

Lancashire Fire & Rescue Service

REPORT OF: DCFO Justin Johnston

APPENDIX 2: EMERGENCY COVER REVIEW 2017 C(ii): DETERMINING A REVISED RESPONSE TO AUTOMATIC FIRE ALARMS / UNWANTED FIRE SIGNALS

Executive Summary / purpose of the report

1. To present proposed amendments to the Combined Fire Authority's (CFA) automatic fire alarm (AFA) / unwanted fire signals (UwFS)¹ policy as part (Cii) of the Emergency Cover Review (ECR) 2017. Should these proposals be implemented it would increase non-attendance (reduction in the call-outs of fire engines) to a number of premises, so this report also sets out the rationale behind the proposed policy changes and details the anticipated reductions which could be achieved. The reduction in the call-outs of fire engines to UwFS would realise the following benefits: fire engines would be more available to attend genuine life threatening emergencies, it would reduce the risk to staff and other road users of fire engines attending non-emergencies under blue lights, it would provide less disruption and more efficient use of time for the Service to carry out its core tasks (training, risk inspection and community safety work), and there would be additional environmental and financial savings.

Recommended that:

- [1] The report be considered by the CFA; and
- [2] Members approve consultation on the adoption of a phased approach to the implementation of Option 1 for 12 months in 2018 / 19. At this point (April 2019) the Combined Fire Authority undertake to reviewing the analysis of 2018 / 19, prior to determining the appropriate risk based decision in terms of any potential implementation of Option 2.

Background

2. The Service's original UwFS policy was introduced on 1st October 2004. In March 2011 the policy was revised significantly following extensive consultation and briefing sessions with both internal and external stakeholders. The main features of the revised policy were:
 - the introduction of a call-challenge procedure;
 - call back arrangements with fire alarm receiving centre's (ARCs);

¹ An UwFS is an activation of an automatic fire alarm (AFA) where there is no fire: a false alarm.

- the enhancement of the advice given in response to single UwFS; and
 - the implementation of more robust ways of managing the Service's relationship with the parties responsible for premises with unacceptably high levels of AFAs.
3. The objectives of the revised policy were:
- to secure a reduction in the number of false alarms generated by automatic fire detection and alarm systems, by encouraging improved maintenance of systems;
 - to reduce fire engine movements, unnecessary costs and disruption to both the Service and the business community; and
 - to reduce the risk to the public and Service personnel through unnecessary emergency responses.
4. In June 2015 the UwFS policy was "Reaffirm LFRS policies and procedures implemented in 2011 with adequate time afforded to Protection Officers to manage the work stream of UwFS, which supports the Chief Fire Officers Association (CFOA) guidance (reducing UwFS). This includes highlighting problem premises and working with the business to advise about measures. This will comprise an audit of the premises, provide advice and/or commence Fire Safety Officers (FSO) enforcement. Although now not a key performance indicator (KPI) should be a defined work stream within fire safety enforcement (FSE) and be audited to ensure that UwFS are kept at an acceptable level (risk based approach adopted)".
5. The call-challenge procedure does not currently apply to any sleeping risk premises (sleeping risk premises include hospitals and residential care homes) and these premises continue to receive an emergency attendance.
6. Industrial sites which are licensed under either the Control of Major Accident Hazards (COMAH) or Radiation Emergency Preparedness and Public Information (REPPPIR) regulations are excluded from the non-attendance policy due to their unique risk. This reflects other fire services approach in the North West.

Impact of policy changes on performance

7. The current UwFS policy has now been in effect for almost six years and since 2011 the Service has achieved a reduction of 19% in the number of attendances to AFAs. We are unlikely to experience further significant reduction in numbers unless we review the policy again and consider alternative ways of responding to AFAs.
8. This report considers and suggests a number of ways in which the Service could achieve further reductions in the number of attendances to UwFS in line with the incremental change policy previously agreed by Members. These proposals will have a positive impact on administrative burdens, increase crewing capacity to carry out other work and contribute to a reduction in on-call costs for RDS.

