ARSON CONTROL FORUM

Evaluation of the Arson Control Forum Implementation Fund: Emerging Findings

Foreword

Arson is still the largest single cause of major fires in the UK and costs the economy around £2.8 billion per year. The human cost is equally high with over a thousand deaths and some 27,000 injuries resulting from deliberate firesetting in the last decade. It follows therefore that the control of arson must be a key element of the Government's strategy to make our communities safer.

Since its inception in April 2001, the Arson Control Forum has invested over £11.3 million in local arson reduction schemes, firstly in piloting local projects to see what works on the ground and then by rolling these out nationally as good practice. The common theme of many of the successful projects is the use of the framework provided by crime and disorder legislation to foster strong multi-agency links, often involving local authorities, the police and fire and rescue services and other key stakeholders such as the insurance industry.

This Bulletin provides an overview of some of the emerging findings from the second phase of the Forum's investment programme, the Implementation Fund. It highlights how the context within which arson reduction projects are undertaken has changed since the evaluation of the Forum's pioneering New Projects Initiative. In particular, the ramifications of effective partnership working can be widely seen and this has been a positive development. Working together more closely has enabled a greater degree of strategic working and assisted in increasing the total amount of effective arson prevention work that has been undertaken.

I welcome this report and commend it to all those who have an interest in reducing deliberate fires.

JIM FITZPATRICK MP
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State
Office of the Deputy Prime Minister

Introduction

This research bulletin outlines the initial findings of the evaluation of the Arson Control Forum's Implementation Fund, based on fieldwork conducted between April and December 2005.[1]

The Implementation Fund was designed to consolidate findings from an evaluation of an earlier arson reduction programme (the Arson Control Forum's New Projects Initiative), by funding a small number of approaches that had been shown to be cost-effective. The Implementation Fund consequently invested over £9 million in 66 projects that aimed to reduce arson between April 2003 and March 2006. Of these, 30 were selected for evaluation. This included an examination of the process of implementation, the impact of various interventions on deliberate fires and the cost effectiveness of the programme.

Developments from the New Projects Initiative

The Implementation Fund differs from the New Projects Initiative (NPI) in a number of respects. The concentration of funding on specific types of projects that had been shown to work is reflected in the relatively narrow range of project types included in the 30 being evaluated. As Figure 1 shows, 24 (80%) of the evaluated projects were either Arson Task Forces or Vehicle Removal Schemes.

Although narrowly focused on a small number of generic types of project, these projects included a wide range of different interventions. By September 2005, the 30 evaluated projects had implemented a total of 346 interventions, averaging 12 interventions per project. Included in this number were 42 different kinds of intervention. Closer partnership working (26 projects), removal of abandoned/untaxed/burnt out vehicles (25 projects) leafleting campaigns (17 projects) and delivering arson information to children in schools (17 projects) were among the most common.

Partnership working

A common theme among the projects was the high number that were specifically working closer with other partner organisations. Although the NPI also highlighted a high proportion of projects that involved partnership working[2], the nature of that partnership work would appear to be qualitatively different in the Implementation Fund projects. The Fire and Rescue Service would appear to have become a more central player in community safety activity than it was three years ago, partly due to the recent fire service reforms (that have increased focus on Community Fire Safety) and partly as a result of becoming one of the statutory Responsible Authorities on local Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships (CDRPs), as set out in s97 of the Police Reform Act (2002).

