



Attacks on TWFRS staff 2017/18 – 2021/22

Data & Information Department

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1 Executive Summary

- 1.1 The Health and Safety Executive (HSE), defines violence at work as “any incident in which an employee is abused, threatened or assaulted in circumstances relating to their work”. This can include verbal abuse or threats as well as physical attacks.
- 1.2 The term “attacks” is used throughout this report to refer to any kind of verbal or physical assault, abuse or other kind of violence by members of the public towards fire service employees.
- 1.3 Attacks on firefighters resulting in appliances not being available because of damage or firefighters not being able to work due to injury continue to be a concern to the fire service.
- 1.4 This report focuses on the number of firefighter attacks experienced by Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service (TWFRS) over the four year 8 months reporting period between 1st April 2017 and 30th November 2021. Incidents which occurred in the 8 months (1st April 2021 to 30th November 2021), although not a full year for comparison is the most recent data available and has been captured throughout the report as 2021/22.
- 1.5 The figures in this report include incidents attended during the financial year 1st April 2020 to 31st March 2021. During this financial year in response to the COVID-19 pandemic strict limits on daily life were imposed including three lockdowns. The restrictions and lockdowns are therefore captured in IRS data for the financial year 1st April 2020 to 31st March 2021.
- 1.6 The data for attacks on firefighters analysed in this report includes the type of attack, when and where the attack occurred, injuries sustained to fire and rescue Service (FRS) personnel and also any costs to the service.

The types of attacks recorded are:

- Harassment
 - Objects thrown at firefighters/appliances
 - Other acts of aggression
 - Physical abuse
 - Verbal abuse
- 1.7 Each time a FRS attends an incident, details of that incident are uploaded to the Home Office’s Incident Recording System (IRS) by the FRS.
 - 1.8 Data is recorded in the IRS where a firefighter experienced an attack either travelling to / from or at an incident. Attacks on individual operational crew members are not recorded in the IRS, attacks are recorded per incident.
 - 1.9 Data is also recorded on the number of firefighters who sustained slight or serious injuries as a result of these attacks.
 - ‘Slight injuries’ are defined as attending hospital as an outpatient, first aid give at the scene (by anyone) or a precautionary check recommended.
 - ‘Serious injuries’ are defined as at least an overnight stay in hospital as an in-patient.

- 1.10 It should be noted that the IRS does not provide a complete picture of attacks on firefighters as it only captures data on incidents attended as a result of an emergency call, it therefore does not capture data relating to attacks for example which occurred during training or whilst carrying out routine activities.
- 1.11 Incidents of Violence at Work (VAW) are not confined wholly to appliance crews and can, potentially, affect other service staff, and in particular control staff, fire safety staff, community safety staff and flexible duty officers.
- 1.12 Violence at Work data presented in this report has been collected and collated by the TWFRS Health and Safety Department.
- 1.13 A comparison of TWFRS against the other Metropolitan (Met) FRSs is also provided.

2 Key findings

- 2.1 Fluctuations in the number of incidents attended could be explained by various factors, such as the weather, school or bank holiday dates and not simply the restrictions on life under COVID-19 national lockdowns.
- 2.2 The majority of attacks on firefighters occurred whilst travelling to / from or in attendance at a fire categorised as a Secondary fire incident. Secondary fires and outdoor primary fire incidents are heavily affected by the weather and so any effect of the lockdowns would be minor in comparison.
- 2.3 During the reporting period (1st April 2017 to 30th November 2021):
- whilst 2020/21 saw a reduction in the number of attacks compared to previous years, 2021/22 data indicates that attacks on firefighters are increasing, although still below the levels reported in 2017/18, 2018/19 and 2019/20
 - there were 53 incidents involving an attack on firefighters in 2021/22, an increase of 43% (16 incident) on the previous year
 - these incidents resulted in 1 injury to a firefighter which was classed as a slight injury (attended hospital)
 - the majority of incidents involving an attack involved objects thrown at firefighters / appliances 58% (31 incidents)
 - Newcastle Upon Tyne district experienced the highest number of attacks and account for 40% (21 incidents)
 - the proportion of attacks on firefighters per 1,000 incidents has been on a downward trend, from a high of 4.4 per 1,000 incidents in 2018/19 to a low of 2.4 per 1,000 incidents in 2020/21
 - there were 40 reported violence at work incidents, the majority of the VAW attacks occurred whilst undertaking routine activities on TWFRS premises (28 reported incidents)

- the majority of VAW attacks 86% (24 incidents) occurred whilst undertaking routine activities **on** TWFRS premises and involved members of staff being verbally abused
- more than half of the VAW experienced by TWFRS was from members of the public who verbally abused Control Staff whilst they answered emergency calls
- verbal abuse routinely affects not only firefighters but also control room staff / hoax calls
- cost of the overtime to cover absence between 1st April 2017 and 30th November 2021 was £3,458.76
- cost to replace / repair damaged appliances or equipment which was recovered through insurance between 1st April 2017 to 30th November 2021 totalled £13,126.10.

