



St. Helens Council

## **Safer Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel**

### **Review of Anti-Social Behaviour and Fires**



**April 2014**

#### **Task Group**

**Councillor(s) - Jimmy Jackson – Chairman  
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**Elaine Collins – Merseyside Police**

**Peter Mallet, Louise Higgins and Mike Petersen – St Helens Council**

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## Chairman's Foreword and Acknowledgements



**Councillor Jimmy Jackson: Chairman of the Scrutiny Task Group**

I am pleased to present this report of a review undertaken by the Task Group of the Safer Communities Scrutiny Panel about the mechanisms in place to reduce anti-social behaviour and deliberate fires in St Helens.

It is clear that tackling anti-social behaviour is not the responsibility of one agency and requires a partnership approach. Meeting as a group with all the different agencies paid dividends. Representatives around the table worked together to agree possible solutions.

We found that prevention and education plays an important part in engaging with communities to tackle anti-social behaviour before it becomes an issue. Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service do a great deal of good work with partners such as educational visits and high visibility patrols which help reduce incidents of anti-social behaviour.

Diversions activities set up by the Fire Service, Helena and the Youth Service are welcomed and valued by service users, as are positive activities such as those provided by Sports Development Service which encourage young people away from committing anti-social behaviour, especially activities available at critical times. A great example of this is SpringWatch.

This review is a short snapshot in time looking at how we can all work together to reduce the number of deliberate fires. The Council spends over £50,000 every year on replacing brown bins which have gone missing or have been burnt. I believe that our recommendations will go some way towards reducing this.

I would like to thank all those who have contributed to and supported this review, particularly Chris Case, Kate Morris and Sara Garside from Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service, Elaine Collins from Merseyside Police, Peter Mallet, Safer Communities, Louise Higgins, Youth Service and Mike Petersen from Environmental Protection. In addition I would like to thank all the Task Group members for their time and effort.

## **1.0 Introduction and Terms of Reference**

- 1.1 During the process of agreeing the Scrutiny Work Programme for 2013/14 the Council's Safer Communities Scrutiny Panel agreed to look at Anti-Social Behaviour and Fires.
- 1.2 The aim of the review was to investigate how we can work together to reduce the number of fires associated with Anti-Social Behaviour.
- 1.3 The terms of the review were as follows:
  - To establish if there are sufficient working links between the Council and its partners with regards to ASB and fires.
  - To identify if there are any areas within the borough that have increased numbers of fires associated with ASB.
  - To investigate if there are certain times of the year that the rate of ASB fires increases.
  - To establish what can be done to reduce the incidents of fires associated with ASB.
  - To ensure that prevention and education partnership working is in place and continues.

## **2.0 Method of the Investigation**

- We received a presentation from Fire Service on background information to ASB and Fires across the borough.
- We undertook online research, news articles, published reports etc.
- We held a one day in depth session with Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service, Merseyside Police, Environment Protection, Youth Service and Safer Communities to establish what partnership work is currently being undertaken and what could be done to improve.

## **3.0 Background**

- 3.1 'Anti-social behaviour' describes a range of everyday nuisance, disorder and crime, from graffiti and noisy neighbours to harassment and street drug dealing. It is sometimes dismissed as trivial, but anti-social behaviour has a huge impact on victims' quality of life, and it is the public's number one concern when it comes to local crime issues. Over 3.5 million incidents were reported to police forces in England and Wales last year, and it is clear that

that many more were reported to other local agencies such as councils and housing associations, or not reported at all. Reducing anti-social behaviour is a priority for all partner organisations particularly where it is criminal or targeted at vulnerable victims. Unchecked, anti-social behaviour can be linked to increased disorder, low-level crime and fear of crime in a neighbourhood – the so-called ‘broken windows’ effect. The police and their local partners need a range of tools to deal with anti-social behaviour.

