



Crime Reduction & Community Safety Group

Tilley Awards 2007

Application form

Please ensure that you have read the guidance before completing this form. ***By making an application to the awards, entrants are agreeing to abide by the conditions laid out in the guidance.*** Please complete the following form in full, within the stated word limit and ensuring the file size is no more than 1MB. Failure to do so will result in your entry being rejected from the competition.

Completed application forms should be e-mailed to tilleyawards07@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk.

All entries must be received by noon on **Friday 27th April 2007**. No entries will be accepted after this time/date. Any queries on the application process should be directed to Alex Blackwell on 0207 035 4811. Any queries regarding publicity of the awards should be directed to Chaz Akoshile on 0207 035 1589.

Section 1: Details of application

Title of the project: **Arson of Rubbish Bins in Armfield Crescent, Mitcham**

Name of borough/agency/CDRP: Merton

Name of one contact person with position/rank (this should be one of the authors): Chris Williams

Email address: chris.williams@merton.gov.uk

Full postal address: 3rd Floor Athena House, 86-88 London Road, Morden, Surrey SM4 5AZ

Telephone number: 020 8545 3623

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Name of Borough Commander: Chief Superintendent Michael Wood

Full address of Borough Commander: Wimbledon Police Station,
15 Queens Road,
Wimbledon,
London.
SW19 8NN

Name of endorsing senior representatives(s): Supt. Graeme Thomson

Name of organisation, position and/or rank of endorsing senior representatives(s):
Metropolitan Police Service, Community and Partnerships Superintendent

Full address of endorsing senior representatives(s):

Wimbledon Police Station,
15 Queens Road,
Wimbledon,
London.
SW19 8NN

Please tick box to indicate that all organisations involved in the project have been notified of this entry (this is to prevent duplicate entries of the same project):



Section 2: Summary of application

Problem

Figges Marsh Safer Neighbourhood team (SNT) initiated a problem solving process in response to complaints by residents of anti-social behaviour by groups of young people congregating outside Armfield Crescent, particularly Mainwaring Court. Simultaneously, data provided by the London Fire Brigade (LFB), when analysed, revealed a series of fires in the communal bins unrecorded in police data.

A separate problem-solving process was started to deal with the arson problem. The MPS had two reports for arson at Mainwaring Court compared with 29-logged LFB call outs. It appeared that the 2003 Memorandum of Understanding between the two agencies had not been actioned, so the SNT – who were already dealing with ASB in the area – had no idea of the scale of the problem of arson. The defined aim:

- To reduce the number of reports of arsons in the bins on Mainwaring Court to LFB by 10% by November 2006.

Research/Analysis

- 17% (57 fires) of all non-accidental fires in Merton in 2005 occurred in Figge's Marsh over this time period.
- 47% (27 fires) were from bins
- 72% (19 fires) of bin arsons were in the area behind the flats on Armfield Crescent.
- Of the four blocks of flats that make up Armfield Crescent, Mainwaring Crescent made up 47% (9 fires) of the incidents.
- Using the Home Office Cost of Fire figures, £47,850 worth of damage was caused in Armfield Crescent in the first nine months of 2005.

Response

- Improved usage of FS/FIT/1 form between MPS and LFB
- Appointed Borough Arson Liaison Officers in MPS and Local Authority
- Created a new reporting system for caretakers and neighbourhood wardens to improve reporting of arson or fire damage
- Used diaries to gather community intelligence on perpetrators
- Targeted local individuals known for arson
- Joint agency patrols of hotspots
- Educated residents to make sure the doors to the bin enclosures were locked
- Used rapid response arson boards and leaflets around the fires' locations
- Diversionsary schemes offered to known firesetters in the area

Assessment

- Between April 1 – Dec 31 2005, there were 29 arsons in Armfield Crescent
- Between April 1st - 16 November 2006, there were two incidents.
- LFB staff confirmed that the FS/FIT/1 form is now being fully utilised. The margin of error between the LFB recorded deliberate fires and MPS arsons across the borough has fallen by 82%

3. Description of project

The project commenced in December 2005.

A Joint Tasking Group meeting was held on 7 December 2005 in order to involve partners in the problem solving process.

Partners involved included:

London Borough of Merton:

Anti-Social Behaviour Team

Safer Merton, Merton's Crime & Disorder Reduction Partnership

Housing

Youth Offending Service

Graffiti Team

Street Management

Neighbourhood Wardens

CCTV

London Fire Brigade:

Merton Borough

Arson Task Force

Metropolitan Police:

Figge's Marsh Safer Neighbourhood Team

ASB Unit

As well as these partners, a specialist problem-solving partnership group was created. This consisted of representatives from the police ward team, the Arson Task Force, Housing and the Neighbourhood Wardens.