Figure 1: Type of projects included in the ACF Implementation fund evaluation

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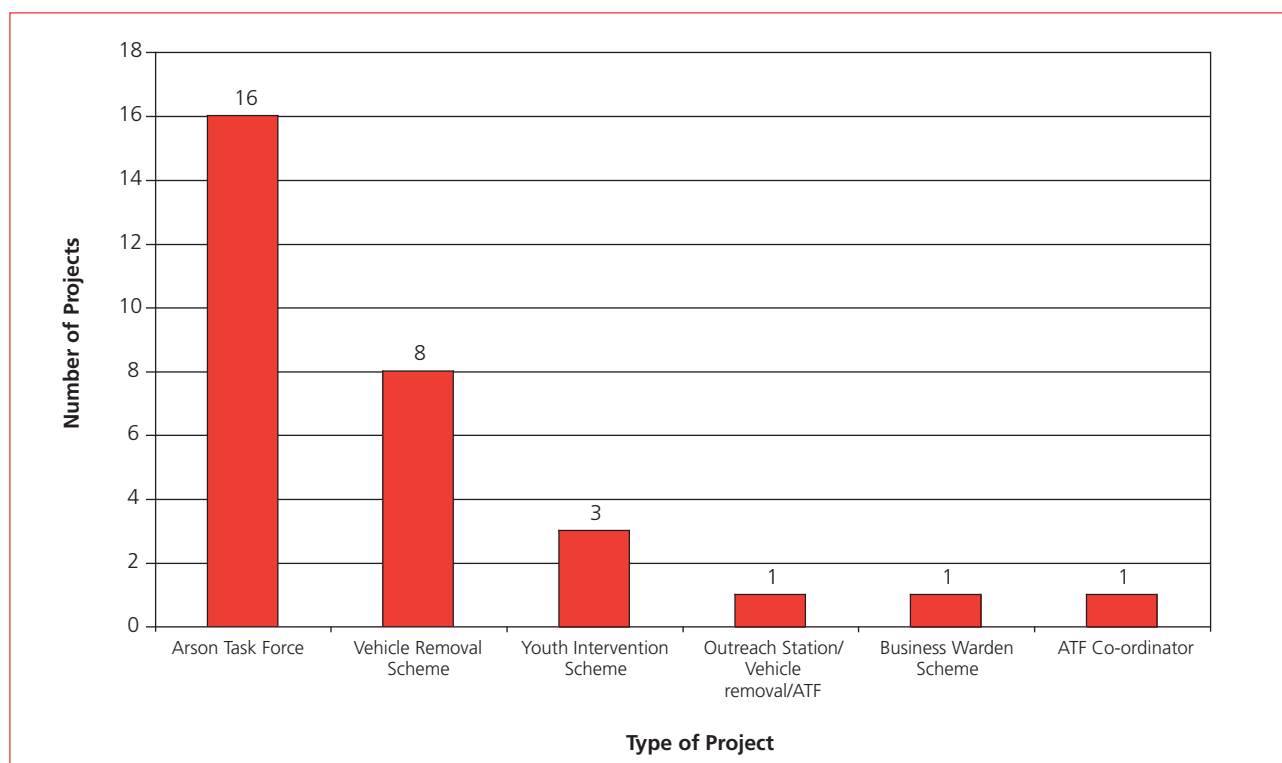
1   The Implementation fund is being externally evaluated by Evidence Led Solutions, Morgan Harris Burrows and CRG.

2   Indeed, 31 (100%) of the New Projects Initiative projects were identified to include closer working with other organisations, compared to 26 (87%) of the Implementation Fund projects.

This improved partnership working has taken many different forms and a number of general themes have been observed. These include:

1. **Increased secondment of staff from partner organisations:** Many of the Arson Task Forces seconded staff from other organisations – especially the police – and this has helped to break down the cultural barriers between the organisations.

2. **Data Sharing:** The increased liaison between the fire and rescue service and the police has also been beneficial for gaining access to police data systems that hold information (in particular) on abandoned vehicles and other incidents that may be of interest to the Arson Task Force.

