

Lancashire Combined Fire Authority

Planning Committee

Meeting to be held on 6 February 2023

Automatic Fire Alarm Attendance Policy - Nine Month Review and Forward Proposals

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Executive Summary

In 2021, the Fire Authority was asked to endorse for public consultation, a recommendation to remove attendance to Automatic Fire Alarms (AFA) at non-sleeping premises (unless presence of fire was confirmed) on the basis of a staged implementation over two years; during the day in year one and during the night from year two. The resulting consultation commenced on 12 August and concluded on 21 September 2021.

In April 2022 the revised AFA policy, which aimed to reduce the volume of Unwanted Fire Signals (UWFS), was introduced to non-sleeping premises types between the hours of 0800 to 1900. Certain property types (as detailed further in this report) were to be exempt from the policy change due to the inherent risks associated with them.

Following a 9-month implementation period of the revised policy, data is now available for the Authority to review, highlighting the benefits delivered to date.

Recommendation(s)

That Planning Committee note the analysis provided and endorse that the Service continue with the roll out of the revised AFA policy across the full 24-hour period.

Information

The Protection Strategy 2022-27 highlights the risks posed by Unwanted Fire Signals (UWFS) and states “*Over the course of this strategy, we will continue to seek to reduce the risks associated with UWFS by reviewing our fire engine attendance policy to automatic fire alarms and the associated unwanted fire signals policy*”.

The CFA considered and approved the matter for public and stakeholder consultation on 21st June 2021. The consultation ran from 12th August until 21st September 2021 following which, the policy was implemented in April 2022, between the hours of 0800-1900 seven days per week, to non-sleeping risk premises.

Prior to implementing the revised AFA policy, a significant amount of engagement was completed over a six-month period, with North West Fire Control (NWFC), Alarm

Receiving Centres (ARC), members of the public, operational and fire protection staff, to ensure that the policy changes were understood by all concerned, and that they could adapt working practices and procedures to manage the change.

In addition to premises that contained sleeping risk, a number of other premises types were exempted from the policy due to the inherent risks posed and the consequences of a fire occurring:

- Single private domestic dwellings.
- Sheltered accommodation.
- Other residential premises such as hostels, hotels, student accommodation, care/nursing homes etc.
- Registered Control of Major Accident Hazards (COMAH) sites, and nuclear sites covered by the REPPIR legislation.
- High rise buildings.
- Hospitals.
- Prison/Young Offenders' institutions.
- Police stations, military barracks.
- Infant, primary, or secondary education premises.
- Grade 1 or Grade 2* heritage premises.

The policy also permitted that non-sleeping premises, which would not normally receive an attendance during the above hours, be granted a fire alarm exemption, if they provided evidence that their premises had an Enhanced Reliability Alarm System¹.

To date one property has requested a fire alarm exemption and provided the necessary documentation for this to be implemented.

Data Analysis (9-month review)

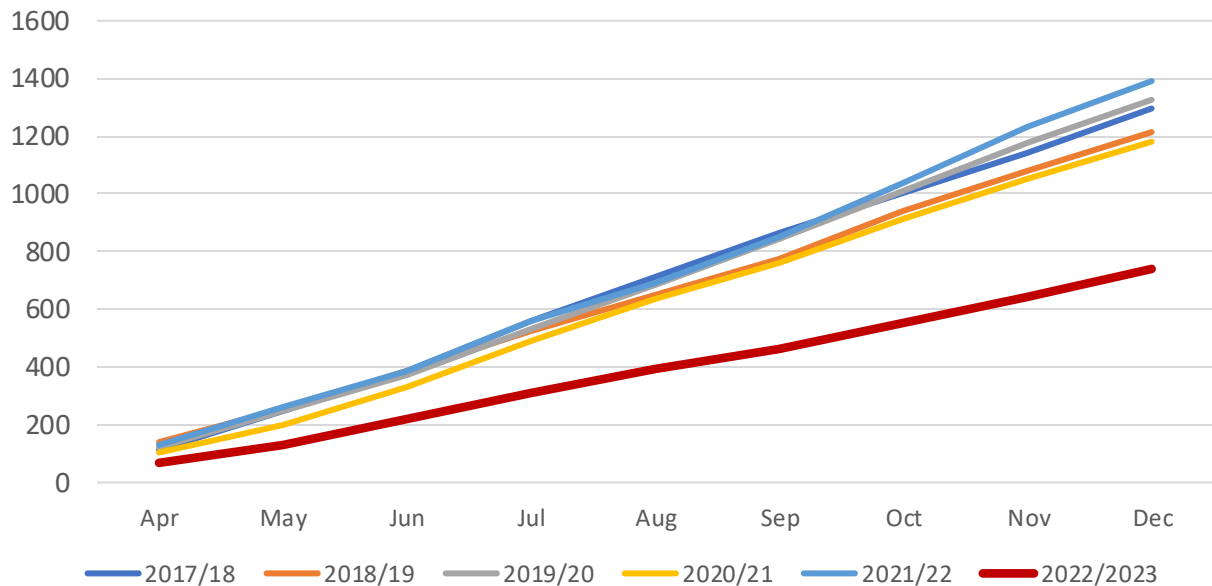
Since implementation, the Service has seen significant reductions in the overall number of AFA attendances to premises covered by this policy. The table below shows over each **24-hour period**, the cumulative count from 1st April 2022 to 31st December 2022 (740). This is a **42.3%** decrease on the previous five-year average (**1281**) over the same comparative period (Apr-Dec).

