



TYNE AND WEAR FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

Item No 4

MEETING: 11th DECEMBER 2023

SUBJECT: BONFIRE PERIOD 2023

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

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to inform Members of the outcome of the Bonfire Period 2023. The aim of the Service 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 and associated anti-social behaviour (ASB) related issues.
- 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 Darker Nights work stream takes place during the weeks prior to the bonfire period. It 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 AND EDUCATION

- 3.1 In response to last year's work, and having analysed previous years, the Prevention and Education department elected to take a different approach to the bonfire period, particularly in the run up to bonfire night itself.



- 3.2 Traditionally, the Darker Nights work has always been referred to as a campaign. However, given this has been run year after year for many years, it was decided that this is business as usual, and is a standard way of working as we approach this time of year. The decision has therefore been made that we will still specifically refer to the 'bonfire period' which covers the 1st – 6th November, but the term 'campaign' will no longer be used in reference to Darker Nights. It is also a larger piece of work that covers more than just the bonfire period, and not just a one off initiative as the name could suggest.
- 3.3 Our District Delivery Teams (DDT) began the delivery of our schools education sessions on the week commencing 2nd October.
- 3.4 Using both internal and partner data, we identified and rated the schools across Tyne and Wear using the red/amber/green rating system (RAG). This allowed us to prioritise those deemed at a higher risk of ASB related issues.
- 3.5 Schools that were identified as red or amber had sessions booked with our DDTs, with those being at highest risk visited closer to the bonfire period. This ensured that the messages delivered were fresh in the young people's minds as the time approached. Once all of the red rated schools were scheduled, invites went out to amber rated schools, and then the remaining places were offered to green rated schools.
- 3.6 Following feedback from last year's engagement, this year's sessions centred around 15 minute assemblies. This was a direct response to schools requests for shorter sessions as many were unable to accommodate the forty five minute sessions we had previously offered.
- 3.7 The sessions were themed around choices, and how making bad choices could negatively affect the young person and those around them in many ways. Part of these choices focussed on attitudes toward emergency services and the attacks we have, and continue to face, especially around the bonfire period.
- 3.8 Corporate Communications worked closely with partner agencies including Northumberland Fire and Rescue, Northumbria Police and the North East Ambulance Service to deliver joint messages around the bonfire period. This built on the success of last year's social media campaign, with resources being reused where possible, demonstrating value for money.
- 3.9 Local media outlets ran multiple stories focussing on the issues faced over previous years, and Corporate Communications team were very proactive in seeking out opportunities for interviews and stories to be published. A focussed social media campaign was implemented on the run up to, and duration of the bonfire period.
- 3.10 The Service promoted the use of the Firestoppers reporting tool to enable members of the public to report their concerns anonymously.



- 3.11 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 14 hours and 55 minutes were committed by TWFRS operational crews to identifying loose refuse that resulted in 70 uplift requests being submitted, and actioned utilising our ReportIT tool. We are still collating the data for telephone contact uplifts.

4 BONFIRE PERIOD (1st – 6th November)

- 4.1 This period saw our proactive ASB prevention work increase, with more patrols by crews to identify areas at higher risk over the period.
- 4.2 Using a combination of local intelligence and historic data, crews increased patrols in known hotspots in order to identify stockpiles of materials that could be used to build bonfires, as well as insecure derelict properties and vehicles that could pose a risk of being involved in fire.
- 4.3 As in previous years, uplift contact numbers were secured for each local authority area. This provided a real time link between crews and their local authority to ensure uplifts were carried out in a timely manner.
- 4.4 Following feedback from last year, arrangements were made at a local level between Service Delivery Station and Group Managers and their Police counterparts around providing triage teams on both the 4th and 5th November.
- 4.5 These teams were assigned to each of the Northumbria Police command areas, Northern, Central and Southern, and overlaid with the geographical areas of Tyne and Wear to ensure coverage across the whole service area.
- 4.6 Each team consisted of a TWFRS Fire Flexible Duty Officer (FDO) and Police Bronze Commander. They were in direct contact with the Fire National Interagency Liaison Officer (NILO) and Police Silver Commander who were in the Police Silver cell, set up at West Hartford, Northumberland Fire and Rescue Services HQ. This model followed the success of last year where the cell was established at our headquarters.
- 4.7 In previous years, the FDOs were selected from command groups who were not on call over the bonfire period, and had volunteered to fulfil the role within a triage team. This model was used to bolster the on duty command group for the period of increased fire calls. The officers selected were on a random allocation.



