



NOTTINGHAMSHIRE
Fire & Rescue Service
Creating Safer Communities

Nottinghamshire and City of Nottingham
Fire and Rescue Authority
Community Safety Committee

THE INVESTIGATION OF FATAL FIRES IN NOTTINGHAMSHIRE

Report of the Chief Fire Officer

Agenda Item No:

Date: 08 April 2011

Purpose of Report:

To inform Committee Members of the process for the investigation and profiling of fatal fires in Nottinghamshire.

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1. BACKGROUND

In the period 1 January 2010 to 9 March 2011 there have been 8 fires that have resulted in fatalities and one casualty who died following a fire in 2009. This report details the work that takes place after a fatal incident in terms of investigation, profiling of the casualty and determining the causes of fire.

2. REPORT

- 2.1 Fire and Rescue Service Circular 1/2006 recognised that best practice for the investigation of fires would be to have a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the Police that details the roles and responsibilities of each service. It was also recognised that best practice is to have a Police Liaison Officer seconded to Arson Task Forces to provide a link between Fire and Police Service intelligence gathering systems. Both of these have been in place in Nottinghamshire since 2006.
- 2.2 Since the Police liaison officer has been in place in Nottinghamshire there has been a significant increase in the exchange of information between the services which is reflected in the quality of the investigations conducted and the comprehensive reports that have been produced.
- 2.3 There has also been a significant increase in the amount of information being obtained from partner agencies following fatal fires as they are more comfortable exchanging information with the Police compared with Fire and Rescue Services.
- 2.4 This intelligence and information sharing has enabled a profile to be produced of those who are most vulnerable and therefore most likely to be killed or seriously injured in fires. The latest data and intelligence suggests that those that are most at risk are:
 - Over 55 years of age
 - Known to partner agencies
 - Have mental and or physical health issues
 - Alcoholic or regularly abuse alcohol
 - A smoker
 - Live alone
 - Live mainly in one room of their home.
- 2.5 Of the 8 fires resulting in fatalities from 1 January 2010 until 10th March 2011 all met some of the above criteria and indeed all 8 people lived alone and all were over the age of 55. Although the early profiles indicated that males seem to be at greater risk the latest data shows an increase in the amount of females dying in fires.
- 2.6 At every incident involving a fatality, a full investigation is undertaken involving experienced Fire Investigation Officers and Police Crime Scene

Investigators. This ensures that thorough examination of all the facts take place which enables compressive reports to be created for HM Coroner.

- 2.7 The purpose of these reports is not only to provide conclusions on the cause and origin of fire but also to provide HM Coroner with background information on the circumstances of individual's life (profile) which contributed to that particular fire ending in a fatality.
- 2.8 This additional information ensures that community safety resources and interventions are targeted in the most appropriate way. This is reflected in the development of new polices and is a factor within the Risk Profiling undertaken at a District level.
- 2.9 With the support of HM Coroner, in tandem with the development of a new Vulnerable Persons Policy, it is hoped to ensure that partner agencies will refer more of those who are at high risk in terms of the profiling data.
- 2.10 A short presentation by the lead for Fire Investigation will be made to the committee at the meeting, which will outline the broad circumstances of the 8 fires that have resulted in the fatalities since 1st January 2010.

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications arising from this report; however the maintenance of 10 Flexi-Duty officers trained and competent in undertaking Fire Investigation has a cost. Each basic course costs in excess of £2500 which has previously been maintained within the training budget. Ongoing refresher training is undertaken as identified through Personal Development Reviews incurring negligible costs.

4. HUMAN RESOURCES AND LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT IMPLICATIONS

There are no human resources and learning and development implications arising from this report; however initial training, not just in terms of basic course provision, but also through the building of experience is extensive. Typically a trainee Fire Investigation Officer requires 6-12 months active experience prior to undertaking the role fully.

5. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

As a public sector organisation, NFRS must ensure that services are provided to all sections of the community. This is particularly important for the most vulnerable in terms of access to services. By using profiling data to inform policy and activity, NFRS demonstrates a clear determination to meet the needs of all within the community.

6. CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

The work of the Arson Task Force is crucial in determining the origin and cause of fire. Previous incidents, including those that have threatened lives, have been investigated and successfully assisted in the conviction of arsonists.

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

Fire and Rescue Services are compelled to investigate and determine the cause of all fires. This is particularly relevant in incidents that involve serious injuries and fatalities. Failure to undertake robust and thorough investigative processes in these circumstances could lead to criticism from HM Coroner, and a failure to meet the requirements of the Fire Services Act 2004.

8. RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

The identification of the profile of those most at risk from serious injury or death from fire is a key strand to the strategy utilised to target resources and reduce risk within the community. Failure to recognise the importance of, or to act on this data, would seriously undermine prevention activities and lead to increased numbers of fatal incidents.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

That Members endorse the work undertaken by the Arson Task Force, and continue to support the profiling activity undertaken within the Service.

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS FOR INSPECTION (OTHER THAN PUBLISHED DOCUMENTS)

None.

Frank Swann
CHIEF FIRE OFFICER