3. **Implementation of interventions involving a variety of agencies:** One implication of the improved partnership working has been that many of the interventions that are being implemented rely on a number of partners to participate. Indeed, without the involvement of partners, many of the interventions could not be implemented or would be less effective. For example, in South Yorkshire, the Sheffield City CDRP undertook Operation Dust-Up, which implemented a range of situational crime prevention measures to reduce the risk of arson in a particular part of the city. In West Yorkshire, the Arson Task Force (ATF) is a key partner in police led multi-agency operations, which are estimated to take 40% of the ATF's time. In Avon, Luton and South Bedfordshire and Manchester and Salford, Nottinghamshire and West Midlands environmental 'clean-up' interventions involve regular multi-partner activities. In these kinds of interventions, the input of the Fire and Rescue Service is predominantly providing a facilitating, or catalyst role in taking the activity forward. This will include identifying or promoting the existence of a problem, bringing partners together and co-ordinating a response to the problem. In many instances, the actual work associated with resolving the problem on the ground will be the responsibility of other partners. For example, 'clean-up' style interventions, may rely on (among others) Local Authority Environmental Services departments to remove refuse/abandoned

vehicles, the Police to enforce the laws on abandoned vehicles, DVLA to address untaxed vehicles and Registered Social Landlords to enforce tenancy agreements where hazardous levels of refuse have built-up on a tenant's property.

4. **Spreading resources:** By working in partnership with others on a more routine basis, projects have been able to spread their resources more widely and engage in a wider range of activities. Indeed, one consequence of the shift towards a facilitation role has been an increase in the number of interventions undertaken. In the NPI, an average of nine interventions were undertaken by each project. In the Implementation Fund, this has increased to 12 interventions per project.

5. **Willingness of partners to fund activities:** This increase in the number of interventions undertaken is also partly a result of the increased willingness of partners to fund arson reduction initiatives. Brown et al (2004) highlighted the difficulties that some projects funded under the NPI experienced in convincing partners that arson should be a priority. This in turn affected those partners willingness to invest in arson reduction activities. By contrast, projects funded under the Implementation Fund would appear to have been more successful at levering in cash from partners. For example, Basingstoke and Deane CDRP received £36,200 from the ACF and has matched this with funding and other resources totalling over £300,000 per annum to tackle the local arson problem. In Tyne and Wear, Northumbria Police provided 50% matched funding for a problem solving approach to arson investigation. Furthermore, in Stockton on Tees, an additional £130,000 per annum was secured from the Police, the Council and the Fire and Rescue Service to fund arson reduction activity.

Styles of implementation

The increase in partnership working has provided the context for a shift in approach towards greater strategic working in some instances. Table 1 provides a summary of different styles of implementation.

Table 1: Style of Approach by focus of activity			
Project Focus[3]			
Style of delivery[4]	**Narrow Focus**	**Wide Focus**	**Total**
Operational	9	4	13
Mixed	1	15	16
Strategic	0	5	5
Total	10	24	34[5]

As Table 1 indicates, there were 13 projects with an operational style, of which nine (69%) were narrowly focused. Five of these were car clearance schemes where the main activity was the removal of the targeted vehicles, three were youth interventions where the focus was on specific work with young people and one involved bilingual advocates, where the activity involved engaging with particular minority ethnic groups. In contrast to the operational projects, strategic projects were all wide focused, engaged in a range of activities, including the development of arson strategies and protocols to tackle issues such as vehicle removal and fly-tipping.

As Table 1 also shows, almost half (16 projects) were 'Mixed', with some operational activities and some strategic. In these cases, much of the operational work was 'reactive', addressing particular arson problems as they arose. These stand in contrast to the projects classed as 'Operational', where the activity tends to be more defined and proactive, rather than wide ranging and reactive (as in the case of 'Mixed' projects).