2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
1,296	1,214	1,326	1,181	1,391	740

¹ *Enhanced Reliability Alarm System*

To be considered for this exemption, the fire alarm system must meet specific criteria; Certification confirming that the fire alarm system has been installed to BS 5839 Part 1 or equivalent. Evidence that the fire alarm system is serviced and maintained in compliance with the recommendations of BS 5839 Part 1 or equivalent. Certification confirming that a fire signal is only obtained when at least two independent triggering signals are present at the same time. This is referred to as a 'Coincidence Alarm' or that the origin of alarm is a sprinkler system, other fixed installation, or call point

The following chart illustrates the comparative overall impact upon the volume of AFA's received over the 24-hour period (April 2022 to December 2022) over the last five years.



The following table shows a count of incidents, recorded initially as AFA, by hour of occurrence. The column at the end is the percentage of those that fall within the daytime period (08:00 to 19:00). The table illustrates that during the months of April 2022 to December 2022, **14.1%** of the total initial AFA incidents occurred within daytime hours, against an **average of 55.8%** during the preceding 5 years.

Hour	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	% Day
2017/18	40	35	46	32	33	33	52	74	76	86	62	70	56	55	63	62	42	56	72	53	53	52	47	46	54.0%
2018/19	35	46	37	22	22	36	53	57	77	82	68	82	76	63	66	51	50	39	52	40	40	45	35	40	58.2%
2019/20	38	35	42	36	38	32	51	64	75	100	93	84	57	74	76	63	44	55	43	58	40	30	50	48	57.6%
2020/21	47	32	46	28	25	35	63	49	74	76	67	60	51	55	64	44	39	51	48	42	52	42	51	40	53.3%
2021/22	37	46	46	47	31	48	51	58	82	74	101	79	69	61	81	51	81	51	51	54	47	53	40	52	56.1%
2022/23	57	44	51	32	23	42	59	70	10	8	11	12	10	7	12	7	7	9	11	65	67	51	41	34	14.1%

The below is a count of incidents initially recorded as AFA (08:00 to 19:00) (orange shading above). The table illustrates the decrease in AFA volumes within the various property types.

2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
700	706	764	629	781	104

Incidents at property types to which the new AFA policy applies, between the daytime hours, have reduced **85.5%** during the comparative first nine months of 2022/23, to the previous 5-year average (716).

No incidents occurred during the 9-month period where the initial AFA daytime non-attendance, was subsequently followed up by a 999 call to a primary fire.

Retrospective Analysis (had the policy been applied 24/7 since April 2022)

From April 2022 to December 2022 there were a total of 740 AFA attendances with 104 during the day-time hours (subject to the new policy) and **636** during the night-time hours (1900 – 0800). Through analysis of these attendances we can, with a high-level of accuracy, identify the premises which would and would not have resulted in an attendance had the new policy been applied 24 hours per day.

By discounting relevant premises there would have been **c.109** night-time incidents attended and **c.527** not attended - unless there was a confirmed fire. A reduction of 527 would have seen an **82.9% decrease** in night-time attendances from April 2022 to December 2022.

The 5-year average is 565 incidents occurring during night-time hours which would equate to an **80.70% decrease** in night-time incidents

For greater comparison, had the policy been applied 24hrs against a 5yr average of 1281 incidents it would equate to an **83.4% decrease** in incident attendances to premises covered by this policy.

The table below compares the number of night-time attendances (by hour) between what was attended and what would have been attended had the policy been in place 24/7.

Hour	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	18	19	20	21	22	23	Total
2022/23 – actual	57	44	51	32	23	42	59	70		65	67	51	41	34	636
2022/23 – proposed outcome had the policy been applied 24/7	6	8	9	4	3	6	10	6		16	13	10	8	10	109

The following table shows that the number of night-time attendances has been increasing over recent years (comparative 9-month data period); it illustrates the current day/night distribution and what the resultant impact would have been on activity using retrospective analysis.

