

report

meeting	NOTTINGHAMSHIRE AND CITY OF NOTTINGHAM FIRE & RESCUE AUTHORITY	
	COMMUNITY SAFETY COMMITTEE	
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REPORT OF THE CHIEF FIRE OFFICER

ARSON REDUCTION TEAM

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

To update the Community Safety Committee on arson reduction activities, highlighting achievements to date, work in progress and future objectives for the team in 2007-2008.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 Arson affects everyone, invading communities, threatening business and family security. Deliberate fire setting is the largest single cause of fires in the UK, it is a problem that leads to loss of life, serious injuries and can result in substantial financial and personal hardship. The visual impact on communities is devastating (Arresting Arson Review ODPM November 2003).

2.2. The objective of the Arson Reduction Team is to contribute to the reduction of deliberate fires by 10% by 31 March 2010 from the 2001-02 baseline of 104,500, improving public safety through increased intelligence and reduce social, economical and environmental losses. The 2004-2005 Arson Task Force annual report outlines the achievements for the period and details actions for 2005-2006. The Arson Reduction Team consists of a Station Manager, a Watch Manager and a seconded member of Nottinghamshire Police. The projects are contained within the budget allocation for 2007-2008 and grants from the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG).

3. REPORT

3.1 Arson Task Force Annual Report 2004-2005

The annual report established the need for a centralised approach to arson reduction with strong links to the Service's fire investigation function, the police and other key partners. The report highlights a number of initiatives across the county that address the problems associated with anti-social behaviour, deliberate fires in empty properties, arson and abandoned vehicles. The multi-agency approach taken provides further evidence that working with partners can make a difference to the community's safety and well being. The Arson Reduction Team have identified problem areas by interrogating fire and police data and have responded to reports from Districts, the Fire Investigation Team and other agencies. The report provides substantial evidence of the impact of the team since its inception; arson co-ordinators on districts will support the work of the team and raise the profile at District level of preventative arson reduction.

3.2 2006/2007 Progress So Far

- 3.2.1 Delivery of arson awareness in schools has continued. The team have visited thirty schools, spending five days at each school delivering an arson awareness presentation during assemblies. Currently schools are targeted by interrogating fire and police data, requests from districts or head teachers. A commitment has been made to safer neighbourhood teams to provide training in arson awareness for Police Community Support Officer (PCSO's), Neighbourhood Wardens and the Police. The team have delivered 18 training events directly supporting efforts to reduce arson.
- 3.2.2 In partnership with the Police and their support services, there have been 143 prosecutions for arson leading to a total of thirty nine years imprisonment for those found guilty. Three more court actions are pending. Work with anti-social behaviour teams across the county continues and in particular work during September and October on the anti-social behaviour and fireworks issues. Although district led, this campaign was fully supported by the Arson Reduction Team in partnership with the environmental crime unit.
- 3.2.3 The team have made twenty referrals to the fire setters programme and offer support to the co-ordinator, providing sensitive data to inform and prepare team members for case meetings. The Bendigo project has been fully supported by the members of the Arson Reduction Team and is involved fully in the project development. The Bendigo project continues and anecdotal evidence suggests that there is real benefit to the young people participating. The team participated and supported Operation Cubit which focused on the removal of cars that were illegal or abandoned. The multi-agency team, including members of Arson Reduction Team carried out two to three days of action over four weeks in targeted areas across the city and the county.
- 3.2.4 The regeneration of Top Valley continues. This presents additional opportunities for arson and deliberate fires in void and derelict properties creating an unsafe environment for the Services' response personnel and the community. The Service attended 530 fires prior to the interventions and these have been reduced to a handful of calls. Working with the responsible contractor the Service has secured the empty buildings and by agreement they have increased security measures and patrols in the area which will lead to a reduction in arson and anti-social behaviour. Arson awareness programmes were delivered in the schools located in the area.
- 3.2.5 The use of Section 215 to 219 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 has been utilised successfully in forcing those responsible for void and derelict properties to make them secure. The powers are given to local authority planning departments and they have been encouraged to use them by the Arson Reduction Team.
- 3.2.6 The following summary of intentional fires attended since 2000 indicates that since the creation of the Arson Reduction Team in 2004 a reduction has been achieved. The Arson Reduction Team would like to think that the work, interventions and their arson reduction activities have had a major impact. The following table is based upon intentional fires which include dwelling, building, vehicle, outdoor and secondary fires.

