

**BRIEFING NOTE: Arson Issues in Cheshire****Summary**

Historically the format of Best Value Performance Indicators related to the Fire Services and crime statistics has focussed on fires in buildings and vehicles rather than fires set deliberately and small fires. This has masked the real issue of arson as crime and anti-social behaviour, which in 2006-7 accounted for 66% of all incidents attended by Cheshire Fire & Rescue Service.

It is nationally recognised that arson incidents impact directly on community perceptions of safety and well-being as they affect the broader community as well as the victim. It also has an affect on economic prosperity as it can impact upon the potential development of high-risk areas as it sign posts the gap that communities experience through social, health and economic inequalities. In particular, research demonstrates the overall annual cost of arson to be £2.53 billion to English and Welsh economies and loss adjusters recognise that every £1 spend on arson reduction provides £16 of benefit to the wider community. In 2005/6 there were 123 deliberate fires in commercial premises across Cheshire, unfortunately it is recognised nationally that 80% of these premises never fully recover. As well as commercial premises the County experienced 627 car fires and 1953 small fires.

Fire & Rescue Services and CLG recognise the association between arson, anti-social behaviour and community cohesion, and recognise arson as being a regional priority. Safer and stronger communities can only be built by significantly reducing the risk of devastating and demoralising incidents of arson and fire setting. The latest Cheshire perception survey undertaken in 2006 clearly indicates that 47% of respondents were either very or fairly worried about anti-social behaviour

Fire Services are responding nationally to the arson and anti-social behaviour relationship through the development of risk profile planes. When arson risk planes are overlaid with anti-social behaviour risk planes the planes mirror or match illustrating that arson is a signal crime for anti-social behaviour. In Cheshire

- 40% of property and vehicle fires are arson incidents linked to youth crime
- 60% of secondary fire are one of the root causes attributing to anti-social behaviour

**(Arson Control Forum Report, 2006)**

**Suggested Approach:**

The Governance Board has previously expressed concern that anti-social behaviour in Cheshire will presently be measured by perception surveys. By embedding NI 33, which is a measure of actual arson fires, the majority of which is rooted in anti social behaviour, numerical data can be used to demonstrate improvement in Cheshire. It would therefore be prudent to use the relevant performance outcome from CFRS for 2005-6 as the baseline data (2951 incidents). These measures are attached to a PSA target for the Fire Service, which stands at a 10% reduction by 2010 using

2001-2 performance as baseline data. Performance has currently been surpassed and a new target has therefore been formulated to reduce the number of incidents by 5% year on year by 2010/11 which equates to a projected 14.3% drop over 3 years from 2008/09 to 2010/11.

**Recommended:**

The Governance Board formally asks the six district based CDRPS to review their action plans with regard to arson reduction as a new priority for the Communities of Cheshire Partnership.