

MEETING: 13 DECEMBER 2021

SUBJECT: BONFIRE CAMPAIGN 2021

**REPORT OF THE CHIEF FIRE OFFICER AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE
(CLERK TO THE AUTHORITY)**

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to inform Members of the outcome of the 'Bonfire Campaign' 2021. The aim of this campaign is to reduce the impact of the Bonfire period on communities whilst preventing injuries, deaths and anti-social behaviour caused by fireworks and bonfires.

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The 'Bonfire Period' is between 1st and 6th November inclusive and is traditionally the busiest time of the year for the Service and our partners for deliberate fires.
- 2.2 The Service takes appropriate measures to deal with the increase in calls, response to bonfires and deliberate fires whilst maintaining operational capability to respond effectively to other incidents that may occur as part of business as usual.
- 2.3 Our annual bonfire campaign takes place during the weeks prior to the bonfire period. The campaign incorporates targeted educational activities, publicity and media, bonfire uplift schemes, fire safety activities, and operational command and control arrangements.
- 2.4 This paper provides a summary of the work that the Service and Partners have undertaken.

3 PREVENTION & EDUCATION

- 3.1 The Service liaised with local authority contacts to establish refuse uplifts for all areas of Tyne and Wear. Removing combustible material from the streets of our community prior to it being ignited is a key strategy in reducing the occurrence of fires and anti-social behaviour. By removing the fuel it has the effect of both improving the environment for communities and prevents the fire from being started. In the Beacon Lough area of Gateshead alone 30 tonnes of refuse was removed as part of one exercise.

- 3.2 Targeted messages were distributed to all secondary schools for dissemination via 'Parent Mail' and assemblies. We produced and circulated an updated version of our film 'Ryan's Regret' which highlights the dangers and consequences of the misuse of fireworks. The video also includes key safety messages relevant to the period including the consequences of Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) and how our 'Firestoppers' telephone line can be used to report any issues.
- 3.3 Engagement events promoting safe bonfire messages and the use of 'Firestoppers' took place, including events in Newcastle's Farndale Park. Here our Firefighters and Prevention and Education teams distributed leaflets and placed stickers on refuse bins in the Wingrove area.
- 3.4 In Sunderland our Firefighters and our Prevention & Education team are heavily involved with the SARA (Southwick All together Raising Aspirations) project. This was an area historically that was regularly an area that Firefighters would be called to deal with anti-social behaviour fires. Our work in this area has received Ministerial Recognition by the Fire Minister who has praised the work of the Service.
- 3.5 The two-week 'Darker Nights Campaign' 2021, was launched on Monday, October 25, to coincide with the beginning of half term. It was ran in conjunction with Northumbria Police, the North East Ambulance Service (NEAS) and all five local authorities in Tyne and Wear. The focus of our media activity was to promote safety advice and assist operational work to reduce deliberate secondary fires. The main target audience was parents and guardians, who we encouraged to work with emergency services and educate young people about the consequences of ASB and disorder. Our communications activity was tailored for the communities of Tyne and Wear but we also shared National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) preventative messages throughout the two weeks.
- 3.6 The media activity was followed by further communications around attacks on firefighters, focusing on how figures for 2021 at the end of Quarter 2 were already higher than the full previous year. Our communication messages were focussed towards parents and called on them to educate their children about the consequences of this type of behaviour.
- 3.7 Members will recall that the Service previously invested in the provision of Body Worn Video Cameras to enhance the safety of our staff. The Service released body worn videos of attacks on firefighters and included a case study of a Watch Manager whose appliance was taken off the road when a teenager threw a scaffolding pole at the cab, smashing the windscreen. That media activity was covered extensively by the local media, with the case study featuring on the front page of a Sunday newspaper.

- 3.8 As part of Bonfire week we also arranged a media event at our SafetyWorks! Centre in Newcastle to reiterate our prevention messages for bonfires and fireworks. We arranged for Year Six pupils from a Newcastle school to attend and receive safety talks by TWFRS staff and officers from Northumbria Police. Our staff conducted interviews with Metro Radio, BBC Look North and ITV Tyne Tees. It was also covered in written press and on our social media. Again the messages focused on calling on the support of parents, both to prevent disorder but also to listen to safety messages around fireworks, bonfires and sparklers.

