

HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

COMMUNITY SAFETY & WASTE MANAGEMENT CABINET PANEL

TUESDAY 6 SEPTEMBER 2016

AUTOMATIC FIRE ALARMS (AFAs) AND UNWANTED FIRE SIGNALS (UFS)

Report of the Director Community Protection (Chief Fire Officer)

Author: Andy Hopcraft – Area Commander Response and Resilience
(Contact 01992 507540)

Executive Member: Richard Thake – Community Safety & Waste Management

1 Purpose

1.1 To seek support from Members regarding the Officer recommendation not to charge for attendance to Automatic Fire Alarm (AFA) activations in premises housing vulnerable groups.

2 Summary

2.1 The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) introduced the general power of competence under the Localism Act 2011.

2.2 These powers came into effect on 18 February 2012 for all Principal Local Authorities and Fire and Rescue Authorities in England. As a result, Fire and Rescue Services may now, under Section 18c of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004, charge for reports of fire (effectively this means the attendance of the fire service) where:

- (a) The report is of fire at premises that are not domestic premises;
- (b) The report is false;
- (c) The report is made as a direct or indirect result of warning equipment having malfunctioned or been incorrectly installed, or
- (d) There is a persistent problem with false reports of fire at the premises that are made as a direct or indirect result of warning equipment under common control having malfunctioned or been incorrectly installed.

2.3 Whilst it is recognised that there is an opportunity to charge premises, it is recommended to the Community Safety and Waste Management Cabinet Panel that no charge is made for attendance to premises that reach or exceed the Unwanted Fire Signals (UFS) thresholds at the present time, where the premises involved are categorised as vulnerable.

- 2.4 If agreed Hertfordshire Fire and Rescue Service (HFRS) will continue to be proactive and work with District Councils and other relevant bodies, by monitoring the performance of premises within their area and to develop and implement local action plans to reduce the incidence of UFS for those identified as presenting a persistent problem. This will include clearly stating, in writing, that the facility now exists within legislation to charge for these types of attendance and though HFRS will not be doing so at this stage, this will be kept under review should performance not improve.

3 Recommendation

- 3.1 The Cabinet Panel is asked to note the contents of the report and to support the recommendation that no charge is made for attendance to AFA activations in premises housing vulnerable groups.

4 Background

- 4.1 Since the implementation of Service Order 109 – (Reduction of Unwanted Automatic Fire Alarm Calls) in March 2014, HFRS have monitored their attendance to these types of incident.
- 4.2 The introduction of Service Order 109 introduced a policy of non-attendance of Fire Service resources for reports of fire signals generated from automatic fire detection and fire alarm systems between the hours of 0900 to 1700hrs, Monday–Friday, unless; there is a confirmed fire, the premises are used to house vulnerable persons, the premises are deemed a high risk premises or HFRS deems there to be a risk assessed specific need.
- 4.3 There are currently 141 premises in Hertfordshire that meet the criteria for Service Order 109 (Reduction of Unwanted AFA Calls) “Poor Performance Thresholds” these thresholds are defined as one of the following:
- Two or more Unwanted Fire Signals (UFS) in any period of four weeks,
 - Three or more UFS in any period of twenty six weeks,
 - Where the cause of any UFS has not been remedied within seven days.
- Service Order 109 also states:
- 4.4
- If the Service attends any premises due to an AFA sounding more than three times resulting in a false alarm, then HFRS will consider levying a charge against the premises.
 - If a premise has generated three false alarms resulting in an operational attendance, the owner or operator will be informed that they have reached this threshold and that the HFRS will start to consider recovering costs for any future attendances made.

4.5 Attendance will always be made and no charges levied in the following circumstances:

- Where premises are used to house vulnerable persons or deemed, through an appropriate risk assessment, a high risk premises.

4.6 Premises deemed to house vulnerable persons are, for the purpose of the policy, those listed below:

- Hospitals,
- Care Homes,
- Houses in multiple occupation,
- High rise properties,
- Hostels,
- Schools

5 Charging

5.1 In addition to the mobilisation, and if HFRS attend any premises due to an AFA sounding more than 3 times resulting in a false alarm, then HFRS will consider levying a charge of £250 per call against the owner of those premises.