2.4 ELT will be aware that there has been significant investment in replacing the Appliance CCTV and the introduction of Body Worn Video Cameras has been introduced to enhance the health, safety and welfare of our firefighters. The use of such cameras can not only support operational learning and debriefing but are also a useful deterrent and assist to record evidence against person or persons that attack firefighters or appliances

2.5 The greatest number of attacks that take place against firefighters are when they are assigned to deal with secondary fires. We have seen a large increase in secondary fires over the current and previous reporting years which could correlate to the increase in the number of attacks. Secondary fires and in particular deliberate secondary fire reduction is a key focus of Service Delivery.

3 Number and type of attack on firefighters

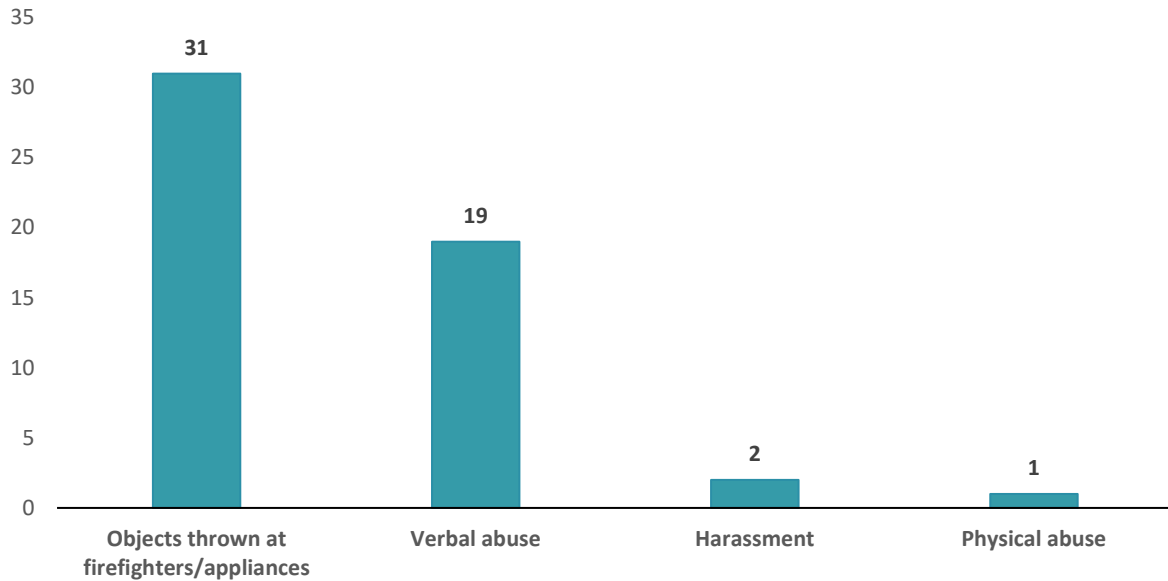
3.1 In 2021/22 (1st April 2021 to 30th November 2021) there were 53 incidents involving an attack on firefighters, an increase of 43% (16 incidents) on the previous year.

3.2 The majority of incidents 58% (31 incidents) in 2021/22 involved objects thrown at firefighters / appliances, and a further 36% (19 incidents) involved firefighters being subjected to verbal abuse. The remaining incidents involved harassment 4% (2 incidents) and physical abuse 2% (1 incident).

3.3 The chart below provides a breakdown of the number of attacks of Fire and Rescue Service personnel by the type of attack.