9. The majority of false alarms are caused by faulty alarms, normal human activity within buildings resulting in accidental or careless activation of the fire alarm, dust, cooking fumes and failure to inform alarm receiving centres (ARCs) when testing alarms.
10. Tables 1 and 2 (below) show a 13% increase occurred in 2016/17 (compared to the same period in the previous year). During 2016/17 the Service attended 2,633 UwFS which when compared to the total number of 15,165 incidents attended by the Service over the same period, equates to 17% of all calls.
11. The 13% increase in incidents is equivalent to attending 308 more incidents last year compared to the previous year, an average of 25 additional incidents every month.

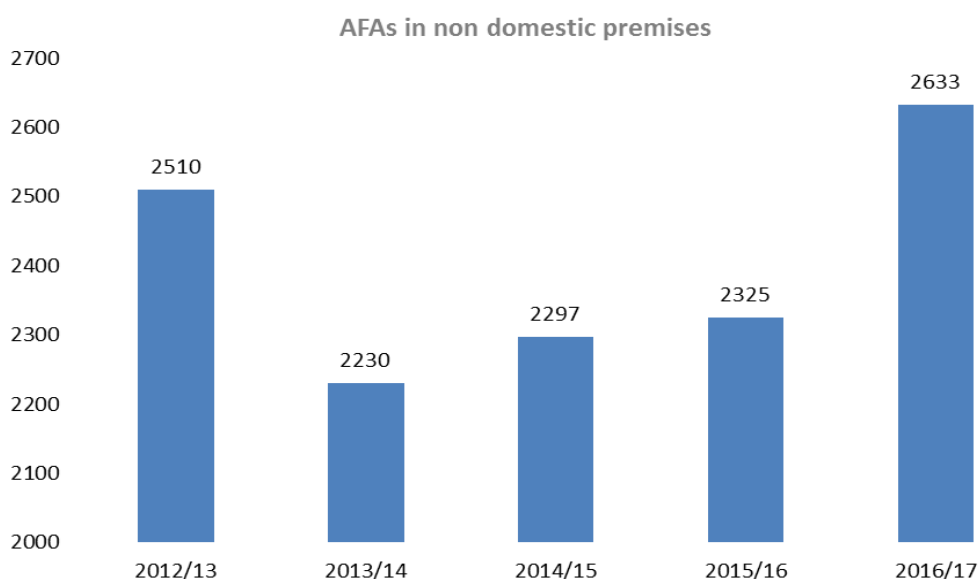
**Table 1: Number of attendances to AFAs over last 5 years
(including % change)**

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total	Annual Change*	5 Year Change
2012/13	650	731	601	528	2,510		
2013/14	456	639	590	545	2,230	-11%	
2014/15	548	641	631	477	2,297	3%	
2015/16	438	584	732	571	2,325	1%	
2016/17	566	760	723	584	2,633	13%	5%
Total**	2,658	3,355	3,277	2,705	11,995		

* Annual Change denotes % change on previous year's figures.

** Total number of UwFS.

Table 2: Number of attendances to AFA over last 5 years



12. Table 4 & 5 (below) shows the hours at which these incidents have happened as an average over the past five years, highlighting the impact the implementation of the 08:00 to 18:00 non-attendance will have (green bars in Table 4). It also tells us that previously the majority of UwFS occurred during daytime hours. The implementation of the 08:00 to 18:00 element of the UwFS policy will reduce this differential significantly.
13. Of the total, 9,861 (excluding hospitals) UwFS in five years on average 14% were in sleeping-risk premises and 86% were at non-sleeping commercial buildings.
14. Table 3 (below) details the five most frequently attended premises types over the past five years that account for 73% of all activations. Notably, the hospitals and medical care premises (non-residential as per our classification) represent 20% of this total. These are exempt from the policy therefore have been taken out of the figures.