The group quickly established that community intelligence indicated that the fires were largely the handiwork of one individual. Groups of teenage males were gathering in the closed-off areas around the bins to smoke and it seemed that at least one of these individuals was in the habit of setting the bins on fire as he left.

Further issues came around the reporting of fires. There was an enormous disparity between the fires reported by the police, the LFB, Housing and the Wardens. Each dataset had different amounts of fires recorded, with a maximum of 29 deliberate fires recorded by the LFB, and 2 incidents of arson recorded by the MPS over the same time period, with the Housing and Warden data occupying points in between.

There especially seemed to be an issue around the use of the FS/FIT/1 form. This form is designed to be used by LFB officers to report a suspicious fire, and as such is dropped off at the front desk of the local police station following an incident. However, it appeared that due to a lack of training for desk officers at the stations, the FS/FIT/1 forms were rarely actioned, and resultantly the LFB officers had begun to neglect to submit them; hence the disparity in reported offences between the agencies. Whilst a Memorandum of Understanding between the MPS and the LFB was drawn up in 2003, few officers in the MPS seemed to be aware of its existence and even less had implemented its recommendations.

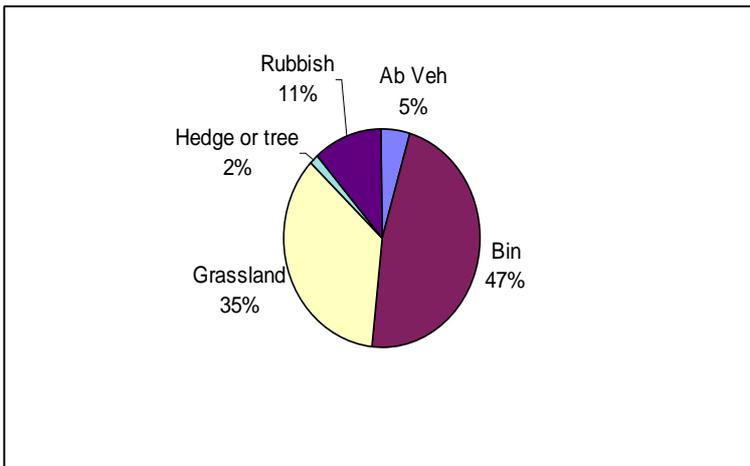
Equally, it was discovered that reports made by Neighbourhood Wardens to Housing about bin fires (and, indeed, many other incidents) were being sent to an email inbox that was no longer being checked. This meant that not only were Housing unaware of the scale of the problem, but were not passing information on to the LFB either.

The aim therefore became twofold – firstly, to reduce the numbers of deliberate fires in bins in Armfield Crescent; and secondly, to improve the reporting structures between the interested agencies. Ideally success in the latter would lead to success in the former. One might see an increase in reports initially; but this would quickly lead to a large decrease once data and intelligence were shared and used wisely to challenge offending.

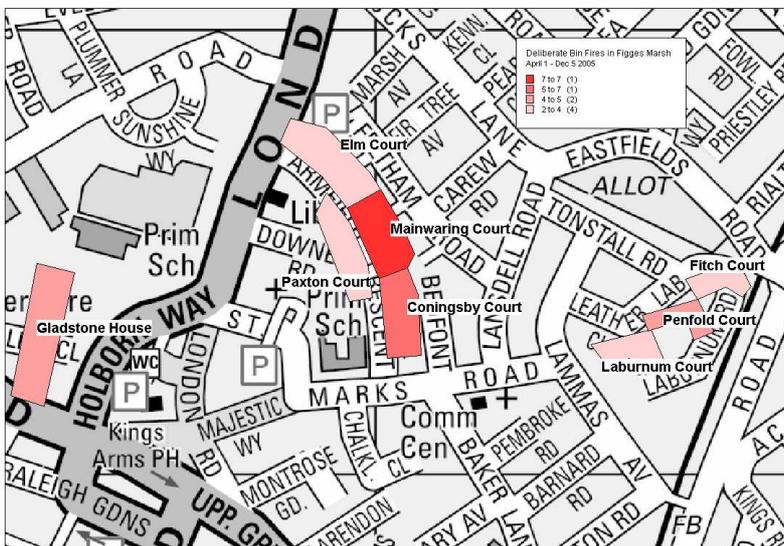
Analysis

Of the data collected by the LFB,

- 17% (57 fires) of all non-accidental fires in Merton in 2005 occurred in Figge's Marsh (the ward containing Armfield Crescent) over this time period.
- 47% (27 fires) were from bins set on fire
- 72% (19 fires) of bin arsons were in the common land behind the flats on Armfield Crescent.
- Of the four blocks of flats that make up Armfield Crescent, Mainwaring Crescent made up 47% (9 fires) of the incidents.
- Using the Home Office Cost of Fire figures, £47,850 worth of damage and costs were caused in Armfield Crescent in the first nine months of 2005.

