



**NORTHAMPTONSHIRE
ARSON TASK FORCE**

COUNTY ARSON REDUCTION STRATEGY 2011 - 2014



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Northamptonshire Arson Task Force

“Partners in Arson Reduction”



Executive summary

Northamptonshire’s Arson Task Force (ATF) was established in 2004 and is a partnership between Northamptonshire police and Northamptonshire Fire and Rescue Service (NF&RS). This document sets out in detail current and emerging business for the ATF.

It is important that the ATF develops a partnership strategy that is citizen focused. By doing this we can contribute to the NF&RS four arson reduction strategic objectives.

- **Prevention**
- **Education**
- **Investigation**
- **Detection**

These areas of work will address the needs of our communities and will support key aspects of the current ‘Local Policing Plan 2011/12 – 2014/15’ of putting communities first by addressing Anti-Social Behaviour, protecting the public, supporting vulnerable people, working with young offenders and reacting appropriately to Domestic Violence and Hate related crime and incidents.

It is common knowledge that the more determined offenders will attempt to use fire to destroy evidence and confound investigation. By working closely with its partners the Police and Fire and Rescue Services will develop protocols that will preserve vital evidence and thereby provide greater opportunities for successful prosecution.



The development of fire fighting techniques, more effective use of information and technology, coupled with greater partnership awareness and inclusion will lead to a more holistic approach to current goals and objectives. The renewed ATF strategy will be delivered over the next three years. This strategy is a working document; therefore the prevention of developing arson threats and emerging core business will be appropriately included into the objectives of the ATF throughout the delivery of the strategy.



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Introduction and emerging issues

In June 2003 the white paper "Our Fire and Rescue Service" was presented to Parliament setting out the Government's vision for the Fire and Rescue Service of the future. Amongst the many reforms proposed, the report reiterated the need for Fire Service objectives to be mainstreamed into the regeneration agenda with local key strategic partnerships established to ensure a coordinated long-term approach to community safety. An example of this statutory duty now placed on the Fire Authorities under Section 97 of the Police Reform Act, April 2003 that identifies Fire Authorities as a responsible body, alongside Police, Police Authorities, and Local Authorities, for the purposes of formulating and implementing Crime and Disorder Reduction Strategies

There has been a year on year overall reduction in deliberate fires across the county however there still remains concern that the true extent of the problem remains largely unknown. The implementation of the NF&RS Information Recording System has led to an increased accuracy in arson figures and a greater consistency with Northamptonshire Police in the recording of arson and fire related crime.

Whilst major incidents are captured in some format often minor incidents of fire are less well recorded.

It is the intention of the ATF to seek a solution to this to ensure that a consistency is provided that will withstand any future scrutiny. This reliability will develop through better working practices between partner agencies in particular the Fire and Rescue Service and the Police. The introduction of the new NF&RS Incident Reporting System in April 2009 has supported these developments. There will be greater accuracy concerning types of fire that will enable the ATF to provide partners with better information.

By identifying all fire related incidents we will be able to capture intelligence and identify trends that will enable us to ensure that resources are used appropriately and effectively.



Through the process of inter-agency work the ATF are able to respond to those in our communities who are at serious risk from Arson related offences and impact upon those offenders who engage in such practices.

The implementation of prevention and detection strategies detailed in this document will contribute significantly to the safety of our communities within the County of Northamptonshire.

Prevention

Prevention is high on every agenda and it is important that partnership work is not duplicated.

Deliberately started fires are a significant problem and add to the degradation and decline of local areas. These types of offences affect the environment and the community increasing the fear of crime and Anti Social Behaviour.

Safer Community Partnerships across the county are engaging in regeneration programmes, working with many other agencies to deliver a comprehensive approach to existing problems and crime.

Fire surveys and free smoke alarm fitting (Home Fire Safety Checks) will continue to take place and to inform people how to prevent and remove the means and opportunities for deliberate fire setting.

The ATF support the prevention agenda by using technology in the form of CCTV rapid deployment. It will also identify environmental issues that provide opportunities for arson and remove / reduce these by introducing sustainable strategies that are citizen focussed and intelligence driven. By understanding the cause we are able to work more effectively towards the solution.



Electronic Remote Intelligence Camera (E.R.I.C.)

The ATF deploys CCTV in support of crime prevention. This deployment follows existing protocols and is intelligence based and citizen focussed. To ensure correct deployment the ATF carries out site surveys. The ATF maintains the cameras whilst in situ and arranges recovery. Each deployment is subject to evaluation to try to determine the effect of the camera with regards to crime reduction.



