15 years old accounting for 39% of deliberate vehicle fires. The graphs below show a wave effect when comparing data from 2001 – 2003 against 2004 –2006. This crest of the wave remains constantly at the 13-year mark. This type of information assists the Service and partners when undertaking initiatives such as Operation Cubit.

3.3.1 Deliberate Vehicle Fires 2001 to 2003



3.3.2 Deliberate Vehicle Fires 2004 to 2006



- 3.4 These findings also link clearly across to data on vehicle thefts in general which suggests that vehicles 14 years old are at greatest risk and further adds to the body of evidence on the relationship between arson, theft and illegal disposal due to costs associated with ownership
- 3.5 There are identified links between vehicle fires and areas of high social deprivation as measured by Index of Deprivation 2000. In one study the findings suggest that areas described as 'most deprived' had a prevalence of vehicle fires 41% higher than should be expected for a standardised population rate.
- 3.6 This evidence further highlights why the Service is actively working with partners as a member of Crime Reduction Partnerships, and why the Service needs to strengthen this partnership working with the Police and local authorities to address this issue.
- 3.7 As a Crime Reduction Partnership statutory partner, the Service is in an ideal position to ensure that deliberate vehicle fires are considered when strategies are being put in place to reduce car crime. The Service's work in this field has seen targets for the reduction in deliberate vehicle fires being included in both Nottinghamshire County Council's and Nottingham City Council's Local Area Agreements.

4. **INITIATIVES BEING UNDERTAKEN TO REDUCE DELIBERATE VEHICLE FIRES**

- 4.1 Operation Cubit was operated throughout Nottinghamshire between 21 November and 16 December 2005. The basis of Operation Cubit is the immediate removal, under DVLA powers, of any untaxed vehicles from the public highway whether they are considered to be abandoned or not.

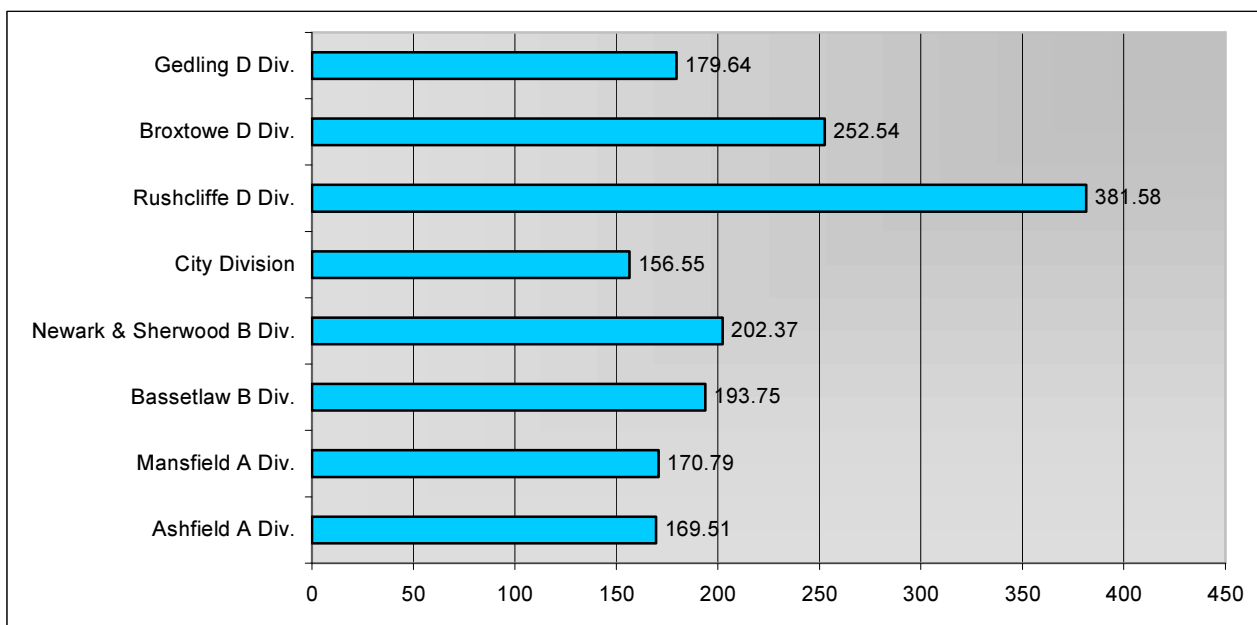
4.2 The scheme also deals with the immediate removal of abandoned vehicles on private land by posting statutory notices on the land in advance of the operation. Vehicle owners are required to pay statutory fees plus any unpaid tax in order to reclaim their vehicles. Vehicles not claimed within the prescribed periods will be sent for destruction. The associated benefit is the immediate removal of the vehicle, where previously the vehicles would have had statutory notices affixed and they then become a target for vandals or arson attack during the notice period.