Year starting April 2000	Year starting April 2001	Year starting April 2002	Year starting April 2003	Year starting April 2004	Year starting April 2005	Total no. of intentional fires
5,612	8,923	9,960	11,438	7,019	6,641	49,593

3.3 Future Activity of the Arson Reduction Team

- 3.3.1 The successes and efforts of the last two years will be built upon and a further structured approach to risk reduction will be introduced with the development of underpinning protocols and procedures enhancing the team's ability to support districts and reduce the risk of arson within the community. The transfer of the co-ordination role of the Fire Investigation Team to the response element of the Safety Services department presents an opportunity to re-focus the team's efforts in a more pro-active approach. Developing strategies to enable the team to anticipate increased risk of arson and to support districts in carrying out pro-active initiatives is a priority.
- 3.3.2 There will be a greater effort to develop district awareness of arson reduction initiatives through district co-ordinators and community safety advocates. A risk reduction protocol is in development based upon three levels of risk. Following this assessment and categorisation of the risk the appropriate level of intervention will be utilised. The team will be involved for all high risk categories, but the emphasis will be on reducing the risk to a tolerable level allowing districts to take responsibility for their local issues.
- 3.3.3 Districts are encouraged to take responsibility for arson awareness and working with local partners will have a greater impact on arson reduction targets. The team are advising, supporting and offering guidance to districts, but a shift of emphasis to anticipate potential environmental influences will ensure that pro-active measures can be taken before an excessive number of arsons are encountered.
- 3.3.4 Full support is continuing to be provided to the Fire Investigation Team and access to police data will be provided to enhance the Fire Investigation Team's ability to determine the cause and identify potential offenders for prosecution. The Fire Investigation Team have a critical role to play in informing future initiatives and strong links between arson and investigation will be maintained. A commitment to train all Watch and Crew Managers in fire investigation to level one will enhance and support the team's ability to identify arson and co-operate with police colleagues. The team will continue to build working relationships with other Fire and Rescue Services within the region.
- 3.3.5 A district arson co-ordinator team leader has been appointed who will develop a team approach and develop a communication structure to enable full utilisation of this resource. The district arson co-ordinator's function will be to support the work of the Arson Reduction Team by raising arson awareness within the district by targeting local issues and creating local partnerships. Regular meetings will facilitate and direct district activities.
- 3.3.6 In conjunction with the police, local authority Crime and Drug Partnerships (CDRPs) and the city abandoned vehicle department started work to provide a county wide resource to remove abandoned and illegal vehicles on a sustained basis. Phase one has seen the use of a Services' recovery vehicle for the week of action planned for January in the Meadows area of the city. Future geographical areas of activity will be based upon statistical and

community intelligence provided by police, fire and safer neighbourhood management teams. The Service is looking at a secondment opportunity from the police to the project to co-ordinate activity based upon information provided by partners, communities and neighbourhood management teams.

- 3.3.7 Arson in schools has been identified nationally as being problematic, a total of 51% of all arson attacks in schools are not reported. A determined effort to make schools and in particular head teachers aware of the importance of early intervention is a priority and a pro-active approach will be taken. Currently the Service rely on fire and police data to prompt approaches to schools, there is a considerable amount of work to do in creating a strategy to deal with this important issue. The creation of a Memorandum of Understanding between the Fire Safety Protection, the local Education Authority and schools will provide the team with opportunities to raise the awareness of arson and its affects on communities.

3.4 Actions

- 3.4.1 The following steps are being taken in order to meet the above objectives and provide the foundations for future planning. An enhanced arson risk reduction strategy has been developed, which will give clarity and direction to districts through the arson co-ordinators. Underpinning protocols and procedures will support the team and district activities. The Service are raising the awareness of arson reduction in districts by creating an arson co-ordinators network led by a member of the Arson Reduction Team, this will improve communications and provide a cohesive and sustained effort to reduce arson across the county. Developing all Crew and Watch Managers to level one in fire investigation will greatly assist in determining and informing future initiatives.
- 3.4.2 Reducing arson in schools is a challenge, and the team are formulating a plan to pro-actively raise awareness and reduce the opportunities provided for arson to take place; this is in partnership with schools and other agencies. Developing working arrangements to deal with abandoned vehicles is a priority, working with key partners the Service will explore the viability of funding a co-ordinators post to scan fire and police data, collate community intelligence and allocate and co-ordinate resources, activities and weeks of action to reduce anti-social behaviour leading to the abandonment and subsequent firing of vehicles.
- 3.4.3 The link between arson and fire investigation is important and the team will continue to support Fire Investigation Teams locally, within the county, and at regional level. Local protocols will be developed to ensure that strong links are maintained. Also the Service are raising arson awareness through education to schools, neighbourhood management teams and business forums, providing support to districts by addressing the high risk areas of void and derelict properties, vulnerable persons, fires in schools, fly tipping, anti-social behaviour leading to fire setting, abandoned vehicles and arson attack in the community and on business.

4. **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

The financial implications are contained within the budget for 2007-2008.

5. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

The impact upon human resources is concentrated upon the development of Watch and Crew Managers to level one in fire investigation.

6. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

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

7. RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

Risks associated with non-achievement of arson reduction targets are recognised and the developmental work seeks to eliminate such risks.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

That Members note the content of the report.

9. BACKGROUND PAPERS FOR INSPECTION

Arson Task Force Annual Report 2004-05

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