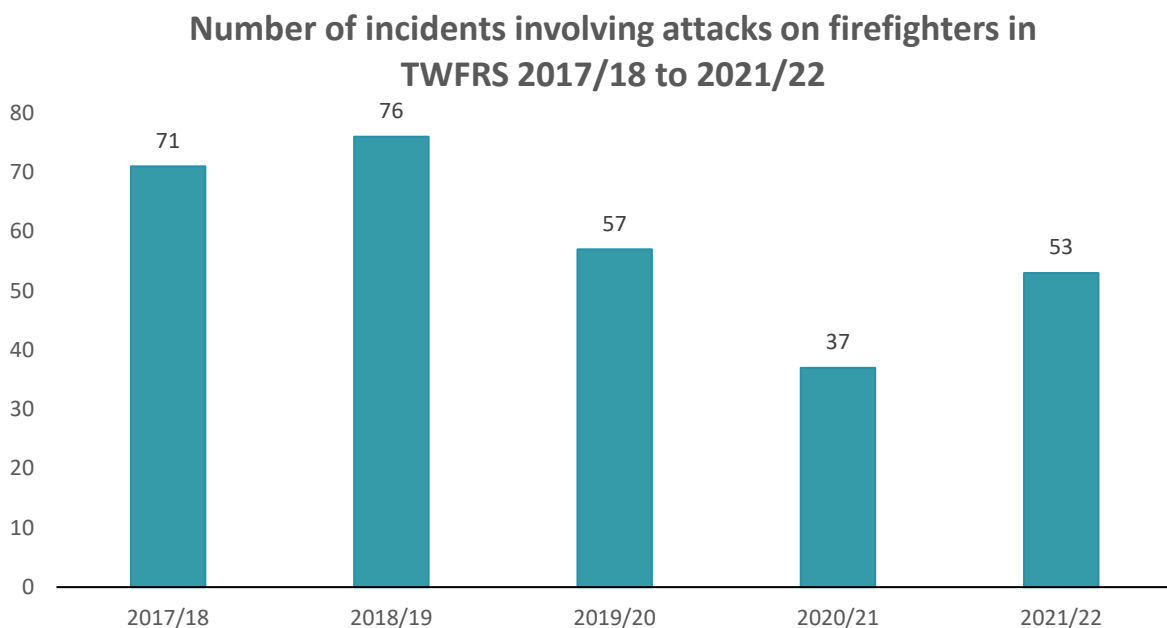
Chart 1 – Type of attacks on firefighters (2021/22)

Type of attack on firefighters 2021/22



- 3.4 TWFRS recorded 53 incidents involving an attack on firefighters, this was an increase of 43% on the previous year (2020/21) where the lowest number of 37 incidents was recorded in the five year reporting period.
- 3.5 The decrease in the number of incidents recorded in 2020/21 could be explained by the restrictions on life including lockdowns in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 3.6 The chart below provides a breakdown of attacks of Fire and Rescue Service personnel by the type of incident attended in the five year reporting period.

Chart 2– Number of attacks on firefighters (2017/18 - 2021/22)



- 3.7 Over the four year 8 months reporting period the type of attacks were similar to those reported in 2021/22 with the majority of incidents 49% (144 incidents) involved objects thrown at firefighters / appliances, and a further 41% (122 incidents) involved firefighters being subjected to verbal abuse. The remaining incidents involved other acts of aggression 6% (17 incidents), harassment 2% (6 incidents) and physical abuse 2% (5 incidents).
- 3.8 The table below provides a breakdown of attacks of Fire and Rescue Service personnel by the type of attack in the five year reporting period.

Table 1 – Type of attacks on firefighters (2017/18 - 2021/22)

Year	Harassment	Objects thrown at firefighters / appliances	Other acts of aggression	Physical abuse	Verbal abuse	Total
2017/18	1	41	4	1	24	71
2018/19	2	33	4	3	34	76
2019/20	1	19	8		29	57
2020/21		20	1		16	37
2021/22	2	31		1	19	53
Total	6	144	17	5	122	294

4 Incident category and property type

- 4.1 The majority of attacks on FRS personnel incidents 80% (236 incidents) occurred whilst travelling to / from or in attendance at an incident which was categorised as a fire.
- 4.2 The table below provides a breakdown of attacks of Fire and Rescue Service personnel by the type of incident attended in the five year reporting period.

Table 2 – Type of incident where an attack on firefighters occurred (2017/18 - 2021/22)

Type of incident	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	Total
Fire	60	66	42	27	41	236
False Alarm	7	6	8	5	6	32
Special Service	4	4	7	5	6	26
Total	71	76	57	37	53	294

- 4.3 The incident type 'Fire' covers all types of fire which are categorised for reporting purposes in the following way:
- 4.4 Primary Fires – includes fires in buildings, vehicles and most outdoor structures or any fire involving casualties, rescues or fires attended by five or more pumping appliances. Also includes Secondary fires which become Primary fires when they include casualties, rescues or are attended by five or more pumping appliances.
- 4.5 Secondary Fire – an incident that did not occur at a Primary location, was not a chimney fire in an occupied building, did not involve casualties and was attended by four or fewer pumping appliances
- 4.6 Chimney fire – any fires in buildings where the flame was contained within the structure and did not involve casualties, rescues or attendance by fire or more pumping appliances.
- 4.7 The majority of attacks on FRS personnel 92% (216 incidents) occurred whilst travelling to / from or in attendance at a fire categorised as a Secondary fire incident.