The overt deployment of this camera supports a reduction in crime and the fear of crime as by its nature it is high visibility and attracts public interest. The ATF work with police and partners maximising the use of this equipment and ensures that this level of usage is manageable and sustainable.

Sanctuary

Sanctuary is a support mechanism for high risk Domestic Violence victims that has been implemented within the county to minimise disruption and distress to both victims and children alike.

The ATF fully support the scheme and engage in site visits to ensure that any area that is target hardened within the victim's house meets all fire safety recommendations, building regulations and provides a safe compartment in which victims can gain protection before the arrival of the emergency services.

Whilst Sanctuary is a proactive response to prevent criminal violence there is also a large element of education that takes place with the victims to ensure that they understand what to do in case of emergency, this is vital for their safety.

Sanctuary seeks to buy time and safety for the victim allowing the emergency services to respond effectively.



Threat Danger/Threat to life Response

Where a serious threat has been made to individuals concerning arson, the ATF work with other agencies to develop an action plan based on risk. Any intelligence forwarded to the ATF by police or other agencies concerning arson or threats to commit arson receives appropriate action.

Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference-Domestic Violence

Following the recommendations of the Mavis Clift enquiry 2009 and the Home Office Multi-Agency Statutory Guidance for the Conduct of Domestic Homicide Reviews 2011:

The ATF now work closely with the County's Sunflower centres and other partnership agencies.

Any high risk threat danger/threat to life referral submitted through the police referral system now incorporates an Arson prompt that, if activated ensures that a referral is immediately made to the ATF for a home fire safety check/Arson check to be carried out.

Upon receipt of such referrals the ATF conducts an appropriate risk assessment and ensures that necessary actions are carried out to increase the protection of these vulnerable victims.

Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference-Hate Crime

The ATF are a single point of contact for arson related Hate crime/incidents and will ensure that those individuals or sections of the community targeted in this way will receive appropriate support.

These referrals take a similar route as Domestic Violence referrals and therefore we are confident that as part of the county wide partnership we can respond effectively.



Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA)

It is crucial that the ATF engages solidly with MAPPA clients who commit Arson. MAPPA is intelligence and information driven and offenders are managed by numerous multi-agency partners. MAPPA clients are the most dangerous of offenders and are subjected to continuous risk assessment to ascertain their level of threat to the community. Mismanagement of these offenders can have serious consequences for victims and organisations alike. Information sharing is crucial and the ATF engages in a number of functions that support the MAPPA process. The ATF:



- Attend and contribute at meetings
- Flag potential problem areas with NF&RS control room
- Ensure an alert system is in place so that NF&RS specialist fire investigators attend crime scenes with Police forensic investigators and preserve evidence
- Carry out fire surveys and arrange the fitting of smoke alarms where necessary
- Offender conduct – Prison visits – Intelligence gathering – Prison intelligence

MAPPA clients are by their very nature problematic and difficult to manage. Therefore time must be set aside to deal with them effectively and efficiently. This approach will ultimately result in reduced risk to victims and the community in general.



Void buildings

Void buildings continue to be problematic and are a honey pot for anti-social behavior and offences of Arson and Criminal Damage. The ATF are working with partners to ensure better management of void and derelict buildings. Responsible persons are contacted and advised of their obligations under the law especially with



regard to consequences and apparent dangers. Northamptonshire can boast of a good record when dealing with these types of properties the ATF will build on its successes and ensure that partners continue to respond appropriately.

Education

The ATF where possible will educate young people through the implementation of a variety of strategies involving greater awareness of the consequences of arson and inviting young people to come up with their own strategies to reduce fire related social problems.

The ATF already support the Fire Services Action Reaction and Consequences (ARC) programme working with individuals who are excluded or facing exclusion from school. Often these students come from chaotic backgrounds and are very difficult to reach. Through the use of inspirational strategies we are able to motivate some



students to change their ways and become ambassadors for the fire service. This approach provides a significant contribution to the safety of our communities.



Youth Offending Teams

The ATF work closely with the Youth Offending Teams and undertake to support them by meeting with problematic young people who engage with Arson. The ATF gives appropriate advice and education to young offenders regarding the serious consequences of their action and the long term effects it can have on them and their community. Referrals to the ATF can take the form of a court order.

