

LANCASHIRE COMBINED FIRE AUTHORITY

PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE

Meeting to be held on 17 March 2021

UNWANTED FIRE SIGNAL POLICY (UWFS) – PROPOSALS FOR CHANGE (Appendices 1 and 2 refer)

Contact for further information:

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Executive Summary

This paper and accompanying presentation (attached as appendix 2) provide an overview of the current policy pertaining to Automatic Fire Alarm (AFA) actuations and in particular, those categorised as Unwanted Fire Signals (UWFS), and provides proposals for policy change.

AFA mobilisations account for around half of all Lancashire Fire and Rescue Service (LFRS) operational activity, and almost two thirds of those relate to false alarms involving unwanted fire alarm apparatus actuations (UWFS). The levels of activity were noted by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) who made reference to the current policy, observing that "*LFRS was attending more false alarms than necessary and that call challenging protocols employed by LFRS were out of step with the other Fire and Rescue Services using North West Fire Control (NWFC)*". This is an area which it is reasonable to expect will receive further HMICFRS scrutiny during the second round of inspections.

UWFS mobilisations present a number of risks and challenges to the Service; diverting essential resources from emergencies, increasing road risk, disrupting operational training and impacting upon the delivery of community and business safety activities.

Furthermore, there are environmental, financial and performance aspects also impacted by the current approach.

This paper provides Performance Committee with 3 scalable options for change, framed around non-attendance to non-sleeping risk premises, the formulation of a charging policy and the development of a new policy relating specifically to domestic false alarms. The individual proposals could be adopted in isolation or collectively and could be implemented on a staged basis to monitor and measure the impact of policy change.

The proposals would bring LFRS into greater alignment with other North West Services and with sector direction of travel.

Recommendation

Performance Committee is asked to consider the proposals within the paper and accompanying presentation, and endorse recommendations into the Full Fire Authority.

Information

The current AFA policy has been in place since April 2016. It provides for the following principles:

- Setting out the impact and risks associated with Unwanted Fire Signals;
- Defining what constitutes an Unwanted Fire Signals;
- Defining the role of Alarm Receiving Centres (ARCs);
- Defining the call handling role within NW Fire Control;
- Confirming the information gathering role of Operational Crews; (to correctly categorise the incident and populate the Incident Recording System);
- Confirming that LFRS does not reset Fire Alarms;
- Setting trigger points for Fire Protection staff intervention;
- Setting out a proportionate enforcement route which starts with the provision of business support & escalates to formal enforcement action to resolve unsatisfactory premises.

LFRS continues to attend much higher volumes of Automatic Fire Alarm actuations than many other fire and rescue services, as noted by HMICFRS during our first inspection. In 2020, LFRS attended 4851 AFA's, 63% were in sleeping risk premises and 37% in non-sleeping risk. Further statistics are available in Appendix 1.

At the present time, LFRS is distinctly out of step with the approaches currently being employed by the other services operating within North West Fire Control, whom have taken a risk-based approach to reducing mobilisations to AFA's, typically framed around building types and/or time of day or night.

LFRS current approach poses a number of challenges to the Service:

- Diverts essential resources from actual emergencies;
- Creates risk to crew and public whilst responding;
- Disrupts Community and Business Safety activities;
- Creates disruption for businesses employing On-Call firefighters;
- Reduces operational training time and impacts upon planned exercises;
- Creates environmental impact;
- Constitutes a draw upon public finances;
- Causes call handling delays in NWFC impacting Service performance levels.

The National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) publishes guidance to assist fire and rescue services in reducing the risks created by Unwanted Fire Signals citing options such as:

- Undertaking call challenge in Control rooms (NWFC do this);
- Ensuring Fire Alarm Monitoring Organisations undertake call-back (NWFC do this);
- Sending reduced or no attendance under risk based and defined conditions (LFRS partially does this).

NFCC also endorses:

- Setting reasonable expectations for UWFS (LFRS applies these);
- Providing Business Advice to continually nudge compliance (LFRS does this);
- Using Fire Safety Enforcement to secure compliance (LFRS does this);

- Exercising capability to Raise Charges (LFRS does not do this).