- 4.8 The table below provides a breakdown of attacks of Fire and Rescue Service personnel by the type of fire incident attended in the five year reporting period

Table 3 – Type of fire incident where an attack on firefighters occurred (2017/18 - 2021/22)

Type of incident	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	Total
Primary Fire	6	4	4	3	3	20
Secondary Fire	54	62	38	24	38	216
Total	60	66	42	27	41	236

- 4.9 The Secondary fire property types are mainly those fires involving loose refuse or rubbish containers and represent more than three quarters of the incidents where an attack on FRS personnel occurred. The table below details the top four secondary fire property types.

Table 4 – Secondary fire property type where an attack on firefighters occurred (2017/18 - 2021/22)

Type of property	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	Total
Loose refuse (incl in garden)	15	11	11	12	14	63
Wheelie bin	15	23	10	2	7	57
Refuse / rubbish tip	9	9	9	5	7	39
Small refuse/rubbish container	5	8	1	1	2	17
Total	44	51	31	20	30	176

5 Attacks on firefighters where an injury was sustained

- 5.1 Over the four year 8 months reporting period there were three incidents where four slight injuries were sustained by TWFRS firefighters. Injuries were caused by 50% (2 injuries) objects being thrown at firefighters / appliances and a further 50% (2 injuries) by physical abuse.
- 5.2 The table below provides a breakdown of the type of attack where a slight injury was sustained by Fire and Rescue Service personnel.

Table 5 – Type of attack where a slight injury was sustained on firefighters (2017/18 - 2021/22)

Year	Harassment	Objects thrown at firefighters / appliances	Other acts of aggression	Physical abuse	Verbal abuse	Total
2017/18		1		2		3
2018/19						
2019/20						
2020/21						
2021/22		1				1
Total	0	2	0	2	0	4

- 5.3 In the five year reporting period only 1% (3 incidents) involved a slight injury at the recorded 294 incidents involving an attack on firefighters. At one of the incidents in 2017/18 two firefighters sustained slight injuries.
- 5.4 There were no attacks on firefighters where a serious injury was sustained.
- 5.5 In 2021/22 there was 1 slight firefighter injury which required hospital treatment as a result of an object being thrown at firefighters / appliances.
- 5.6 The slight injury was sustained whilst in attendance at a Special Service incident in the Newcastle district where during a standoff with police an individual had climbed onto the roof of a two storey dwelling, causing substantial damage to the roof. Crews stood by whilst police negotiated with the male. Missiles (ridge and roof tiles) were thrown by the individual injuring the Watch Manager, damaging three police cars, neighbouring windows and a 13.5 meter appliance ladder.
- 5.7 The Watch Manager suffered a laceration to his foot which required stitches resulting in a three week absence from work. Damage to the 13.5 meter appliance ladder meant it had to be replaced at a cost to the fire service.
- 5.8 The rooftop siege lasted 50 hours, left a firefighter injured and caused damage to property. At Newcastle Crown Court the defendant entered a plea of 'guilty' to the charges and was sentenced to 2 years imprisonment. There was no award of costs to TWFRS or to Northumbria Police.
- 5.9 The court case was reported by the press and the article can be found by clicking the link to the [ChronicleLive](#) website.
- 5.10 In 2017/18 whilst in attendance at a dwelling fire in the Sunderland district and on completion of firefighting activities a male began boarding the appliance, moving on to another appliance, he then began verbally and physically assaulting crews on scene. Two other individuals joined the fracas and began assaulting crews who were attempting to refrain the initial male. One firefighter conveyed to hospital and a second treated for injuries at the scene. Two further crew members were assaulted without injury.
- 5.11 At Sunderland Magistrates Court the individual admitted three charges of common assault and was sentenced to 12 weeks in prison, suspended for 18 months, including 25 days of rehabilitation activity. The court case was reported by the press and the article can be found by clicking the link to the [Sunderland Echo](#) website.
- 5.12 During the bonfire period in 2017/18 there was one incident where a slight injury was sustained whilst in attendance at an incident in the Gateshead district. The fire incident involved a bonfire which had got of control and was producing large volumes of smoke. A large group of youths were verbally abusive and threw a stone striking a firefighter on the leg causing a slight injury, first aid administered at scene.

