

# BURNLEY WOOD ARSON REDUCTION

## Summary

The Burnley Wood Arson Reduction project was established following the realisation by members of the Fire Reduction Team at Burnley Fire Station that the Burnley Wood area was suffering from a higher than average number of deliberate fires.

Following detailed scanning and analysis of both the problem and the area itself, it was decided that the best way of working towards a reduction in the number of deliberate fires would be to adopt a multi-agency problem solving approach.

This approach was chosen because some of the underlying problems affecting the area were outside the scope of any one agency. These problems included extensive fly-tipping, run-down and derelict housing and social deprivation.

Detailed analysis provided a good deal of quantitative data as well as highlighting the problems above. It also provided qualitative data which needed to be considered carefully in order to point the partners involved towards the right locations and times, and to form an appropriate response.

Based on the analysis, a number of responses were formed and tasked to relevant partners. These responses, including joint bike patrols, a referral scheme, the fitting of smoke alarms and clean ups, are considered in more depth in the main body of this report.

In order to assess the success of the project, we considered the number of arsons in Burnley Wood before and after the study which incidentally, is under constant review. We also monitored improvements in the time taken to move abandoned vehicles and at the increased number of referrals to the Fire Service's FACE programme.

As a result of the project, deliberate fires were reduced by 36%, abandoned vehicles are now removed faster than previously, 334 extra homes now benefit from smoke alarms and six youths from Burnley Wood have been referred to the FACE scheme.

## **Objectives of the Project**

The Burnley Wood Arson Reduction project was an initiative aimed at reducing the number of deliberate fires set in an area of Burnley known as Burnley Wood.

This specific objective was brought about due to the unreasonably large number of arsons recorded by the Fire Service and dealt with by them, the police and other agencies in a localised, well-defined area. It was felt that this was a realistic aim but that a multi-agency approach was required.

The success criteria decided upon was whether, over the succeeding 12 months after the project was commenced, a drop in the numbers of fires started in the area was recorded.

The problem that was to be addressed was deemed a priority because the amount of time, money and resources which we were all having to commit to this area were immense.

We were also concerned about the possible consequences of derelict houses being set on fire: there was a real danger to the offenders; occupants in neighbouring houses were living in constant fear of their premises catching fire; and arson was having a negative impact on the community in general.

The problem was initially identified by the Fire Service who called a series of multi-agency meetings. These involved the Police Community Beat Manager for the Burnley Wood area, PC 3850 Andy Thornhill, a representative from Burnley Council Environmental Health Dept and representatives from the newly formed Community Wardens. These people and their agencies were deemed to be crucial partners in addressing the gambit of issues which, when considered together, made up the problem.

## Definition of the Problem

Lancashire Fire & Rescue Service and Lancashire Constabulary had recently formed an Arson Reduction Team consisting of a detective and a fire officer working in close partnership. This team, based at Wesham, has promulgated the POP philosophy throughout the Fire Service.

The Fire Reduction Team at Burnley Fire Station used the SARA approach to problem solving in order to assess the causes and then analyse their findings. At the outset it was clear that some of the underlying causes of the problem of fire setting in the Burnley Wood area were related to the area as a whole.

Burnley Wood is roughly bounded by the railway line, Todmorden Road and Parliament Street and consists mainly of terraced houses. For a number of reasons, many of these are empty or derelict. Speculative property developers hoping to make easy money have purchased a lot of properties and unemployment is high in the area. There is extensive fly-tipping in rear yards and spare land and the boarding up of these premises is done mainly using plyboard, which makes for easy access to thieves, squatters, drug-users and juveniles.

In the period from January 2001 to December 2001 the Fire Service recorded a total of 241 deliberate fires in the Burnley Wood area which ranged from grass fires to house fires. This represented 17% of all deliberate fires in Burnley, making Burnley Wood a hot spot - quite literally.

The staff of the Fire Reduction Team carried out their analysis of the fires in a number of ways:

- 1) Analysis by ward revealed that the highest number of fires, both one pump and two pump fires which are known as FDR1 and FDR3 type fires, occurred in the Fulfilled ward which incorporates Burnley Wood followed closely by the Daneshouse ward.
- 2) Analysis by street (see appendices) also revealed that streets included in Burnley Wood were among the top 12 for deliberate fires, Crowther Street being the second highest.
- 3) Analysis by time (see appendices) showed, as could be predicted, that the peak time for deliberate fires was between the hours of 1500 and 2300. This is explained by the fact that school has finished for the day and it was always believed that a large percentage of deliberate fires set in the area were started by local youths.
- 4) Finally, analysis was carried out by fire type (see appendices) and, once again, it came as no surprise to find that the largest number of fires were rubbish fires and domestic fires.