Our present approach to management of AFA's combines Business Safety advice and legal enforcement measures (under the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005).

Business Safety Advisors deliver engagement / education and deal with poor AFA performance using a series of triggers, which aims to help premises owners and operators to comply.

Where business safety advice is not followed the case is escalated and a full Fire Safety Audit is undertaken and Fire Safety Order legal powers used (Enforcement Notices issued to secure compliance, if for example, the Fire Alarm is deemed not suitable). To withstand legal scrutiny / appeal, LFRS has to demonstrate the fire alarm system generating the AFA is poorly installed, defective or poorly managed against criteria in British Standard, BS5839:1.

These approaches to supporting premises owners to comply will continue. However, a number of improvement options exist which could fundamentally reduce fire appliance mobilisations, thereby alleviating service wide impacts, providing increased operational efficiency and better value for money.

Following detail on the AFA policy being provided at the last Performance Committee, work has been undertaken to explore policies of other Services both within the North West region and beyond, to examine the differing approaches, benefits, and risks, in order to shape LFRS' proposals for change.

Options are presented which seek to derive maximum Service benefit, optimising performance whilst encompassing a carefully risk-based approach.

Option 1: Remove attendance to AFA at non-sleeping premises

Performance Benefits:

- Would immediately realise c.40% reduction in attendances to AFA's;
- Aligns LFRS to other FRS in NW Fire Control;
- Improves NWFC call handling process and associated KPI;
- Improves availability and speed of response to real emergencies;
- Introduction could be staged i.e. during the day in year 1 and during the night from year 2.

Resource Implications:

- Public Consultation.

Risks:

- In 2019, there were 1841 AFA in non-sleeping risks, 4 of which were found to be fires on arrival (0.2%).

Option 2: Implement a Charging policy

Performance Benefits:

- Is likely to realise a small % reduction in attendances;
- Could generate up to £80k in cost recovery charges.

Resource Implications:

- Public Consultation;
- Inspecting Officer time / costs (gathering sufficient evidence to withstand potential appeal);
- Administration costs (raising charges and tracking payments / non-payments).

Risks:

- Potential reputational damage (£60k of charges would arise from NHS premises)
- Inspecting Officer time / costs (gathering sufficient evidence to withstand potential appeal)
- Administration costs (raising charges and tracking payments / non-payments)

Option 3: Introduce a Domestic False Alarm Policy

This would be a very different type of policy as AFA's from domestic dwellings are predominantly generated from Telecare systems incorporating smoke alarms. Numbers of actuations are increasing year on year and so the policy would focus on close collaboration with Lancashire's Social Care Providers.

The Objective:

To reduce UWFS and simultaneously reduce risk to vulnerable persons who rely on Telecare systems for their safety. Focus will be on poor installations and improvements that reduce UWFS but don't increase risk to the occupier/s.

Financial Implications

Medium – Financial benefits to Service in increased productivity of operational crews through reduced disruption, reduced fuel costs and reduced road risk liability.

Sustainability or Environmental Impact

Medium – significant reduction in appliance movements across Lancashire representing reduced carbon footprint.

Equality and Diversity Implications

Low

Human Resource Implications

Low

Business Risk Implications

High – should the Service not act to refine the UWFS policy there is a high probability that our next HMICFRS inspection could see a deterioration in outcome, from 'good' to 'requires improvement' across both Efficiency and Response areas of the inspection.

Low – a very low number of AFA mobilisations do result in a fire. In 2019, there were 1841 AFA in non-sleeping risks, 4 of which were found to be fires once appliances attended (0.2%).

Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985

List of Background Papers

Paper	Date	Contact
None		
Reason for inclusion in Part II, if appropriate:		

APPENDIX 1 – Supplementary Data

Overall Appliance attendance at incidents (KPI 1.2) and proportion of which are 'False alarm due to Apparatus'