Strategic activity

As noted above, the increased partnership working has enabled some projects to take more of a strategic approach to reducing arson. This involves a number of activities, including:

- Identifying the nature and extent of arson problems

- Attending meetings to raise awareness of the importance of addressing arson

- Undertaking presentations on arson issues

- Developing long-term strategies to tackle the problem

- Supporting colleagues to address arson problems in their local areas

- Developing and disseminating good practice

- Developing training resources to address arson (especially in relation to fire investigation)

- Developing multi-agency protocols for responding to particular kinds of arson problem (such as vehicle removal and fly tipping)

- Assisting with fundraising for particular problems/interventions

The fact that these projects do not undertake direct arson reduction activity on the ground means that they are freed up to develop a range of activities designed to encourage others to take action (the project acts as a facilitator). This approach to arson reduction is particularly suited to projects that cover a large, sparsely populated, geographical area, where narrowly focused operational work is unlikely to result in a significant area-wide reduction. Indeed, three of the five strategic projects relate to predominantly rural counties, while one is in a large, rural CDRP. The fifth strategic project is in a large conurbation, although this is an area that has also received funding for other operationally focused projects. Box 1 provides an example of a strategic style of project in Cambridgeshire.

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3   A project was classed as 'narrow' focused if it concentrated on one type of activity, or 'wide' if it concentrated on more than one activity.

4   A project was defined as 'Operational' if it was assessed to spend at least 75% of time on actual arson reduction activity. A project was defined as 'Strategic' if it was assessed to spend at least 75% of time on strategies, protocols etc. If less than 75% of time is devoted time to either 'Operational' or 'Strategic' then it was classed as 'Mixed'.

5   The total adds to 34, rather than 30 because Cheshire and Merseyside, while treated as one project for the purposes of the evaluation, are each treated as three projects for the purposes of funding. These each involve more than one 'style' and 'focus' of implementation.

Box 1: Example of a Strategic Style of Approach: The Cambridgeshire Arson Task Force

The Arson Task Force in Cambridgeshire is seen as a strategic hub within the county and has supported and developed the use of Arson Liaison Officers in each of the six Cambridgeshire Districts. It is these Arson Liaison Officers, with help from district Community Fire Safety Officers and the district teams, who are primarily responsible for the implementation of interventions.

The Cambridgeshire ATF produced a business plan that focused work around eight key issues; reviewing and improving fire investigation, developing a media strategy, producing a county based protocol for abandoned vehicles, developing regional Arson Task Force links, updating and reinforcing the memorandum of understanding between the fire service and police, establishing 'mini'-Arson Task Forces in districts, developing a police training package and improving use of statistical data. This business plan forms the backbone of the work of the Arson Task Force.

The task force is attempting to establish 'mini'-Arson Task Forces, usually as an arson sub-group in the CDRP, in those districts where this does not already exist. Additionally, the Arson Task Force has established links to other arson reduction teams within the Eastern Region that have allowed the sharing of best practice ideas.

Benefits of strategic activity

There are a number of benefits from taking a strategic approach to arson reduction. Such an approach enables projects to:

1. **Pool resources to tackle most significant problems:** If careful analysis of the problem has been undertaken, it should ensure that resources are devoted to the most significant problems in the target area.

2. **Be cost-effective in terms of pump-priming ACF resources:** As this approach relies on the activity of other partners to achieve arson reduction, it should be the most cost-effective approach – at least where ACF funding is concerned. This assumes that much of the direct activity on the ground will involve levered-in resources from partners.

3. **Develop a more long-term approach than operational projects:** The strategic approach may well be more sustainable over the longer term because other partners will finance the on-going activity on the ground and because much of the strategic work will involve minor changes in direction/co-ordination that do not require recurrent costs.

4. **Develop 'working' partnerships:** The approach encourages and facilitates a working partnership rather than forums where partners pay lip service to arson reduction without delivering on the ground.

Problems with strategic work

There are, however, problems with the strategic approach that would seem to mirror closely the benefits. These include:

1. **Reliance on others:** The fact that the strategic approach relies on the activities of other partners also means that the project may have relatively little leverage over when and how the arson reduction activity is delivered.

2. **Securing commitment:** Related to the above point, it may prove difficult to persuade partners to deliver the necessary intervention to make a difference.

3. **Sustainability of interventions:** Decisions over whether to continue to provide support for an intervention lie in the hands of others and can mean that resources are redirected away from arson, towards other priorities at short notice (this might be an issue if Key Performance Indicators of agencies change).