4.3 The aim of the project was to harness the powers of partner agencies; the Police, DVLA, local authorities, Government Office East Midlands (GOEM) and the Fire and Rescue Service, to remove untaxed and abandoned vehicles from the public highway and from private land.

4.4 The objectives for Cubit were :

- § To reduce vehicle crime ;
- § To reduce vehicle fires ;
- § To reduce vehicle tax avoidance ;
- § To reduce motor cycle nuisance ;
- § To improve the quality of life for local communities ;
- § To show clear evidence of partnership working.

4.5 The table below shows the cost of removal across each district council area and the City, the overall cost of the scheme was £60,412.23 with the Service contributing £1,200. This equated to an average cost of removing each vehicle at £191.17. This figure has to be compared with reference to the cost that would have been incurred had the vehicle been set alight. A Home Office study estimates this to be £4,000 per vehicle.



4.6 One of the intended objectives for Operation Cubit was to reduce the number of intentional vehicle fires across the County. The following tables indicate the levels of intentional road vehicle fires before, during and after the operation.

4.6.1 Intentional Road Vehicle Fires

District	Oct-05	Nov-05	Dec-05	Jan-06
Ashfield	6	6	7	14
Bassetlaw	11	12	11	11
Broxtowe	6	8	9	10
Gedling	25	8	8	14
Mansfield	8	6	5	5
Newark & Sherwood	4	2	6	14
Nottingham	65	56	45	68
Rushcliffe	5	3	2	5
Totals	130	101	93	141

4.6.2 For comparative purposes consider the previous years figures

District	Oct-04	Nov-04	Dec-04	Jan-05
Ashfield	12	11	12	11
Bassetlaw	9	13	19	11
Broxtowe	8	8	4	7
Gedling	18	11	10	11
Mansfield	12	8	7	14
Newark & Sherwood	6	7	5	5
Nottingham	72	77	76	80
Rushcliffe	4	5	8	7
Totals	141	140	141	146

Source: Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service.
Returned to JiN data hub and processed on 27/2/06

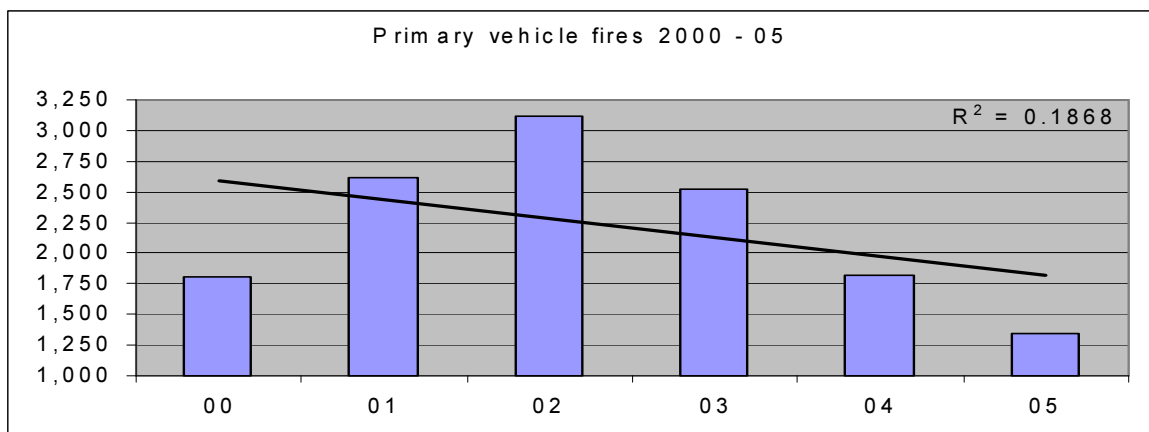
- 4.7 These results indicate a drop in vehicle fires during the months of November and December 2005 compared to the previous years figures, which could be attributable to Operation Cubit.
- 4.8 The Impact Roadshow is a vehicle crime awareness workshop which the Service has introduced into schools across Nottinghamshire. Aimed at proactively reducing the unacceptably high number of vehicle related crimes such as Taken Without Owners Consent and vehicle arson which the County has experienced in recent years. The package dovetails with our long term Community Safety IRMP plans aimed at reducing avoidable injuries and Road Traffic Collisions (RTCs) on the County's roads.
- 4.9 The innovative and interactive pack was developed originally by the Avon and Somerset Constabulary targeting Year 10 students (14 yr olds) and educates young people about the dangers and consequences of getting involved in vehicle crime. This includes the effects of inappropriate speed, being involved in a collision, mechanisms of injuries inflicted on a casualty, the importance of seatbelts and how

