

MERSEYSIDE FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY			
MEETING OF THE:	COMMUNITY SAFETY AND PROTECTION COMMITTEE		
DATE:	30 JANUARY 2025	REPORT NO:	CFO/79/24
PRESENTING OFFICER	CHIEF FIRE OFFICER, PHIL GARRIGAN		
RESPONSIBLE OFFICER:	AREA MANAGER MARK THOMAS	REPORT AUTHOR:	GROUP MANAGER MARK SOPP
OFFICERS CONSULTED:	LINDSAY SCHOFIELD - COMMUNITY SAFETY CO-ORDINATOR JOHN FIELDING – BUSINESS INTELLIGENCE MANAGER STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP TEAM		
TITLE OF REPORT:	BONFIRE REPORT 2024		

APPENDICES:	APPENDIX A	BONFIRE REPORT 2024
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Purpose of Report

- To update Members on the outcomes of the Bonfire period 2024.

Recommendation

- It is recommended that Members;
 - note the content of the report and the commitment and endeavours of Merseyside Fire & Rescue Service in the delivery of the Bonfire Plan through Operation Banger 2024 and;
 - note the increase in incidents this year and the intention of Officers to develop a clear and unambiguous position statement in relation to approved community bonfires (which meet clear safety requirements) and others developed without the appropriate safeguards in place to protect the public.

Introduction and Background

- There has been a significant increase in the number of secondary fires during the reporting period between 19th October and 7th November (which is referred to as the Bonfire Period) despite the response of Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service and partners. During the period, the number of deliberate secondary fire incidents attended by Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service ('MFRS') was 357. This is an increase of 184 incidents (106.4%) on 2023.

Incident	2023	2024	Change	% Change
04 01 Derelict Building	3	3	0	0.0%
04 02 Grassland	8	16	8	100.0%
04 03 Intentional Burning / Bonfire	62	126	64	103.2%
04 04 Outdoor Structure	5	10	5	100.0%
04 05 Refuse Fire	95	202	107	112.6%
04 06 Derelict Vehicle	0	0	0	0.0%
Grand Total	173	357	184	106.4%

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4. MFRS traditionally receive a significant increase in calls for the Service over the Halloween and Bonfire period. In order to limit those demands our annual Bonfire Plan was implemented to help mitigate the number of 999 calls and the overall number of ASB fires MFRS attend.
 5. Given the post-covid relaxing of community restrictions, and in synthesis with cuts in Local Authority funding, there was a notable increase in unregulated, community run, bonfire events.
 6. As a result, the Local Resilience Forum ('LRF') convened a multi-agency exercise to address some of the challenges witnessed over this period. This exercise was attended by Merseyside Police, Merseytravel, MFRS and Local Authority partners with a view to reviewing the previous year and plan for 2024.
 7. On the 4th, 5th and 6th November, MFRS adopted a tolerant approach to bonfires. Bonfires were risk assessed and allowed to continue to burn if the bonfire did not pose a risk to people or property, and there was evidence that the bonfire was being managed safely.
 8. It is, however, the preference of MFRS that bonfires do not form part of the celebrations, given the blight on the environment and the unseen effect of vulnerable members of the community.
 9. The risk to members of the public at such unregulated events also is of growing concern to the Authority, a matter we will be raising with our partners in preparation for the forthcoming bonfire period.
 10. It was noticeable through social-media monitoring, that content-creators and social media platforms were reporting frequently in respect of bonfire sizes. This caused a perceived competitive approach from those organising the larger bonfires. Through the Operation Banger planning process, it should be noted that local communities were engaged with bonfire events, although it was also evident that the same community members raised concerns when more individuals became involved, and the bonfires grew larger.
 11. We are clear that the media influence gave our communities the impression that unregulated bonfires were acceptable and there would be no likelihood of ramifications related to the risks they pose. This is absolutely not the case.
 12. Also noteworthy, social media content shows legitimate businesses dropping useable goods at the sites of the larger bonfires. For example, large goods vehicles were observed dropping 'clean' pallets at sites to add to fuel for bonfires. Other feedback indicates that at certain sites fees were being charged for members of the public to bring large goods such as old beds or sofas to add to the fuel. The Authority will work with its partners to address this unregulated

approach which presents a risk to public safety and the environment.