The ATF are working with county education partners and other partnerships to identify suitable strategies that will impact upon problematic young people who are either excluded or facing exclusion from school. This is done by engaging with the existing Common Assessment Framework.

Child Protection

The ATF attend child protection conferences that concern fire setting and arson. Young children/persons who engage in such activity can, on occasions, be victims in their own right. By engaging with Social Services and other key agencies appropriate action plans can be identified and implemented. In more severe cases this can result in the child being taken into care.

Detection, Investigation and Prosecution

The ATF support the prosecution of offenders by ensuring the appropriate release of fire service products. These will include exhibits from the Fire Service Control in the form of audio discs capturing incoming calls, incident reports, analysis products, impact assessments and the provision of previous fire information that contributes to bad character evidence. These products have already been used to great effect at Crown Court resulting in conviction and lengthy prison sentences.

The preservation of evidence in serious crime is crucial to police investigations. In most serious crime vehicles are used to transport offenders, victims and stolen goods and are often burnt to destroy forensic evidence. The ATF will seek



to implement and support a number of initiatives that will contribute to better fire investigation that will lead to more offences being brought to justice.

An experimental event occurred on the 15th April 09 involving several burning stages of test vehicles. Various items of forensic evidence were placed within these vehicles and once the fires were extinguished forensic scientists examined the vehicles and removed remaining exhibits for laboratory analysis.

To ensure that vehicles falling within this criterion are dealt effectively will require sympathetic fire fighting techniques to preserve evidence and prompt attendance by Crime Scene Investigators and Police Investigating Officers. In order to achieve this Crime Scene Investigators have been trained in the recovery of fingerprints from fire/smoke damaged vehicles.



With the support of forensic scientists a full training presentation will be produced and a joint Standard Operation Procedure (SOP) will be developed for use by all partners.

County Wheelie Bin Strategy

The Arson Task Force will strive to achieve a County wide solution to the Wheelie Bin storage problem and research and develop strategies to reduce problems of Fly-tipping.

This work will include national good practice and be directed by intelligence and information to ensure that the right areas are targeted. By mapping hotspots of wheelie bin arson the ATF will identify areas most at risk. Any advice given will be accurate, realistic and cost effective this will ensure that those areas suffering the most deprivation will be addressed as a matter of urgency.





Work has been carried out with the County's Crime Prevention Design Advisors to ensure that good practice identified by the Fire and Rescue Services with regard to bin storage is brought to the attention of planners to ensure it is considered and implemented.

Work with the County's Crime Prevention Departments and NF&RS Technical Fire Safety Team has given additional weight to general Environmental Surveys.

Community Safety Partnerships will be kept fully briefed about emerging arson trends and fire setting problems. This approach allows a collective response to problem solving and provides partners with short, medium and long term solutions.

Training

The ATF currently engage with police student officers by providing awareness training. The intention is to provide students with knowledge giving them an appreciation of the dangers of fire and smoke.

The police training department has agreed to offer training to fire investigators, and the NF&RS have offered Fire Investigation Awareness training to all student police officers as part of their initial development and training. Other areas of common skills are currently under investigation to identify other opportunities for joint service training and development.

Regular joint meetings and training sessions between NF&RS Specialist Fire Investigators and Police Forensic Investigators supports emerging business.

It is important that the ATF keep abreast of national and international developments in fire fighting techniques and prevention initiatives. This will ensure that good practice is identified and introduced into the County. To support this process the ATF are members of the International Association of Arson Investigators (IAAI) and regularly access training courses and share experiences with over nine hundred Fire investigators.



Risks & Dependencies

The ATF was established in 2004 with the support of a grant from the Arson Control Forum secured by the Northamptonshire Fire & Rescue Service. This funding ceased in March 2006 and the ATF is sustained by the contribution of one full time post from each of the partner services. An analyst was funded during the 3 year project but there was no funding to continue this post after March 2006.

The ATF continues to achieve significant reductions in arson within the county and does this largely by taking on individual projects and working them to conclusion on the basis that the initiatives will be sustainable. Many of these are dependent upon support from partners, either in the establishment or the maintenance of the project.

A good example of this approach is the ELVIS project which is now managed by an outside unit and is self funding, which provides sustainability.

Many of the current projects and those listed as emerging business will depend upon partnership and support for them to be achievable and sustainable. Much of this support will be sought from Safer Community Partnerships in addition to other statutory and voluntary agencies.