

TYNE & WEAR FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

Item No 6

MEETING: 12th DECEMBER 2022

SUBJECT: BONFIRE CAMPAIGN 2022

**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' 2022. 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 created and led on a 'Darker Nights 2022' campaign that was delivered between the 17th October and the 17th November 2022. This was a multi-agency, collaborative operation to engage, inform, enforce and respond to anti-social behaviour (ASB) and associated issues throughout the bonfire period. This campaign was produced in conjunction with the regional ASB coordination group, Northumbria Police in conjunction with 'Operation Vulcan', Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service, all five local authorities, social housing providers and Nexus. The campaign was split into three key areas.

Phase one - Engagement

- 3.2 The engagement phase was the proactive element and consisted of education and preventative activities across three weeks from the 17th October to 6th November 2022.
- 3.3 Joint visits between TWFRS and Northumbria police were conducted, attending schools to deliver bespoke structured lessons that were produced this year by TWFRS's Diversionary Activities Manager. These focused on key safety and anti-social behaviour messages. Two lessons were produced with the preferred session being devised to fill a 60 minute lesson with time included for student engagement and questions. A second 15 minute abridged session was also devised covering the salient points that was suitable for assemblies in schools that were unable to allocate a full lesson to us. To identify the most effective and efficient use of resources, a mix of historic fire, and ASB data and local intelligence was used to identify the schools with young people at the highest risk.
- 3.4 While schools were the primary focus of the engagement strategy, we also engaged with young people at community events, on fire stations, our interactive safety education centre (safety works), and at local youth clubs. In total across the three week period we delivered 112 separate sessions, and engaged with 13,168 young people.
- 3.5 During this phase our Corporate Communications team worked closely with partners including Northumbria police and the North East Ambulance Service to produce and deliver a collaborative, multi-agency communications plan including a fully branded launch of the darker night's campaign. This plan was coordinated across all five local authority areas. The most notable areas of our communication plan were a social media campaign and leaflet drops in predefined hotspot areas. The focus areas of our media campaign were the hazards and risks associated with bonfires and fireworks, anti-social behaviour and disorder, and reinforcement of our ongoing Firestoppers campaign that encourages Tyne and Wear residents to report ASB issues. In addition to the local media, some of our news was picked up by regional and national news outlets expanding our reach and delivering our safety messages to a wider audience.
- 3.6 The Service liaised with local authority contacts to agree increased 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 preventing the fire from being started. This year we were able to use a mix of direct telephone contact and our new ReportIT tool that sends electronic uplift requests to the appropriate local authority including information around rubbish type, quantity with a map identifying the exact location. Our data collection tool, PowerBI identified that a total of 50 hours were committed by TWFRS to identifying loose refuse that resulted in 338 uplift requests being submitted, and actioned utilising our ReportIT tool. We are still collating the data for telephone contact uplifts.

- 3.7 In Sunderland and Hetton, our Firefighters and Prevention & Education teams are integral partners with the SARA (Southwick All-together Raising Aspirations) and HALO (Hetton Aspiring for Local Opportunities) projects. These projects are in areas that Firefighters have a history of significant numbers of anti-social behaviour fires. Our involvement with the SARA project has received recognition by the Fire Minister who has praised the work of the Service.

4 Phase 2 - Bonfire Period.

- 4.1 From the 31st October to 6th November 2022 we transitioned our focus from education to mitigation work. Those dates encompass one full week up to and including bonfire night. The education work from phase one continued; Phase 2 placed an emphasis specifically on issues surrounding bonfire night. Focussing on secondary fires, ASB prevention, and reducing the likelihood of attacks on emergency services personnel through the use of dedicated resources to identify, respond and safely conclude incidents.
- 4.2 The key activities during this phase were the Co-location of tactical commanders from TWFRS, Northumbria Police, and Northumberland FRS within the operations cell of Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Services Control Room on the 4th and 5th November. This enabled a quick triage of incident calls, effective decision making on the resources allocated to each incident, and identified those incidents that required a multi-agency attendances.
- 4.3 Call triaging was utilised to prioritise resources to incidents that represented a significant risk to life and property, and provide responses to deliver a fast and effective deterrence against ASB to reduce the risks to Tyne and Wear residents and emergency service personnel.
- 4.4 To support tactical commanders in the operations cell and provide ground intelligence, Northumbria Police provided one marked vehicle for each of the three police command areas (north, central and south). Within these vehicles were two operational commanders, one Police Officer and one TWFRS Flexible Duty Officer. These cars were supported by additional double crewed Northumbria Police vehicles to respond to incidents involving ASB including threats to operational personnel.
- 4.5 Through coordinated, co-located multi agency teams working collectively and sharing information and intelligence both pre and during the bonfire period ensured that communities received a joined up service with blue light agencies, local authorities and a range of other partners including CCTV teams working effectively together.

5 Phase 3 – Evaluation

- 5.1 The year on year data provided within this report and the qualitative information gathered from the internal and external debriefs will be used to evaluate the successes and opportunities for improvement in future campaigns. This work is ongoing and will be available on completion.

