

Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Authority Periodic Report of the Chairman on Authority Matters

Report of the Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive

1. There were 13 injuries and 3 deaths in accidental dwelling fires for the period April to December 2013 compared to 12 injuries and 3 deaths for the same period in 2012/13. The Service is continuing with its activities to drive down incidents and casualties. In comparison, 15 years ago the figures for accidental dwelling fire casualties were 270 per annum.

There were 1126 fires involving property and casualties for the period April to December 2013, which showed a decrease of 34 (3%) when compared to the same period in 2012/13.

There were 414 accidental dwelling fires between April and December 2013, a decrease of 8 (2%) when compared to the same period in 2012/13. This was a continuing downward trend and a consequence of the ongoing work with partners which sought to influence lifestyle issues which increased vulnerability.

The number of small fires excluding grass increased by 171 for the period April to December 2013 from 957 to 1128 when compared to the same period in 2012/13.

Grass fires between April and December 2013 had increased by 560, from 266 to 826, when compared to 2012/13.

Although the number of both small fires and grass fires had increased compared to the same period in the previous year they were still much lower than in 2011/12 where the weather conditions were comparable.

Fatal Fires – There were two fatal fires during the reporting period. The first on 23 December 2013 in Penkhull had been thought to have been started deliberately by the occupier or by an unknown third party. The 40 year old female was rescued from the property suffering from the effects of smoke inhalation and from severe burns to her body which resulted in her death on 25 January 2014. A smoke alarm was fitted within the property and it did activate. The incident is still under a joint investigation with Staffordshire Police and is subject to a Coroner's inquest. The second fire on 19 January 2014 in Blurton was thought to have been started by the careless disposal of a cigarette and was confined to newspaper and boxed clothing. The occupier, a 60 year old female, was rescued from the property and transported to hospital where she subsequently died. Evidence at the scene and witness testimony suggests that the fire had occurred whilst the lady was at a local shop. When she returned to the flat she attempted to deal with the fire herself but was overcome by smoke. The incident is subject to a Coroner's inquest.

Lives saved By Carbon Monoxide Alarm - On 21 December 2013 the Service received a report of the activation of a specialist smoke alarm system for the deaf and hard of hearing with a linked carbon monoxide (CO) alarm. The CO alarm had detected a fault on the boiler and activated the alarms system waking the occupants. The specialist system had been fitted some time ago by the Service's Specialist Deaf Technician team based in the north of the county. The occupants, a couple aged 72 and 82 years, stated they had not been feeling well and had recently been sleeping in until 10:30 hours, which was unusual. The couple's grandson was also staying

overnight in the property. Gas monitors detected a high reading of carbon monoxide within the property; the gas board attended and confirmed that it was a faulty boiler which they capped off and made safe.

Carbon Monoxide Alarm Programme - A twelve week pilot started in March to enhance Home Fire Risk Checks (HFRCs) by issuing free Carbon Monoxide (CO) alarms. The pilot partnership was agreed between National Grid (NG) and Chief Fire Officers Association (CFOA) to provide the Service with 3,000 CO alarms for HFRC Technicians and Community Safety Officers (CSOs) to issue to households that may be at an increased risk to the dangers of carbon monoxide poisoning.

Volunteers Celebration Event - The Service has seen the introduction of the new Volunteer Programme since January 2013. This has included the recruitment of three Volunteer Programme Co-ordinators, a new policy, an improved recruitment process, marketing materials, training and an informative area on the website. Volunteer numbers increased to 65 by Christmas, with over 1,000 hours of volunteering having been completed during the 12 month period. The focus has been on how and where the Service can benefit from volunteers and improve the efficiency of working with communities. As a result of this, based on the needs of the Service, specific roles are now being created for volunteers and recruited to. In order to show the Service's appreciation for the work that the volunteers have done, a Volunteer Celebration was arranged at Headquarters in December. This event also provided a great opportunity for the volunteers to meet their counterparts from different areas of the Service.