13. It is the view of the Authority that only events approved by the Safety Advisory Group would be supported, thereby ensuring that suitable safeguards are in place for those involved in the running of the events and those attending.
14. Officers are currently developing an unambiguous policy statement in this regard, which will detail the position of the Authority alongside the expectations we place on both our partner and stakeholders in this regard.
15. However, the wider context will be considered in relation to community impact and reductions in anti-social behaviour in support of well-managed, regulated community bonfire events, subject to the appropriate safeguards in place.
16. Officers are currently working with LRF partners to establish and understand these increases and will engage academic partners to support further evaluation. Whilst it is clear that there has been an exponential rise in bonfire activity, Merseyside Police have reported a 13% downturn in ASB activity for the three key nights in comparison with 2023 activity.
17. This insight will inform the development of the Authority's policy in this regard.
18. Returning to the period itself the Prevention Directorate began planning for the Bonfire period commenced in June 2024.
19. Merseyside Police led Operation Banger, the multi-agency operation which co-ordinates Police, Fire and Local Authority activity over the Halloween and Bonfire period. This included monthly Silver meetings chaired by Merseyside Police at the JCC. The monthly meetings involved all Police Commanders responsible for the implementation of Operation Banger and representatives from MFRS and other agencies.
20. MFRS Corporate Communications Team produced a bespoke Bonfire Communications Strategy which included:
 - A series of infographics carrying unique messages on social media.
 - A series of videos utilising MFRS staff to carry out unique messages around bonfire.
 - Bonfire Leaflets - distributed by MFRS staff and partner agencies.
 - Video animations in relation to the dangers of arson and the impact of ASB in local communities.
 - School presentations for both juniors and Seniors.
21. MFRS staff along with partners visited schools to deliver key messages highlighting the impact of arson and ASB in local communities. MFRS and partners (PCSO's) visited schools and delivered our message to children and young people.

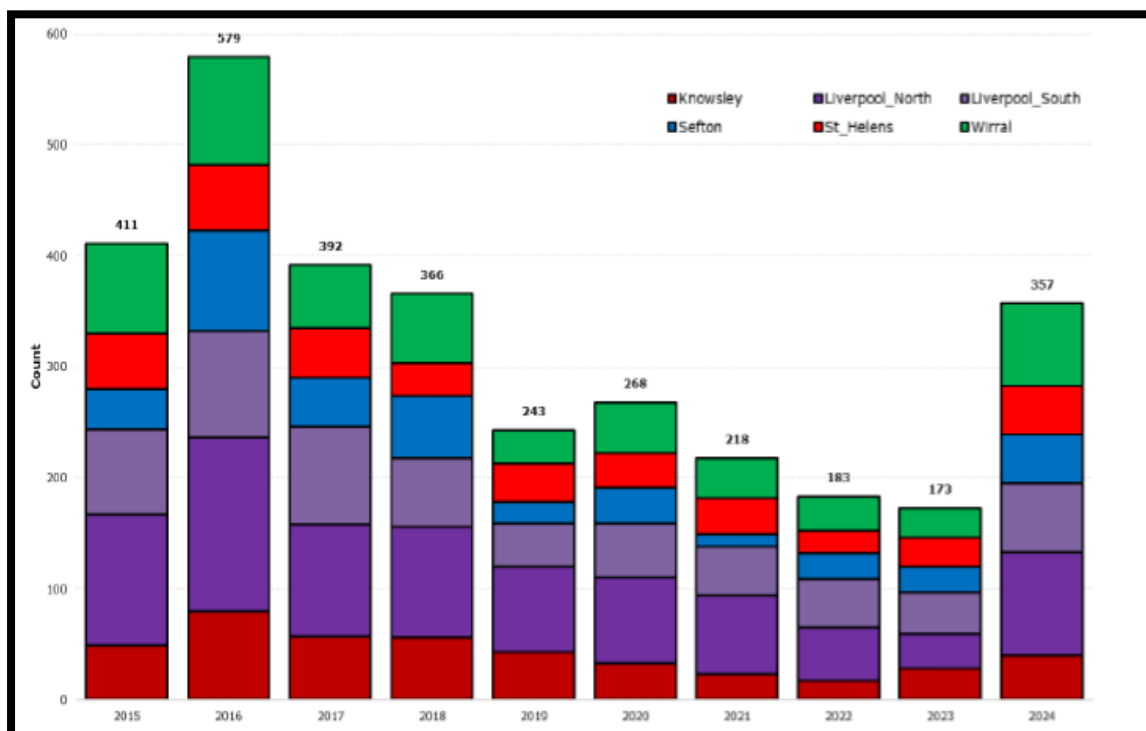
22. Violence at work increased from 4 occurrences in 2023 to 10 instances this year. These occurrences ranged from eggs being thrown at vehicles to fireworks used as a weapon towards firefighters. There was an increase in the volume of 999 calls dealt with by MFRS control room throughout the bonfire period compared to the same period in 2024. This is evidenced in the below table.

