

TYNE AND WEAR FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

Item No 5

MEETING: POLICY AND PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE 21 FEBRUARY 2022

SUBJECT: ATTACKS ON TWFRS STAFF

**JOINT REPORT OF THE CHIEF FIRE OFFICER/CHIEF EXECUTIVE (THE CLERK
TO THE AUTHORITY) THE FINANCE DIRECTOR AND THE PERSONNEL
ADVISOR TO THE AUTHORITY**

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This paper presents the Policy and Performance Committee (PPC) with a report detailing attacks on TWFRS crews at operational incidents and reports of violence at work on staff whilst carrying out their daily duties (Appendix 1).
- 1.2 The report covers the period from 01/04/2017 – 30/11/2021. The 2021/22 fiscal year is therefore an 8 month period.

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 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.
- 2.2 The term ‘attack’ refers to any kind of verbal or physical assault, abuse or other kind of violence towards TWFRS staff.

3 ATTACKS ON TWFRS STAFF

- 3.1 The report covers the period from 01/04/2017 to 30/11/2021 and looks at the type of attack, the severity of any injury sustained by the Crew, where and when the attack took place, employee absence costs and damage to TWFRS equipment.
- 3.2 Key findings from the report include:
 - The data shows a strong correlation between attacks on firefighters and incidents involving deliberate secondary fires.
 - There were 53 incidents where an attack on firefighters took place during 2021/22 (up to 30/11/2021). This is 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.

- 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 resulting in a significant reduction in deliberate secondary fires.
- 58% (31) of incidents where an attack on Crews took place involved objects being thrown at firefighters/appliances.
- Over 40% of the attacks were carried out in the Newcastle district, within the Denton and Westerhope ward having the most incidents of attacks on crews over the reporting period.
- The proportion of attacks per 1,000 incidents is on a downward trend from a high of 4.4 per 1,000 in 2018/19 to a low of 2.4 per 1,000 in 2020/21.
- The cost to TWFRS to cover absence and damage to appliances/equipment was over £16,000 during the reporting period.
- The Service have the third lowest number of attacks (2.4) per 1,000 incidents when compared to other Metropolitan Fire and Rescue Services. In 2020/21 West Midlands FRS had the highest number of attacks per 1,000 incidents of all of the Met FRS' with 4.6.
- In addition to attacks on firefighters, there were 40 Violence at Work (VAW) reports submitted to the Health and Safety team. 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.
- The majority of these VAW incidents (86%) were recorded as verbal abuse whilst carrying out routine activities on TWFRS premises. More than half (21 of the 40) incidents of VAW were experienced by our Control room staff whilst taking an emergency call from members of the public with reports of callers being verbally abusive, and making threats.
- Appliance and Body Worn video CCTV cameras can be a useful deterrent and can be utilised in social media campaigns as well as being used as evidence if cases are brought before the courts.
- 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 had 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. 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.

3.3 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 for the Service.

4 RISK MANAGEMENT

4.1 The Service will continue to report incidents of attacks on our staff and progress these through the criminal justice system where appropriate.

5 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 There are no financial implications in respect of this report.

6 EQUALITY AND FAIRNESS IMPLICATIONS

6.1 There are no equality and fairness implications in respect of this report.

7 HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

7.1 There are no health and safety implications in respect of this report.

8 RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1 Members are recommended to:

- a) Endorse the contents of this report
- b) Receive further reports as appropriate.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

N/A