	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23 actual	2022/23 potential
Daytime	700	706	764	629	781	104	104
Night-time	596	508	562	552	610	636	109
Total	1,296	1,214	1,326	1,181	1,391	740	213
% Day	54.0%	58.2%	57.6%	53.3%	56.1%	14.1%	48.8%
% Night	46.0%	41.8%	42.4%	46.7%	43.9%	85.9%	51.2%

Regional Approach

NWFC serves Cumbria, Greater Manchester, and Cheshire FRS, all of whom have AFA policies which include a non-attendance option for certain premises via call challenge (referred to as NWFC Emergency Call Management) which enables Control Room Operatives to process calls more efficiently:

- GMFRS operate their non-attendance policy between 08:00 and 20:00.
- Cumbria FRS and Cheshire FRS operate their non-attendance policy 24-hours per day.
- LCFA initial decision was to approach implementation on the basis of daytime implementation in year 1 moving to proposed 24/7 application from year 2.

Future efficiencies

In the HMICFRS inspection report dated 2019, the inspectors highlighted that –

“[...] the service has not taken advantage of the call-challenging protocols which the other fire and rescue services that share the North-West Fire Control centre use. This means that Lancashire FRS may attend more false alarm calls than it needs to”.

The data demonstrates that the change to the AFA policy has resulted in a reduction in the number of mobilisations for LFRS and produced a reduction in UWFS incidents between the hours of 0800 and 1900. These reductions represent tangible efficiencies in the use of resources and avoid unnecessary disruption to other aspects of service delivery activities.

Based upon data held, it is estimated that on applying the policy over a 24-hour period it is highly likely to result in overall reduction of c.83.4% in mobilisations to AFA's in these types of premises.

The revised AFA policy does require premises to significantly adapt their policies and procedures to take ownership of the management of activations to their fire alarm system. The transitional nature in which the Service has implemented the policy change, makes the proposed expansion of the policy to 24-hour application realistic and manageable for those premises concerned. Learning from the first 9-months of implementation has highlighted however, that despite extensive engagement and consultation having taken place, several organisations had not either fully understood, or properly considered the impacts of the change and were still caught unawares. This underpins the requirement for further extensive engagement over the coming months so as to ensure that businesses, and those responsible for them, can be best equipped to manage the impacts of this policy change.

Business risk

Medium – should the Service not act to continually refine the AFA and UWFS policy there is a high probability that the next HMICFRS inspection could see a deterioration in outcome across both Efficiency and Response areas of inspection due to continued impact of unnecessary mobilisations to UWFS, which:

- Divert essential resources from genuine emergencies
- Create road risk to crew and public whilst responding
- Disrupt Community & Business Safety activities
- Disrupt operational training
- Create avoidable environmental impact
- Drain public finances
- Disempower businesses from managing their own fire safety
- Divert Protection activity away from high-risk premises

- Create disruption for businesses employing On-Call FF's
- Cause avoidable call handling delays in NWFC

Low – During the 9-month period, no incidents occurred where the initial AFA (daytime) non-attendance, was subsequently followed up by a 999 call to a primary fire.

There was one fire call which occurred outside of the daytime period (19:30 hours) and which the Service did attend as per the current policy, and which resulted in a primary fire. Proportionally (1 incident out of 740) represents 0.1% of occasions.

Mitigation of this risk comes in the form of the exemptions to non-attendance provided in the original revised AFA policy. In addition, effective business engagement which emphasises the importance of back-up 999 calls from occupied premises, will assist those responsible to consider the implications of the change and adapt their arrangements to effectively manage the risk to their premises.

Prior to implementation, further extensive engagement will be undertaken with commerce and owners of non-sleeping risk premises to inform them of the new approach and the changes needed to their fire alarm investigation procedures. We will also seek to evidence the benefits of Enhanced Reliability Alarm systems for responsible persons to consider.

Sustainability or Environmental Impact

Significant reduction in unnecessary appliance movements across Lancashire leading to reduced carbon production.

Equality and Diversity Implications

Low

Data Protection (GDPR)

Will the proposal(s) involve the processing of personal data? No

HR implications

None identified

Financial implications

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

Increased availability of qualified staff to inspect high risk premises as presently, all applicable premises are subject to LFRS Unwanted Fire Signals Policy which details that premises suffering regular UWFS receive a follow up from a Fire Safety Inspector/Business Safety Advisor. The anticipated reduction in UWFS attendances will create greater capacity due to less follow up activity being required.

Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985

List of background papers

Paper:

Date:

Contact:

Reason for inclusion in Part 2 if appropriate: N/A