5th November ONLY	2023	2024	Difference	Percentage Difference
Total	188	285	97	51.6%

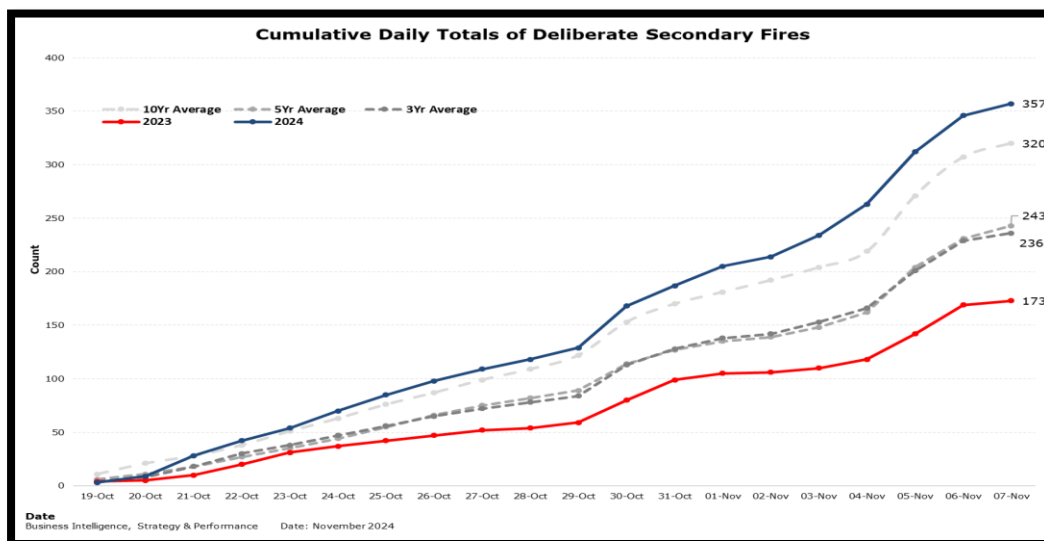
30th October to 5th November	2023	2024	Difference	Percentage Difference
Total	536	723	187	34.9%

19th October to 7th November	2023	2024	Difference	Percentage Difference
Total	1208	1887	679	56.2%

23. The table below identifies that during the 2024 period the number of deliberate secondary fire incidents attended to was 357.



24. The table below provides a cumulative analysis of deliberate secondary fire incidents through the 2024 period, contrasting it with previous years.



25. Despite the increase in incidents MFRS adopted a proactive approach during this year’s Bonfire period and ensured high visibility throughout the recording period. Tactics utilised included:

- MFRS utilised the offer of Probation Service to assist with removing fly tipping
- Fly tipping referrals
- Community risk management routes
- Tipper trucks in each district.

Equality and Diversity Implications

26. The MFRS communications team utilised both organic content and boosted posts for the Halloween and Bonfire social media campaign, with a budget of **£500** (half of the previous year’s budget).
27. During the Halloween and Bonfire period, the MFRS social media content had almost **300,000** impressions (number of unique users who see the content) across Facebook, Instagram, Twitter/X and Nextdoor. MFRS launched their Nextdoor channel during the Halloween and Bonfire period, with over **50,000** users across Merseyside viewing our messages during this time

Staff Implications

28. A number of directorates and departments contributed significantly during the bonfire period.
29. The Liverpool, Knowsley, Sefton, St Helens and Wirral Street Intervention Teams (SIT) worked throughout the reporting period in high demand areas to engage with young people and local communities about the associated dangers of the period.

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30. The Operational Support Room was utilised to support co-ordination of prevention staff completing high visible presence and Street Intervention Teams.

Training Implications

31. To satisfy the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974, all staff during the tipper tucks have received a driver validation by the Driving School and all staff on the tipper trucks are manual handling trained.

Legal Implications

32. Under the Explosives Regulations 2014 and the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974, Protection Officers visited retailers storing fireworks for sale to ensure compliance with legislation.

Financial Implications & Value for Money

33. All costs for delivering the bonfire plan were sourced from planned budgets or supported by external partners.

Risk Management and Health & Safety Implications

34. In considering the risk management implications for staff operating within Merseyside during key nights, a decision was made to utilise the Operational Support Room.

Environmental Implications

35. In order to reduce the impact and noticeable increase of fly tipping, tipper trucks operated pre bonfire to remove hazardous waste or combustible materials to minimise the impact on the environment and the safety of MFRS staff.
36. A post Bonfire night sweep took place on the 6th November. This involved fire crews patrolling their station areas in order to extinguish smouldering bonfires in known fire locations. Appliances remained available for redirection by Fire Control.

Contribution to Our Vision: *To be the best Fire and Rescue Service in the UK*

Our Purpose: *Here to Serve, Here to Protect, Here to Keep you Safe*

37. Effective joint working with our partners from the Police, Housing Associations and Local Authority ensures the highest quality operational response is delivered to Merseyside residents.
38. The delivery of the Bonfire Plan aims to limit and reduce the threat of the number of Anti-Social Behaviour incidents and deliberate fires across Merseyside.
39. Its aim is to reduce the risk of attacks on firefighters through education and

engagement. It also promotes key safety messages to allow the public to have a safe Halloween and bonfire period free from harm and injury.

40. MFRS maintained its attendance standard to life risk incidents throughout the bonfire period.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

NONE

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

IIT	Incident Investigation Team
JCC	Joint Control Centre
MFRA	Merseyside Fire & Rescue Authority
MFRS	Merseyside Fire & Rescue Service
OIC	Officer in Charge
OSR	Operational Support Room
SHQ	Service Head Quarters
SIT	Street Intervention Teams