their actions affect people involved physically and emotionally, while also giving students an indication of financial and emotional costs of RTCs.

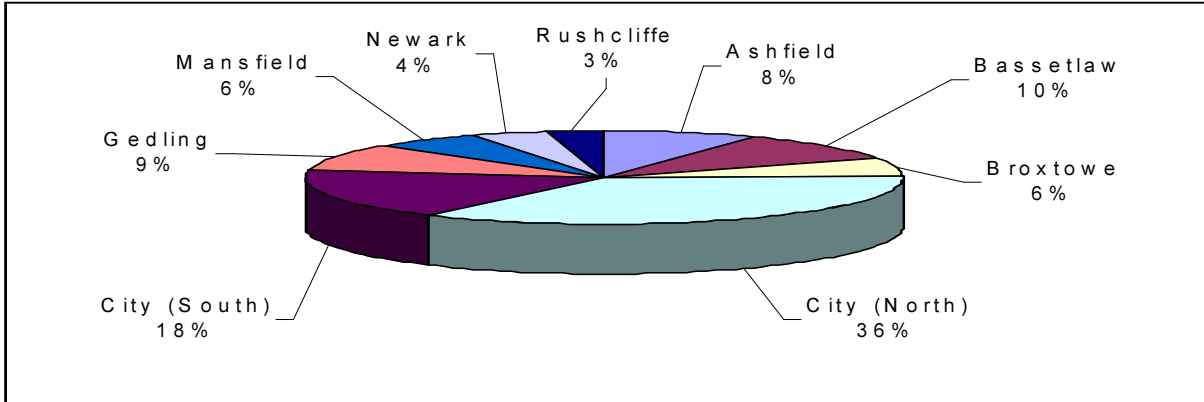
- 4.10 Aimed primarily at Year 10 students, its flexibility has allowed its use with a range of audiences aged 11-25 in special schools, youth clubs, clients on probation and inmates in HM Young Offenders Institutes. Research and validation has been carried out by numerous professionals including Consultant Child and Adolescent Psychiatrists, a Professor of Psychology, Youth Justice Social Workers, Teachers, Probation Officers, Education Welfare Officers and Clinical Psychologists. It has been accepted as best practice by the Home Office Police Standards Unit and ACPO (Association of Chief Police Officers).
- 4.11 The schools are initially contacted by the District Community Safety Advocate (CSA) who introduces Impact Roadshow, the content of the workshop and the structure of its delivery to students. Explaining the concept and how it fits into the Education Outcomes Framework Document under Every Child Matters Stay Safe section. A convenient appointment is made to fit into the school's curriculum to deliver the two hour presentation.
- 4.12 The session involves an interactive workshop, various vehicle crime related hazard and risk issues are discussed. Visual aids are used to show pictures of RTCs, video footage of RTCs and interviews with various people who have been effected by an RTC – eg: a mother who had to identify her son who was killed in a stolen vehicle RTC. Worksheets are used for the students to interactively complete with their teachers, police officers and the fire crew who are presenting. These help illustrate the various consequences of vehicle crime and irresponsible driver behaviour. The six worksheets show the point of view and effects of an RTC for a fire officer, parent, pedestrian, doctor, vehicle owner and vehicle examiner, from personal injuries to a young lady, to how the family and community are affected. Advice is given to help minimise the risk to the students individually.
- 4.13 The education strategy is aimed at the long term culture change of future road users having information presented to them before driving age to give a good level of background knowledge and to promote a better attitude towards future road safety.