- 3.2 The everyday crime and disorder that is described as ‘anti-social behaviour’ – from vandalism and graffiti to drug dealing and harassment – has a huge impact on the quality of life of millions of people in this country. It is corrosive, blighting communities and neighbourhoods. Moreover, as recent tragic cases have shown, it is often targeted at those members of our society who are least able to protect themselves.
- 3.3 For the purpose of this review we agreed to look at anti-social behaviour and deliberate fires. Bins have become a target for anti-social behaviour, with 115 wheelie bin fires in Merseyside in October. This compares to 77 fires in bins in September and 70 in August.
- 3.4 During Autumn of 2013 the Council introduced a new waste collection/recycling scheme. Every week 12 crews visit over 76,000 houses in the Borough. 240-litre brown and green-wheeled bins are provided free to residents and are collected alternative weeks; in addition there are weekly recycling services. If the Council’s recycling team are unable to gain access or experience any transport difficulties they will try to return the same day. Where this is not possible they will collect before 5.00 pm the following day.
- 3.5 Residents are asked to put their wheelie bin out at their collection point for 6.30 am, on the day of collection and take their bin back into their property as soon as possible after collection, this will prevent the brown bin being stolen, vandalised or set alight.
- 3.6 Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service recently quoted in a press release:

***"We know from our incidents that wheelie bins left out on the streets offer tempting targets for certain individuals intent on causing fires at this time of year, tragically these fires have caused deaths on Merseyside due to rapid fire spread effecting adjacent property.***

***"We would urge residents not to leave their wheelie bins out; they should be stored away from doors or windows to prevent fire spreading to properties.***

***"Bins should be left out only on collection day and returned as soon as possible after emptying."***

- 3.7 The Fire and Rescue Service offer the following advice;
- Never store bins close to doors, windows or service intakes – any fire in the bin could easily spread to your property.
  - Wheelie bins should be stored securely behind locked gates.

- If a secure location is not available the wheelie bin should be closed and secured away from buildings.
- Bins should be placed on the highway on collection day and returned to your property as soon as possible after emptying.

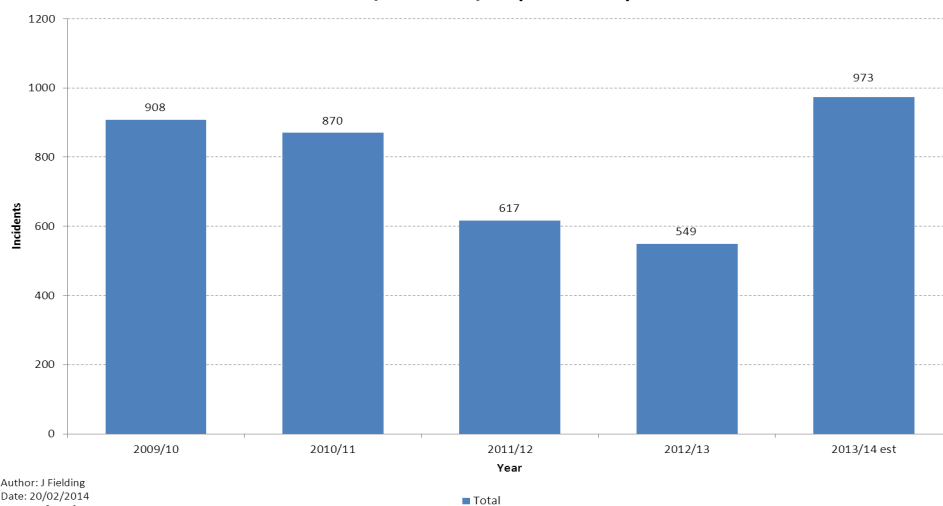
## 4.0 Findings

- 4.1 Anti-Social Behaviour secondary fires tend to be small in scale with detritus like rubbish, discarded furniture or foliage being burnt deliberately. We heard that April 2013 evidenced a significant increase in reports of secondary fires and all partners believed that the dry weather during winter was a contributing factor.
- 4.2 This increase was dealt with via a partnership response with the MF&RS prevention team and crews patrolling hotspot areas and on occasions accompanied by the Police.
- 4.3 During this time the increase in secondary fires was evident across Merseyside as a whole and does not correlate with our other ASB performance measures. It was reported in regional press that several areas in the North West, including Warrington, also experienced similar rises in secondary fires.

