



NOTTINGHAMSHIRE
Fire & Rescue Service
Creating Safer Communities

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

REDUCTIONS IN UNWANTED FIRE SIGNALS

Report of the Chief Fire Officer

Date: 06 January 2023

Purpose of Report:

To provide members with an update on progress and recommendations to achieve the Authorities CRMP target of reducing Unwanted Fire Signals by 10% by 2025.

Recommendations:

It is recommended that Members:

- Support the proposal, not to attend automatic fire alarm calls at hospitals, between 07:00 and 19:00.
- Note the changes to future unwanted fire signals performance reporting.
- Support consultation and policy development to enable the Service to financially charge unwanted fire signal persistent offenders.

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1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service (NFRS) responds to and investigates the causes of automatic fire alarm activations (AFA) in a variety of premises. Where these activations have been apportioned to a cause other than fire, these are classified as Unwanted Fire Signals (UwFS).
- 1.2 In 2021/22, NFRS responded to 3,480 UwFS apportioned to AFA systems or process. This is reduction from 3,793 in 2017/18.
- 1.3 The National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) has published guidance to support fire and rescue services (FRS) to reduce the number of UwFS they attend and the number and weight of response to AFAs, considering local community and societal risk.
- 1.4 In June 2018, Members approved changes to enable a collaborative approach as part of the Tri-Service Policy (Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire, and Leicestershire FRSs) to reduce the number of UwFS.
- 1.5 The Community Risk Management Plan has set an objective to reduce the number of UwFS by 10% by 2025 and further supported within the Futures 2025 Efficiencies strategy aim to reduce demand

2. REPORT

- 2.1 The Tri-Service UwFS Policy was introduced in 2018 to reduce the impact of UwFS calls on the FRS and allow a standard approach to the receipt and mobilisation to incidents across the Tri-Service Control Rooms. The key components of the Policy are listed below:
 - 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 automatic fire detection 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 AFA calls enable a thorough and safe approach. This has seen some premises, for example some high-rise properties, having an amended attendance of resources to ensure an effective search can be undertaken in a timely manner.
- 2.4 During 2021/22, NFRS has attended 3,480 calls as a result of UwFS. This compares to 3,142 calls attended in the same period of the previous year. An increase of 11%.
- 2.5 However, it must be noted that during 2019/20 and 2020/21, premises within Nottinghamshire were subject to government COVID-19 restrictions which resulted in premises being empty or with limited use for extended periods. This reduced use would have seen a natural reduction in UwFS being generated based on human behaviour factors.
- 2.6 Over the last five-year period, UwFS account for approximately 35% of all fire incidents attended.

Year	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20*	2020/21*	2021/22
Number of UwFS	3793	3678	3338	3142	3480
number of incidents	10601	11235	9659	8992	10096
% UwFS	36%	33%	35%	35%	34%

Table 1: UwFS / Incidents (Past 5 Years)

*COVID-19 restrictions introduced by Government

- 2.7 A UwFS can be classified as:

- False alarm - apparatus
- False alarm - good Intent
- False alarm - malicious.

Table 2 below shows a breakdown of the total false alarms attended, over the past five years

	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Total Apparatus	3276	3146	2779	2666	2962
Total Good Intent	409	422	441	389	417
Total Malicious	108	110	118	87	101
Total False Alarms	3793	3678	3338	3142	3480

Table 2: False Alarms by Classification

- 2.8 The Fire Protection department continues to work closely with the `Responsible Person` at premises where the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 (RRO) applies. Internal systems identify repeated UwFS occurrences, which enables Fire Protection staff to provide support and guidance relating to management processes, system maintenance and standards being adopted by premises in scope. In extreme cases of repeated poor management and non-compliance, staff will use powers afforded under the RRO to achieve compliance via informal and formal routes.
- 2.9 Whilst this approach has seen improvements for NFRS, research suggests that other societal factors may have resulted in an increase of UwFS in other property types. An increase in UwFS in single domestic premises and sheltered accommodation have been identified and could be apportioned to the increased use of Telecare and Lifeline systems that enable elderly people to live independently for longer in their own homes.
- 2.10 Historically, the top five premises types that result in UwFS are identified in Figure 1 below.