Table 3: The top five property types involved in AFAs

Property type	AFAs attended	% of all AFAs attended
Hospitals and medical care	2,134	18%
Education	1,937	16%
Retail	1,393	12%
Industrial Manufacturing	1,386	12%
Offices and call centres	887	7%
Total	7,737	73%

Number of primary fires attended that originated as AFAs

15. Upon receiving a call from an ARC, North West Fire Control (NWFC) will ask the ARC whether it is a confirmed fire. It is the responsibility of the ARC to make contact with the premises and confirm if a fire exists prior to informing NWFC. In the case that calls are received from ARCs which have not completed a 'call back' to the premises the ARC should be asked to make 'call back' and advise the premises to ring 999 should they discover a fire. If the ARC is uncooperative and refuses to undertake a 'call back', they should be informed that the Service will not be attending.
16. Over the past five years, only 0.3% of all incidents attended were to non-domestic primary fires where the original call type was thought to be an AFA. Notably, 67% of these fires required no firefighting as they were small and out on arrival.

Impact of responding to UwFS

17. Call-outs of fire engines to each AFA call causes a significant impact on the Service for the following reasons:
 - Fire engines are not available to respond to genuine life threatening emergencies.
 - Responding to AFAs under blue light conditions poses an unnecessary risk to staff and other road users.
 - Operational crews are disrupted whilst undertaking other core tasks such as training and community safety activities.
 - Financial costs are incurred for fuel and there is an associated impact on the environment caused by the fire engine movements.
 - Retained Duty System (RDS) firefighters require payment for being alerted and are unnecessarily disrupted from their primary employment.

Approach of other North West Fire and Rescue Services

18. Within the region, Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service (FRS) currently use a non-attendance approach (unless the premises is a private dwelling, in which case it receives a pre-determined attendance (PDA) of two fire engines) and all sleeping risk premises are exempt during night time hours (19:30 to 07:30). There is no call-challenge approach to their policy; premises are simply advised that they must ring 999 if they discover a fire.
19. Cheshire FRS has the same approach except 09:00 to 17:00. Greater Manchester FRS's strategy is to send one fire engine to non-domestic, two fire engines to domestic AFAs and four fire engines to high-rise premises. Cumbria FRS currently sends one fire engine to residential dwellings and non-domestic sleeping risk 24/7. They do not respond to non-domestic premises unless there is a confirmed fire. Due to the remote location of some non-domestic premises they will send one fire engine where no contact can be made with the key-holder. They have some exempted

premises such as control of major accident hazards (COMAH) sites and private funded institutions (PFI) hospitals because of specific structural design.

20. A regional approach to reducing AFAs is currently under consideration. The adoption of the proposals would further support a move to a regional North West fire services UwFS policy, which would assist NWFC in managing call-outs across the North West region.

Options for consideration

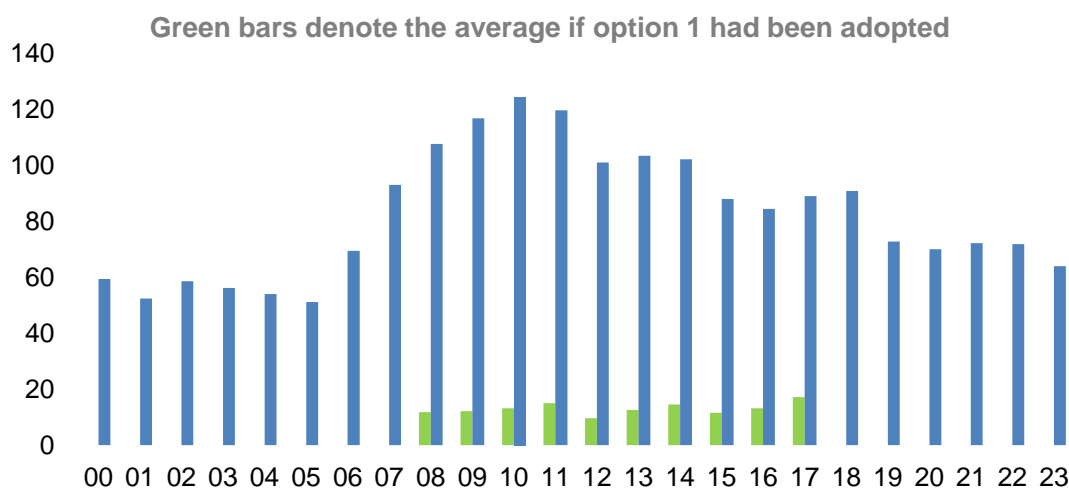
21. The current UwFS policy includes taking a staged approach to managing premises who hit the relevant trigger points (problem premises) for increased AFAs. The Service has determined that non-single domestic dwelling house premises that are provided with a fire detection system are classified as a 'problem premises' from an unwanted fire signal perspective, in the following circumstances:

- Two or more unwanted fire signals are received in a four-week period.
- Three or more unwanted fire signals are received in a 26-week period.
- The cause of the unwanted fire signal has not been remedied within seven days.

