

Resources and Fire & Rescue Overview and Scrutiny Committee

22 February 2017

Report on Deliberate Fires across Warwickshire

Recommendation

It is recommended that the Resources and Fire & Rescue Overview and Scrutiny Committee note the contents of this report.

1.0 Background

At its meeting on 14th December 2016, Resources and Fire & Rescue Overview and Scrutiny Committee requested further information regarding deliberate fires across the County.

2.0 Introduction

The definition of a deliberate fire is:

An incident of fire setting where the source of ignition is believed to be deliberate, it includes fires of a primary nature (these are fires that involve property or vehicles or where casualties or rescues have occurred) and a secondary nature (these are fires that do not involve property, vehicles or life risk and are mostly outdoor fires, such as refuse and grassland fires), the majority of deliberate fires in Warwickshire are secondary fires.

3.0 2016/17 Performance

The current analysis of deliberate fires is taken from the monthly monitoring of performance undertaken by WFRS.

Performance data for Deliberate Fires in Warwickshire				
2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	Target 2016/17	Year To Date (Apr–Dec)
532	583	670	595	437

This shows a steady increase over the last 3 years; however the current figure for the year to date indicates the potential for a more positive year end figure. Overall levels of deliberate fires between April and December 2016 have decreased by 23.8% compared to the same period in 2015.

4.0 The Location of Deliberate Fires across the County

The following analysis relates to incidents of deliberate fire setting, where the source of ignition is believed to be malicious or deliberate. It includes fires of both a primary and secondary nature but is mostly comprised of secondary fires. It is taken from the WFRS Risk Profile 2016 as prepared by the Warwickshire Observatory and the WFRS Performance Information Department. The purpose of this information is to identify the areas of higher activity and therefore potentially higher risk. This subsequently focuses our prevention agenda and the allocation of resources to reduce deliberate fires.

Deliberate Primary Fires

Deliberate primary fires are of particular concern to WFRS as they pose a greater risk to human life and also involve property of a higher value. In 2015, Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough had the most deliberate primary fires reported, 39% of all deliberate fires in the County. The majority of these were deliberate car fires (43 incidents).

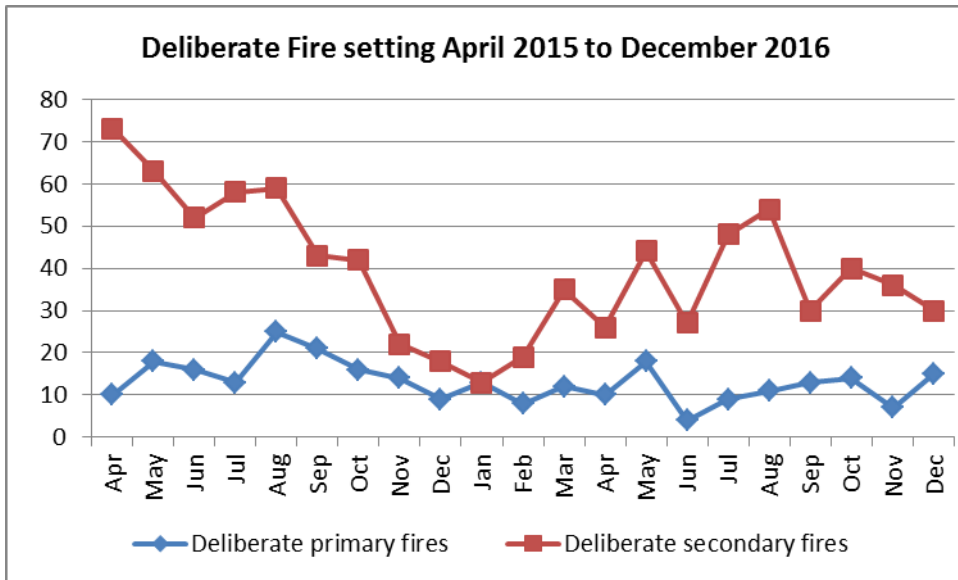
Deliberate Secondary Fires

In 2015 Nuneaton and Bedworth had the most deliberate secondary fires reported, 59% of all the secondary fires in the County. The majority of these were setting fire to refuse and grassland (91% of all deliberate small fires).

A possible explanation for this includes a number of socioeconomic factors in Nuneaton and Bedworth as compared to other districts and boroughs within Warwickshire which include the relatively high levels of unemployment, poverty and incidents of Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB). There is a strong link between ASB and incidents of deliberate small fires. As ASB incidents include deliberate fire setting, Nuneaton and Bedworth has the highest proportion (32%) of ASB incidents in the County over a 3 year period.