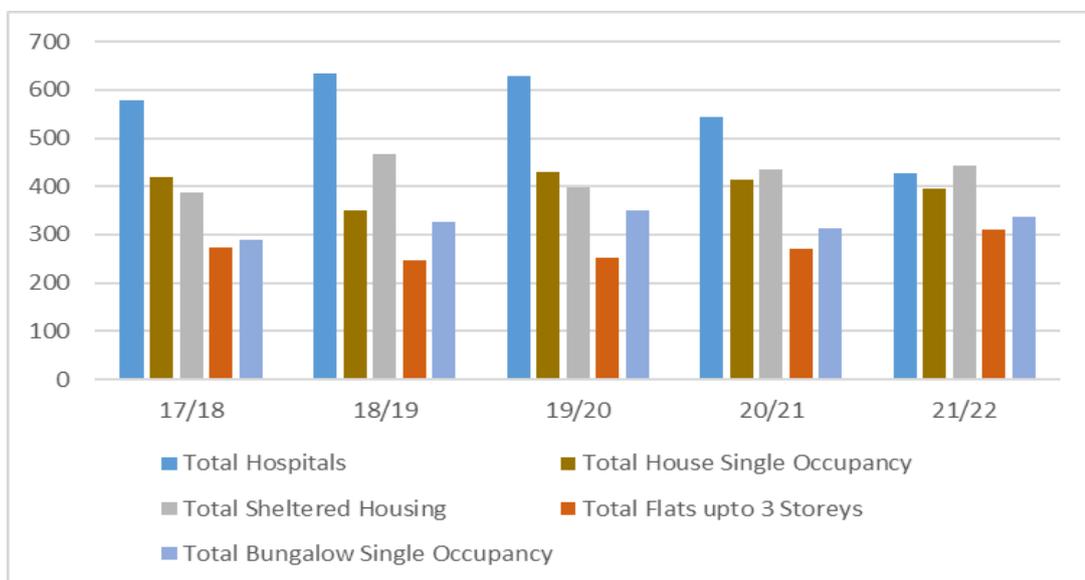


Figure 1: Top Five Premises Types

These five premises types generated 65% of NFRS UwFS calls during 2021/22.

- 2.11 Attendance at UwFS does impact on the Service's ability to respond to other emergencies, it also impacts on the amount of time available to focus on reducing risk through critical prevention and protection work.
- 2.12 Based on the reported figures, there is scope to reduce the Service attendance at UwFS, and to put the onus on the premises Responsible Persons. Other FRSs have approached this through a number of means:
- Not attending some AFA calls;
 - Having a reduced exemption list;
 - Call challenging all calls during 'waking hours';
 - Introducing charging for repeat UwFS as per NFCC guidance.

It is proposed that NFRS adopt a blended approach to support a decrease in UwFS by the following actions.

UwFS REPORTING

- 2.13 Currently all premises that result in an activation of a fire alarm, whether this is a domestic grade alarm or a system that complies with commercial grade BS5839:1, are captured as part of UwFS reporting. However, the Protection department cannot influence a change in system design or use its legislative powers afforded under the RRO within the domestic environment.
- 2.14 To ensure accurate reporting and appropriate follow up actions, the reporting of domestic and commercial grade systems will be reported separately, specifically given that the reduction of domestic grade activations could be considered as part of a wider piece of work with Prevention Teams, who may be better placed to influence a change in behaviour with regards to private domestic dwellings.
- 2.15 Future Service Delivery reports presented to the Community Safety Committee will reflect these changes, to enable future detailed comparisons and analysis.

INCIDENT REPORTING SYSTEM (IRS)

- 2.16 Analysis of the IRS has highlighted that there are potential discrepancies in the way incidents are reported by operational crews, potentially inflating UwFS data. For example, during a dip-sample of incidents, a number were reported as 'False Alarm Apparatus', which would be reported as an UwFS, however, with the cause being given in the narrative log as 'small fire, out on arrival'. In these instances, the AFA has worked effectively and this was not an UwFS.
- 2.17 As a result of this, additional scrutiny and guidance will be provided to all Supervisory Managers to improve the recording and reporting of AFA calls. Furthermore, additional increased levels of scrutiny and assurance will be introduced, alongside incident monitoring and data cleansing, to support an overall improvement.

