

GREATER MANCHESTER FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE



ALARM Award Submission 2007

Category: OPERATIONAL



PREVENTING PROTECTING RESPONDING

Executive Summary

Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service (GMFRS) has for many years had a comprehensive reporting system to record attacks on firefighters (reviewed and updated following the Oldham riots in 2001). However, there has been an alarming increase in the number and severity of attacks in recent years and so monitoring and reporting has become increasingly important.

Following an attack in April 2005, we wanted to highlight the scope of the issue and so began to compile evidence and statistics to demonstrate the extent of the attacks in Greater Manchester. We also enlisted central agencies such as The National Chief Fire Officers Association (CFOA) and the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) to establish the scale of the problem nationwide and to give their support. We urged each Fire and Rescue Service to highlight the problem locally, through the media and through lobbying their local MPs.

In an effort to combat the issue we spearheaded a joint campaign involving the Manchester Evening News (MEN), the Local Government Association (LGA), Chairs of Fire Authorities from all over the country and CFOA. Our objective was to make it an offence to attack or obstruct a firefighter whilst carrying out their duties. To ensure we were successful in our endeavour, we had to highlight the increasing number of attacks on firefighters and bring it to the attention of the public and in particular, central and local government.

We identified that Swansea MP Alan Williams was intending to put forward a Private Members Bill calling for specific legislation to be introduced in England to protect Emergency Workers, as already existed in Scotland. We made contact with Mr Williams and worked closely with him on the Bill.

Significant work was done by our Borough Commands to highlight the problem of attacks and we started to ask the communities for help, so whenever attacks took place we wrote to residents and businesses in the locality asking for witnesses to come forward. We also trialled CCTV cameras on fire engines that operated in known attack "hot spots" which led to the arrest and subsequent prosecution of an offender in Rochdale, which was widely publicised in the media.

As a result of the high profile campaign, Ministers made a commitment to support a specific offence, in addition to introducing a number of other non-legislative measures. The Emergency Workers (Obstruction) Act 2006 subsequently came into force in February 2006.

Main Submission - A Clear Need

The issue of attacks on firefighters is not new but awareness of just how serious these attacks are was highlighted following an attack on an operational crew in Eccles, on Good Friday in 2005, which left two firefighters requiring hospital treatment. The attacks attracted considerable media attention due to their severity and sadly, were followed by a number of copy-cat attacks over the next two weekends both in Greater Manchester and elsewhere in the country.

In a MEN news article, Barry Dixon, County Fire Officer (CFO) said, "I believe that sooner or later one of our firefighters will be seriously injured or killed because of attacks on crews."

The CFOA Operations Committee raised concerns that the under-reporting of incidents on a national basis was significantly underestimating the situation and that the number of attacks could be as much as three times higher. The level of under-reporting was highlighted by official data from DCLG (Department for Communities and Local Government), which indicated that there were only nine attacks in the whole of Greater Manchester in the nine months to the end of January 2005. However, our own figures showed attacks running at around 200 per year and even this was considered to be an understatement due to non-reporting by victims.

In 2006 we reported 248 attacks on firefighters.

The Report by the Labour Research Department for the Fire Brigades Union in April 2005 recognised that fires were being deliberately started in order to lure fire crews into pre-planned ambushes and stated that although actual physical violence did not always occur, fire crews were still facing threats, intimidation and abuse.

In September 2005 the Government introduced a 'Respect' Task Force to drive forward its Respect agenda which tackles anti-social behaviour and its causes. One of the key objectives of the Respect agenda is, "Encouraging respect for public servants and services including teachers and schools, health and emergency services and the Police." The Task Force is responsible for co-ordinating production of a national action plan on Respect and its delivery.

Main Submission - Our Approach

In 2004, we shared our attacks reporting system with Her Majesty's Fire Service Inspectorate (HMFSI) and subsequently, in February 2005, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM - now known as DCLG) issued a Fire and Rescue Service Circular 5-2005 which detailed revised arrangements for reporting attacks on firefighters and civil disturbances "to allow ODPM to collect

meaningful statistics” and make it easier for Fire and Rescue Services to report such incidents. We report monthly statistics to DCLG relating to attacks on firefighters.

Following the Good Friday attacks in 2005 we teamed up with MEN and local MPs in a bid to gain greater protection for our firefighters through the introduction of specific legislation that would lead to stiff penalties for anyone found guilty of attacking or obstructing a firefighter carrying out their duties. It soon became apparent that the campaign needed to be widened to include all emergency service workers and this growing support helped us to increase the pressure on government to act to protect our front line workers.

