

report

meeting	NOTTINGHAMSHIRE AND CITY OF NOTTINGHAM FIRE & RESCUE AUTHORITY	
	COMMUNITY SAFETY COMMITTEE	
date	19 January 2007	agenda item number

REPORT OF THE CHIEF FIRE OFFICER

FIRE INVESTIGATION TEAM

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

To update Members on the activity of the Fire Investigation Team.

2. BACKGROUND

Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service has maintained a Fire Investigation Team for a number of years on a voluntary basis. The Fire and Rescue Services Act has now formalised the requirement to provide such a team. The 2004/2005 National Framework directed that Fire & Rescue Authorities should work together through Regional Management Boards to ensure effective fire investigation. This report details the Authority's response to the above and provides an overview of the activity of the team during the previous twelve months.

3. REPORT

- 3.1 Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service maintains a team of ten, Level 2 qualified, Fire Investigation Officers. Each has qualified via a training programme which involves shadowing other Officers and attending at least one of the nationally accredited Level 2 courses. A number have also attended the Advanced Fire and Explosion Investigation course at Edinburgh University.
- 3.2 Following direction from the Regional Management Board, a Regional Fire and Explosion Investigation Policy was agreed on 30 June 2006. This policy requires that each of the Fire and Rescue Services of the East Midlands will maintain a minimum of eight investigators qualified to undertake Level 2 fire and explosion investigations. The policy also provides that in the event of no Level 2 investigator being on duty within an individual Fire and Rescue Service, the Command and Control Centre for that Service will request a suitably qualified investigator from the next nearest Service within the East Midlands, to the location of the incident.
- 3.3 Further agreement has been made as to the policy for deploying a Fire Investigation Dog Unit in the East Midlands Region. During the period 1 January to 19 December the accelerant detector dog has been deployed in Nottinghamshire on twenty-six occasions, for a total of 133hrs.
- 3.4 A Memorandum Of Understanding (MOU) exists between Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service and the Police and Scenes Of Crime Officers of Nottinghamshire which provides for a guaranteed response on request from either party.

- 3.5 In the period 1 January 2006 to 19 December 2006 a total of 100 investigations have been conducted. Two of these have been conducted by Investigating Officers from partner Services within the Region. During the last twelve months more than 200 arrests have been made for arson offences with more than 100 statements having been made by Fire and Rescue Service staff. This year alone 34 years of imprisonment have been handed down by courts. One Fire Investigation Officer has received a commendation from the Crown Court for the quality of the evidence provided in a murder case.
- 3.6 Representation has been made at Coroners Court for each of the five fatal fires that have occurred. Due to the high standard of reporting, every submission made by a Fire Investigation Officer has been accepted unchallenged. The Coroner has provided support and direction that has helped publicise and drive initiatives focused on protecting the vulnerable. A fatal fire analysis prepared in conjunction with members of the Arson Task Force has helped identify those most at risk and has resulted in a total of seven multi-agency meetings with positive outcomes.
- 3.7 Fire Investigation Officers ensure that the outcome of their investigations influence the work of the Arson Task Force and/or the Community Safety Department as appropriate. A recent review of the structure, activity and management of the Fire Investigation Team in Nottinghamshire has been undertaken and is being used to shape the future direction of the team. One recommendation made as part of this review is the proposal that a Member of the Fire & Rescue Authority could be nominated as a “champion” for the Fire Investigation Team. This would help raise the profile of the team locally and regionally and would ensure a timely and informative flow of information between the team and the Authority Members.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The average annual cost of training and development relating to fire investigation specifically is approximately £4000.

5. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

A process for ensuring that the team size is maintained at ten, Level 2 qualified officers, is in place.

6. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

There are no equalities issues arising from this report.

7. RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

The head of the Fire Investigation Team is responsible for ensuring compliance with the Service’s obligations under the Fire Services Act.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

That Members note the contents of this report.

9. BACKGROUND PAPERS FOR INFORMATION

Regional Fire & Explosion Investigation Policy

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