6 FIRE SAFETY

- 6.1 The Service continued to work with local partners in Trading Standards and Northumbria Police to monitor firework sales and any illegal activity. This is vital work which looks to ensure compliance with all current legislation. In addition to this Northumbria Police engaged with the Service so they can assure their own policies and procedures are correct with regards to fireworks.
- 6.2 This year there are currently 108 premises which have a license to store and sell fireworks within Tyne and Wear, which is a slight increase on last year. Inspections were carried out at 66 premises (an increase of 21 from 2021) some of which were intelligence led and involved multiple visits. It is the Services goal to seek compliance in all licensed premises and whilst there were minor issues found at a number of premises, no enforcement action was taken.
- 6.3 Following the Services premises audits, licensing processes and media campaigns there was two intelligence led visits to commercial premises with Trading Standards and the Police. The visits did not result in any seizures due to compliance being met at the premises when visited.
- 6.4 There were a number of requests by the Police and Trading Standards to take immediate action against some premises occupiers, the drivers for these requests was fireworks related anti-social behaviour in a number of areas, however the circumstances and our available powers did not permit any immediate action.
- 6.5 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 progressed a prosecution, started in 2020, to court in October 2022. The outcome being the Responsible Person receiving a 10 months suspended sentence, 150 hrs unpaid work and £5000 costs and a need to forfeit the fireworks seized which have subsequently been destroyed.

7 INCIDENT DATA AND INTELLIGENCE

- 7.1 The Service worked with Northumbria Police to combine our historical deliberate fire incident data with Police ASB data to identify and predict hotspot locations for fires and related ASB. 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.
- 7.2 The bonfire period (1st to 6th Nov 2022) incident data below is compared against the same period in 2021.
- 11.8% increase in the number of calls received from 807 to 902
 - 1.1% decrease in the total number of incidents attended from 437 to 432
 - 2.8% increase in the number of deliberate secondary fires from 178 to 183
 - No change in the number of Firework related primary fires (2).
 - 40% increase in the number of attacks on our fire crews from 5 to 7

- 7.3 On the evening of 5th November, our control room handled 371 calls, this was a 4.2% increase from last year's Bonfire Night (356).
- 7.4 A detailed breakdown of the activities over the Bonfire Period can be found at Appendix A.

8 FIRE CONTROL ARRANGEMENTS

- 8.1 Key to all operational activity and no less so than during the bonfire period, is the role our fire control room staff play. The fire control room staff are the first point of contact between the public and other agencies and are vastly experienced in giving advice to the public, dealing with often irate or concerned callers and ensuring that emergency resources are dispatched without delay. The experience and professionalism of the control room staff is a key strand of keeping both public and firefighters safe.
- 8.2 In support of the control room staff, the TWFRS control room Operation Cell (Ops cell) was implemented and utilised on the 4th and 5th November with representatives from Northumbria Police and Northumberland FRS in attendance. This also included access to both Sunderland City and Newcastle City CCTV cameras images, which was used in some occasions to help inform joint decisions on deployment to incidents. The function of the Ops cell is to provide a multi-agency space to support operations and the fire and police control rooms.
- 8.3 Any calls taken by Northumbria Police where triaged by those within the operation cell in conjunction with a TWFRS control room operator. Any life or property risk calls taken by the police were passed direct to fire control.
- 8.4 Three Fire Officers 'buddied' up with three Police Officers in vehicles across the area meaning on scene assessments could be made and decisions taken around the mobilisation of assets. This ensured a risk based approach was adopted at a time when resources were stretched.

9 ATTACKS ON FIREFIGHTERS

- 9.1 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.
- 9.2 There were seven reported attacks on operational fire crews during the bonfire period in 2022, which represents a 40% increase from four in 2021. Of the seven incidents, there were three in Newcastle, 3 in Sunderland and one in South Tyneside. Four of the attacks involved objects being thrown at firefighters or the appliances, two were verbal abuse and the one incident in South Tyneside did result in physical abuse towards firefighters. Crews responded to a large fire made up of various bit of rubbish, wheelie bins and furniture. There was approximately 20 people in attendance ranging from 6 years to about 50 years.
As crews began to extinguish the fire with 1 hose reel they became verbally abusive. Some of the children kicked the Firefighters.
As the crews were putting the equipment back onto the appliance, a child stole a petrol can, and as the appliance drove away, some of the children kicked and hung off the rear of the appliance

10 CONCLUSION

- 10.1 TWFRS will continue to take a proactive approach to engaging with the community in the build up to bonfire night. 112 separate sessions were delivered by TWFRS personnel and over 13,000 young people were engaged with.
- 10.2 Working closely with our partners ensured an effective and efficient approach was adopted. A joined up approach to planning for, and responding to incidents, is one that has attracted national focus and it is pleasing to see TWFRS are at the forefront of this type of collaborative approach.
- 10.3 The data and figures created over the bonfire period are varied in comparison to last years. Total number of calls over the bonfire period went up by 11.8% but the number of incidents actually attended saw a small decrease of 1.1%. This drop will be due to the proactive approach of police and fire adapting a risk based approach to attending incidents
- 10.4 2022 saw an increase of 40% in the number of attacks on our fire crews over the previous year. The attacks went up from five in 2021 to seven in 2022.
- 10.5 The new approach to having police in fire control proved to be a real success and this will be built upon for future years. Couple that with both fire and police attending incidents together in the same vehicle, meant a risk based approach was taken when deciding to attend incidents. Again this proved to be a real success and demonstrated the benefits of blue light partners working together to reduce the risks to the community.
- 10.6 The work done within the Tyne and Wear area over the period leading up to and during the bonfire period highlights the strong application of the Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Principles (JESIP) and extended well beyond blue light services to include local authorities and range of other partners. This collaborative approach to supporting local communities is the bedrock of community response that is designed for the benefit of communities and the public at large.

11 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

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

12 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 12.1 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.