4 FIRE SAFETY

- 4.1 The Service again worked closely with Police and Trading Standards to monitor and act on the illegal sales of fireworks, including joint visits. It is only through multi agency working and the sharing of intelligence between organisations that we can target those that are not complying with current regulations.
- 4.2 There are 102 premises licensed to store and sell fireworks within Tyne and Wear this year. Audits were undertaken on a risk / intelligence led approach at 44 of these premises. In some instances, this involved multiple visits to the same premises. The Service seeks to work with business to support them to be compliant with regulations, but where safety standards fall significantly short we will proportionately use our statutory enforcement powers to improve community safety.
- 4.3 Of note to Members is that there appears to be a trend in that the number of premises licensed to store and sell fireworks continues to reduce. However it is unclear whether this is due to the regulatory burden or the reduced availability of fireworks amidst a pandemic. There were seven premises that did not renew their licence this year. The majority of these premises were visited to ensure that selling without a licence was not taking place.
- 4.4 As a result of the Service's explosive licensing procedure, premises audits and media campaigns, there were a total of four intelligence-led joint visits undertaken to both commercial and domestic premises with Trading Standards and the Police. The visits did not result in any seizures, either due to no fireworks being stored or the correct licence and storage arrangements in place.
- 4.5 The Service seeks to work with business to support them to be compliant with regulations, but where safety standards fall significantly short we will proportionately use our statutory enforcement powers to improve community safety. As such, the Service continues to progress an investigation and possible prosecution from last year's bonfire period.

5 INCIDENT DATA AND INTELLIGENCE

- 5.1 The Service worked with Northumbria Police to combine our historical deliberate fire incident data with Police ASB data to identify and predict hotspot locations. This successfully supported an effective multi-agency response during the bonfire period across all districts, including co-location with Northumbria Police in the control room, and working together and responding simultaneously within hotspot areas.
- 5.2 The bonfire period incident data below is compared against the same period in 2020.
- 11.8% decrease in the number of calls received from 915 to 807
 - 5.6% decrease in the total number of incidents attended from 462 to 436
 - 12.8% decrease in the number of deliberate secondary fires from 203 to 177
 - 33% decrease in the number of Firework related primary fires from 3 to 2
 - 25% increase in the number of attacks on our fire crews from 4 to 5
- 5.3 On the evening of 5th November, our control room handled 356 calls, this was a 22.4% decrease from last year's Bonfire Night (459).
- 5.4 A detailed breakdown of the activities over the Bonfire Period can be found at Appendix A.

6 ATTACKS ON FIREFIGHTERS

- 6.1 The vast majority of people enjoyed the bonfire celebrations safely and responsibly. However, once again our crews were attacked by a small minority of individuals.
- 6.2 There were five reported attacks on operational fire crews during the bonfire period in 2021, which represents a 25% increase from four in 2020. Of the five incidents, there were three in Newcastle and two in North Tyneside. All of the attacks involved objects being thrown at firefighters or the appliances, three of the five incidents involved fireworks deliberately directed towards crew members or the appliance.
- 6.3 Fortunately these events did not result in any injuries to our firefighters, but this behaviour is absolutely unacceptable – firefighters work tirelessly to keep people safe and the last thing they deserve is to have fireworks and other missiles thrown at them. Enquiries to identify those responsible will continue alongside Northumbria Police. Members have requested further analysis of the attacks on firefighters and this analysis will be presented at a future Policy and Performance Committee meeting.

7 CONCLUSION

- 7.1 Our incident data shows the majority of indicators falling significantly from last year. The success is a result of partnership working with our blue light and local authority partners.
- 7.2 Following the bonfire period we released figures to demonstrate the success of our Darker Nights campaign and thanked the public, parents and guardians in particular for passing on the important messages to their children and relatives about the dangers of fire, fireworks and ASB.
- 7.3 The Service also published an article on our intervention at a community orchard that was developed as part of the SARA Project. The orchard was vandalised on Bonfire Night when a number of trees were torn from the ground. Our crews responded and took the trees back to the station. Their intervention helped save 19 trees that were then re-planted at a later date alongside local schoolchildren and other members of the community. There was extensive media coverage on our intervention that included significant praise for the crews involved. It also provided us with an opportunity to demonstrate our commitment to the community project that has helped reduce ASB in Southwick.

8 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 There are no financial implications in relation to this report. The cost of the bonfire campaign was met from existing budgets.

9 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 9.1 Members are recommended to:
 - a) Note the content of the report and the enclosed Bonfire Incident Data Power BI report, attached at Appendix A
 - b) Receive further reports as necessary.