22. The Service continues to investigate ways to actively reduce the total number of UwFS through business support engagement with the premises' responsible person. However, two new possible options to help the Service achieve more significant reductions are detailed below taking into account lessons learnt over the past 12 months and from other FRSs nationally.

Option 1 - non-attendance for all non-domestic, non-sleeping buildings during 08:00 to 18:00

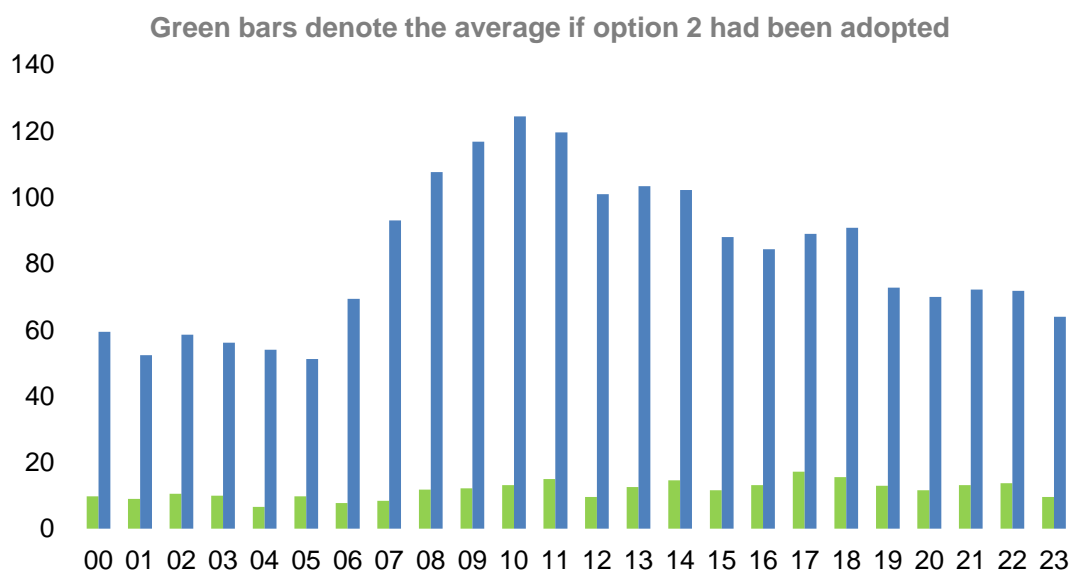
Table 4: Five year average attendance to AFAs in non-domestic premises by hour (excluding Hospitals)



23. The introduction of a non-attendance approach to all non-domestic, non-sleeping buildings (example offices and shops) during daytime hours, seven days a week.
24. The proposed change in procedure would mean that the Service will not attend actuations of AFA to all properties if they are not supported by a phone call to confirm a fire service attendance is required. During this time period most premises will have someone available to investigate the cause of the alarm, who can then confirm if a fire has occurred.
25. During weekends there may be some non-residential commercial buildings which are unoccupied, but equally the absence of occupiers will reduce the risk of both UwFS and a fire occurring. The Service will then be able to respond to confirmed fires, not just an alarm sounding and send the appropriate number of firefighters and fire engine immediately, confident that there is a real incident to deal with.
26. All premises would be included in this option with the exception of high-rise flats, residential dwellings and COMAH sites.
27. Premises with sleeping accommodation are by their nature higher risk than non-sleeping commercial premises; this is mainly due to the slower reaction times of the occupants. People who are asleep will be reliant on automatic fire detection to warn them, should a fire break out, therefore an emergency response will continue to be sent without delay. However, it should be recognized that due to increased number of staff and number of non-sleeping residents during daytime period evacuation times are greatly reduced.
28. This option would realize a 46% reduction based on five year average figures. Resulting in a reduction of 900 attendances. Table 4 (above) illustrates this option.