4. **Assessing added value of approach:** It may also prove difficult to assess the added value provided by a strategic approach. Here, the particular concern will be in establishing how much of the arson reduction activity would have been undertaken anyway by partners, had there been no Arson Task Force to lead the strategic approach.

Box 2: Example of an Operational Style of Approach: The Surrey Arson Task Force

The Surrey ATF has been involved in a range of operational activities designed to reduce arson, including the following:

- **Intelligence gathering and analysis.** The research co-ordinator has interrogated Police and Fire data to enhance the profiling of incidents and to identify patterns and trends.

- **Arson investigation and detection.** Improved investigations were designed to increase detections and to act as a deterrent to potential arsonists. This has been achieved through increased co-ordination between fire and police services and through the introduction of a Hydrocarbon dog team.

- **School arson.** 'School Fire Watch' a specific arson strategy designed to combat opportunistic arson attacks in schools has been implemented. Pupils from local schools are trained and supervised by borough support teams. On a monthly basis the children perform arson specific risk assessments of their school on a pro-forma tick box form.

- **Countryside arson.** Interrogation of fire incident data highlighted a marked increase in countryside arson during periods of school closure. Consequently a joint initiative with Crimestoppers was pursued to provide a 'phone credit' reward scheme for children supplying information leading to the apprehension of other children responsible for heath land and grass fires.

Operational activity

Operational activity refers to the direct delivery of interventions on the ground to reduce arson. This can take many different forms, from arson reduction publicity to removal of sources of fuel and detection of arson offenders to name but a few. The key here is that the project team is directly involved in this work, rather than simply developing the strategy that leads to this activity.

Box 2 provides an example of an ATF with an operational focus. The important point here is not the types of interventions that are being undertaken, but the fact that the ATF is heavily involved in delivering the actual interventions itself.

As with strategic work, there are both benefits and problems arising from this approach.

Benefits of operational activity

The main benefits of the operational approach are outlined below:

1. **Projects have control over what interventions of implemented:** A key benefit of the operational approach is that control that can be exerted over the interventions. The project can control which interventions are delivered at what time and are not necessarily heavily reliant on partners.

2. **Monitoring and evaluation:** This approach is also easier to monitor and evaluate as projects can measure the timing and dosage of delivery and link the impact on fires more directly to the work of the ATF, than might have been possible under a strategic approach.

3. **Measuring Project Inputs:** In relation to the above, with operational approaches it is also easier to establish the exact inputs that are required to set up and run the intervention.

4. **Exiting versus mainstreaming:** As operational approaches are likely to involve activity that is more contained than under strategic or mixed approaches, it might be argued that these kinds of projects are easier to close down, although, conversely, they will also be more difficult to mainstream for the same reason.

Problems with operational activity

The main problems associated with operational activity are outlined below:

1. **Sustainability:** Continued operational activity by an ATF will rely on a continuing source of funding. Once that funding ceases, so too will the intervention. These kinds of projects are therefore reliant on seeking future sources of funding and this can create uncertainty, both for the project team and the interventions that being delivered.

2. **Narrow focus:** Project activity can become focused in small hotspot locations that may be unlikely to impact on the overall incidence of arson (this is most likely to be apparent in larger metropolitan areas).

Emerging themes from the evaluation

Regardless of whether a strategic, an operational or a mixed style of arson reduction project is undertaken, there would appear to be a number of emerging themes from this evaluation. These are outlined below in relation to factors that 'facilitate' intervention and those that 'inhibit' intervention.

Facilitating factors

From examining the 30 projects that have been evaluated, there would appear to be three key factors that would seem to facilitate project implementation.

- **Partnership working.** As noted earlier, effective partnership working would appear to have improved the delivery of project interventions.

