

Spotlight on...

Preventing cell fires in Leeds District

What the need was and how we identified it:

During 2015/16 West Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service (WYFRS) attended 88 fire related incidents within the Leeds District prisons, of which 50 occurred in HMYOI Wetherby. Of these 88 incidents there were 20 fire related injuries. This is having a very significant impact on the District's non-domestic building fire and fire related injury performance management indicators (PMI), which in turn is beginning to impact on the overall performance summary for WYFRS.

With agreement from HMYOI Wetherby and WYFRS the joint decision was taken to second a member of staff, part time, into the prison service to explore new and innovative ways of reducing cell fires. This role has been picked up within the current Leeds ADPM role by WM Craig Bedford.

What we have done:

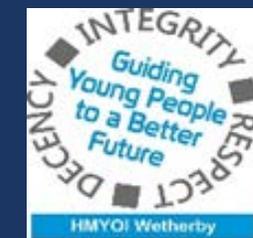
Craig has been in post for almost a year and works as part of the Health, Safety and Fire team at HMYOI Wetherby. He has been able to influence change in many areas; change that would not have been able to happen from outside Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service. It was identified that the role could address:

- The investigation of cell fires, primarily looking at the material used to ignite the first item.
- Aiding on the internal information gathering and evidence to push for prosecution for a cell fire where necessary.
- Creating and delivering an arson awareness package to all young people who are held at the establishment.
- Improving the recording of arson within the establishment by creating live documents that record the costs of cell fires and those responsible for them.
- Improving training for both HMPPS and WYFRS staff by running regular training exercises on site.
- Familiarisation visits for all crews who are on the Pre-determined attendance for the establishment.
- Establish an Arson Reduction plan with regards to the management and location of arsonists.

There has been much progress so far. The first major step forward was in the investigation of cell fires and the identification of the ignition source. HMYOI Wetherby is already a non-smoking establishment due to the age of those held; although occasionally matches/lighters may be smuggled in they are largely unavailable to the young people. It was identified that the method of ignition was the power sockets and the possession of conductive material within the cells. Young people would place something in the earth port on the socket which would open the live and neutral ports, then put a conductive material (yogurt pot lids containing an amount of foil) in them and switch the socket on. This would cause electricity to arc between the material, which they could then use shower gel or some other substance to ignite. Once a flame was established a fire was able to be developed through the addition of paper and other combustible materials. After speaking with the head of the procurement team and the catering manager, yogurt pot lids were removed or changed to non-foil containing products, preventing this method being used.

One of the other key areas of work undertaken during the secondment is the delivery of arson awareness and fire safety education for the young people. A package has been created which lasts anywhere between 30 minutes to an hour and covers several areas including fire development, the dangers of compartment fires and the punitive measures the young people will face should they set a fire. The package has reached approximately 30% of the young people currently on site. The delivery has been to either a group of young people or one to one and includes young people with a diagnosis of mental ill health. Statistics show that 40% of all cell fires at HMYOI Wetherby were taking place on the mental health support wing in particular, but almost 17 weeks have now passed without a cell fire on this wing, where there once would have been at least one per month.

Via feedback, Craig identified that the punitive measures for causing a cell fire were minimal, adjudication awards or losing gold level status outweighed the motivations for starting a cell fire. Three months ago, permission was received from the Governor to class all of the items damaged in a fire as contaminated and to be sent for destruction. After this measure was imposed, feedback has identified that this is a much greater loss to the young people. It also identified the full cost of a cell fire, rather than potential only the loss of 'burnt' products. This has been a significant factor in the current downward trend of fires.



