

Hampshire Fire and Rescue Authority

Performance Review and Scrutiny Committee

Item 8

27 June 2012

Evaluation of HFRS dedicated Specialist Fire Investigation Team

Report by the Chief Officer

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1 Summary

- 1.1 This report reflects the outcomes of the evaluation carried out into the impact and effectiveness of the HFRS dedicated Specialist Fire Investigation Team. The report provides evidence to support the decision made in 2010 of the transition from the previous HFRS fire investigation model (fire investigation carried out by flexi duty system Station Managers and above as a “*bolt on*” role) to the more flexible and efficient structure of a dedicated Specialist Fire Investigation Team. This has been achieved through the redeployment of existing HFRS resources and the introduction of two non-uniformed Fire Investigation Officer posts.
- 1.2 The evaluation concludes that the dedicated Specialist Fire Investigation team has made excellent progress since its implementation. It is recognised as a high performing specialist multi agency team that is having a positive and direct effect in improving the safety and economic wellbeing of Hampshire.

2 Recommendation

- 2.1 That the Committee, acknowledges and supports the progress made to date of the dedicated Specialist Fire Investigation team and the *Hampshire Arson Task Force.

3 Introduction and background

- 3.1 Since November 2010 the dedicated Specialist Fire Investigation team have become an integral part of the Arson Task Force partnership and have merged into one cohesive unit. The merger of the two units has seen further reductions in the incidence of arson and continued to build on this success by increasing the arrest and conviction rates for arson within Hampshire and bringing offenders to justice.

* In a 2006 report, the Department for Communities and Local Government in alliance with the government-led Arson Control Forum identified that only 9 per cent of arson cases recorded by the police resulted in a suspect being identified and less than 3 per cent resulted in the successful conviction of the offender(s). As a result, Police and Fire Services nationally were asked to jointly focus on improving the multi-agency investigation of deliberate fires and increase the percentage of investigations which resulted in the identification, detection, and conviction of the arsonists.

It was as a consequence of those recommendations an LAA (Local Area Agreement) grant was obtained to allow the establishment of the Hampshire Arson Task Force in April 2007, tasked with developing strategies to support and compliment the work already being carried out by the Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service Group Managers and Hampshire Constabulary BCU (Basic Command Unit) Commanders within Tactical Arson Reduction Teams across the county. The Task Force was instructed to provide a common link between all multi agency arson reduction activity and focus on increasing the percentage of investigations which resulted in the identification, detection, and conviction of the arsonists within Hampshire.

- 3.2 The significant contribution that fire investigation makes to HFRS community safety must not be overlooked. In terms of the criminal justice system and the support that fire investigation provides to the police and the Crown Prosecution Service it must be acknowledged that evidence gathered during fire investigations is central to the successful prosecution of arson offenders. Without this technical investigative information it is considered unlikely that many prosecutions would be taken forward by the Crown Prosecution Service.
- 3.3 Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service currently maintains a Specialist Fire Investigation/Arson Task Force team consisting of ten members of staff as follows:
- 1 x T/Station Manager (Fire Investigation and Arson Task Force Manager)
 - 1 x Detective Constable (funded by Hampshire Constabulary)
 - 2 x Watch Managers (Fire Investigation Officers)
 - 2 x Green Book Fire Investigation Officers (part time contract, pro rata)
 - 1 x Green Book Fire Investigation Support Officer (37 hours)
 - 2 x Green Book administrators (37 hours)
 - 1 x fire-fighter (seconded for 12 months as part of the efficient and flexible crewing project)
 - 2 x fire investigation search dogs (fire investigation search dog unit)
- 3.4 All the team members are highly skilled and have received extensive advanced training in fire and explosion investigation, fire and forensic science, investigative practice, court room / expert witness skills and digital photography. Fires are investigated in consequential levels, these being:
- *Level 1
 - Level 2
 - Level 3
- 3.5 The team has elevated the professional reputation of HFRS and also the expectation for investigative quality with all internal and external stakeholders. HFRS fire investigation officers and Arson Task Force are now acknowledged as experts in the fire investigation discipline.
- 3.6 As the profile and benefits of fire investigation has been elevated, so has the number of fire investigator call outs as set in Table 1.

Table 1: Number of fire investigations per year

Year:	January – December	Number of Investigations
	2007	178
	2008	250
	2009	323
	2010	255
	2011	268

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- *Level 1 fire investigations: basic investigations carried out by initial fire officers attending an incident
 - Level 2 and 3 multi agency investigations carried out by specialist fire investigation officers
 - Level 2 fire investigations: Intermediate fire, explosion (non-terrorist) and arson investigation
 - Level 3 fire investigations: Advanced fire, explosion (including-terrorist) and arson investigations.