- **Intelligence gathering and analysis.** Many projects have invested in data collection and analysis and this has paid dividends in allowing them to target resources more effectively. Where data gathering in concerned, a number of projects have taken steps to mobilise front-line staff in identifying local problems. Some projects have also recruited analysts to assist with the analysis of arson problems.

- **Learning from experience.** Some projects have also noted that they have built on the lessons from earlier arson reduction initiatives. For example, Tyne and Wear have developed an intervention targeted at wheelie bin fires that was originally developed in Sunderland. Luton and Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Service has rolled out its Environmental Action Day (EAD) intervention from Luton to South Bedfordshire and Avon has also implemented Luton's EAD approach. These examples point towards the importance of promoting good practice and also to the importance of opportunities for networking between arson reduction professionals.

Inhibiting factors

In common with other grant funded multi-agency projects there were also a number of factors that were felt to inhibit progress.

- **Recruitment and retention.** The recruitment of posts has been problematic for a number of projects. Common problems include the length of time it takes to fill a post and the failure to find a suitable candidate in some cases. These problems are compounded by the short-term nature of projects, which can make posts appear unattractive to those already in secure employment. This short-term aspect of projects can also lead to retention problems, as staff will often begin to look for new posts with six to nine months remaining on a project.

- **Funding.** At present, all funding under the Implementation Fund is due to cease in March 2006 and at the time of the fieldwork there was uncertainty over whether another round of funding for arson reduction projects would be made available from ODPM. As well as creating staff retention problems, it also created difficulties in obtaining mainstream funding from other sources. In some cases, Fire and Rescue Services were unwilling to confirm that mainstream funding was available for the continuation of projects until they were certain that alternative funding was not going to be available from central government, thereby creating an environment of uncertainty for the project.

- **Data problems.** There were problems with data both within and between organisations. Within some Fire and Rescue Services, there was concern over how some arson incidents were being classified by staff. There was also continued concern over the differences in arson statistics between the fire and police services. This led many projects to invest in IT and personnel to develop ways of reducing the discrepancy and so help to gain a clearer understanding of the problem.

- **Bureaucratic and cumbersome processes:** Some projects highlighted the difficulty of gaining access to people/departments in partner organisations that were able to make quick decisions about issues relating to project interventions.

- **Engaging with schools.** A recurring theme among projects that identified schools arson as an issue was the difficulty experienced in engaging with schools at risk. There seemed to be unwillingness among some to participate in arson reduction initiatives until they themselves were the victims of arson.

- **Maintaining support among partners.** While partnership working was a strength of many projects, some personnel noted that this took time to cultivate and maintain and this diverted time away from other activities that could have been undertaken to tackle arson. However, here it should be noted that the benefits from partnership working probably outweigh the costs.

- **Size of project areas:** It was reported in some larger metropolitan areas that the sheer geographical size of the area occasionally made it difficult for projects to know where to begin to start targeting resources.

- **Falling arson levels.** Although this should be heralded as a success, it is important to note that this could have a negative impact on projects' ability to engage partners. As the problem has declined, it has become harder to convince other agencies that this is a problem worthy of investment of resources. This has led some staff to feel they have been 'victims of their own success'.

- Many of the inhibitors to effective arson reduction work outlined above, are similar to those identified during the evaluation of the New Projects Initiative. It may be argued, therefore, that these inhibitors are symptomatic of multi-agency partnerships of this kind.

- On 23rd January 2006, the Government announced fire prevention grants worth £11.4m for 2006/7 and 2007/8 to support fire prevention work, including community fire safety, arson reduction and work with children and young people.

- This single grant to all fire and rescue authorities will replace the grants paid to some authorities under the CFS Innovation Fund and ACF Implementation Fund in 2003/6, and provide revenue funding to complement the capital grants paid to all fire and rescue authorities under the Home Fire Risk Check initiative in 2004/5.

References

Brown R., Hopkins M., Cannings, A., Poole, H. and Raybould S. (2004) "Evaluation of the Arson Control Forum's New Projects Initiative: Summary of Findings" London: Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.