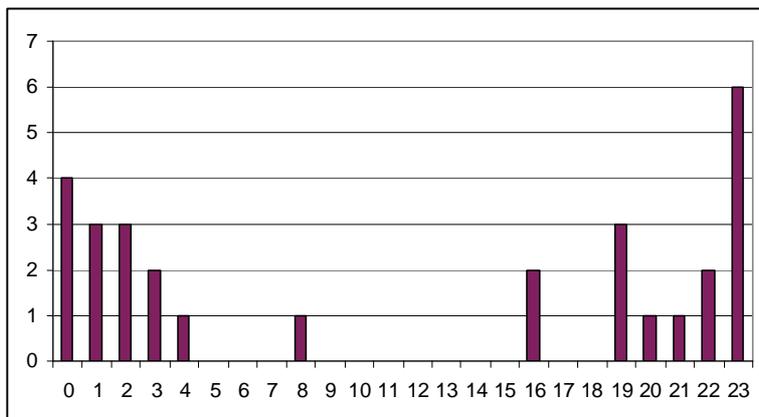


Types of fire in Figge's Marsh 2005



Location of deliberate bin fires in Figge's Marsh, Apr-Dec 2005.

Time of bin fires in Armfield Crescent



93% (24 fires) of the bin fires occurred in the hours of darkness, and 48% (14 fires) occurred on a Saturday or a Sunday. The bin themselves were of the "Eurobin" class, and in each incident investigated incendiary material was lit before being placed into the bin (as opposed to being lit in the building then sent down the chute). A number of individuals had already been identified as being involved with ASB in the Armfield Crescent area, and further intelligence gathering revealed one particular individual who was repeatedly named as being involved with firesetting.

Response

In the first instance the initial concern was to rebuild the lines of communication between the police and the LFB. By interviewing members of the local fire team we were able to determine that they had ceased to deliver form FS/FIT/1, which is the agreed liaison form between the two agencies, as they felt that desk officers did not know what to do with the form and it was not being passed on. Resultantly, training was given to desk staff, special "FS/FIT/1" trays were installed at all police front desks, and a Borough Arson Liaison Officer was appointed at Detective Inspector level.

The Arson Task Force member for Merton ran a special training session of the Joint Tasking Group to ensure MPS officers of Superintendent and Sector Inspector level were *au fait* with the Memorandum of Understanding and could cascade learning throughout the borough.

On the Local Authority side, the Neighbourhood Wardens and Housing had discovered that warden reports requesting action from Housing were being sent to an unchecked inbox. This meant that Housing were unaware of the majority of the fires, and as the Wardens were relying on Housing to pass the information on to the LFB and the MPS, then these were going unreported too. The communication issue was quickly reorganised and greatly improved. In addition, the Armfield Crescent warden co-located with the caretakers, which meant that lines of communication were enhanced.

A problem-solving meeting between Housing, Wardens, LFB and MPS was able to define a protocol for the reporting lines of suspected arson incidents.

With regard to the fires themselves, the Arson Task Force erected Yellow Boards asking for witnesses and information following each fire, and also leafleted the blocks with "Don't Fuel the Flames" leaflets in order to educate the residents in not leaving potentially flammable material around. From this campaign they received information that tallied with intelligence gathered separately by the Warden and the Safer Neighbourhood team regarding the involvement of one particular individual in the arsons.

From all this activity, one individual was identified as being particularly responsible. They were firstly issued with an anti-social behaviour-warning letter by Housing, and then arrested for arson. However, due to the difficulty in presenting evidence related to arsons, the CPS felt there was not enough material evidence to proceed with a prosecution.

Following this, the decision was taken to try and engage the young person in diversionary activity. A place was found for him on the LIFE project, a five-day youth engagement project working with young people at risk of offending to build up self esteem. Unfortunately the young man turned this down, however he did accept a place on the Junior Fire Setters Intervention scheme (JFIS), a project aimed at young people known to be involved in Arson. Additionally, As the problem was based around the accumulation of flammable material in unsecured bins, the LFB requested to

LBM Waste Services that the collection times could be moved to a Friday, thus making the likelihood of potential fuels lessen. This was taken on board and collection times were altered in the light of this request.

The Safer Neighbourhood team and Neighbourhood Warden used the results of data analysis produced in the CDRP to organise joint patrolling of hotspot areas at hotspot times. In addition, late-night response teams were asked to check the bin areas between 0100 and 0300 on Saturday nights/Sunday mornings.

Suggestions to close off the enclosures containing the bins were quickly dismissed by the residents. This was a disappointing response given the potential seriousness of a fire getting out of control.