Children and Young People's Strategy Consultation - A series of internal and external focus groups took place following the consultation launch on 17 January 2014. These groups were both fun and interactive, creating a 'buzz' in each session which led to data being captured on how young people are perceived, what aspirations they have, the barriers that prevent them reaching their aspirations, what needs to be done to break down those barriers and the ways in which young people prefer to receive information. All of this information has been analysed and will be used to shape the Strategy so that, as far as possible, it meets the needs of the children and young people throughout the Authority's area.

Sprinkler Event - The Service's first Fire Safety Engineering Conference was held at Branston Golf Club Burton on 19 March 2014. It was organised by Andrew Brown the Service's Fire Engineer supported by members of the Central Risk Reduction Team. It was attended by 85 delegates, including Fire Authority Members, Councillors, Approved Inspectors, Fire Engineers, Social Housing Providers, local authority Building Control Officers, as well as representatives from Fire and Rescue Services across the UK. The conference, 'Fire Safe by Design' included speakers from the Sprinkler Industry, design consultancies and two representatives from the Education Sector.

The morning session concentrated on the value of fire engineering in commercial buildings and the importance of timely consultation involving all key stakeholders early in the building design process; thereby preventing the traditional delays experienced when detailed, finalised designs are reviewed by the Fire and Rescue Service at Statutory Consultation stage. The afternoon session outlined the work being done in Staffordshire with high fire risk domestic and residential properties in the County.

As part of the conference, delegates were taken on a visit to a local infant school to see how a fire engineered approach and the installation of sprinklers had reduced the need for other fire safety measures and allowed greater design and architectural freedoms.

Feedback following the conference stated the event had been professional, enlightening, informative and the 'whole Fire Service' approach was encouraging to observe.

Dementia Campaign Update - An update has been received on the initiative being trialled where the Service is working closely with Pharmacies across the county who will identify people suffering with Dementia from their prescriptions and sign-post them for a Home Fire Risk Check (HFRC). The campaign aims to boost the number of vulnerable people benefiting from a free HFRC.

The Service teamed up with South Staffordshire Pharmacy Committee to launch the trial on 10 February 2014 with four pharmacies in Uttoxeter and 20 pharmacies in the Tamworth area. Family members, carers and friends who collect prescriptions for those with mild or moderate forms of dementia will also be encouraged to book a HFRC on behalf of the patient.

Eye-catching posters promoting the scheme will be on display in all participating chemists and pocket size leaflets featuring information on the HFRC referral process will be stapled to prescription bags. Should pharmacy staff recognise other people as being 'vulnerable' they will also give out the information and encourage them to book an HFRC. People will be asked to give a specific code relating to the pilot scheme when booking a HFRC. Its success will be assessed through the number of appointments made using the reference. The pilot will be monitored over a six month period, before potentially rolling it out across the county.

Community Facilities – Statistics - Community room use remains high with 2,352 uses, equating to 6,603 hours during November 2013 to February 2014. With the option of extending the CIC's Public Liability Insurance for those unable to provide their own, a number of small community groups have been able to start to utilise Community Rooms.

Flooding Response - Fire and Rescue Services across the country have been at the heart of the response to help those affected by adverse weather conditions and Service personnel have played their part in assisting the response. A crew from Rugeley with a High Volume Pump, a Prime Mover and Welfare vehicle provided support at Marlow in Buckinghamshire and our Enhanced Logistics Support Team assisted in the management and co-ordination of resources involved in dealing with the flooding across the South-West of England.

Financial Challenge – Financial Challenge briefings have been held for all staff and facilities for staff to make suggestions using the Money Box Forum and the suggestion wall have been made available. Responses to the suggestions will be shared with all staff.

Workplace Health Award - In January the Service received the Staffordshire Workplace Health Gold Award at an event at Cannock Fire Station, which attracted dozens of delegates from public bodies, private sector companies and voluntary organisations. The award was made by Staffordshire County Council in recognition of the work that SFRS has undertaken to improve staff health and wellbeing.

