



NOTTINGHAMSHIRE
Fire & Rescue Service
Creating Safer Communities

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

FIRE INVESTIGATION UPDATE

Report of the Chief Fire Officer

Date 08 January 2016

Purpose of Report:

To provide the Community Safety committee with an update on progress with regard to fire investigation activity, fatal fire reviews and the actions taken to share information and learning to assist in preventing loss of life, business and property.

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1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service (NFRS) Fire Investigation Team is based at Mansfield fire station and has a variety of duties with regard to fire investigation (FI):
- Training NFRS staff to carry out simple, initial investigations into the cause of fire (Level 1);
 - Conducting more in-depth investigations (Level 2);
 - Collaborative work with Nottinghamshire Police to ensure investigative standards are high and consistent;
 - Establishing memorandums of understanding with key partners such as Trading Standards, along with day to day trend analysis, both locally and nationally to ensure information on the causes of fire are shared throughout the United Kingdom with fire and rescue services and other key partners.
- 1.2 Although the Fire and Rescue Services Act places a clear duty on the Authority to investigate fires, the role of the FI Team has evolved beyond that expectation, to also focus on prevention and protection strategies to continue to reduce the number of fires, and work with partners to improve service. This work will continue into the future to further develop a multi-agency approach for investigating fires and putting measures in place to re-assure and inform communities.

2. REPORT

- 2.1 In 2014, NFRS attended 2,617 fires, of these fires 2,538 were able to be investigated by the operational staff who attended the incident. This is largely due to the training the FI Team have delivered at fire station level. It should be recognised that the majority of these fires would have been secondary fires, such as bins fires, grass fires etc. Any large incident (six fire appliances or more, a member of the FI Team would be sent to the scene by Fire Control).
- 2.2 In total, 79 Level 2 investigations were carried out by the FI Team, as opposed to 104 that were completed in 2013. This reduction of 25 from the previous year is a continuing trend linked with the reduction in the number of fires NFRS attends.
- 2.3 Over the past three years fire deaths have fluctuated. In 2012 there were six, in 2013 there were two and in 2014 there were a total of five fire deaths, a total of 13 in three years.

- 2.4 The FI Team work closely with all NFRS departments, particularly Community Safety to ensure vulnerable persons are identified, so that additional support can be given, such as enhanced fire detection, fire resistant bedding and advice given to other agencies and support groups.
- 2.5 Fatal fire investigations are resource intensive and can take a considerable length of time, particularly if a criminal act is suspected. The Police always have primacy at this type of investigation, but the FI Team is considered the specialist in this area and work closely with the police, specifically the Crime Scene Investigators (CSI) in a multi-agency approach to ensure the investigation is carried out to the very highest standard.
- 2.6 Following a fire death, NFRS conducts a “fatal fire review” where representatives from the Partnership and Engagement Team, Service Delivery, Communications and Media Team and Fire Investigation Team attend. The key aims of this review is to consider the lessons learned and what can be done to prevent similar, future fire deaths and to establish an ‘action plan’ that will clearly record ownership of any agreed priorities.
- 2.7 This action plan is then reviewed at subsequent follow up meetings and can include internal and external partners. A review of this nature ensures that key learning outcomes are recognised and addressed to ensure that the organisation develops how it responds following a tragedy of this nature.
- 2.8 A memorandum of understanding has been established between the NFRS FI Team and Trading Standards. This ensures a clear, auditable process of reporting issues regarding products that are known or suspected of being a fire risk, such as faulty chargers or adaptors and specific, branded models that are on a product re-call or where fire services and other agencies have shared concerns regarding a product. An example of this is the recent concerns over certain types of E-cigarettes coming into the UK.
- 2.9 The NFRS FI Team also sits on the East Midlands Regional Fire Investigation Liaison Group, that works towards ensuring Chief Fire Officers Association guidance is reviewed and adopted along with national best practice and also maintains a regional agreement for mutually supporting each of the regions fire authorities for FI activity. Part of this agreement is that four Services, including NFRS, fund the East Midlands hydro-carbon (fire) dog.
- 2.10 Police intelligence is shared with the FI Team that may be relevant to NFRS and the safety of the community. This information can be regarding the location of known/convicted arsonists. This information is then shared with other NFRS departments such as Fire Protection and Community Safety to ensure that the organisation assesses this risk and puts the appropriate measures in place.
- 2.11 Nottinghamshire Police are presently reviewing and standardising their procedures throughout the county. This review is likely to influence change in how NFRS is required to record and report on investigations and could also

influence NFRS's regional fire and rescue partners in the future to establish a more consistent, regional approach to fire investigation.

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Fire investigation financial implications fall within agreed budgets.

4. HUMAN RESOURCES AND LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT IMPLICATIONS

Learning and Development record the NFRS staff that receive fire investigation training. There are no human resources implications.

5. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

There are no anticipated implications for equality.

6. CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 requires NFRS to exercise its various functions with due regard to the likely effect of the exercise of those functions on, and the need to do all that it reasonably can to prevent crime and disorder in its area. The activities of the Fire Investigation Team directly support this legal requirement.

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

The Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004, Part 6 Section 45, places a statutory duty on Fire and Rescue Authorities to obtain information and investigate fires. The role of the Fire Investigation Team, highlighted through this report, demonstrates how NFRS complies with this statutory duty.

8. RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

Effective fire investigation measures not only support the Authority in discharging its statutory duties, but provides valuable support to partner agencies in discharging their duties. It provides valuable knowledge and learning regarding the cause and nature of fires back into NFRS in order to prevent future incidents and develop the competence and safety of fire fighters.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

That Members note the contents of the report and support the continuing work and development of the Fire Investigation Team.

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

None.

John Buckley
CHIEF FIRE OFFICER