Safer Merton's Anti-Social Behaviour team provided diaries for residents living in the worst affected block to record times and details of any disturbances, as it was felt likely that these individuals identified would be part of the group responsible for the arsons.

From all this activity, one individual was identified as being particularly responsible. They were firstly issued with an anti-social behaviour-warning letter by Housing, and then arrested for arson. However, due to the difficulty in presenting evidence related to arsons, the Crown Prosecution Service felt there was not enough material evidence to proceed with a prosecution.

Following this, the decision was taken to try and engage the young person in diversionary activity. A place was found for him on the LIFE project, a five-day youth engagement project working with young people at risk of offending to build up self esteem. Unfortunately the young man turned this down, however he did accept a place on the Junior Fire Setters Intervention scheme (JFIS), a project aimed at young people known to be involved in Arson. Additionally, the Neighbourhood Warden was able to develop a daily relationship with the young man, and work closely with him to attempt to give him mentoring and a positive male role model.

Evaluation

Between 1 April and 7 December 2005 there were 29 bin fires in the Armfield Crescent area; between 1 April and 16 November 2006 there were two, a 93% reduction.

Apart from the great success in ending the fires – and saving an estimated £40,000 in doing so – perhaps the key achievement of the process was in developing the implementation of the 2003 Memorandum of Understanding between the LFB and the MPS in Merton. This has ensured that the discrepancy between fires reported to the LFB and those reported to the MPS has significantly altered – the margin of error is down to around 8% from around 90% in 2005, an 82% reduction.

In terms of evaluating some of the responses, the local publicity campaign (boards and leaflets) was excellent in terms of gathering community intelligence, as were the disorder diaries; it was these that led to the identification of the prime suspect. However, in terms of changing the behaviour of the residents in terms of their propensity towards leaving possible fuels lying around, the leaflets seemed to have negligible effect on people's behaviour – materials were still left lying around and there was real resistance to denying total access to the bin blocks. Instead, ongoing work between the Housing Officers, the caretakers and the wardens to educate the residents in the danger of leaving fuel around seems to be having an impact, and recent site visits have seen a reduction in possible fuel stuffs left by the bins.

Much more success was garnered by the close working relationship between the MPS and the local council's Street Management department. The Joint Agency Group is chaired by the Head of Street Management and this close relationship easily enabled the MPS's request for the change in collection times to be actioned. This change made sure that the availability of fuel was at a minimum at the key hotspot time of Saturday night.

The joint patrols were never able to actually catch anyone in the act of firesetting, however it is likely that the likely perpetrators consequently altered their behaviour given their presence.

Perhaps the most effective responses were those targeted at the key individual suspected of being involved. The ad hoc mentoring supplied by the Neighbourhood Warden appeared to be the key to the whole project; the warden was able to provide a positive role model for the young man, and although he refused his place on the flagship LIFE project, he did participate in the Junior Firesetter's Course. It seems likely that these targeted diversionary projects were the key to the success of the whole process; the young man in question was something of a ringleader amongst his associates, and even if he were only personally responsible for a fraction of the fires there was a diffusion of benefits amongst his peer group, as his influence permeated across their social network boundaries.

Since the end of the problem solving process the positive effects have continued – there was only been one bin fire between November 2006 and April 2007.

In conclusion, whilst the project achieved what it set out to do – namely, to reduce bin fires – with great success, the real success of the project was in repairing the relationship locally between the frontline officers of the LFB and the MPS, and ensuring the Memorandum of Understanding and form FS/FIT/1 is fully implemented across the borough.

Section 4: Endorsement by Senior Representative

I hereby express my endorsement for the submission of this project to the Tilley Awards, which is supported by the wider partnership as an example of effective problem solving. This has been an excellent piece of work, with full support from a range of partners, and has been supervised through Merton's multi-agency Joint Tasking Group, who have also helped fund several of the initiatives. This submission is not subject to any data sharing restrictions.

Supt. Graeme Thomson, Metropolitan Police Service, Community and Partnerships Superintendent.

Checklist for Applicants:

1. Have you read the process and application form guidance?
2. Have you completed all four sections of the application form in full including the endorsement from a senior representative?
3. Have you checked that your entry addresses all aspects of the judging criteria?
4. Have you advised all partner agencies that you are submitting an entry for your project?
5. Have you adhered to the formatting requirements within the guidance?
6. Have you checked whether there are any reasons why your project should **not** be publicised to other police forces, partner agencies and the general public?
7. Have you saved you application form as a PDF attachment and entitled your message 'Entry for Tilley Awards 2007' before emailing it?

Once you are satisfied that you have completed your application form in full please email it to Tilleyawards07@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk. Two hard copies must also be posted to Alex Blackwell at Home Office, Effective Practice, Support & Communications Team, 6th Floor, Peel Building (SE Quarter), 2 Marsham Street, London, SW1P 4DF.