



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

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

# **REDUCING THE NUMBER OF UNWANTED FIRE ALARM SIGNALS THROUGH COLLABORATION**

Report of the Chief Fire Officer

**Date:** 22 June 2018

**Purpose of Report:**

To inform Members about the number of calls to unwanted fire alarm signals and the benefits of harmonising the Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service response to such calls with neighbouring fire and rescue services for Members' consideration.

## **CONTACT OFFICER**

**Name :** Wayne Bowcock  
Deputy Chief Fire Officer

**Tel :** 0115 967 0880

**Email :** wayne.bowcock@notts-fire.gov.uk

**Media Enquiries  
Contact :** Therese Easom  
(0115) 967 0880 therese.easom@notts-fire.gov.uk

## **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 2017, 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 The number of AFD systems installed across Nottinghamshire is unknown, NFRS has no control over these systems. The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 (FSO) places a duty on the responsible person (RP) for the alarm system and for all fire safety measures in the premises.
- 1.5 False alarms become UwFS at the point a FRS is requested to attend. However, they are avoidable through good system design, management practice, procedures, maintenance and the appropriate use of space within premises.
- 1.6 The Tri-Service Fire Control covering Derbyshire, Leicestershire and Nottinghamshire was introduced to provide resilience, efficiency and effective response across the three FRS areas. This was supplemented by the Regional Implementation Team (RIT) in 2017 which aims to harmonise the introduction of national operational guidance across the five East Midlands FRSs. This is to achieve efficiency in terms of the work required to introduce the guidance but more importantly, effectiveness through harmonising the ways of working between the FRSs to provide the fastest and most effective service to communities.
- 1.7 Presently Derbyshire, Leicestershire and Nottinghamshire have slightly different approaches when dealing with and responding to UwFS.

## **2. REPORT**

- 2.1 NFRS has an UwFS policy in place which includes a local interpretation of elements of the NFCC guidance including call challenging, amended response to calls received from Alarm Receiving Centres (ARC), response to unoccupied premises where alarms are sounding and dealing with premises where there are frequent false alarms.
- 2.2 The NFRS policy includes proactive engagement with RPs and premises to advise and ensure accountability is clear in relation to effective system maintenance, staff training, procedures and management arrangements.

- 2.3 To harmonise the process for handling UwFS across the Tri-Service area, a draft joint procedure has been developed. Should NFRS wish to align with this draft procedure, Members would have to agree to a policy change within NFRS.
- 2.4 The key differences between the current policy within NFRS and the draft Tri-Service procedure are:
- Move from call challenging between the hours of 07:00 and 18:00 to 24 hours, 7 days per week;
  - Hotels will be 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 of one appliance.
- 2.5 Certain premise types will be 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 site specific risk information (SSRI) National PORIS Level 4 and 5;
  - 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 is locally determined to be unsuitable for call challenging
- 2.6 To minimise the impact of UwFS it is recommended that a trial will take place within Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire, to be reviewed prior to adoption across the Tri-Service area, whereby unoccupied buildings will not be exempted from call challenging.
- 2.7 To provide assurance, 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.

### **3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

Increasing the level of call challenging and the corresponding reduction of unnecessary appliance movements to UwFS will have some positive impact on budgets. Beyond the notional £300 per call per appliance this is unquantifiable until performance can be analysed and costs applied.

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

There are no anticipated human resources implications as a result of a policy change. There will be minor training requirements for Fire Control staff, operational firefighters and Fire Protection Team members. This will be delivered internally as part of normal business.

#### **5. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS**

An equality impact assessment has not been undertaken because only minor changes to existing policy are required. Should Members support his policy change, a gap analysis of the existing policy will be undertaken jointly across the Tri-Service.

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

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

#### **7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

The Authority has statutory duties under the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 and the RRO. The suggested amendments to policy are compliant with the latest NFCC guidance which complies with both pieces of legislation. National guidance and local performance will be monitored to ensure Members can be informed if future changes are required to meet statutory duties.

#### **8. RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS**

Several potential risks exist in relation to unnecessarily attending UwFS:

- Diverting essential services from attending other life risk incidents;
- Increased risk of accidents and collisions as a result of responding under emergency conditions;
- Disruption to the programmed activity of NFRS, for example fire safety education and fire prevention activities;
- Significant financial burden. Cost of attendance to tax payers for each UwFS can be up to £300 per call;
- Environment impact, caused by unnecessary appliance movements.

Wider risks to the community can include:

- Disruption to business (downtime and time wasted);
- Loss of credibility in the alarm system which may result in occupant complacency leading to inappropriate response in the event of a real fire;

- Loss of revenue;
- Drain on public finances.

These risks, and the proven effectiveness of call challenging and reduced or no attendances offset the perceived reputational risk associated with a fire occurring where no attendance is made by NFRS.

## **9. COLLABORATION IMPLICATIONS**

This is a collaborative approach between Derbyshire, Leicestershire and Nottinghamshire FRSs to realise the benefits of Tri-Service Fire Control through harmonised policy and procedure. To harmonise the East Midlands adoption of national guidance and to ensure the nearest, quickest and most appropriate resources are used to respond to incidents regardless of their county of origin or the location of the incident.

## **10. RECOMMENDATIONS**

That Members endorse the harmonisation of UwFS policy across the Tri-Service Fire Control area of Derbyshire, Leicestershire and Nottinghamshire.

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

None.

John Buckley  
**CHIEF FIRE OFFICER**