### 4.4 Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service - Chris Case, Sara Garside and Kate Morris

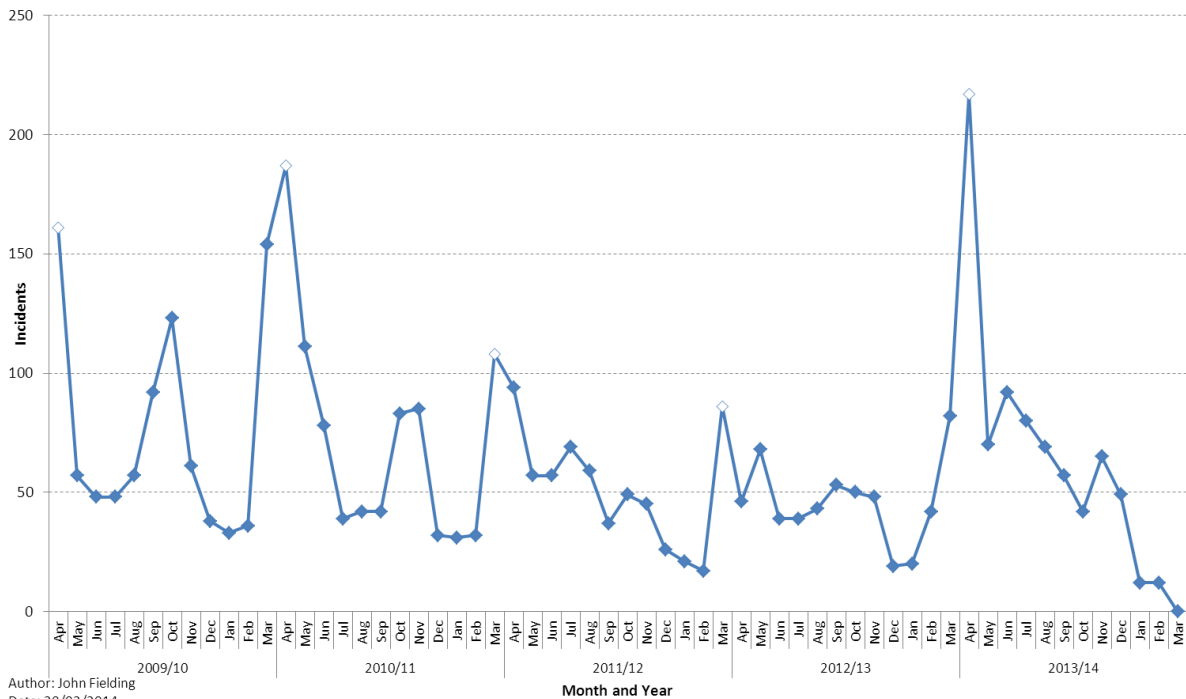
- 4.5 The charts below show a significant increase in deliberate secondary (rubbish/grassland/wheelie bins) fires. The peak month was April when the Fire Service witnessed an increase of 171 incidents compared to the previous year. Other spikes occurred in the summer months, November and December. The increase during the summer months was predominately down to the good weather which resulted in each district within Merseyside witnessing an increase. During November and December a prolific fire setter set fire to approximately 60 wheelie bins in the St Helens area. This increased the number of recorded incidents by approximately 50%.

Retrospective of Deliberate Secondary Fires in St Helens  
2009/10 - 2013/14 (estimated)



