# 71-year-old man sentenced for arson linked to drug use



A 71-year-old man has been sentenced to four-and-a-half years in prison following a serious incident involving arson and erratic behaviour linked to drug use. Walter Harrison, who has an extensive criminal record of 23 convictions for 53 offences, pleaded guilty to arson with intent to endanger life after intentionally setting fire to bedding in a bungalow community in Leek, Stoke-on-Trent.

The evening of August 17 marked a chaotic series of events that alarmed residents in Harrison's neighbourhood, known as Churnet View. Shortly before the fire, neighbours reported seeing Harrison wandering the streets naked, engaging in bizarre behaviour, including shouting, throwing items, and banging on doors in an apparent attempt to gain entry to homes. Emily Andrews, prosecuting, detailed these disturbing interactions, recounting how one neighbour was confronted by Harrison at her doorstep during the early hours of the morning. This unsettling encounter reportedly prompted a phone call to the authorities.

As the events unfolded, Harrison, who was accompanied by his dog Axel, ignited combustible materials on a double bed within the property. The ensuing fire not only destroyed the interior but also resulted in significant smoke damage, with estimates placing the total amount of damage at around £100,000. The fire spread quickly from the bedding into other rooms, necessitating extensive rebuilding efforts for the affected bungalow.

Harrison's erratic behaviour was characteristic of the effects associated with "monkey dust," a Class B substance that has been linked to violent incidents and arson in the Stoke-on-Trent area. Following the fire, Harrison was apprehended, though he was not immediately interviewed due to concerns regarding smoke inhalation; he was instead transported to a hospital for evaluation.

During the court proceedings at Stoke-on-Trent Crown Court, Barry White, representing Harrison, sought a shorter sentence, citing his client's troubled history, which includes a lifetime spent largely in prison due to various stresses which White claimed have compounded Harrison's situation. White remarked, “Mr Harrison was not in the right place at that time," adding that he acknowledged the harm caused and expressed remorse for his actions.

Judge Trevor Meegan addressed the gravity of the incident, noting, “In the early hours you stood outside your home address, you were screaming and displaying erratic behaviour, and you were naked." He emphasised the impact of Harrison's actions on the community, particularly given that it is a street populated by elderly residents. Judge Meegan remarked on the extensive damage, stating that the property would require complete reconstruction due to the fire and smoke destruction.

Harrison's actions have led to significant implications for the local community, not only resulting in a substantial financial loss but also affecting the quality of life for the elderly residents in the vicinity. The case highlights ongoing concerns about substance abuse and its consequences within the region.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news> - BBC News often reports on local crimes and incidents in the UK, including arson cases. While not specific to Walter Harrison's case, it would report on similar incidents involving arson and erratic behavior in Stoke-on-Trent.
* <https://www.thestaffordshirenewsletter.co.uk/news/stoke-on-trent-news/> - Local news outlets like The Staffordshire Newsletter may cover local incidents such as arson and its effects on communities, providing context for the impact of Harrison's actions.
* <https://www.police.uk/staffordshire/> - Police.UK provides crime data and incident reports for different regions in the UK, which could offer statistics on drug-related crimes in areas like Stoke-on-Trent.
* <https://www.stoke.gov.uk/info/20027/court_proceedings> - Stoke-on-Trent's official website might contain information on court proceedings and legal decisions such as those involving arson and substance abuse cases.
* <https://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/drugs> - The Home Office provides information on substance misuse and its legal consequences in the UK, including Class B substances like 'monkey dust' linked to violent incidents.