5.0 Seasonal Trends

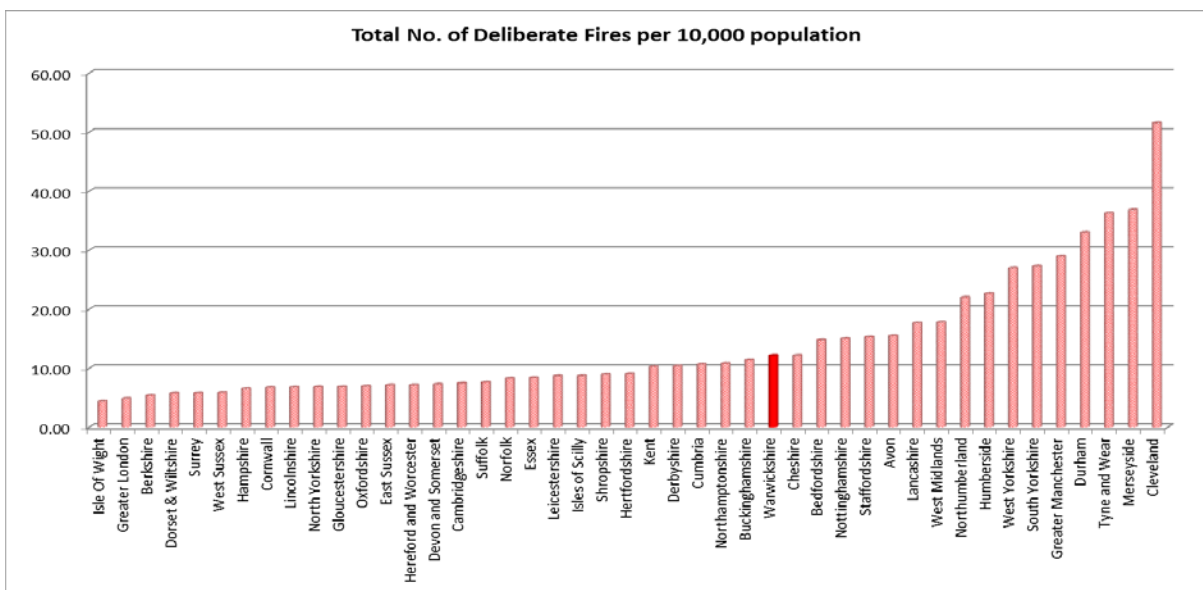
The seasonal trends are predictable, in so much as deliberate fires peak across the summer months April to August, reducing during September and October with low activity levels between November and March. This is predominantly caused by periods of warmer weather and will also coincide with the summer school holidays.



6.0 National Benchmarking

This information is taken from a national benchmarking exercise against key incident categories in comparison to the other 44 English Fire and Rescue Services.

Across England the levels of deliberate fire setting have remained relatively static during 2015/16 compared to the previous year, in terms of the overall rate. There was the same trend in Warwickshire however the league position improved slightly from 31 to 29. Warwickshire continues to perform better than the overall figure for England and the average across all Services. For 2016/17 the levels of deliberate fires have slightly increased compared to the previous year.



7.0 Summary

Over the last three years there has been a steady increase in deliberate fires across Warwickshire, however it is anticipated that this may improve by the end of 2016/17. The level of activity is dependent on a number of factors for example long dry spells of warm weather. It is also predictably seasonal and incidents will increase over the summer period or during school holidays. Local incident data along with professional experience indicates the location of higher activity is in the area of Nuneaton and Bedworth. This can also be linked to acts of Anti-Social Behaviour and socioeconomic reasons such as higher levels of unemployment. In an attempt to reduce the number of deliberate fires WFRS works closely with other agencies on a number of prevention activities, some but not all of these are detailed in the next section.

8.0 WFRS Prevention Activity

WFRS has an Arson Reduction Officer embedded in the Justice Centre in Nuneaton; their role is to work alongside partner agencies to reduce deliberate fire setting activity. This is done, for example, by working with other agencies to secure premises which are vacant and identify deliberate fire setting hotspots which would otherwise be easily targeted by arsonists. This is extended to incorporate a strong working relationship with building control to identify unsafe structures.

WFRS operates a **Small Fires Unit (SFU)** in Nuneaton and Bedworth throughout the year, and patrols are increased in frequency during times such as school holidays, Halloween and Bonfire periods. This unit is dedicated to driving down deliberate fire setting activity through youth engagement, intelligence gathering and raising awareness of nuisance fire setting. The crew consist of three Fire Service staff and a PCSO (Warwickshire Police). A major advantage to dedicating a team to small/nuisance fires is that it means larger fire engines are available for emergencies involving a life risk. The Small Fires Unit attended a total of 249 deliberate small fires in the Nuneaton and Bedworth borough between January 2012 and December 2014, and over 90% of these were grassland and woodland fires.

The Bicycle Intervention Knowledge and Education (BIKE) initiative is an extension of the SFU team which enables staff to target areas the SFU cannot access, such as woodlands and farmlands.

The **Anti-Social Behaviour Intervention Team (ASBIT)** works in known deliberate fire setting hotspots across the County, engaging with and educating young people in local areas.

WFRS has supported initiatives such as the **Two Wheels in Motion** programme which was first launched in September 2014, and acts as both a road safety and deliberate fire setting reduction initiative. It is targeted at young motorcycle and scooter owners (aged 14 -18) and educates them on safe riding and the use of protective gear. It also informs them of the dangers of deliberate fire setting as these types of vehicles are sometimes set fire to by their owners. This scheme is run in conjunction with Warwickshire Youth Justice Service.

WFRS also support the **Car Clear Scheme** where WFRS working with partners to ensure that abandoned vehicles are identified and crushed in a timely manner to avoid them being targeted by arsonists.

WFRS also attend Community Safety Partnership (CSP) meetings alongside other forums (such as the Deliberate Fire Setting Forum) and receive regular data from the Performance Information Department so that crews have timely information to support their partnership reporting requirements.

9.0 Supporting Documents

WFRS Risk Profile 2016

10.0 Background Papers:

None

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Councillor Neil Dirveiks
Councillor Nicola Davies
Councillor Kam Kaur
Councillor John Horner

Local Members: None