Author: J Fielding  
Date: 20/02/2014  
Strategy & Performance

**Deliberate Secondary Fires attended by Month, St Helens**



Author: John Fielding  
Date: 20/02/2014  
Strategy & Performance

- 4.6 In order to tackle the spate of wheelie bin fires, Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service in conjunction with Merseyside Police and other partner agencies commenced Operation Telba. The operation assisted with the identification of incidents and produced a clear picture of where the incidents were occurring and the times they were happening.
- 4.7 Good use was made of CCTV via St Helens Council Control room and CCTV attached to fire appliances. Following on from this, Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service Operational Crews and Prevention Team together with Merseyside Police, conducted high visibility patrols in the areas. This joined up working resulted in an individual being identified and prosecuted. Since the successful prosecution there have been no wheelie bin fires within these areas.
- 4.8 In the hope of avoiding such an increase in secondary fires as witnessed in 2013 the Fire Service have planned to work in conjunction with partner agencies across the district on a range of diversionary activities and high visibility patrols and events. These are:
- Football sessions which will take place in two of our hotspot areas from last year. These will take place one evening a week for four weeks leading up to the school holidays.
  - Arson workshops in partnership with Helena Partnerships – attendance will be approximately 120 young people.
  - A diversionary event which will be held at the station on 16th April – attendance will be approximately 200 young people.

- A high visibility event on 10th April arranged by Helena which will consist of all relevant agencies patrolling the hot spot areas.
- Daily high visibility patrols around the known hot spots, identifying any combustibles or insecure properties but also providing a presence in the community.
- Delivery of the grassland presentation in all schools prior to the Easter holidays.
- Environmental audits in conjunction with the Prevention Team and the Ops Crews.

#### **4.9 SpringWatch 2013 – Peter Mallet St Helens Council**

4.10 SpringWatch is a multi-agency initiative led by the Council's Safer Communities Team in collaboration with Merseyside Police, Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service, Registered Social Landlords and other Community Safety Partner agencies.

4.11 The SpringWatch campaign has helped to steadily reduce anti-social behaviour in April, a time when traditionally due to the lighter nights and warmer weather we usually experience increases in certain types of anti-social behaviour:

- Neighbourhood nuisance
- Off-road vehicle nuisance
- Dog fouling and other environmental anti-social behaviour (i.e. litter/graffiti/wheelie bin fires)
- Nuisance Fires

4.12 Last year the campaign saw an 18% reduction in the total number of ASB incidents in April 2013 compared to April 2012 with 105 fewer incidents reported to Merseyside Police. (See diagram below)

4.13 Partners contributed to the 'SpringWatch' by organising targeted diversionary activities in key hotspot locations, which included:

- Multi-agency 'high visibility' estate walkabouts with several of the Registered Social Housing providers
- Neighbourhood Police patrols sent to identified hot spot locations under a plan devised for 'SpringWatch'
- MF&RS Fire Crews and partner agencies were provided with hot spot locations from 2012, to help guide their resources into the areas of concern
- The Council and Police ran four 'Staysafe' operations in response to an emerging issue of the gathering of 60+ young people at the beginning of April; and
- The ASB Outreach team were tasked to hotspot locations to engage with

young people within the hot spot locations.

#### 4.14 Overall Performance

- 4.15 'Springwatch' evidenced a 18% reduction in the number of ASB incidents reported to Merseyside Police (from 583 to 478 calls) compared to 2012. It was pleasing to hear that the Hot spot locations identified in 2012 did not manifest themselves in 2013.
- 4.16 The table below provides a breakdown of ASB calls for service against ASB categorisation by the Police for April.

ASB Type	2012	2013	%
Abandoned Vehicles	1	2	100%
Animal Problems	1	1	0%
Begging/ Vagrancy	3	4	33%
Inappropriate Vehicle Use	60	33	-45%
Littering/Drugs Parapernalia	8	0	-100%
Malicious Communications	11	13	18%
Noise	12	10	-17%
Nuisance Neighbours	110	85	-23%
Rowdy Inconsiderate Behaviour	348	320	-8%
Street Drinking	6	1	-83%
Trespass	3	0	-100%
Blank	20	9	-55%
Grand Total	583	478	-18%

Table - ASB Calls for Service to Merseyside Police

#### 4.17 Helena Partnerships – Jeanette Mason

- 4.18 Although Helena was unable to be present at the meeting we asked for their thoughts on how they worked in partnership with other agencies to tackle anti-social behaviour. We heard that Helena Homes was very keen to reduce the incidents of anti-social behaviour fires on its estates and across all areas of the Borough. They worked in partnership with a wide range of agencies, such as Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service, Neighbourhood Action Groups, Safer Communities, Education and Environmental Health to spread fire safety information and also to deal with individual issues which could arise.
- 4.19 Helena takes a partnership approach to deal with specific incidents. For example, 'special' partnership meetings are called to address concerns when a location is experiencing issues, such as wheelie bin fires. We work proactively with partners in support of 'SpringWatch' and 'Operation Good Guy' by:
- Providing diversionary activities for young people to reduce the anti-social behaviour fires during these critical periods.