6 Where

Local Authority

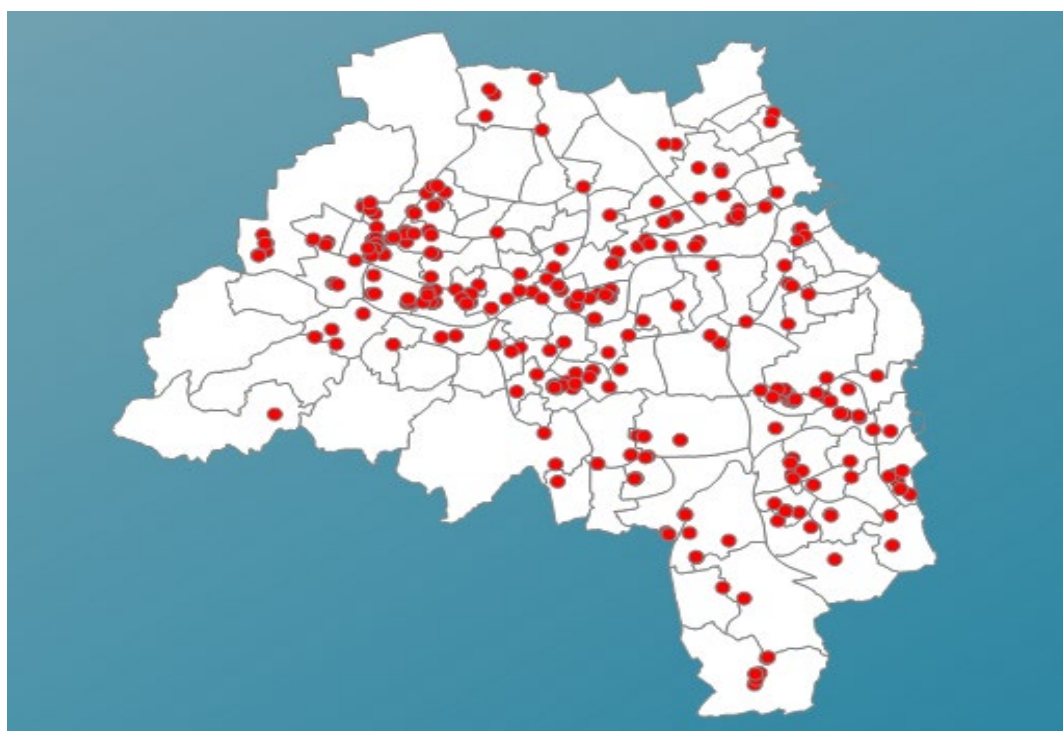
- 6.1 All of the five local authority areas of Tyne and Wear reported attacks on firefighters over the reporting period, Newcastle upon Tyne experienced the highest number of attacks and account for 40% (118 incidents).

- 6.2 The table below provides a breakdown of the number of attacks on Fire and Rescue Service personnel based on the Local Authority in which the fire occurred.

Table 6 - Local Authority in which the attacks on firefighters occurred (2017/18 - 2021/22)

Local Authority	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	Total
Newcastle	32	38	22	5	21	118
Sunderland	17	17	18	16	15	83
Gateshead	15	12	7	2	5	41
North Tyneside	4	8	5	8	9	34
South Tyneside	3	1	5	6	3	18
Total	71	76	57	37	53	294

- 6.3 The map below illustrates the location where the 294 attacks on Fire and Rescue Service personnel occurred during the reporting period 1st April 2017 to 31st November 2021.



Ward

- 6.4 Wards in the Newcastle Upon Tyne Local Authority area account for more than half of those districts which recorded eight or more incidents involving an attack.
- 6.5 The table below provides a breakdown of the number of attacks on Fire and Rescue Service personnel based on the ward in which the fire occurred. The table only shows those wards with eight or more incidents over the four year 8 months reporting period.

Table 7 - Ward in which the attacks on firefighters occurred (2017/18 - 2021/22)

Ward	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	Total
Denton and Westerhope	7	5		1	3	16
Elswick	5	4	3		3	15
Redhill	1	5	1	3	3	13