4 Objectives of the evaluation

4.1 This report is based over a 12 month period from the 1 November 2010 until 31st October 2011 and is produced in relation to the intended objectives outlined in the HFRS Service Plan 2010-2013 :

- Creating a dedicated Specialist Fire Investigation Team
“In November 2010, we introduced a Fire Investigation team (FI) . . . This team now deals with most fire investigations that are carried out within our organisation. To widen the idea of a dedicated FI team across the region, we are currently working with a number of other fire and rescue services.”
- Reduce the number of fires started deliberately by 20% by 2012 (from 2008)

5 Benefits achieved

5.1 The establishment of the dedicated Specialist Fire Investigation team has resulted in the following positive benefits to HFRS, Hampshire Constabulary and external agencies:

- Releasing Flexible Duty System (FDS) Group and Station Managers who previously supported level 2 and 3 fire investigations from these responsibilities, resulting in a freeing up, on average, of 45 hours per month for each fire investigation officer and allowing these managers to concentrate on their primary roles.
- Greater resilience in providing a multi agency investigative response to meet demand.
- Assured service provision at least one fire investigation officer on duty 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.
- Dedicated team that work alongside HFRS Crime Scene Investigators, so greatly increasing the ability of HFRS to capture fire investigation data. This data can now be used in the HFRS planning cycle.
- Enabled fire investigation research, testing, and development work to be undertaken and to develop learning from its findings.

6 Outcomes achieved

6.1 The dedicated specialist fire investigation team has contributed to the reduction of the number of fires started deliberately by 669 (21.06%) (see Table 2). This exceeds the 20% reduction target as set out in 4.1 above.

Table 2: Annual numbers of fires started deliberately April 2006 – March 2012

	Primary	Secondary	Total
April 2006 – March 2007	947	4304	5251
April 2007 – March 2008	855	3134	3989
April 2008 – March 2009	795	2382	3177
April 2009 – March 2010	717	2010	2727
April 2010 – March 2011	594	2000	2594
April 2011 – March 2012	616	1892	2508

- The introduction of the dedicated Specialist Fire Investigation team has enabled level 1 and 2 fire investigation training to be delivered to HFRS station based personnel and external agencies.
- The experience gained by a small team of fire investigators attending over 300 level *2 and 3 investigations within a 12 month period has led to the Police and the Crown Prosecution Service now recognising HFRS Fire Investigation Officers as expert witnesses within a court of law.
- The introduction of the dedicated Specialist Fire Investigation team has seen arrest and conviction rates relating to level 2 and 3 arson investigations within Hampshire increase significantly over the last 5 years. In addition to a range of non-custodial sentences, this has resulted in 257 years total imprisonment time for convicted offenders of arson (see Tables 3 and 4 below).

Table 3: Comparison of National and Hampshire rates for arrest, detection and conviction for arson

	National rate April 2006	Hampshire average December 2011
Arrest rate	9%	49%
Detection rate	6%	25%
Conviction rate after detection	3%	52%

Table 4: Summary of prosecution outcomes for arson April 2007 – March 2012

	Community Service /rehabilitation	Imprisonment	Supervision Orders
Imprisonment (total time in years)	12	257	17

7 Future opportunities being considered by the Service Delivery directorate

- 7.1
- Continue to improve on the arrest and conviction rates for arson related incidents within Hampshire.
 - Develop the dedicated Specialist Fire Investigation team to support Group and Station Managers undertaking arson reduction activities within HFRS.
 - Further develop the team and build on interagency/partnership work within Hampshire and the South East Region (South East Fire Investigation Group project work)
 - Build resilience in the team and have good succession planning by training up new members into the team to become qualified fire investigation officers.
 - Build in a progression structure for both grey and green book personnel within the dedicated Specialist Fire Investigation team. This will assist to retain personnel throughout their career following investment in training.
 - Development of an electronic format for recording and gathering our fire investigation data.

- Consider gathering additional data and information on human behaviour and characteristics as part of our investigation process
- Develop the data and information gathered through fire investigation to further improve the targeting of our prevention activity to vulnerable groups and individuals in our community.

8 Evaluation measures:

8.1 During the period between 1 November 2010 and 31 October 2011 HFRS attended and carried out a total of 304 level 2 and 3 fire investigations with the average time estimated as follows:

- Time spent to investigate a level 3 fatal fire investigation estimated at 46 hours.
- Time spent to investigate a level 2 fire investigation estimated at 28 hours.
- Arson cases being pursued by the CPS requiring the fire investigation officer to attend court, estimated at 62 hours.

9 Equality impact assessment

9.1 People Impact Assessment completed in November 2012 for the dedicated fire investigation team identified no issues.

9.2 The proposals in this report are considered compatible with the provisions of the equality and human rights legislation.

10 Evaluation conclusion

10.1 The evaluation concluded that the dedicated Specialist Fire Investigation team has made excellent progress since its implementation. It is recognised as a high performing specialist multi agency team that is having a positive and direct effect in improving the safety and economic wellbeing of Hampshire.

11 Background papers

11.1 The following documents disclose the facts or matters on which this report, or an important part of it, is based and has been relied upon to a material extent in the preparation of the report:

- South East Fire Investigation Group Statistics and Data
- Arson Task Force Report – April 2009
- HFRS Community Risk Intelligence data and statistics – December 2011
- Fire Investigation Evaluation Survey – November 2011

Note: The list excludes: (1) published works; and (2) documents that disclose exempt or confidential information defined in the Act.