5. SERVICE PERFORMANCE

- 5.1 The following section highlights the Service's performance in reducing primary deliberate vehicle fires across the Service area and then detailing down to the unitary City areas and each district area.
- 5.2 For the whole of Nottinghamshire from the peak year of 2001/2 with 3,121 primary deliberate vehicle fires, there has been an overall reduction down to 1,350 in 2005/6, this represents a 57% reduction.



5.3 When analysis is undertaken across the City and District areas it is apparent that vehicle crime is a significant problem in specific areas.

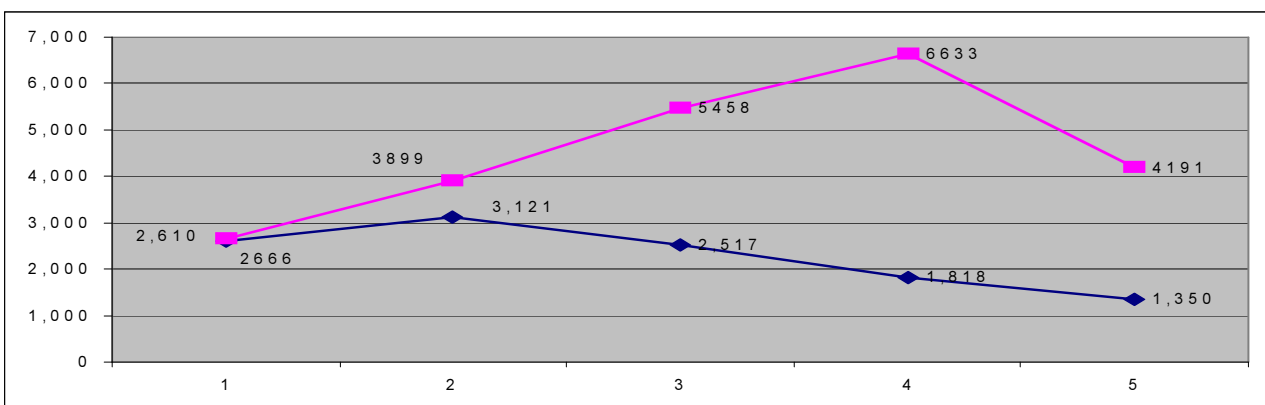


5.4 It can be clearly seen that the City accounts for 54% of all primary deliberate vehicle fires, with the City North area alone accounting for over a third of all the Service's vehicle fires.

5.5 Across the City area significant reductions been made through the strong partnership with the City Crime and Drugs Partnership, which are outlined in detail in Appendix A to this report.

5.6 Members will clearly see that in every District significant progress has been made over the past two years with substantial reductions in the number of vehicle fires from the peak periods covering 2002-03.

5.7 There has in the past been an argument that a significant contributor to the number of vehicle fires has been the levels of scrap steel prices. The graph below shows the number of vehicle fires in Nottinghamshire and the corresponding scrap steel price.



5.8 The correlation between vehicle fires and scrap steel prices can be seen from the period 2000 to 2004 with vehicle fires falling in line with an upsurge in demand for steel and rising scrap steel prices. The key points to note are that vehicle fires were at their highest when scrap steel prices were below a yearly average of 4,000 pence per tonne and did not start to fall until scrap steel prices rose above this figure.

- 5.9 A measure of the Service's success with partners is that currently the scrap steel yearly average price for 2004/05 was 4191 pence per tonne, yet the Service achieved another significantly yearly reduction in deliberate vehicle fires. This suggests that the tighter controls on vehicle ownership and the initiatives by the Service and partners could be breaking the link between scrap steel prices. That said, with the price of scrap steel continuing to fall this should be a key driver for the Service to continue to work with partners to further develop initiatives to reduce deliberate vehicle fires.