- Carrying out Hi-viz walkabouts with partners to engage with young people and provide fire safety advice to our residents.
  - Working with St Helens Council to remove items from our own properties and private homes during 'Good Guy'.
- 4.20 Any concerns regarding fire safety that are identified when visiting tenants' homes are flagged up to Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service and other relevant agencies. We work closely with the Fire Service, referring and then carrying out home visits to support vulnerable customers such as hoarders and those at risk due to Domestic Violence. Neighbourhood staff also carry out regular site inspections on their patches. Estate Caretakers remove any fly tipping and inflammable items on Helena land. Issues identified on non-Helena land are reported to the Council Contact Centre. Information regarding any 'locations' of concern is then fed into the Neighbourhood Action Groups so extra support can be assigned to these areas.
- 4.21 In addition, new tenants are advised regarding their responsibilities surrounding fire safety when they sign up for their new home. New tenants receive a personal visit from their Neighbourhood Officer within 4 weeks of taking up the tenancy, and then again after 7 months, where they can discuss any fire safety concerns. In addition, tenants can report any concerns to Helena via the website, telephone, or in person at any Helena office.

## 5.0 Conclusions

- 5.1 Secondary fires present a particularly difficult problem for MFRS as the service undergoes restructuring due to budgetary restrictions. As with other local services, the operational delivery element of MFRS is changing over the next few years, where in the St Helens area the front line operational delivery of available fire appliances is reducing from three to two. If an appliance is engaged with a secondary fire, it is then unavailable, or certainly significantly delayed, in attending any primary fire calls (residential property for example). In total, 2013 represents a 51.5% increase in fires due to Anti-Social Behaviour in the St Helens District, compared to the previous year. This remains a key priority for MFRS and the Service will continue to engage with partners in their aim to reduce these incidences.
- 5.2 One identified cause of a number of the deliberate fires which occurred during Spring 2013 was the misuse of disposable bbq's. We discussed the possibility of asking local retailers to be diligent when selling disposable bbq's and liquid gasses to young people during the longer spring/ summer evenings. It was felt that these products could be included in the Trading Standards initiative, 'Responsible Retailer Scheme'.
- 5.3 We heard from Merseyside Police that intelligence on previous arsonists from other agencies was not always shared. When young people in care were transferred into the borough from neighbouring authorities, it was important that any previous/possible concerns were shared amongst each division.
- 5.4 Residents are asked to put wheelie bins out at your collection point for 6.30 am, on the day of collection and take their bin back into their property as soon as possible after collection. The Fire Service expressed their concerns about

wheelie Bins being left out overnight, sometimes this was because residents naturally put the bins out last thing before they go to bed and sometimes because of missed collections. It was felt that in order to alleviate any misunderstanding over missed collections, hard and fast guidance setting out what to do if a collection is missed and when it will next be collected should be distributed to all residents. Feedback from the Fire Service was that residents were still unsure what to do with their wheelie bin when collections were missed.

