

Report of the Community Safety Committee meeting held on 11th June 2008

Present: Councillors S Giles, L W McGuire, G Murphy and L Oliver (Chairman)

Apologies: Councillors R Butcher, D Harty and H Williams

This report contains items considered by the Committee which are submitted to the Fire Authority for information.

1. DIRECTORATE AND DISTRICT PLANS 2008/09

The Committee has considered the Community Safety Directorate Plan and the six District Plans and Fire Control Plan which sit beneath the Directorate Plan. These plans give an overview of how each district intends to operate during the year, detailing the specific targets to be met in order to achieve the overall targets for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough as set out in the Directorate Plan.

By utilizing the 'Best Value Performance Indicators' (BVPIs) over a period of 5 years, it is possible to establish trends within Cambridgeshire and Peterborough on which performance targets could be based. Communities and Local Government (CLG) has been collecting data over many years, and this enables each Fire and Rescue Service to identify how it is performing compared to other similar services throughout the country.

Targets in the Directorate Plan seek to improve the performance of the Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service over a 3 - 5 year period so that it achieves performance within the upper quartile for all of the measures, when set against the benchmark figure of 2006/07. Where performance is already within the upper quartile, targets have been set to achieve best performance of all Fire Services. Although performance targets have been set using the latest available data published by CLG, these will be updated using the 2006/07 data once this is available. The global targets include an aspiration to achieve over a longer period of time. These targets will be measured against the benchmark figures provided by the CLG for 2006/07, as there is no intention to continue to report these indicators nationally in the future. A copy of the Directorate Plan is attached as Appendix 1 to the report.

The global targets for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough set out in the Directorate Plan have been broken down into detailed targets for the 6 Districts agreed with each District manager, a process which gives them greater ownership for performance, whilst accepting that the principal responsibility is to meet the county targets. Efforts will be made to provide greater consistency in presentation in future District Plans. Copies of the District Plans are available on the Fire Authority's website in the papers for the Community Safety Committee meeting and future plans will be available on the Fire Authority's new intranet. Targets will be inserted into these plans where they are missing.

The development of the District Plans with targets will allow challenge by members on performance issues, assist in understanding the factors affecting performance, and help in deciding priorities and the allocation of resources.

The Committee received further explanations of performance on the following indicators:

- Primary fires (BVPI142ii) - Whilst the number of fires in private dwellings have decreased there has been an increase in the number of fires in sheltered accommodation. It was noted that most sheltered accommodation had automatic alarm systems which could be triggered by incidents such as burning toast which, depending on the severity could be classified as a "fire". However, more analysis of the data was required to establish the reasons for the increase and to develop appropriate responses.
- Fire Injuries (BVPI 143ii) - The number of injuries has increased from 26 in 2006/07 to 55 in 2007/08. It was thought that the introduction of the new Incident Recording System (IRS) may have resulted in the mis-reporting of injuries where individuals are taken to hospital by ambulance for precautionary checks.
- False Alarms (BVPI 149) - Although performance is improving, the Service is currently 46th out of 46 Fire Authorities in the number of automatic false alarms (AFA) per thousand non-domestic premises. Cambridgeshire and Peterborough has a higher proportion of non-domestic premises fitted with AFAs than the national average. The Authority's policy is to respond to all AFAs whereas other fire authorities include policies where independent confirmation is required prior to responding to an AFA. The Service's current policy is to work with the occupiers of premises which generate large numbers of AFAs to reduce their incidence. A specific plan for Addenbrooke's hospital has been developed which is proving to be successful.
- Non Domestic Fires (BVPI 207) - Performance is almost 50% above the national average on the number of fires per thousand non-domestic premises which is of concern. In future these were to be split into deliberate and accidental fires in order to improve the targeting of activity.

The Committee has endorsed the commitment to performance management within each of the districts and the targeted approach to community safety.

In future the Directorate Plan will be brought to the April meeting of the Community Services Committee with a half hour seminar beforehand focusing on the detailed District plans.

2. ARSON TASK FORCE (ATF) - UPDATE

The Committee has received a report on the arson reduction statistics for 2007/08 and recommendations on how to best use resources to achieve further reductions in arson incidents in Cambridgeshire.

There is a national target for Fire Authorities to achieve a 10% reduction in deliberate primary fires by March 2010 based on a 2001/2 baseline. For Cambridgeshire the target equates to 1,266 fires, from a baseline of 1,406 fires. There has been a year on year decrease in deliberate primary fires since the current ATF structure was established nearly 4 years ago. The team has made a valuable contribution to the reduction of arson incidents in Cambridgeshire and at the end of 2007/08, deliberate primary fires fell to 795 equating to a 43% reduction to date.