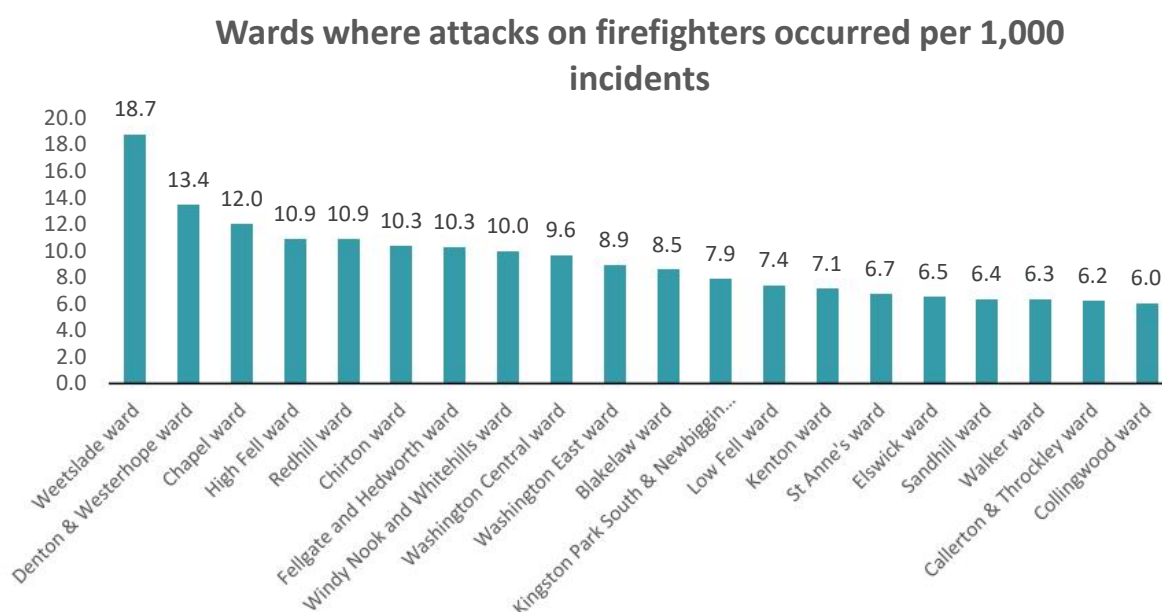
Walker	2	6	1		3	12
High Fell	7	3	2			12
Byker	3	4	1		3	11
Southwick	3	2	1	1	1	8
Windy Nook and Whitehills	4	1	1		2	8
Blakelaw	4	3			1	8
Total	36	33	10	5	19	103

Ward where attacks on firefighters occurred per 1,000 incidents

6.6 In the reporting period (including the 2021/22 incomplete year) the proportion of wards where an attack on firefighters occurred per 1,000 incidents Weetslade ward had the highest rate per 1,000 incidents with 18.7, Denton and Westerhope ward had the second highest rate per 1,000 incidents with 13.4. There are 34 wards in Tyne and Wear where an attack occurred, only the top 20 wards are detailed in the chart.

6.7 Weetslade ward has the highest attack on firefighter rate per 1,000 incidents, five attacks were recorded in this ward but it has a low number of incidents (267) over the reporting period.

Chart 3 – Wards where attacks on firefighters occurred per 1,000 incidents (2017/18 - 2021/22)



7 When

7.1 Over the four year 8 months reporting period, the highest number of attacks occurred in quarter three, the months of October, November and December and account for 36% (106 incidents). Not surprisingly the month of November saw more than half of the total (58 incidents) with bonfire period (1st to 6th November) accounting for 34 of the incidents involving an attack on fire service personnel.

7.2 The table below provides a breakdown of the number of attacks on Fire and Rescue Service personnel based on the month in which the fire occurred.

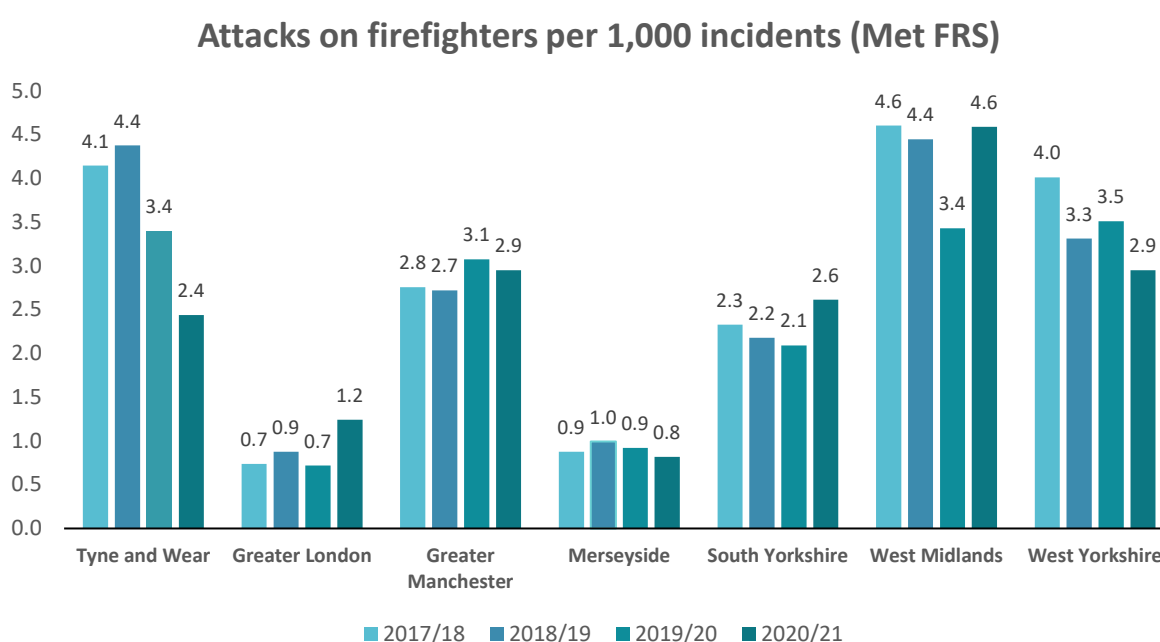
Table 8 - Month in which the attacks on firefighters occurred (2017/18 - 2021/22)