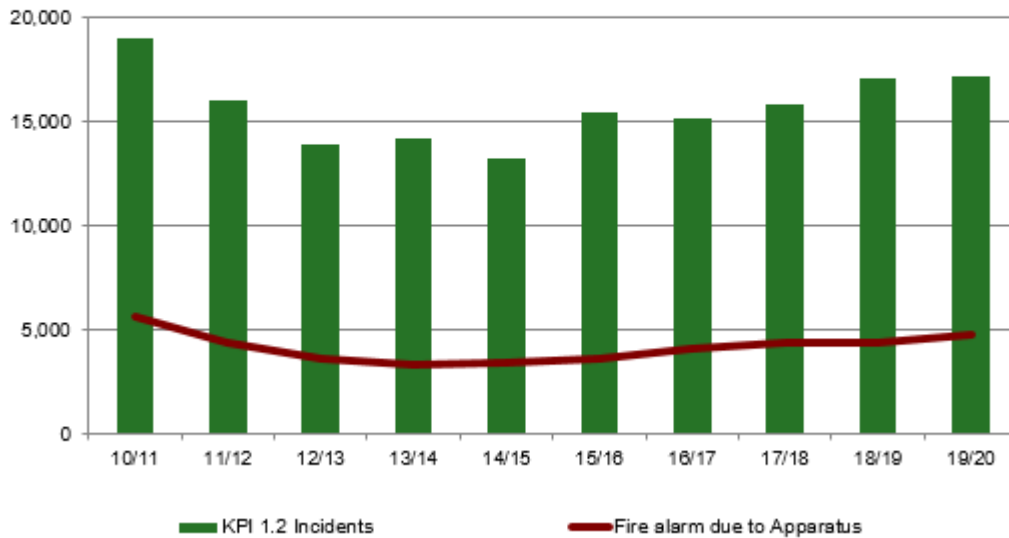
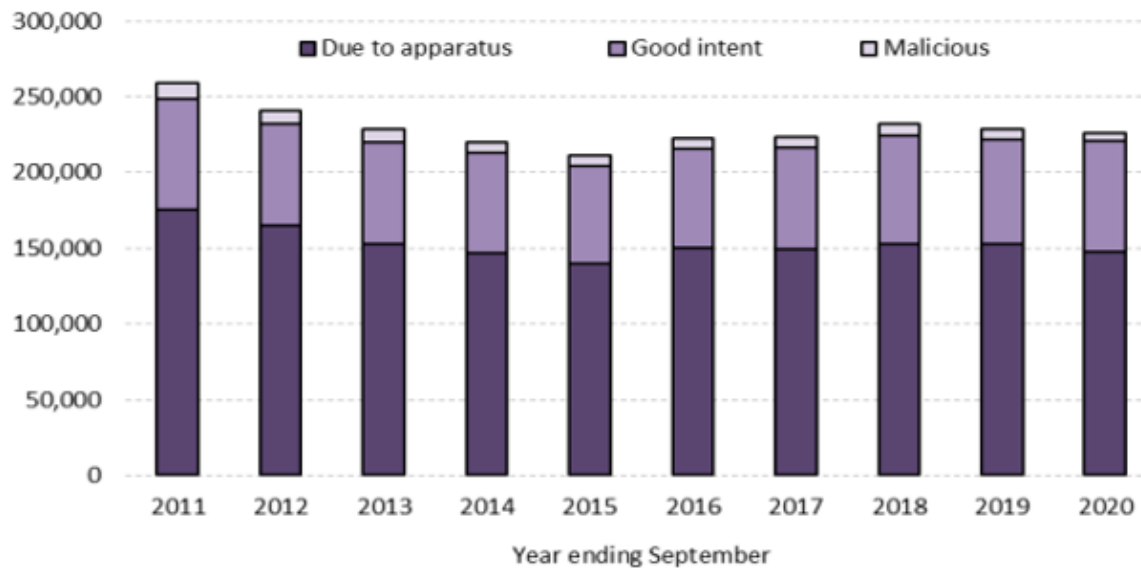