As can be seen, the analysis was carried out in great depth to confirm the problem and the results appeared to show that in the Borough of Burnley, the Burnley Wood area during the late afternoon and early evening suffered from an above-average and unacceptably high number of deliberate fires.

If the Problem Analysis Triangle (PAT) is alluded to, then the 'victims' can be identified as absent landlords, speculative property developers and also occupants in adjoining houses. The problems associated with fire-setting all contribute to create a poorer quality of life for the victims and escalate the dilemma of negative equity whilst lowering the overall impression of the area.

The '**location**' or second side of the triangle can be identified as the Burnley Wood area in general and in particular the derelict or unoccupied properties and spare land.

The '**offender**' or third side of the triangle can be identified as juveniles local to the area. As mentioned previously, a large number of fires were believed to have been started by local youths. These were believed to be youths with low parental control, a fascination for fire setting or bored teenagers with little to do after school.

The philosophy behind the PAT is that if a side of the triangle is removed from the equation then the triangle will collapse or the problem is removed. We decided to consider all three sides of the triangle in this case, by implementing a multi-agency response which began with a series of meetings held at Burnley Fire Station.

## **Response to the Problem**

The analysis carried out indicated early on that the problem of fire setting in Burnley Wood could not be addressed by any single agency and that some of the root causes would need to be considered in any attempt at addressing the situation.

As stated earlier, a number of partners were involved from the outset including Community Wardens, Fire Service, Environmental Health, and Police. At their regular meetings each agency agreed upon certain actions. Obviously a number of these actions, as will be seen, cross over between the various agencies and were carried out jointly.

The Fire Service response consisted of a number of actions. The Fire Reduction Team approached a local cycle retailer and managed to acquire two mountain bikes which two of the team regularly used in the Burnley Wood area.

Wearing high-visibility clothing, which readily identified them as Fire Officers, they carried out targeted patrols in previously designated streets at relevant times of the day. Station work routines were actually changed to allow crews to concentrate their efforts during hot spot hours.

These patrols were often carried out in company with police or community wardens.

Training was given to community wardens in extinguishing rubbish fires, chip pan fires and the like. Demonstrations were also given to the wardens and the police using the arson-detecting dog.

Historically, Burnley Wood had been seen by the Fire Service as a hard to reach community in terms of fire safety and the provision of smoke alarms so house to house visits were also introduced with all occupied houses (892 in total) visited (408 were actually unoccupied).

Each watch at the fire station was allocated four wards each to visit and records were kept of which houses were visited with no reply so that follow-up visits could be made. These visits resulted in 892 homes receiving fire safety, advice and 334 homes having smoke alarms fitted which would otherwise, not have had them installed.

A system was also introduced at Burnley whereby youngsters were referred to the Young Fire-fighter's scheme. This involved youths from the area volunteering to attend the fire station and taking part in events, open days, away days, fire safety initiatives etc. This served to raise their awareness of fire safety and the dangers of arson.

New protocols were drawn up regarding the use and sighting of waste skips to the extent that a blind eye was turned to commercial tipping in these skips as long as the rubbish was disposed of in the skips.

Presentations were also given on the Fire Awareness Child Education scheme (FACE) to the police and wardens. Schools in the area were targeted in an attempt to educate the children and role-play activities were carried out involving the pupils.

Responses from the **council** included improved procedures for securing derelict premises - for example by using metal shuttering instead of plyboard. This made the premises almost impossible to enter and prevented further attacks. In addition, the time-scale for securing premises was reduced for those identified as a priority ie: those next to an occupied house, or which had already been subject to arson. In these cases boarding would be carried out within 24 hours.

Likewise the removal of abandoned vehicles, another easy target for would-be arsonists, was speeded up. Community skips were located to discourage fly tipping.

The contracts for demolition of derelict properties were reviewed which led to speedier work and the demolition sites were made more secure whilst work was on going.

The **community wardens** engaged in foot patrol in vulnerable streets at targeted times and worked in company with the Community Beat Manager, PC Andy Thomhill. They referred abandoned vehicles and insecure properties direct to Burnley Borough Council.

Major community clean-ups were initiated in the area using a reward scheme for the youngsters that became involved. These ranged from McDonalds vouchers to free bowling sessions at the nearby bowling alley. They also pro-actively looked for and removed materials likely to be fired.

