

**TYNE & WEAR FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY**

**Item No 4**

**MEETING: 16 DECEMBER 2019**

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**SUBJECT: BONFIRE CAMPAIGN 2019**

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

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## **1 INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to inform Members of the 2019 bonfire campaign.

## **2 BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 The bonfire period is traditionally the busiest time of the year for the Service and its partners in terms of deliberate fires. Measures are taken to ensure that the Service has the capability and resources to deal with the increase in calls and response to bonfires and deliberate fires, whilst maintaining operational capability to respond effectively to other life threatening incidents.
- 2.2 A proactive bonfire campaign was undertaken during the weeks prior to the 5 November. The campaign incorporated educational activities, publicity and media messages, bonfire uplift schemes and operational command and control arrangements.
- 2.3 The aim of this year's campaign was to prevent deaths and reduce the number of injuries caused by bonfires and fireworks.

## **3 FIREWORKS**

- 3.1 Fire Safety (FS) granted 35 explosives licences, with a total of 130 licences in force for the Halloween and bonfire selling period from 15 October ending on 10 November 2019. This data was made available to operational crews via firefighter risks on appliance MDTs.
- 3.2 86 explosives inspections being completed by the explosives officers on the lead up to and within this selling period. As part of these inspections, the department conducted 15 joint inspections with Northumbria Police and local Trading Standards teams across Tyne and Wear.

- 3.3 A leaflet was further developed for use by our partners and our own FS staff on the safe storage and selling of fireworks, to be issued to local retailers on the lead up to bonfire night.
- 3.4 The downward trend in licenses being issued has continued, this year there was a decrease of 50% from the previous year. This is in part because extended licenses are now available for up to 5 years. This year the FS department carried out 33 fewer inspections, this was due to both the decrease in applications and a reduction of suitably experienced staff.
- 3.5 This year saw one seizure of fireworks from an unlicensed car wash, this seizure was undertaken as part of joint working with North Tyneside Trading Standards. November saw the culmination of a lengthy investigation for illegal storage of over 500kg of fireworks. This culminated with the Responsible Person being given an 8 month suspended prison sentence, 150 hours community service and Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service (TWFRS) being awarded £850 costs.
- 3.6 A media campaign was also utilised which focused on areas such as the correct storage, ensuring that premises were licensed to sell and the inappropriate sales over social media platforms such as Facebook. This campaign may be in part responsible for reduction in known social media sales.
- 3.7 The FS department ran explosives training in preparation for the firework season. This year all local authorities were invited to attend as were Northumbria Police and Durham County Council. This collaborative approach allowed for some valuable shared learning and partnership building.

## **4 INCIDENT STATISTICS**

- 4.1 Bonfire period 1 – 6 November – indicates validated data and variances from 2018.
- 25.6% decrease in the number of fire calls received – 1078 to 802
  - 23.7% decrease in the number of incidents attended – 556 to 424
  - 28.2% decrease in the number of deliberate secondary fires – 244 to 175
  - 25% decrease in the number of attacks on our fire crews – 8 to 6
  - 50% decrease in the number of Firework related primary fires – 2 to 1
- 4.2 Due to experience of previous years, additional measures for management of calls and incidents during the bonfire period changed for 2019. The 'busy' bonfire period would fall midweek in 2019 and significant rainfall occurred in the weeks prior to early November, therefore no additional officers were used to support control. One additional flexible duty officer (FDO) was on standby as a 'Brex' point of contact, but was not used during the period.

- 4.3 Control staff numbers were increased to ensure busy periods were captured with additional call takers and supervisors, these were covered by some dayshift staff starting and finishing late to set up the control support room should queuing of incidents be necessary, this was only necessary on the 5 November there were no other significant busy periods.

## **5 ATTACKS ON FIREFIGHTERS**

- 5.1 There were six reported attacks on operational fire crews in 2019, which represents a 25% decrease from eight in 2018. Of the six incidents, there were individual incidents in Newcastle, Gateshead, Sunderland and North Tyneside and two incidents in South Tyneside.
- 5.2 No injuries were sustained by firefighters over the 2019 bonfire period and in light of crews still suffering attacks, the Service will continue to work in collaboration with local partners and Northumbria Police to tackle incidents of anti-social behaviour (ASB) and attacks on emergency crews.
- 5.3 Body Worn Cameras (BWC) were introduced into TWFRS on 21 October 2019 for the purpose of firefighter safety. They were introduced with the primary aim of reducing attacks on firefighters by acting as a deterrent. Their current use also extends to appropriate footage being used to:
- Supporting police investigations
  - Aiding fire investigators in evidence gathering
  - Supporting accident investigations
- 5.4 One extract of BWC footage, from 5 November, has been utilised by the Service on social media to highlight an attack on crews (throwing of a firework), whilst attending an incident. No footage has yet been requested by the Police or any other agencies.
- 5.5 All frontline appliances have been allocated two cameras with the Targeted Response Vehicle's (TRV's) allocated one. The cameras are worn by the officer in charge at every incident.

## **6 CONCLUSION**

- 6.1 Collaboration through a partnership approach to the bonfire period continues to be the most efficient and effective way of reducing the risk to the community.
- 6.2 It can be clearly seen that the total number of calls received and the total number of incidents attended have decreased this year.

- 6.3 The bonfire campaign has proven to be a success, as the Service experienced a reduction in all measured outcomes from the same period last year. There were also no reported deaths or injuries in relation to bonfires or fireworks again this year, meaning the campaign has successfully achieved its aim and delivered its objectives for four years in a row.
- 6.4 A full evaluation is being completed, with a full stage two debrief planned for January 2019. This will be used to inform the planning and delivery of next year's campaign and inform future deliberate fire and ASB campaigns or initiatives.
- 6.5 The Service will continue to work with key partners, Royal Victoria Infirmary (RVI) Burns Unit, The Grafters Club, youth groups, schools, local authorities and Northumbria Police, in order to establish a better understanding of the problems associated with ASB and the bonfire period.

## **7 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

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

## **8 RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 8.1 Members are recommended to:
  - a) Note the content of the report.
  - b) Receive further reports as necessary.