6. ONGOING DEVELOPMENT WORK TO FURTHER REDUCE VEHICLE FIRES

- 6.1 The Service is currently working with Nottingham City Council, Nottinghamshire County Council and Nottinghamshire Police to develop Operation Cubit into an all year round programme. The concept of this project is to identify vehicles that are illegally on the highway, whether they are untaxed, uninsured or known to have been used for criminal activities.
- 6.2 This early intervention will proactively remove the vehicles before they reach the end of their useful life and are illegally abandoned and deliberately set on fire. The project aims to pool resources to target areas suffering high levels of vehicle crime and arson, and will involve police colleagues working with the DVLA to identify potential illegal vehicles while Community Police Support Officers will provide local intelligence. Removal vehicles, including the Service's own vehicle, will be deployed to swiftly remove any confirmed illegal vehicles to a safe compound.
- 6.3 Owners will be given seven days to collect their vehicles and will have to pay any unpaid vehicle licence tax, the removal and stowage costs before their vehicle is released to them. After this period of time if unclaimed or the owner fails to pay the due amount, the vehicle will be destroyed.

7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

No additional financial implications have been identified which cannot be accommodated within current budgets, however by achieving further reductions in the number of vehicle fires and the impact of response this should allow revenue to be re-directed to further risk reduction work.

8. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

There are no personnel implications arising from this report.

9. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

A full equality impact assessment has not been undertaken with regard to this report.

10. RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

Any increase in the number of vehicle fires could result in a poor Comprehensive Performance Assessment outcome and potential interventions from the Secretary of State. This shows the importance of the Service reducing the risk.

11. RECOMMENDATIONS

That Members note the contents of this report, and the progress being made in relation to vehicle fires.

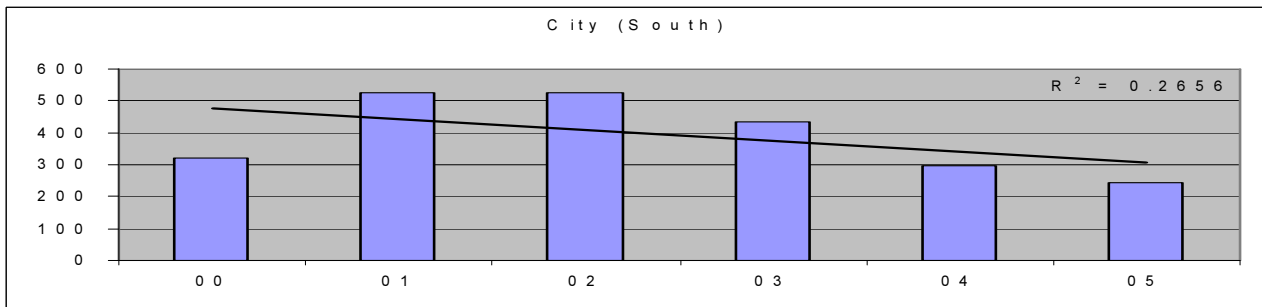
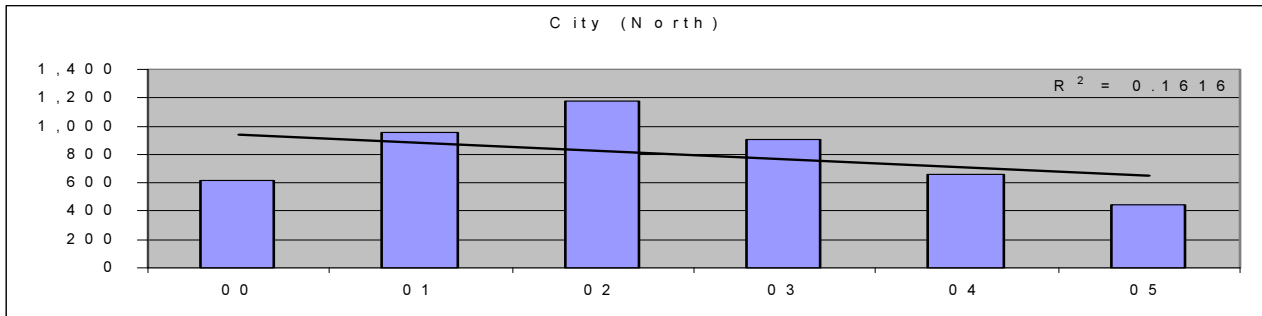
12. BACKGROUND PAPERS FOR INSPECTION

None.

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APPENDIX A



As can be seen from the trendlines for both the City North and South areas, greater progress has been achieved in the South area. With the current weeks of action that are being undertaken by the CDP partnership it is hoped that further reductions will be achieved.

Across the Districts similar progress is being achieved.

