

HEREFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

REPORT OF THE HEREFORD AND WORCESTER FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY TO HEREFORDSHIRE COUNCIL 2 MARCH 2012

Chief Fire Officer's Service Report

Operational Activity

The total incident numbers for Quarter 2 in 2011/2012 showed a slight increase on the same quarter last year. 2236 incidents were attended in Quarter 2 compared with 2163 incidents the previous year which represents an increase of 3.4%. This was due to an increase in the total number of fires attended. However, the number of special service incidents (non-fire related) attended and the number of false alarms attended have both decreased compared with the same quarter last year.

The number of primary fires has increased from 324 to 360 (an increase of 11%). The number of secondary fires attended in Quarter 2 2011-12 was 518 compared with 318 in the same quarter last year. Analysis shows that there was an increase in secondary fires starting in tree scrub, railway trackside vegetation and roadside vegetation and the summer increase in secondary fires lasted longer into September than in the previous year.

Please Note:

Primary Fires – broadly those involving buildings and structures and other property such as vehicles, storage, plant and machinery, fires involving casualties, rescues or escape, fires where significant fire and rescue resources are employed.

Secondary fires – broadly those involving derelict buildings, or vehicles, single buildings under demolition, fires confined to chimneys, other outdoor fires such as those involving grassland, gardens and fences, refuse and refuse containers.

Items of Interest

7 ½ years Sentence for Arson

At 03:35 hours on Friday 14 January 2011, Fire Control received a call to a house fire in Evesham Road, Cookhill. The incident was identified as persons trapped by fire and 3 fire appliances from Redditch Fire Station were mobilised with the first arriving at 03.50 hours.

On arrival the fire crews were faced with a severe fire in a two bedroom detached cottage. The Incident Commander mobilised an additional pump and requested the attendance of a water carrier. As the incident was believed to involve people who were reported trapped, considerable effort was used to search the dwelling with Breathing Apparatus (BA) crews. At one stage the bedroom above the room of origin of the fire collapsed into the ground floor slightly injuring a firefighter. This firefighter was treated at the scene by paramedics and remained on duty. Eventually no persons were found to be in the dwelling.

A Fire Investigation Officer was also mobilised and arrived on the scene at 04:23 hours. Initial observations of the scene identified vital evidence in the way of bottles containing an ignitable liquid which were preserved for later seizure by Police Forensics Investigators.

A second Fire Investigator took on the job of a full scene examination in daylight hours and worked alongside a Police Forensic Investigator and the West Midlands Fire Service Hydrocarbon Detector Dog Team. The dog made several indications to the presence of ignitable liquids within the cottage.

A Police investigation led to the arrest and charging of an individual on several counts of arson.

After a 3 day trial at Worcester Crown Court in September 2011, where one of the Service's Fire Investigation Officers gave expert evidence, the individual was found guilty of arson, recklessly endangering the life of the occupier, and recklessly endangering the life of rescuers (emergency service) and others. The individual was given a custodial sentence of 7 ½ years.

Herefordshire Awards Ceremony

Fire-fighters and staff from Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service were honoured at an Awards Ceremony held on Friday 4 November at Hereford Town Hall.

During the evening, medals for Long Service and Good Conduct were presented by Lieutenant General Sir John Foley KCB, OBE, MC, DL, Vice Lord-Lieutenant of Herefordshire, and also by Chief Fire Officer, Mark Yates and Councillor Derek W Prodger, MBE, Chairman of Hereford and Worcester Fire Authority. Station Commander Neil Pigott acted as Master of Ceremonies.

Fire and Rescue Authority Options for Appointment of a Treasurer and Clerk/Monitoring Officer

The Authority agreed to directly employ a Treasurer and Clerk and the Chief Fire Officer was given authority to complete detailed investigations for consideration by the Appointments Committee in January 2012.

Reduction in Attendance at Automatic Fire Alarms – Consultation Feedback

The Authority agreed 12 proposals that would assist the Authority in reducing attendance at unwanted fire signals. The Service currently attends over 3,000 Automatic Fire Alarm (AFA) calls per year which equates to over a third of all incidents attended (of which only a very small percentage turn out to be 'real' fires).

The proposals were consulted on widely and a twelve week consultation period was completed prior to the review being presented to the Fire and Rescue Authority. On completion of the initial review a more direct programme of engagement had been undertaken with stakeholders likely to be affected by the outcomes. A total of 650 premises from the business sector were contacted via a letter. A wider campaign of partner, public, professional and representative

body engagement was managed through existing networks. The Service also undertook a media campaign.

Amongst the recommendations approved by the Authority were:

- Attendance continue to be made to Automatic Fire Alarms received to dwellings (includes houses in multiple occupation, flats, schools, residential care and other residential (includes special units, sheltered housing, hotels, hostels).
- Hospitals will receive a one fire appliance attendance to calls from Automatic Fire Alarms for a period of 12 months, during this 12 months a full assessment of each hospital be made to establish if a single fire appliance or a non-attendance is appropriate.
- The Authority will not adopt a 'Charging for Automatic Fire Alarms' policy at this time.
- Attendance will not be made to non-residential premises (includes offices, shops, factories, warehouses, other buildings); unless it is deemed necessary following a risk assessment.
- All Pre-Determined Attendances to Automatic Fire Alarm calls to be one pumping appliance only, except where risk factors and Intel (intelligence) information indicate otherwise.

Revised Redundancy Policy

The Authority approved a revised Redundancy Policy which had been reviewed in accordance with the Service's review schedule. The key changes in the policy related to the inclusion of the option for voluntary redundancy and pay protection for those staff redeployed into alternative roles from three years full pay to a sliding scale over a three year period.

Future Financial Prospects

Members received an update on the initial review of future financial prospects. The Department for Government and Local Communities (DCLG) has now released the national grant totals for the latter 2 years and the year on year reductions were 8.5% and 5% respectively. The impact of this had been factored into the Authority's Medium Term Financial Plan.

With regard to a Council Tax freeze, DCLG had announced details of a further Council Tax Freeze Grant for 2011/12 which meant that if the authority were to set a precept of 0% the FRA would receive a grant equal to 3% of the 2012/13 precept which equated to approximately £0.627m.

Risk Management Strategy and Strategic Risk Register

The Authority approved a revised Risk Management Strategy and live Strategic Risk Register. The overall objective of the revised strategy is to ensure that the Authority identifies strategic risks and applies the most cost effective control mechanisms to manage those risks.

Information Commissioner's Office (IC) Model Publication Scheme Review

The Authority approved the Revised Publication Scheme which commits the Authority to proactively publishing and routinely making available information held by the Authority.

Business Continuity Planning

Members received a report and presentation on planning arrangements and associated strategy. Approval was given to the assumptions and proposals as laid out in the report and detailed during the presentation. Approval was also given to resilience of response standards to be implemented by the Chief Fire Officer during periods of appliance unavailability.

Health and Safety Liaison Panel

A recommendation had been made by the Policy and Resources Committee in September 2011 that a Member be appointed to the Health and Safety Liaison Panel. Group Leaders had recommended that Councillor P Watts take on this role and he had duly accepted the nomination.

Brigadier Peter Jones, CBE
Vice-Chairman
Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Authority

FURTHER INFORMATION

Any person wishing to seek further information on this report should contact: Corporate Support on 01905 368367. Further information on the Fire and Rescue Authority and the Fire and Rescue Service can also be found on the Internet at (www.hwfire.org.uk).

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Agenda and papers of the meeting of the Fire and Rescue Authority held 14 December 2011