



Safest People, Safest Places

Combined Fire Authority

21 September 2020

Arson Reduction Team Progress

Report of the Area Manager, Community Risk Management

Purpose of Report

1. Following the introduction of the Arson Reduction Team (ART) in 2018, the purpose of this report is to inform members of the progress made by the ART and highlight the strategic benefits gained.

Background

2. In early 2018 a business case was presented to the Service Leadership Team to restructure Community Risk Management, the business case reallocated workloads and created savings in some posts which were reinvested into others, the result being a structure with greater capacity and resources better allocated to risk.
3. Part of the restructure allocated three dedicated posts into a multi-disciplinary team with responsibility for Fire Investigation, Arson Reduction and Young People, referred to in this report as the Arson Reduction Team (ART).
4. The new structure was approved and implemented in September 2018. This report provides a summary of progress made by the team and the strategic benefits gained.

Progress of the Arson Reduction Team

5. For several years leading up to the introduction of the ART there was a steady increase in primary and secondary fires as seen in Table 1 below. The table

also shows that following the introduction of the ART in September 2018, primary fires have begun to stabilise and there was a significant reduction in secondary fires during 2019/20.

Table 1: Primary and Secondary Fires 2015 to 2020

	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
Total Primary Fires	928	974	1058	1024	1002
Deliberate Primary Fires	403	462	551	480	505
Total Secondary Fires	2142	2152	2646	2915	2387
Deliberate Secondary Fires	1647	1718	2263	2534	2129

6. The ART have developed a three year 'Arson and deliberate fire reduction plan' to underpin the Service's Community Safety Strategy. This plan clearly sets out the strategic objectives of the ART, these are:
 - a. The development and communication of a clear local arson profile to indicate its prevalence, impact and economic cost to partners and communities.
 - b. Develop and implement effective local solutions for collaborative interventions.
 - c. Develop and implement effective solutions for partnership and community intervention.
 - d. Develop and implement effective solutions for intervention as a standalone fire and rescue service.
7. The introduction of the ART has provided an improved link between the Service and the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) to ensure that national arson reduction initiatives are better supported locally with toolkits and resources provided to Emergency Response (ER) crews and the Communications Team.
8. The following are some examples of key areas of work delivered by the ART with partner organisations or internally which have provided benefits in the reduction of fires in the community.
9. In 2019/20 there were 505 deliberate primary fires, 60% (303) of these were road vehicles, with 42% (211) being cars. Following discussion with the Police, many of the vehicle fires in the East Coast area are suspected to be linked to the activity of Organised Crime Groups. The ART have agreed a forensic decision-making toolkit with the Police to focus fire investigation resources onto incidents with the greatest opportunity to maximise evidential recovery. Also,

all Police Crime Scene Investigators will be trained by the Fire Service to Skills for Justice L2 in Fire Investigation. Due to the high rate of deliberate vehicle fires, work in this area will continue to be a focus over the coming years.

10. The ART have worked with both Durham County Council (DCC) and Darlington Borough Council (DBC) to introduce an electronic fuel management reporting system on all fire stations to enable ER crews to report fly tipping/waste directly to the local authorities and for them to confirm when it has been removed. This has improved reporting, recording and the management of waste fuel in the community.
11. Working closely with housing associations and local authority bin collection services, Operation Gravity utilises new bin security technologies in high-risk wards with housing association premises to prevent bins from being stolen and reduce the opportunity for deliberate fires.
12. In partnership with Believe Housing, the ART have introduced Phoenix Fire Champions which involved working with 200, year 5/6 primary children in high priority areas for primary and secondary fires. This project provides education around the dangers and consequences of deliberate fires and the impact this has on their community. The successful outcomes of the project have been identified by the schools where teachers have seen a marked improvement in behaviour with the children involved which will reduce the risk of harm and build confidence in young people when decision making, with the hope that they will avoid peer pressure which could result in fire setting/arson. The project has also enabled the Service to engage positively with the local community by involving parents and carers in the project which helped to break down barriers and improve relationships with uniformed (blue light services) and create safe communities.
13. To establish working relationships with our education partners, the ART approached the strategic leads of education in County Durham and Darlington to enable the Service to develop relationships with all primary and secondary schools, giving us a platform to access and deliver education programmes to young people in Key Stage 2, 3 and 4.
14. The ART have collaborated with Durham Constabulary to develop the arson reduction 'challenge' session which is an intervention with young people aged between 10 and 16 years, who are identified as being involved in fire setting and anti-social behaviour (ASB). This ran in the Durham and Newton Aycliffe areas with a total of 35 young people and their parents and carers. Following this engagement, the Service saw a significant reduction in deliberate secondary fires by 83% in Newton Aycliffe and 79% in the Durham district area. The interventions have been so successful, that the ART have been recognised by Durham Constabulary and nominated for a Problem Orientated Policing Award along with their Police colleagues. This model is now offered as part of the ART formal education intervention offer.

15. All Crew and Watch managers are being trained to Skills for Justice L2 in Fire Investigation, this will improve quality of data in reports and analysis of fire trends.
16. Educational resources have been developed by the ART for use by ER crews to be delivered to young people, which supports Service campaigns around Easter and bonfire night and the NFCC campaign calendar.
17. The ART have worked with the Service Communications Team to deliver campaigns to support the NFCC campaign calendar and through targeted district based and seasonal initiatives.

Future work priorities for the ART

18. The Flexible Learning, Arson Messages & Education (FLAME) programme has been developed during the COVID-19 pandemic and will deliver a range of interventions and interactions to challenge fire setting and anti-social behaviours by children and young people within the community.
19. The 'challenge' interventions described above will be maintained across north and south divisions with children and young people.
20. Localised arson reduction plans will be developed for each fire station.
21. The ART are developing virtual workshops to enable the Service to continue to deliver their education programme during and after Covid-19.

Conclusion

22. The introduction of the multi-disciplined team for Fire Investigation, Arson Reduction and Young People has delivered significant improvements in partnership working, support for ER crews, improvements in public engagement and communication and multi-agency interventions to reduce arson and deliberate fires.
23. In the relatively short time since their introduction in September 2018, the Service has seen the rising trend of fires stabilise for primary fires and significantly reduce for secondary fires. This will need to be monitored to understand the longer-term impact.
24. The investment in the ART and the positive impact to date has supported the Service strategic priority to reduce fires and work towards the Service's vision of Safest People, Safest Places.

Recommendations

25. CFA members are requested to **note** the content of the report.

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