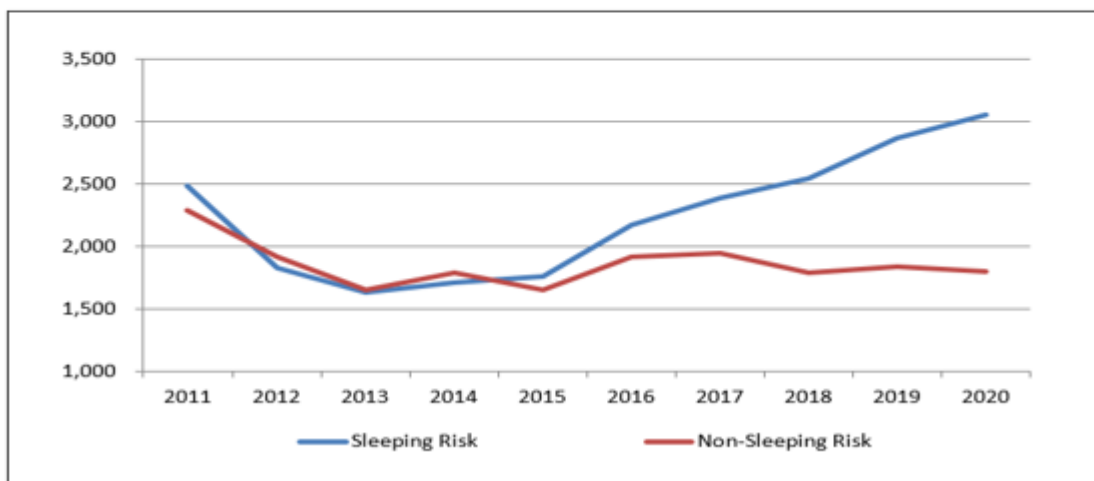
Figure 3.1: Total fire false alarms by type of false alarm, England; year ending September 2011 to year ending September 2020



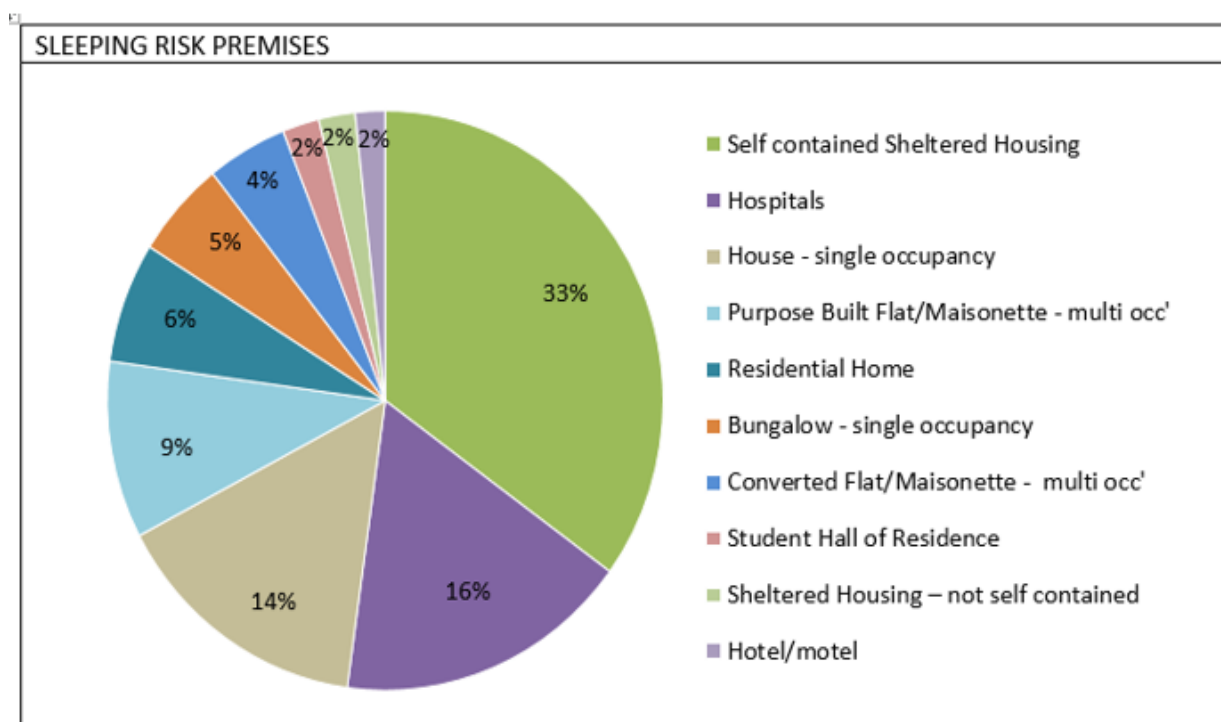
False Alarm due to apparatus (UWFS) performance nationally has remained broadly stable at circa 50k per anum