Station Ground	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	Total
January	5	8	5	1		19
February	1	3	2	1		7
March	2		3	6		11
April	9	9	11	4	8	41
May	5		3	2	5	15
June	2	7	6	3	4	22
July	1	8	1		2	12
August	5	3	7	1	6	22
September	6	9	6	10	8	39
October	13	15	2	2	11	43
November	20	13	9	7	9	58
December	2	1	2			5
Total	71	76	57	38	53	294

8 Attacks on firefighters per 1,000 incidents

- 8.1 In the reporting period (but not including the 2021/22 incomplete year) the proportion of attacks on firefighters per 1,000 incidents has been on a downward trend, from a high of 4.4 per 1,000 incidents in 2018/19 to a low of 2.4 per 1,000 incidents in 2020/21.
- 8.2 Similar to TWFRS three other Met FRS saw a downward trend, Merseyside saw the lowest rate with 0.8 per 1,000 incidents, Greater Manchester and West Yorkshire with 2.9 per 1,000 incidents.
- 8.3 The downward trend in attacks on firefighter seen in 2020/21 could be explained by the restrictions on life including lockdowns in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 8.4 The chart below shows the number of attacks on Met FRS firefighters per 1,000 incidents.

Chart 4– Number of attacks on firefighters per 1,000 incidents (Met FRS) (2017/18 - 2021/22)



9 Violence at work

9.1 Between 1st April 2017 and 30th November 2021 there were 40 reported violence at work incidents, the majority of the VAW attacks occurred whilst undertaking routine activities **on** TWFRS premises (28 reported incidents).

9.2 The table below provides a breakdown of the number of VAW attacks and the type of activity being undertaken at the time of the incident and where the activity occurred.

Table 9 – Violence at work, type of activity at time of incident (2017/18 - 2021/22)

Type of duties at time of incident	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	Total
Routine activities on TWFRS premises	1	5	10	9	3	28
Routine activities off TWFRS premises	2	3	1	1	2	9
Other		3				3
Total	3	11	11	10	5	40

9.3 During the five year reporting period the majority of VAW attacks 86% (24 incidents) occurred whilst undertaking routine activities **on** TWFRS premises and involved members of staff being verbally abused.

9.4 Similarly verbal abuse accounts for 67% (6 incidents) of the VAW attacks experience whilst undertaking routine activities **off** TWFRS premises.

9.5 The table below provides a breakdown of the number of VAW attacks, the type of activity being undertaken at the time of the incident, where the activity occurred and the type of attack.

Table 10 – Violence at work, type of activity at time of incident (2017/18 - 2021/22)

Type of duties at time of incident	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	Total
Routine activities on TWFRS premises	1	5	10	9	3	28
Verbal Abuse		5	8	9	2	24
Harassment	1				1	2
Physical Assault			1			1
Other Acts of Aggression			1			1
Routine activities off TWFRS premises	2	3	1	1	2	9
Verbal Abuse	2	1	1	1	1	6
Objects thrown		2				2
Harassment					1	1
Other		3				3
Objects thrown		1				1
Verbal Abuse		1				1
Other Acts of Aggression		1				1
Total	3	11	11	10	5	40

9.6 In 2021/22 (1st April 2021 to 30th November 2021) there were 5 incidents where violence at work was reported, a decrease of 50% (5 incidents) on the previous year.

- 9.7 Over the four year 8 months reporting period the majority of VAW incidents 78% (31 incidents) involved members of staff being verbally abused by members of the public.
- 9.8 The table below provides a breakdown of VAW attacks on Fire and Rescue Service personnel in the five year reporting period.