Gaining political support for the campaign was a crucial part of the work carried out. We had identified that Swansea MP Alan Williams was intending to put forward a Private Members Bill so CFO Dixon made contact with Mr Williams and we began to work closely with him on the Bill. Regular meetings were held with Alan Williams MP over many months, during which time the CFO worked with CFOA, who developed a work stream to look at the issue in depth. In addition to our contact with Mr Williams, letters were sent to all Greater Manchester MPs outlining our concerns about the increase in the number of hostile acts towards firefighters and seeking their support in bringing a national focus to the issue. We kept the MPs up-to-date on the levels of attacks throughout the campaign and contact was made with the relevant departments in the Home Office and the DCLG. As a result of our efforts The Emergency Workers (Obstruction) Act 2006 was enforced in February 2006.

In November 2005 a successful pilot scheme was held in Rochdale, Salford and Bolton, where CCTV cameras were fitted on five fire engines. This led to a 15 year old boy being given a 12 month supervision order after pleading guilty to threatening behaviour. In February 2006, the teenager was caught on camera after he prised open the door of a fire engine whilst its crew were dealing with a car blaze and punched the driver. As a result, the decision was made to install CCTV cameras on all of our appliances. The Boroughs worked hard to secure financial support through their local Crime and Disorder Partnerships to fund the initiative and all fire engines will now have high quality, fixed mounted cameras which will record digital images of all sides of the vehicle. They will be switched on at all times and used to capture images of would-be attackers. Any footage captured will be downloaded from the camera’s hard drive and passed to the police to assist in the prosecution of offenders.

Tackling the problem of attacks on firefighters is not just about penalising offenders, it’s also about preventing incidents from occurring by raising awareness and educating those involved. We already run a wide range of youth schemes aimed at offenders or those likely to offend, to help them turn their lives around. All referrals for the schemes come from agencies such as the Youth Offending Teams and are part of a wider youth engagement programme to engage young people.

The programme gives young people a better understanding of the work of the fire service and seeks to reduce antisocial behaviour including attacks on fire fighters.

Internally, comprehensive new operational guidance was issued to all firefighters that embraced all aspects of civil unrest and included intelligence gathering by Control, Inter Agency Liaison Officers and local knowledge. Guidance was reissued to crews about the importance of reporting attacks to enable liaison with the police. In April 2006, an Attacks Task Group was established to ensure a holistic, joined up approach throughout GMFRS for dealing with the issue.

It was important to maintain a high media profile and in this respect we received a commitment from the MEN to continue the 'Protect our Heroes' campaign. We participated in the Trevor McDonald 'Tonight' programme on ITV and the Jeremy Vine Radio 2 programme and ensured all local media were kept up to date on developments as well as promoting our youth schemes and their benefits in reducing attacks.

Everyone involved in the campaign worked hard to secure some fantastic outcomes which included:

- the commitment to the introduction of the Emergency Workers (Protection) Act;
- the introduction of a number of non-legislative measures – a number relating to youth schemes;
- placing GMFRS as the leader on the issue; and
- a significant increase in profile and the development of our political contacts.

The campaign was even praised in the House of Commons, but perhaps most importantly for GMFRS it has produced an outcome that should ensure the safety and protection of all front line emergency workers when carrying out their daily duties of protecting communities and saving lives.

Main Submission - Innovation

In addition to all the initiatives detailed in 'Our Approach' we have now introduced hostilities training; a training programme that will be given initially to all operational crews and flexi-duty officers.

The training, which is the first of its kind to be delivered to a Fire and Rescue Service in the UK, will help firefighters learn how to deal with any hostilities they encounter whilst going about their normal operational duties. The training is being delivered by highly experienced Police Officers from Greater Manchester Police's (GMP) Public Order Unit and has been designed in partnership with

GMFRS, so that it is completely tailored to our needs. The training is not self defence or riot training but it will equip firefighters with a wide range of skills, should they encounter any hostilities. The course content is a mixture of classroom and practical scenarios and includes:

- Legal Awareness – understanding about work related violence, general lawful powers and identification of offences.
- Gathering Evidence – identifying those involved, understanding what it is the Police need to enable a prosecution to take place.
- Conflict Management – methods of dealing with hostilities and avoidance techniques.
- Scenario Role Play – role playing some of the situations they may encounter for example, theft of equipment from the appliance or attempting to obstruct crews, actions to be taken in the event of missiles being thrown.

A pilot of the training was run in 2006 and feedback from the crews involved was overwhelmingly positive.

Main Submission - Who Helped

Alan Williams MP

Local MPs

Local and National Media

Members of the public in Greater Manchester

Main Submission - Schedule of Evidence

'Protect our heroes' campaign praised in the House of Commons

Firefly Award

Emergency Workers (Obstruction) Act 2006

Fire Services Forum 16 September 2005 Item 3 – Hostilities towards fire fighters

ITVs Tonight with Trevor McDonald (Attacks on firefighters)

Jeremy Vine Radio 2 interview

Bonfire season poster campaign "If you stop us doing our job, you put your family in danger"

Attacks Task Group – Action Summary

Attacks Task Group - Outline Strategy

Letters of support from Local MPs

ODPM - Fire and Rescue Service Circular 5-2005