The Committee has expressed their thanks and appreciation for the work of the Arson Task Force for the significant reduction achieved and has asked that this be conveyed to the staff involved. The Committee has also agreed that the Chairman write to the Cambridgeshire Chief Constable thanking the Police for their continued support of the Arson Task Force, which includes the secondment of a police officer to the ATF.

The Committee has considered a range of options for the future operation of the ATF and has agreed that a review be undertaken of the current role of the Arson Task Force (ATF), taking into account effective use of resources across both domestic community safety and non-domestic fire safety, and including the enhanced use of the attached police officer for non-domestic arson and Fire Safety Order prosecutions. The review will also look at the potential to concentrate the efforts of the ATF, predominately in the area with the highest risk of arson, where maximum benefit can be achieved while ensuring the valuable work and successes of arson reduction continue. The review will take into account the requirements / needs of Cambridgeshire Constabulary from the attached police officer role to the ATF.

The Committee has also agreed:

- to review partnership working and engagement, specifically in Peterborough.
- to create two way communication paths with our neighbourhoods, to enable the sharing of intelligence on arson and nuisance crime activity.
- to make better use of socio-demographic analysis to target arson prevention activity.

3. UNWANTED FIRE SIGNALS (UFS)

The Committee has considered a report on the current position of the Service relating to the reduction of Unwanted Fire Signals (UFS) in 2007/08 and options and recommendations on how further reductions might be achieved.

UFS are a significant problem for the Service and local intervention work undertaken by districts in the past had little effect on the number of UFS which had seen a year on year increase up to 2006. This led to the appointment of a Fire Signal Manager to operate across the county from the Community Risk Reduction Group (CRRG). The role implemented systems and liaised with large non-domestic premises to reduce UFS. The role has been very successful in reducing UFS in 2007/08 by 12%. The temporary role finished in September 2007.

The Committee has considered the following options:

- (i) To operate to the Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) and promote UFS intervention by the districts. (As the number of non-domestic premises increased in Cambridgeshire, the majority with fire detection, UFS were likely to increase)
- (ii) To reintroduce the Fire Signal Managers post with a target reduction of 10% year on year, for 3 years.
- (iii) To introduce non-attendance at low risk and unoccupied buildings. (This could be incorporated in option ii as an objective)
- (iv) To introduce a policy of non attendance at the majority of automatic fire alarms (AFA), with the exception of identified high life risk premises.

Members have noted that the introduction of a policy of non-attendance, particularly at high risk premises such as University accommodation, would be viewed with concern by the community and supports the continued attendance where Automatic Fire Signals are received. Members supported actions to seek to reduce the number of UFS and have made suggestions as to how this might be achieved (e.g. advising the owner of premises of the costs incurred in attending the incident). As

the Service is unable to charge for call-outs it was suggested that the owners of premises subject to UFS be invited to make voluntary contributions towards the costs incurred. However, Members were advised that where repeated incidents of UFS occurred, this was likely to be met with an increasingly rigorous application of the powers in the Fire Safety Order including possible prosecution if no improvement were made and that voluntary contributions were unlikely to be forthcoming in such circumstances.

Current policy during daytime is to dispatch only one appliance to incidents notified by UFS which avoids the costs of dispatching further appliances until the fire has been confirmed and their requirement assessed. Incidents where appliances were dispatched in response to an AFA but which were turned back prior to arrival are not categorized as an UFS despite costs being incurred in the mobilization of the appliance.

Members have also discussed the increase in UFS at sheltered accommodation where the improved categorization of incidents in what constituted a fire could lead to these being assessed as UFS.

The Committee has endorsed the following actions:

- (i) Districts and control to continue delivering their local interventions, while monitoring activity and adherence to the Standard Operating Procedure for the management of Automatic Fire Alarms (AFA) and reduction of Unwanted Fire Signals (UFS).
- (ii) Reinstate the central Fire Signal Manager position with the remit of working with those larger premises that are experiencing UFS and to develop further strategies. The costs of the 3 additional Fire Safety Officers one of whom could undertake the role of Fire Signal Manager has been included in the Budget for a 3 year period.
- (iii) Expand on existing systems to manage and reduce unnecessary mobilisation of appliances to AFA.
- (iv) Provide advice and guidance to districts to monitor and reduce UFS as they occur.

The Committee has asked that an annual report be presented to the Community Safety Committee on progress made in reducing UFS, including an assessment of the need for the continued appointment of the Fire Signal Manager after 2 years.

CHAIRMAN

Source Documents	Location	Contact
Agenda, reports and minutes of the Community Safety Committee – 11/06/08	Hinchingsbrooke Cottage Brampton Road Huntingdon	Michael Brown 01480 444572 michael.brown@cambsfire.gov.uk