Option 2 – Non-attendance for all non-domestic non-sleeping risk premises (extending our Option 1 policy to 24 hours)

Table 5: Five year average attendance to AFAs in non-domestic premises by hour (excluding Hospitals)



29. The introduction of a non-attendance approach to non-sleeping, non-domestic buildings twenty four hours a day, seven days a week.

30. The proposed change in procedure would mean that the Service will not attend activations of automatic fire detection systems to low risk properties, if they are not supported by a phone call to confirm a fire service attendance is required. During weekends and evenings there may be some non-domestic buildings which are unoccupied, but equally the absence of occupiers will reduce the risk of both UwFS and a fire occurring.

31. The Service will then be able to respond to confirmed fires, not just an alarm sounding and send the appropriate number of firefighters and fire engines immediately, confident that there is a real incident to deal with.

32. This option would realise an 86% reduction based on a five year average resulting in a reduction of 1,700 attendances.

33. Appendix 1 sets out the Service's current attendance policy and summarises Options 1 and 2.

Financial implications

34. There would be significant non-cashable savings achieved as a result of the implementation of either of the proposed options in terms of increased availability of crews to attend other incidents. Nominal cashable savings would also be made, but it is impossible to fully quantify these savings which would include, for example; direct payment for on-call staff; overtime and fuel costs. However, an estimated efficiency (non-cashable) saving could be calculated on the call-outs of a fire fighting crew of one Crew Manager (CM hourly rate £29.34) and Four Firefighters (Ff hourly rate £26.42) hourly rate. Total crew hourly rate of £135.02 times the reduction in 1,700 call-outs per year (as per Option 2) would equate to £229,534 year on year non-cashable savings.

Legal implications/business risk

35. The Fire and Rescue Services Act (2004) Section 7 states:

- (1) A fire and rescue authority must make provision for the purpose of:
 - (a) extinguishing fires in its area, and
 - (b) protecting life and property in the event of fires in its area.
- (2) In making provision under subsection (1) a fire and rescue authority must in particular:
 - (c) make arrangements for dealing with calls for help and for summoning personnel, and
 - (d) make arrangements for ensuring that reasonable steps are taken to prevent or limit damage to property resulting from action taken for the purposes mentioned in subsection (1).

37. There is little case law relating to the activities of FRSs so it is difficult to be certain what these provisions mean precisely. For example, it is arguable that an AFA is not strictly a call for help, nor is there necessarily a fire - it's an UwFS (as the statistics show). However, notwithstanding this, it is important that the Service's approach is reasonable in all of the circumstances.

38. If the proposal of a phased implementation of Options 1 and 2 are approved, the Authority would only be operating in a similar way to a number of other fire and rescue authorities. The approach is not novel and has essentially been 'tried and tested' in other FRSs.

Equality and Diversity implications

39. An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) has previously been completed for the policy however, should the proposals within this policy be adopted then the EIA will be updated.

40. Retained Duty System (RDS) firefighters receive payment for being alerted to call-outs, any reduction of call-outs to UwFS would potentially reduce their payments. A reduction of Option 1 (130 call-outs) would have a £11K reduction on RDS pay and Option 2 (238 call-outs) would have a

£21k reduction on RDS pay. Number of RDS call-outs can be seen in *Appendix 3.

41. The new proposals do not impact on any protected characteristics. The appropriate communication channels will be used to inform all affected premises owners/responsible persons of the new approach to AFAs.
42. It is noted that in the last 12 months no equality and diversity issues have arisen.

Environmental implications

43. The reduced number of unnecessary fire engine movements will have had a positive impact on the environment, mainly due to a decrease in emissions and fuel costs, contributing to an overall reduction in the Service's carbon footprint. The proposed policy changes will therefore contribute to a further reduction in the Service's carbon footprint.

Summary recommendations:

44. (1) the report to be considered by the CFA, and
(2) Members approve the consultation on the adoption of a phased implementation of Options 1 and 2 to assist the Authority reduce the number of UwFS further.

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