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Many familiarisation visits for fire crews who are predetermined to attend the custodial establishment in the event of a fire, has helped to identify best working practices in the prison for WYFRS staff and HMPPS staff. In addition to this risk mitigation measure, an arsonist list is produced twice weekly that highlights all those with either a conviction for arson offences or those who have carried out or threatened to set a cell fire. It became clear that there was no consideration given to the location of the cell these young people might be allocated. After visiting each residential wing and obtaining the digital plans for each, Craig was able to identify the cell with least amount of risk associated should a fire be started. A number of factors, such as positioning of any smoke extraction system or openings that could be used for ventilation, the least amount of travel distance should fire hose be required and limiting the number of fire doors having to be compromised with fire hose/misting system have now been included to develop an Arson Reduction and Arsonist Management Plan.

What difference are we making?

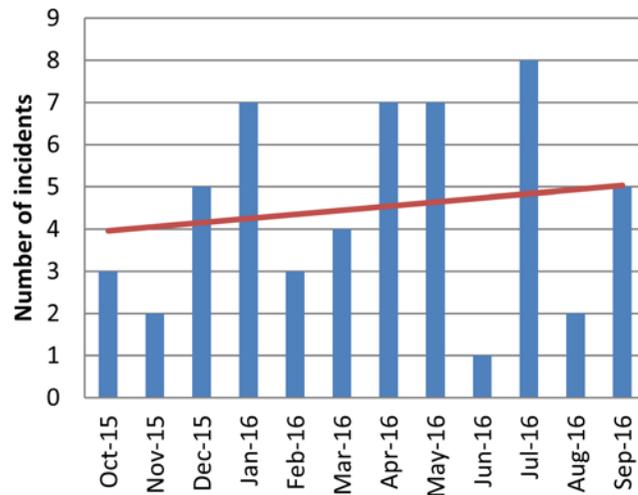
From January 2017 to present we have seen a reduction of over 25% from the same period last year and at the moment we are over 6 weeks without an incident on the full site and as stated above 17 weeks since the last on the mental ill health support wing.

In August 2017 HMYOI Wetherby was inspected by representatives from London of the Crown Premise Inspection Group as part of its annual audit. Having reviewed the work conducted over the last year during the WYFRS secondment and considering what is planned, both visiting inspectors were very impressed and have made recommendations that some of the work be taken as best practice and shared nationally.

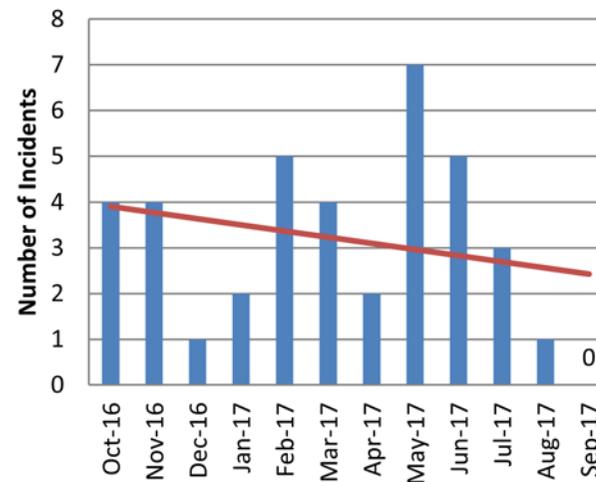
What next?

Craig will be looking to influence and highlight the successes seen at HMYOI Wetherby in the other districts' prisons. It is hoped that these actions will be adopted by both HMP Wealstun and HMP Leeds, who we will support to carry out similar arson awareness training packages and implement the Arson Reduction and Arsonist Management Plans. A scoping exercise is also being conducted to look at the potential for the development of a prison lead Trainee Firefighter scheme, similar to an Army Cadet scheme which has already proven to be changing the behaviour of the young people at HMPYOI Wetherby.

**Prior to WYFRS secondment
October 2015 to September 2016**



**During WYFRS secondment
October 2016 to present**



This 'spotlight on' contributes to...



**DELIVERING A PROACTIVE
FIRE PREVENTION AND
PROTECTION PROGRAMME
ENSURING WE DELIVER TO
VULNERABLE GROUPS IN
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