



**NOTTINGHAMSHIRE**  
**Fire & Rescue Service**  
*Creating Safer Communities*

Nottinghamshire and City of Nottingham  
Fire and Rescue Authority  
Community Safety Committee

# UNWANTED FIRE SIGNALS UPDATE

Report of the Chief Fire Officer

**Date:** 08 January 2021

**Purpose of Report:**

To present Members with an update on the Tri-Service Unwanted Fire Signals Policy.

**Recommendations:**

It is recommended that Members:

- Note the progress made in addressing unwanted fire signals
- Support the exploration of developing the Tri-Service Unwanted Fire Signals Policy.
- Receive a further report with recommendations.

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## 1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 Unwanted fire alarm signals (UwFS) are defined as a false alarm fire signal from an automatic fire detection system (AFD) resulting from a cause other than fire.
- 1.2 In 2018, Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service (NFRS) responded to over 3000 false alarms caused by 'apparatus' which are classified as UwFS.
- 1.3 The National Fire Chiefs Council has published guidance to support Fire and Rescue Services (FRS) in reducing the number of false alarms received and the number and weight of responses to UwFS, considering local risk.
- 1.4 In June 2018, Members approved a policy change to enable a collaborative approach between the Tri-Service Control (Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire and Leicestershire) to reduce the number of UwFS. This process was implemented in Nottinghamshire and went 'live' from the 3 December 2018.

## 2. REPORT

- 2.1 The key elements of the current Tri-Service Policy are:
  - Call challenging 24 hours a day, 7 days per week;
  - Hotels are call challenged during the day, but not during night time hours, 21:00 – 08:00
  - A standard level of attendance after call challenging to AFD calls is of one appliance.
- 2.2 Certain premises types are exempt from call challenging, these are:
  - Domestic premises including houses in multiple occupation (HMO), residential flats, sheltered housing;
  - Residential care and nursing homes;
  - Local Primary Care Trust hospitals and private hospitals which have sleeping on site;
  - Hotels during night-time hours only 21:00 - 08:00. During the day, hotels will be call challenged;
  - Other sleeping risks;
  - Sites that are subject to Level 4 or 5 site specific risk information (SSRI);
  - Heritage sites listed as Grade 1 or Grade II by Historic England
  - High rise premises with sleeping risk;
  - Premises not conforming to the above criteria, but that are locally determined to be unsuitable for call challenging.
- 2.3 In addition to the exempt list detailed above, local crews continue to assess risks in their local areas to ensure that attendance at AFD calls enable a thorough and safe approach. This has seen some premises, for example

some high-rise premises, have an amended attendance of resources to ensure an effective search can be undertaken in a timely manner.

- 2.4 Furthermore, Tri-Service Control retains the discretion to apply the principle of 'dynamic mobilising' which allows the control staff to manually amend the pre-determined attendance at the time of the call based on the information received. This means increasing or decreasing the attendance made by the FRSs in the Tri-Service area, but normally only relates to increases in attendance.
- 2.5 In the last 12 months, NFRS has attended 2272 calls from AFDs. This compares to 2510 calls attended in the same period of the previous year. A reduction of 9.5%.
- 2.6 Of the 2272 calls attended, 2028 (89%) were found to be UwFSs upon arrival, a reduction of 7% compared to the 2169 attended in 2019. Additionally, 1270 of these incidents were attended by only one appliance; further reducing the risk to road users and our personnel, increasing efficient use of time and effective use of our resources.
- 2.7 Upon arrival at the AFD call, 82 incidents transpired to involve a fire and seven incidents required additional resources to deal with the incident.
- 2.8 Of the 82 incidents, 40 involved no flame (heat or smoke only), 28 were restricted to the item that first ignited, seven were confined to the room of origin and six spread from the room of origin.
- 2.9 At those 82 incidents, only one injury was reported and this was classified as 'slight injury – smoke inhalation' to a 73-year-old woman.
- 2.10 The requests for additional resources included:
  - 1 x make pumps two;
  - 3 x make pumps three;
  - 1 x make pumps four;
  - 2 x greater than make pumps four.
- 2.11 Of the 2028 UwFSs, hospitals continue to present the single greatest number of calls. Queens Medical Centre and Nottingham City Hospital together recorded over 471 calls that were false alarms, this is down from 538 in the same period in the previous year, a reduction of 8% but still 20% of all UwFSs. Work continues through proactive engagement with these sites to further reduce the number of calls and improve procedures.
- 2.12 Following every UwFS incident, the premises owner (for non-domestic premises) receives a letter from the Protection team outlining their requirements in relation to Fire Safety. Following a fourth occurrence, the premises is contacted by the Business Education Advocate. A sixth occurrence initiates contact from a Fire Safety Inspector, which may result in a full audit of the premises.