CALL CHARGING

- 2.18 The legal basis for charging comes from the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 (as amended by the Localism Act 2011). Three new sections have been added to the 2004 Act Sections 18A, 18B and 18C, allowing Fire and Rescue Authorities to charge for responding to a report of fire where the call is made that meets the following circumstances:
- There is a report of fire to the FRS;
 - The premises are not domestic premises;
 - The report of fire turns out to be false;

- The report is made as a direct or indirect result of warning equipment having malfunctioned or been mis-installed;
 - There is a persistent problem
- 2.19 The FSO offers a legislative option for tackling any mismanagement of fire safety arrangements in non-domestic premises, including the issue of UwFS. NFRS's objective is to provide another tool in the form of a cost recovery process, to help reduce the number of UwFS by encouraging the correct system design and management of this system in cases where persistent failure to comply is identified.
- 2.20 However, it must be noted that a cost recovery process would place an additional administrative burden on the Service. In addition, NFRS would need to establish a robust methodology for assessing the costs to the Authority in responding to UwFS. Details of this methodology are set out within the NFCC "CFOA Guidance for the Reduction of False Alarms and Unwanted Fire Signals."
- 2.21 It is recommended that NFRS investigates and consults on the proposal to introduce charging for persistent offenders, and that details of consultation outcomes and policy development is reported to Members for consideration.

NON-ATTENDANCE

- 2.22 Hospitals across the City and County contribute to approximately 10% of all UwFS.
- 2.23 Between April and September 2022 (six months) the Service attended 143 AFAs at Queens Medical Centre and Kings Mill Hospital. Of these alarm actuations five (3.5%) were found to be fires, of which none of them had spread beyond the item first ignited. These five incidents related to overheated lift mechanism; light fitting; microwave; cotton bud fire; and an overheated extractor fan. 18 of the 143 alarm actuations were at Kings Mill Hospital, none of these were found to be fires.
- 2.24 Hospitals are professionally managed premises with good levels of fire protection, with well trained and competent members of staff. During waking hours, it is noted that hospitals operate with a sizeable number of staff, therefore in the event of a fire, trained staff are on hand to firstly investigate then call for assistance in a brief period of time.
- 2.25 Reviewing the Service's attendance to hospitals between defined hours, where increased levels of staff are present, would allow the Service to engage in greater levels of prevention and protection activities, allowing resources to be aligned to reducing risk.
- 2.26 As agreed in the Service's Futures 2025: Efficiency Strategy Update, to Fire Authority in September 2022, to change and reduce demand on the response resources, it is proposed the Service does not attend AFA calls from hospitals, between 07:00 and 19:00 from 1 April 2023, unless there is a follow up 999 call.

- 2.27 Engagement with hospitals will commence immediately to ensure hospitals are prepared for this change, with Fire Inspecting Officers being available to support and advise on current safety measures.
- 2.28 It should be noted that the Service will still respond to all AFA calls that are backed up with a 999 call to all premises, and that to ensure an effective response is made by the Service, the Service always recommends a follow up 999 call where possible. It should also be noted that this change in policy would affect all hospital premises, including secure hospital premises.

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 NFRS will make a notional saving of approximately £300 per UwFS reduction, depending on the options which are implemented.
- 3.2 Costings and charging options will be reported to Members for further consideration.

4. HUMAN RESOURCES AND LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT IMPLICATIONS

Supervisory Managers will require additional guidance / training to ensure that they correctly complete the IRS to correctly identify and record UwFS.

5. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

An equality impact assessment will be undertaken as soon as possible as this is a change to the existing policy. The assessment will be brought back to this Committee.

6. CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

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

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 The Service also has a legal obligation to respond to emergency incidents under the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004. No proposals within this report affect the statutory responsibilities under the Act.
- 7.2 NFRS has legal obligations under the FSO to enforce the order. Issues relating to inadequacies with a premises fire alarm system would fall within the scope of this order.

8. RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 Hospital premises are classified as `high risk` premises. Hospitals are an important societal premises that due to their nature are occupied by large numbers of vulnerable persons. However, hospitals have well developed fire safety management processes and staff training procedures, in addition to the modern and extensive coverage as part of fire alarm systems which protect the buildings.
- 8.2 Due to the fire safety regimes in hospital environments, the risk of a fire is low. However, should a fire occur the risk to the occupants is high due to the hazard factors which are present in a hospital environment.
- 8.3 Consulting and implementing financial charges for repeat UwFS offenders will be met with some resistance and concern, which has the potential to impact on the Services community reputation.

9. COLLABORATION IMPLICATIONS

The proposals within this report fall outside of the existing Tri-Service UwFS Policy, which will move us away from the 2018 collaboration approach.

10. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Members:

- 10.1 Support the proposal, not to attend automatic fire alarm calls at hospitals, between 07:00 and 19:00.
- 10.2 Note the changes to future Unwanted Fire Signals performance reporting.
- 10.3 Support consultation and policy development to enable the Service to financially charge Unwanted Fire Signals persistent offenders.

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

None.

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