The **police** response included targeted patrol both with the wardens and the fire service at vulnerable streets in the area. Data was exchanged between the police and fire service utilising the analysts at Burnley Police station. Again working closely with the council, new protocols were devised for the speedier removal of abandoned vehicles and boarding up of premises.

Police officers attended training exercises and presentations given by the fire service. Community safety officers based at Burnley Police station implemented a new referral system for youths to the FACE programme.

The existing Youth Referral Scheme enabled officers who had had cause to speak to a youth about anti-social behaviour to submit a form to the Youth

Involvement Team who then generated a letter to the child's parents outlining what their child had been up to, the brief circumstances of the incident and any action required.

However the nature of the anti-social behaviour was not recognised under this existing scheme so the parents of children who had been setting fires got the same letter as parents of children who had been drinking in the street for example.

To address this, enquiries were made with the Data Protection Officer as to whether the information contained on the youth referral forms could be passed to the fire service and it was agreed that certain criteria would have to be met first. This criteria included:

- 1) Written consent of a parent/guardian
- 2) A written protocol agreed and signed by a ranking police officer and fire officer
- 3) Records kept by both agencies of the data exchanged
- 4) Written reasons for the passing of the information

These criteria were met, a new protocol was drawn up and signed, and a number of new forms were devised. As a result any pertinent youth referral forms were copied to PC Steve Loughlin who then sent a consent form, SAE, and other paperwork to the parent of the youth concerned.

On receipt of the signed consent form, the details of the incident and the youth concerned were then faxed to the Fire Reduction Team at Burnley for onward transmission to the FACE team. If aged over 12 then the details were passed to the young offender's arson programme.

FACE (Fire Awareness Child Education) has been running for several years. It is a scheme aimed primarily at children aged between four to 12 years who have displayed tendencies towards fire setting, playing with matches or similar inappropriate fire-related activities.

FACE personnel arrange a visit to the child's home with a parent present and deliver an educational package tailored to the child's age and understanding level which can include videos, talking to the child, home safety checks including the fitting of smoke alarms and giving the child some responsibility for the maintenance and checking of these.

The FACE team can also refer the child to other specialised agencies if that child's needs dictate it. The fire service estimate that 95% of youths referred to this system do not come back into contact again for similar behaviour. This is obviously an effective tool in the battle against juvenile arsonists. It quickly became apparent that a number of these interventions were effective.

Whilst carrying out the house to house visits the fire service were approached by householders outside the target area who also requested home safety checks and smoke alarms.

The wardens and CBM became known, recognised and accepted in the Burnley Wood area.

There was a noticeable difference to the area visually once some of the houses had been secured properly and the rear yards started to remain clean.

The entire project was under review constantly as meetings were held every few weeks at the fire station and the lists of tasks that each partner was allocated began to grow shorter.

## **Evaluation of the Intervention**

The responses were evaluated in a number of ways, however the primary objective of the POP had been to reduce arson in Burnley Wood.

At the outset during the period January 2001 to December 2001 the overall figure for all arsons was 241. For the same period in the following 12 months this figure had been reduced to 154. This equates to a total reduction of 87 deliberate fires or a reduction in percentage terms of 36%.

It is difficult to determine the precise reasons for this decline; indeed it is probable that a number of factors have combined rather than any one action by any single agency. However as all the actions described earlier in this report were generated as a result of detailed scanning and analysis, it is firmly believed that the interventions made were fully responsible for the 36% reduction on the previous year's figures.

There were many other successes borne out of this initiative too. Houses have been demolished at a faster pace and those that have needed securing have been done so to a better standard.

Abandoned vehicles are now removed faster than previously.

Following personal visits, 892 homes received fire safety advice and 334 extra homes were fitted with smoke alarms.

Six youths from Burnley Wood were referred to the FACE scheme which is over 27% of Pennine referrals.

Ongoing evaluation of arson shows that the overall trend is still downwards at this time, despite a small blip in March 2003 which can be explained by the unseasonably hot weather which prompted a number of grass fires in the area.

This ongoing evaluation is being carried out by staff from the Fire Reduction Team who are in the best position to assess whether further intervention or re-evaluation is needed or if the reduction is continuing.

Assessment also revealed additional benefits in terms of confidence and satisfaction with the police and other agencies. The wardens and Community Beat Manager became better known, recognised and accepted in the Burnley Wood area.

There was also a noticeable difference to the area visually once some of the houses had been secured properly and the rear yards started to remain clean.