- 5.5 We discussed the possibility of developing an 'adopted street' initiative. This could be piloted in areas where deliberate fires have previously occurred and a neighbourhood warden, bin monitor could be nominated to undertake simple checks etc.
- 5.6 All bins should be stored away from doors or windows to prevent fire spreading to properties. It was agreed that it would be valuable for the Fire Service to get sight of any new development plans and have to option to comment on the proposed location of bin stores. It was agreed that this could perhaps be a condition of planning.
- 5.7 It was recognised that PCSO's undertake a valuable role in their communities. A new intake of PCSO's was currently underway and it was suggested that a half day induction session be arranged to include MF&RS, Safer Communities, Environmental Protection and the Youth Service which will explain the different roles and responsibilities of each services.
- 5.8 The Fire Service currently visit all year 6 pupils and deliver educational advice on grassland fires and the effects on wildlife. It was agreed that it would be more beneficial to target these sessions towards all primary school pupils and not solely Year 6.
- 5.9 Councillor Maloney referred to a previous scrutiny review of Grot Spots undertaken in 2011. The task group agreed that it would be worthwhile re-visiting the recommendations and asked that an update be provided to a future meeting of the relevant Scrutiny Panel.
- 5.10 All agencies around the table had faced budget reductions in the past 3 years and would continue to do so in foreseeable future. The fire service requested that any future reduction in resources/services would not impact on the number and quality of current cleansing rounds and the removal of litter. This would go a long way in assisting with the reduction of Anti-social behaviour fires.
- 5.11 Residents living in St Helens can take advantage of the Council's free bulky rubbish collection service. This service is for occasional items of household waste which are too big to fit into a wheelie bin; alternatively it can be taken to the local Household Waste Recycling Centre. Feedback from the Task Group stated that waiting times for the service could sometimes be a number of weeks and there were certain rules as to the condition of the items being collected. Further clarification on this was required.

## 6.0 Recommendations

1. That retailers be approached to encourage the non-sale of disposable bbq's and liquid gasses to young people under18 and that this be included in Trading Standards responsible retailer scheme initiative.
2. That the sharing of intelligence on previous arsonists with relevant agencies be improved.
3. That guidance on what to do when a collection is missed be distributed to all residents.
4. That Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service be included as a consultee in all future planning applications for new development sites in respect of the location of bin storage and sprinkler systems.
5. That a half day induction session for all new PCSO's be organised to include input from Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service, Safer Communities, Environmental Protection and the Youth Service explaining the different roles and responsibilities of each service .
6. That Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service continue to educate Primary and Secondary School Pupils throughout the District.
7. That the Council ensure that any future reduction in resources does not impact on the removal of litter and street cleansing to assist in the reduction of Anti-Social behaviour fires.
8. That the recommendations in the previous scrutiny review of Grot Spots be revisited at a future meeting of the Panel.
9. That the Council and its partners investigate the possibility of introducing a pilot 'neighbourhood warden scheme' in areas where deliberate fires have previously occurred.
10. That the Council re-iterate/further publicise the free bulky waste collection scheme and clarify the conditions imposed and possible waiting times which could be experienced.

## Anti-Social Behaviour and Fires

Rec No	Recommendation	Responsible Officer	Agreed Action and Date of Implementation
1	That retailers be approached to encourage the non-sale of disposable bbq's and liquid gasses to young people under18 and that this be included in Trading Standards responsible retailer scheme initiative.		
2	That the sharing of intelligence on previous arsonists with relevant agencies be improved.		
3	That guidance on what to do when a collection is missed be distributed to all residents.		
4	That Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service be included as a consultee in all future planning applications for new development sites in respect of the location of bin storage and sprinkler systems.		
5	That Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service arrange a half day induction session for all new PCSO's to include Safer Communities, Environmental Protection and the Youth Service explaining the different roles and responsibilities of each service.		

## Anti-Social Behaviour and Fires

6	That educational visits by Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service to primary schools be rolled out to all pupils, Year 6 and below.		
7	That the Council ensure that any future reduction in resources does not impact on the removal of litter and street cleansing to assist in the reduction of Anti-Social behaviour fires.		
8	That the recommendations in the previous scrutiny review of Grot Spots be revisited at a future meeting of the Panel.		
9	That the Council and its partners investigate the possibility of introducing a pilot 'neighbourhood warden scheme' in areas where deliberate fires have previously occurred.		
10	That the Council re-iterate/further publicise the free bulky waste collection scheme and clarify the conditions imposed and possible waiting times which could be experienced.		