Chief Fire Officer Commendations - Chief Fire Officer Commendations were awarded to Firefighter Carl Speakman and Crew Manager Brian Cox for their professionalism and quick reactions in dealing with incidents whilst off duty in rendering first aid until the casualties could be dealt with by paramedics. Commendations were

also awarded to three members of the public; Martin Spooner, Mark Taylor and Rob Steele who removed a tree from a vehicle where a lady was trapped which allowed paramedics quick access to the driver and saved her from further injuries.

Charity Curry Night - A Charity Curry night was held in Stafford in support of the Fire Fighters Charity which was attended by the Executive Leadership Team and members of our Ceremonial Squad. £850 was raised on the night, which was matched by the local branch of Barclays Bank resulting in £1700 being donated to the Fire Fighters Charity that supports all members of Fire and Rescue Services and their families when in need. The Authority noted the grateful thanks to Dr Das Gupta for his enormous support to this Charity and for organising this latest fundraising event.

Joint Emergency Services Inter- operability Programme (JESIP) - Staffordshire Fire and Rescue has been the first Service in the region to begin delivery of this training and continues to drive forward the implementation of the Joint Emergency Services Inter-operability Programme (JESIP) at pace. The project initially sees Fire, Police and Ambulance officers training together to deal with major and complex incidents, with plans in place to roll out the JESIP legacy to the wider partners and military. The first phase of the Tactical Commander delivery to all Station and Group Managers was completed by 20 March. The second phase delivery to Operational Commanders commenced on 27 March. This will see all Watch Managers trained by 12 June, well ahead of the Home Office September deadline.

Brathay Challenge 2014 - The Brathay Apprentice Challenge 2014, supported by the National Apprenticeship Service, is the search for the Apprentice Team of the year where teams of apprentices have to prove their team building, leadership, logistical and communications abilities. The Teams compete in a series of work-related challenges to develop new skills and benefit their local communities as well as raise the profile of their employers and apprenticeships. The Service's apprentices have been busy as part of the Brathay Challenge, including organising charity car washes, promoting apprenticeships within schools and colleges and the wider community and undertaking the Community Project at St Giles Community Garden in Knutton, Newcastle. During National Apprenticeships week in early March, the team undertook a number of visits to careers events for young people and had a 'job swap' with two presenters from Signal 1 radio station. The presenters took part in the firefighters' rural challenge, dressed in full operational kit and a number of apprentices then visited the radio station where they were interviewed about the Fire Service and apprenticeships.

NHS Change Day - NHS Change Day, which was celebrated on 3 March, was about inspiring people to make a pledge to do something better together to improve care for people. The Service's pledge is: *"We will work in partnership with others to promote greater understanding of the fact that prevention is cheaper and more effective than cure."*

Shared Fire Control Project Update

2. The Authority has been advised of the progress of this collaborative project with West Midlands Fire Service. The joint control is based at Vauxhall Road, Birmingham and the name of the shared fire control has been agreed as "The Staffordshire and West Midlands Fire Control". The joint control went live on Monday 31 March 2014 at 10.00 am. The Authority has endorsed the decisions made by the Fire Control Project Governance Board to date. The transition had gone well and this has been a marvelous achievement for all those involved in the project.

Size of the Authority

3. The Authority has considered whether the present size of the Membership of Authority is appropriate going forward and has set up a Working Group to look at the possibilities of reducing the Membership of the Authority from 25 to either 21 or 19. The Working Group have met and made a recommendation which will be considered by the Authority at its additional meeting on 7 May 2014.

Confidential Reporting Policy

4. This Policy, often described as the 'Whistleblowers' Policy, requires the Authority to be informed of any occasion on which an employee has made a disclosure relating to inappropriate and possibly illegal actions by the Service or its officers and any steps taken by the Service in the light of such a disclosure. In accordance with the Policy the Secretary has confirmed that there have been no Confidential Reporting events in the previous twelve months.

L W Bloomer
Chairman

Mrs K M Banks
Vice Chairman