- 2.13 In the last year, 841 first actuation letters have been sent to premises owners, 121 contacts have been undertaken for fourth occurrences, out of a total of 126 occurrences, and 15 audits have been undertaken for sixth occurrences out of a total of 61 sixth occurrences. However, an additional 24 of these premises have been contacted in other ways, via email or telephone contact, and some have had involvement from the Fire Protection team to help reduce UwFS. Over half of the 61 sixth occurrences were premises reaching this trigger more than once during the year.
- 2.14 The number of UwFSs had seen a consistent reduction over the last five years. The most significant reduction was in 2019 with the introduction of the AFA procedure and call challenging. Previously the average reduction was around 50 calls per year, but in 2019, UwFSs reduced by 541 calls in one year, a reduction of 18%.
- 2.15 In 2020, UwFS have reduced by 238 calls from 2019, a reduction of nearly 10%. Therefore, since the introduction of the Tri-Service UwFS procedure, the Service has attended 779 less incidents year-on-year; a reduction of 25%.
- 2.16 On analysis of 2020 data, it was found that out of the total 2028 UwFS in that year, 42% were caused by premises belonging to just three premises owners; Nottingham University Hospitals, Nottingham City Homes and Broxtowe Borough Council. Work continues with these three providers and are demonstrating a downward trend.
- 2.17 Analysis of the Incident Recording System (IRS) has highlighted that there are discrepancies in the reporting of Crews from incidents. For example, during a dip-sample of incidents, a number were reported as 'False Alarm Apparatus' – which would be reported as an UwFS – but with the cause being given in the narrative log as 'burnt cooking'. In these instances, the AFD has worked effectively and this was not an UwFS.
- 2.18 Measures are being taken to ensure consistency in relation to reporting of incident types including future assurance work to ensure improvement in this area.
- 2.19 As the Service still attends over 2000 UwFSs a year, contributing almost 30% of all incidents attended by the Service, there is scope to reduce this further, including.
- Not attending any AFD calls;
  - Having a reduced exemption list;
  - Call challenging all calls during 'waking hours';
  - Introducing charging for repeat UwFSs.
- 2.20 NFRS Officers will explore additional steps, alongside Tri-Service partners, to assess their potential impact and report back to Members with further recommendations. Steps to be explored include, but are not limited to:

- Reviewing the exemption list to remove premises that present a lower risk, such as staffed hotels during night-time hours and Hospitals and High-Rise premises during day-time hours;
- Reviewing the PDA for attendance to other premises types on the current exemption list;
- A review of all amended PDAs for AFD calls to ensure they are current, accurate and conform to the procedure;
- Introducing call charging for persistent, repeat attendance at UwFSs.

### **3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

Whilst a notional financial saving for the reduction in UwFSs could be calculated, there is only a real financial benefit if the call out is attended by an on-call crew for which attendance payments would be payable. These are minimal due to the majority of UwFS occurring in the City. The larger benefits to the organisation are the increased availability of crews to attend other incidents and the freeing up of time for other activities.

### **4. HUMAN RESOURCES AND LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT IMPLICATIONS**

There are no human resources or learning and development implications arising from this report.

### **5. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS**

An equality impact assessment has not been undertaken because the information contained in this report does not relate to a change in policy or procedure.

### **6. CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS**

There are no crime and disorder implications arising from this report.

### **7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1 The Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 places a duty on NFRS in respect of the delivery of its services to communities.
- 7.2 The Local Government Act 1999 places a statutory duty on NFRS to '*secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised*'. The reporting of Service Delivery's performance ensures that the Service is focusing on key objectives as set by the Fire and Rescue Authority and

continuous improvement. This ensures that Members can apply effective scrutiny to be satisfied that statutory obligations are being met.

## **8. RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS**

An effective performance culture and regime ensures that the Service focuses on key objectives which contribute to the management of strategic and corporate risks. Robust performance information and analysis supports effective decision making and efficient use of resources.

## **9. COLLABORATION IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.1 The Service continually seeks opportunities to work closely with other partner's services to maximise efficiency and to provide the highest level of service to the public, with particular focus currently with Nottinghamshire Police.
- 9.2 The Tri-Service Unwanted Fire Signals policy fosters a collaborative approach within the Tri-Service Control arrangements. This collaboration will continue and efforts made to ensure that the three fire and rescue services continue to address the risks and opportunities that are posed in a collaborative manner wherever possible.

## **10. RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is recommended that Members:

- 10.1 Note the progress made in addressing unwanted fire signals
- 10.2 Support the exploration of developing the Tri-Service Unwanted Fire Signals Policy.
- 10.3 Receive a further report with recommendations within six months.

## **11. BACKGROUND PAPERS FOR INSPECTION (OTHER THAN PUBLISHED DOCUMENTS)**

None.

John Buckley  
**CHIEF FIRE OFFICER**