

COMMUNITY AND SAFER CITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

STUDY INTO ANTI SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR – TACKLING DELIBERATE AND ANTI SOCIAL FIRES

REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

8 DECEMBER 2009

**CORPORATE PRIORITIES: CIO1: Delivering Customer Focused Services; CIO4:
Improving Partnership Working To Deliver ‘One City’.**

1.0 Purpose of the report

1.1 To receive a report from John Allison, District Officer, Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service on the issue of deliberate and anti social fires in Sunderland. This report will contribute to the Committee’s study into anti social behaviour.

1.1 The report will set out to:-

- (a) highlight discrepancies between the Sunderland District and other districts within TWFRS;
- (b) highlight those wards within the Sunderland that create the most issues;
- (c) inform partners of the strategies and initiatives being implemented to address the problem

2.0 Current Position

2.1 Data from TWFRS Performance Management System show the Sunderland District as being disproportionately high in relation to other districts with regards to deliberate and anti-social fires. These fires include deliberate property fires, deliberate vehicle fires and deliberate secondary fires (usually rubbish and refuse).

2.2 2008/09 data shows that the Sunderland District was responsible for 37% of all deliberate fires within the Tyne and Wear area and the Sunderland East station area being responsible for 12% of all deliberate fires within TWFRS area. Significantly the Hendon ward alone accounted for 4% of all deliberate fires across Tyne and Wear.

2.3 Overall the cost of all deliberate fires for the Sunderland District in 2008/2009 (based on the Economic Cost of Fire 2004) was in the region of £422,343.

3.0 Action being taken

3.1 TWFRS response to driving down these types of incident has traditionally fallen to the Prevention & Education Department and the Neighbourhood Fire Team (previously known as the Arson Task Force). This has involved using the TWFRS performance management system to identify trends and hotspots across the Sunderland District however as highlighted above, the Sunderland figures remain disproportionately high when compared to our nearest comparator district (Newcastle).

3.2 The initiatives traditionally employed to reduce these figures are: -

- Target hardening of vulnerable properties
- Schools Education Programme
- Vehicle Uplift Scheme
- Refuse and fly tipping referrals
- Phoenix Project and Juvenile Firesetters Intervention Scheme

3.3 These schemes and initiatives have been carried out both by TWFRS and in liaison with many partner agencies including Northumbria Police, Gentoo, Youth Offending Service, Sunderland City Council's Environmental Service and other council services. It is believed to further drive down these incidences, further partnership working would be required. This has led to a significant amount of consultation with partner agencies to develop strategies to reduce deliberate fires.

4.0 **Next Steps**

4.1 Following consultation with key partners, the following initiatives and projects have commenced:

- **Operation Heat**

This is an initiative in partnership with Northumbria Police whereby any fire call to which TWFRS are despatched to the Hendon Ward, automatically results in a call to Northumbria Police (NP) Control and the subsequent despatching of a NP attendance. Previously Officer's in Charge of fire appliances, should they suspect malicious ignition, would request the attendance of NP, however subsequent delay would mean likely culprits or potential witnesses would no longer be in the vicinity of the fire by the time of NP attendance. The approach adopted as part of Operation Heat is designed to ensure simultaneous attendance of TWFRS and NP, allowing NP to carry out a preliminary investigation into the cause any fire suspected to be of malicious ignition and potentially apprehend any culprits.

- **Operation Charlie**

This is a multi agency initiative in collaboration with NP's Perception Campaign involving education and enforcement activities in the Millfield Ward. In the 4 days of action, NP, TWFRS, Environmental Services and Gentoo carried out numerous leaflet drops, door-to-door enquires, Home Safety Checks and enforcement actions on occupiers by members of the Environmental Enforcement Team acting primarily under the Environmental Act 1990.

- **Bonfire Campaign**

Following on from the successes of previous years, TWFRS, in partnership with many agencies, are running an extensive campaign aimed at reducing the incidences of anti-social behaviour in relation to bonfires and fireworks across Sunderland. Initiatives will involve poster campaigns, uplifts of bonfire materials, comprehensive schools education programme and the promotion of legal organised bonfires.

- **Sunderland East Arson Worker**

TWFRS are currently developing an SIB Bid to fund a post of dedicated Arson Worker, which will work in the Sunderland East area. It is envisaged this will reduce anti-social behaviour crime and assist in building confident communities around the Sunderland East area as well as having a positive impact on the economy.

TWFRS are currently exploring the feasibility of installing CCTV cameras to cover Black Road (at the rear of Sunderland East Fire Station) which has been a hotspot area for ASB fires in recent months.

Following discussions with the Sunderland Echo, there has been substantial press coverage relating to deliberate fires including advice to homeowners on ways of preventing these types of fire.

4.2 The above are all in addition to the core activities carried out by the Prevention and Education Department and Neighbourhood Fire Team as previously mentioned.

5.0 Impact

5.1 It is anticipated the activities as detailed in section 4 will have a significant impact in reducing deliberate and anti-social behaviour fires across the Sunderland District, in particular the Hendon and Millfield Wards. This supports the following Safer Sunderland partnership strategic priorities

- Reducing Re-offending
- Reducing the problems in those communities experiencing disproportionate levels of crime, especially the city centre, Hendon, Millfield and St. Michael's
- Tackling anti-social behaviour
- Tackling perceptions of anti-social behaviour and improve feelings of safety

5.2 Driving down incidences of these fires will not only help TWFRS in reducing fire related national indicators NI133 – Reduce the Number of Primary and Secondary Deliberate Fires, and NI49 – Reduce the Number of Primary Fires and Related Fatalities and Non-Fatal Casualties (excluding precautionary checks) but will also contribute to the LAA targets NI19 – The Rate of Proven Reoffending by Young Offenders; NI195 – Improved Street and Environmental Cleanliness and NI17 Perceptions of Anti-Social Behaviour.

5.3 The Sunderland District Management Team will use TWFRS Performance Management Data to monitor for evidence of the economic downturn adversely affecting these statistics, particularly in relation to deliberate property and deliberate vehicle fires.

6.0 Summary

6.1 The projects and initiatives outlined above are expected to produce a significant reduction in the number of deliberate fires currently experienced in the Sunderland District, particularly the Hendon Ward. It is recognised TWFRS cannot influence these statistics alone and greatly welcome the partnership approach currently utilised in the programmes. Initial findings, using unvalidated data, seem to indicate a reduction in these fires in the second quarter of 2009/10 in comparison with the first quarter.

7.0 Recommendations

7.1 That the Committee consider the report and the issues raised be included as part of its study into anti social behaviour in Sunderland.