It was identified following last year's evaluation that this work was successful but left opportunities to improve this provision.

- 4.8 This year, the decision was made to continue appointing FDOs who were not on call, but we utilised the FDO's of the station area(s) that the triage team was covering. The rationale behind this was that they have a heightened level of awareness and local knowledge of the area, as well as existing relationships with the neighborhood policing teams, local authority partners and community groups in the areas they were working with.
- 4.9 This joined up approach allowed for the embedding of the five JESIP principals, co-location, communication, coordination, joint understanding of risk and shared situational awareness. Resources were able to be allocated effectively and efficiently ensuring each incident received the right resources at the right time.
- 4.10 In addition to our FDOs working with the Northumbria Police Command teams DCFO Nicholson and ACFO McVay were accompanied by two Fire Authority members, the Chair of the Fire Authority Councillor Phil Tye and Councillor Gary Haley on the 5th November. DCFO Nicholson along with Councillor Haley visited Stations in the North and West district of the Service. ACFO McVay along with Councillor Tye visited Stations in the East district of the Service. Both Councillors also visited Fire Control at Service Headquarters and were able to visit areas of interest identified by Fire Control to assess if there was a requirement for attendance by Service Delivery crews.

5 FIRE CONTROL

- 5.1 Following a pre-determined model, Fire control numbers were increased on the 3rd, 4th and 5th November from 1400hrs to 2300hrs. These timings centered on times of peak demand.
- 5.2 During these times, pre-arranged SPATE mobilising procedures were ready to be invoked if deemed necessary. SPATE conditions occur when emergency calls are received simultaneously for multiple incidents at various locations. Fire Control manage the mobilisation of appliances based on risk and availability, independent of any pre-determined arrangements.
- 5.3 On the 3rd and 4th, depending on demand, the default position is to attend all incidents as normal, with everything in place to invoke SPATE if necessary. This was not required on either the 3rd or the 4th.
- 5.4 As expected, SPATE was invoked on the 5th and remained in place until it was stood down at 2200hrs.
- 5.5 In total, between 1st and 6th of November, the Service took 829 calls. On the 5th, we took 382 calls, of which crews were dispatched to 153.



6 FIRE SAFETY

- 6.1 The Service continued to work with local partners in Trading Standards and Northumbria Police to monitor firework sales and 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 was 102 premises which have a license to store and sell fireworks seasonally within Tyne and Wear, and an additional 3 with an annual license. Inspections were carried out at 98 premises some of which were intelligence led and involved multiple visits (18). It is the Services goal to seek compliance in all licensed premises, and following two causes for concern, one seizure was carried out.
- 6.3 The Service worked with partners within Northumbria Police to seize a significant quantity of fireworks from a domestic premises in South Tyneside, these are part of an ongoing police investigation. Fireworks were handed to the Service by a secondary school in the region after it was found that a pupil had been selling them to other students. This was investigated by the police.
- 6.4 The Service continually seeks to work with business to support them in being compliant with regulations, but where safety standards fall short we will proportionately use our statutory enforcement powers to improve community safety.

7 INCIDENT STATISTICS

- 7.1 The bonfire period (1st to 6th of November 2023) incident data below is compared against the same period in 2022.
- **7.5% decrease** in the number of calls received from 896 down to 829
 - **6.4% decrease** in the total number of incidents attended from 451 down to 422
 - **23.9% decrease** in the number of deliberate secondary fires from 188 down to 143
 - **Zero** Firework related primary fires zero down from three.
 - **A reduction** in the number of attacks on our fire crews from seven down to five
 - **No change** to injuries from fireworks, with two this year and two last year.
- 7.2 On the 5th November, our control room handled 382 calls, up from 370 in 2022. This was a **3.2% increase** from the previous year.



- 7.3 Although there was a reduction in attacks on crews, it is still disappointing to note that there were five attacks over the course of the bonfire period. Thankfully, none of these resulted in injury to crews or significant damage to any appliance or equipment.
- 7.4 There was no change in the number of injuries to members of the public from fireworks compared to the previous year. Although this number is low (two), the Service will continue to strive to achieve zero injuries from fireworks year on year.
- 7.5 A detailed breakdown of incidents over this period can be found in Appendix A.

8 CONCLUSION

- 8.1 The Authority is recommended to:
- a) Endorse the contents of this report
 - b) Receive further reports as appropriate.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

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

Appendix A: Bonfire Period Report 2023