Lancashire Performance by premises type

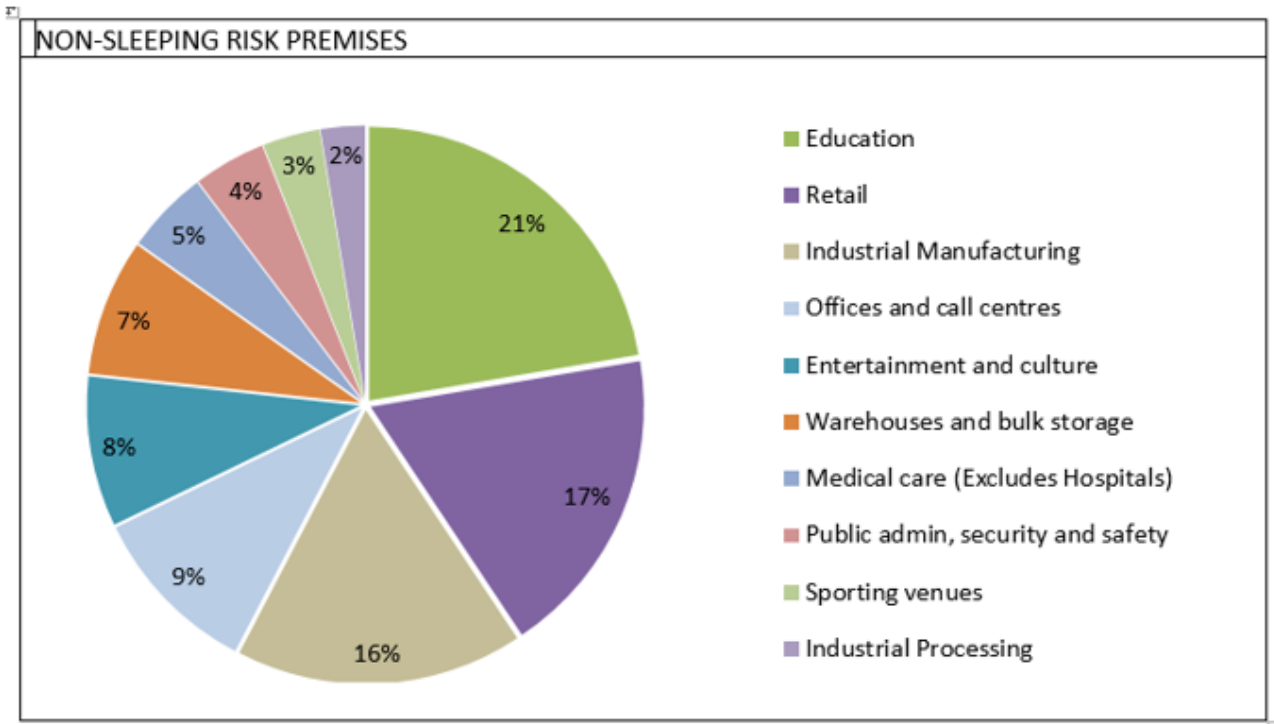
Year	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	Total
Sleeping Risk	2,483	1,833	1,635	1,708	1,766	2,170	2,388	2,548	2,870	3,053	22,454
	52%	49%	50%	49%	52%	53%	55%	59%	61%	63%	55%
Non-Sleeping Risk	2,285	1,917	1,652	1,790	1,654	1,916	1,946	1,786	1,841	1,798	18,585
	48%	51%	50%	51%	48%	47%	45%	41%	39%	37%	45%
Total AFA	4,768	3,750	3,287	3,498	3,420	4,086	4,334	4,334	4,711	4,851	41,039



Breakdown by occupancy type (10 yrs) - Sleeping



Breakdown by occupancy type (10 yrs) – Non Sleeping



Impact of Domestic Alarms (Telecare)

Top 4 property types (which account for 46% of all UWFS) over a 10 year period.

