

**MEETING: 3 NOVEMBER 2008**

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**SUBJECT: RESTRUCTURE OF ARSON TASK FORCES**

**JOINT REPORT OF THE CHIEF FIRE OFFICER, THE CLERK TO THE AUTHORITY AND THE FINANCE OFFICER**

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**1 INTRODUCTION**

1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek approval to the proposals to refocus the work of the Arson Task Forces (ATF) in the years ahead and to rebrand them as Neighbourhood Fire Teams.

**2 BACKGROUND**

2.1 As Members will be aware, there is an ATF in each of the five constituent local authorities, whose role it is to investigate deliberately ignited primary fires in conjunction with the police.

2.2 The premise upon which the ATF's were originally set up was to tackle what had been identified as a significant problem for the Service and society, namely the setting of deliberate primary fires, with the ATF's being tasked to investigate such incidents, particularly large-scale suspicious property fires.

2.3 As a result of their work, together with a range of other successful, proactive safety initiatives, deliberate primary fires have shown significant year on year reductions. Indeed the forecast for this year suggests that a 35% reduction on the 2007/08 end of year figures is likely to be achieved and, as a result, the Authority is set to exceed its target for reducing such fires by 31%. This can be attributed, to a significant extent, to the effective work of the Authority's community safety initiatives, and in particular the role of the ATF's.

2.4 Northumbria Police have taken note of this significant reduction in deliberate primary fires and, in response, have reduced the number of officers from five to two who were assigned to the ATF's on a full time basis. Alternative arrangements, which are more flexible, have been put in place by the police and these are working well.

2.5 Taking this fact into account, together with the significant fall in deliberate primary fires, it is appropriate to take the opportunity to consider both re-directing the ATF's activities as well as rebranding the ATF's to more accurately reflect the new activities.

### **3 REFOCUSING THE TEAMS**

- 3.1 In support of local strategies for community safety and the focus on neighbourhood level solutions it is proposed that the five ATF's become Neighbourhood Fire Teams, tasked to work at a local level within our five districts, separate from but in partnership with, Neighbourhood Policing Teams and other neighbourhood partners.
- 3.2 Their role would be to directly focus on neighbourhood anti-social behaviour (ASB) fires which will help to support the work of the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships, which in turn, will help the Authority to demonstrate its commitment to working to improve local neighbourhoods.
- 3.3 It is envisaged that the Neighbourhood Fire Teams will concentrate on identifying fire related anti-social behaviour and introduce solutions to these widespread incidents, in conjunction with others where appropriate, within communities and neighbourhoods. The removal of the primary fire investigation responsibility will increase the availability of the Neighbourhood Fire Teams within the districts to deal more effectively with these low impact, high volume fires.
- 3.4 This approach will be innovative and a first for a Fire and Rescue Authority, fully integrating resources into neighbourhood safety programmes. It will give District Managers and Station Managers the flexibility to deploy Neighbourhood Fire Teams to support ASB strategies and deliver fire prevention programmes when and where required.
- 3.5 Local teams would work to measurably reduce the numbers of ASB fires thereby helping to improve the social space within which people live. In addition, it will also have the additional benefit of reducing the numbers of operational responses by fire appliances, which would free up operational staff to carry out more Home Safety Checks or undertake further operational training.
- 3.6 The investigation of the small number of significant primary fires would become the responsibility of officers who have the expertise to undertake this work based at SHQ. Flexible Duty Officers would retain their existing responsibility to support operational officers.

### **4 RISK MANAGEMENT**

- 4.1 The Authority will be working to directly support the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 and the National Framework 2008-2011.
- 4.2 The reduction of ASB fires and injuries and the reduced risk to other road users will directly support achievement of the Authority's vision for 'Creating the Safety Community'.

**5 HUMAN RESOURCES**

- 5.1 The job descriptions for some existing ATF staff will require amending to reflect any changes in role. However, responsibility levels will remain in line with those currently existing.
- 5.2 The Community Safety function will consult and liaise with the Human Resources Department to ensure that any amendments are in line with current policy and procedures.

**6 EQUALITY AND FAIRNESS**

- 6.1 The proposal will be subject to an Equality Impact Assessment prior to publication.

**7 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1 There are no additional costs associated with these proposals.

**8 HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS**

- 8.1 There are no health and safety implications in respect of this report.

**9 RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 9.1 The Authority is recommended to:
  - a) Approve the rebranding of the Arson Task Force's as Neighbourhood Fire Teams
  - b) Approve the refocusing of the work of the team work to that of reducing anti-social behaviour fires.
  - c) Receive further reports as appropriate.

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**BACKGROUND PAPERS**

The under mentioned Background Papers refer to the subject matter of the above report:

- Fire and Rescue Authority Paper – Neighbourhood Risk Reduction
- Fire and Rescue Authority Paper – CDRP Reform
- National Framework 2008-2011