Table 11– Violence at work, type of attack (2017/18 - 2021/22)

Year	Harassment	Objects thrown at firefighters / appliances	Other acts of aggression	Physical abuse	Verbal abuse	Total
2017/18	1				2	3
2018/19		3	1		7	11
2019/20			1	1	9	11
2020/21					10	10
2021/22	2				3	5
Total	3	3	2	1	31	40

- 9.9 More than half of VAW was experienced by TWFRS Control room staff whilst answering emergency calls from members of the public. Control Room staff report members of the public being verbally abusive, swearing and making threats.
- 9.10 The majority of VAW experienced by Prevention & Education involved being verbally abused whilst undertaking routine activities in the community.
- 9.11 The table below provides a breakdown of the department experiencing VAW attacks in the five year reporting period.

Table 12– Department experiencing violence at work (2017/18 - 2021/22)

Department	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	Total
Control room		3	8	8	2	21
Prevention & Education	2	4	2		2	10
Service Delivery - North	1	2	1			4
Fire Safety				1	1	2
Service Delivery - West		1				1
Service Delivery - East				1		1
Other		1				1
Total	3	11	11	10	5	40

10 Employee absence cost

- 10.1 There was one attack on firefighter incident which resulted in a member of staff sustaining an injury which led to a period of absence from work.
- 10.2 A total of nine working days (5 night shifts and 4 day shifts) were lost as a result of an injury sustained at an attack on firefighter incident.
- 10.3 The cost of the overtime to cover absence between 1st April 2017 and 30th November 2021 was £3,458.76.

11 Damage to equipment cost

- 11.1 There were six attack on firefighter incidents which resulted in damage to appliances or equipment.
- 11.2 The cost to replace / repair damaged appliances or equipment which was recovered through insurance between 1st April 2017 and 30th November 2021 totalled £13,126.10.
- 11.3 Any damage requiring minor repairs (less than £100) which did not result in a claim are not included. We are self-insured, all costs up to £100,000 are through Service funds.

12 Appliance CCTV

- 12.1 Cameras can be a useful deterrent and assist with evidence to identify perpetrators for prosecution. CCTV fitted to fire appliances with the aim to reduce crime in the form of assaults / attacks on firefighters by aiding prevention, through deterrent, and detection.
- 12.2 Tyne and Wear cat01, cat02 appliances, 10% appliances, TRV's and A07 carry CCTVs, a video mounted CCTV video system designed to cover 360 degrees around the appliance and act as a witness to the situations encountered, it collects evidence, and acts as a permanent visual record.

13 Body worn video cameras

- 13.1 Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Authority (TWFR) introduced a Body Worn Video Camera (BWVC) system into the Service in October 2019. This is with the intent to overtly capture video and voice data during the course of duty for the purpose of firefighter safety, incident analysis and the promotion of community safety.
- 13.2 The camera's primary use, like CCTV is to record evidence against person or persons that attack firefighters or appliances.
- 13.3 Body worn cameras are worn by the officer in charge of the appliance at all incidents for the safety of firefighters.
- 13.4 Over the four year 8 months reporting period body worn video camera footage was requested by Northumbria Police due to attacks on firefighters on three occasions.

14 Conclusion

- 14.1 In conclusion, whilst the number of attacks on operational crews for the 8 month period in 2021/22 is higher than for the previous full fiscal year, there has been a downward trend in attacks on crews from 2018/19 to 2020/21. This can be attributed to the national lockdown restrictions put in place by the UK government due to Covid-19 that required people to only leave their homes for essential reasons.
- 14.2 As most attacks on crews occur at Secondary fire incidents, the increase in this type of incident can be linked to the rise in attacks on operational crews for the 8 month period of 2021/22
- 14.3 The majority of the 294 attacks on firefighters incidents did not result in an injury, there was one firefighter injury recorded in the 8 month period in 2021/22.

- 14.4 Newcastle Upon Tyne experienced the highest number of attacks in the 4 year 8 months reporting period with Denton and Westerhope ward reporting the highest number of attacks.
- 14.5 When looking at the 8 month period in 2021/22 there are multiple wards across Tyne and Wear each reporting three attacks, spread across two local authority areas with no particular hotspot areas.
- 14.6 Not surprisingly the month of November saw more than half of the total (58 incidents) with bonfire period (1st to 6th November) accounting for 34 of the incidents involving an attack on fire service personnel. This can be attributed to the high number of secondary fires reported in this period.
- 14.7 The majority of VAW reports come from our Control room operators reporting verbal abuse when taking an emergency call as part of their routine duties.