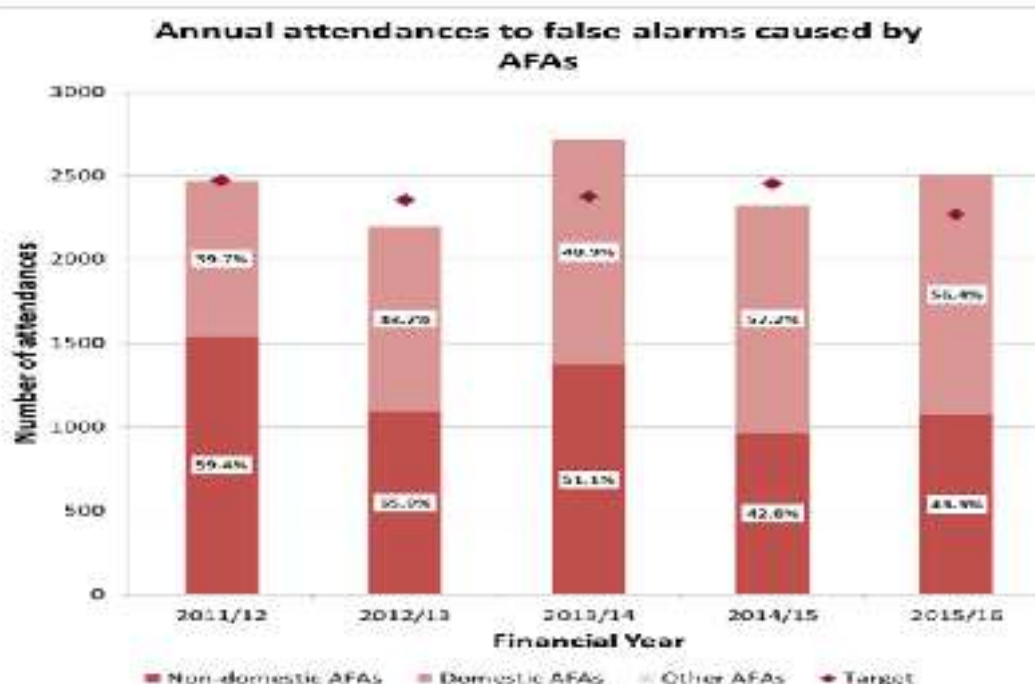
5.2 HFRS have already implemented this policy in relation to premises in the non-vulnerable category, consideration as to whether should be extended to vulnerable, often public sector, premises has been undertaken. Until now, vulnerable premises have not incurred a charge but continue to be among the most prolific source of these calls.

5.3 It should be noted that ten of the most prolific offenders for unwanted fire signals account for 688 or 27.5% of all AFA actuations. From 1 April 2014 HFRS introduced a policy of not responding to calls from AFA systems in business premises between 9am and 5pm, Monday to Friday, unless a fire is confirmed. The policy has proven to be successful and has led to a significant reduction in these types of calls, 14.5% in 2014/15.

5.4 This year to date, the service has experienced an overall rise of 7.9% in the number of calls to false alarms caused by AFAs, attendances to non-domestic premises have subsequently risen by 11.2%.

5.5 However the total number of calls successfully challenged by Fire Control where no attendance was made has risen by 33.4% and overall the Service attended just 67.6% of false alarm calls generated by AFAs compared to

72.1% last year an improvement of 6.2%.



5.6 The premises with the highest number of UFS in the past year are shown in the table below.

No	Name of premises	Type of premises	Owner	Station area	Calls
1	Lister Hospital	Hospital	NHS	Stevenage	27
2	Watford General	Hospital	NHS	Watford	21
3	Blakeney House	Sheltered Accom	North Herts Homes	Stevenage	12
4	Wellfield Court	Sheltered Accom	North Herts Homes	Stevenage	12
5	Enma Rothchild Court	Sheltered Accom	Dacorum Borough Council	Tring	10
6	Ivel Court.	Sheltered Accom	North Herts Homes	Baldock	9
7	Walpole Court	Sheltered Accom	Stevenage Borough Council	Stevenage	9
8	Grove Court	Sheltered Accom	Thrive Housing	Rickmansworth	9
9	27 Springfield Road	Sheltered Accom	B3 Living	Cheshurt	8
10	The Arts Centre	Commercial	Baldock Arts and Heritage Centre	Baldock	8
11	Clitheroe Gardens	Sheltered Accom	Watford Housing Trust	Watford	8

12	Castle View	Sheltered Accom	Elderly Accommodation Counsel (EAC)	B/Stortford	7
13	Robert Saunders Court	Sheltered Accom	North Herts Homes	Baldock	7
14	Ickleford Mill	Commercial	Bowman & Sons	Hitchin	7
15	Fred Millard Court	Sheltered Accom	Stevenage Borough Council	Stevenage	7
16	Woodside Court	Halfway house	NHS Hertfordshire Housing Partnership	Watford	7
17	Banana Tree Restaurant	Commercial	Banana Tree Restaurants Ltd	Watford	7
18	Harrogate Court	Sheltered Accom	Watford Housing Trust	Watford	7
19	Howlands House	Homeless/Refuge	W&H Community Housing Trust	WGC	7

5.7 The table below shows the premises with the highest number of UFS in the past 5 years.

Name of premises	Type of premises	Station area	Number of calls
Lister Hospital	Hospital	Stevenage	145
Watford General Hospital	Hospital	Watford	123
Clitheroe Gardens	Sheltered accom	Watford	61
Blakeney House	Sheltered accom	Stevenage	59
Robert Saunders Court	Sheltered accom	Baldock	57
Sue Ryder Foundation	Hospice	Hitchin	52
Ivel Court	Sheltered accom	Baldock	51
Howlands House	Med/Hospital	WGC	49
Sax house	Shelterd accom	Baldock	47
Tibbles Close	Sheltered accom	Garston	44

6. Financial Implications

6.1 There is no additional financial impact in the decision taken as HFRS will continue to respond to AFA activations in premises housing vulnerable groups in the same way as before.

7. Equalities Implications

When considering proposals placed before Members it is important that they

- 7.1 are fully aware of, and have themselves rigorously considered the equality implications of the decision that they are making.
- 7.2 Rigorous consideration will ensure that proper appreciation of any potential impact of that decision on the County Council's statutory obligations under the Public Sector Equality Duty. As a minimum this requires decision makers to read and carefully consider the content of any Equalities Impact Assessment (EQiA) produced by officers.
- 7.3 The Equality Act 2010 requires the County Council when exercising its functions to have due regard to the need to (a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and other conduct prohibited under the Act; (b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it and (c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it. The protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 are age; disability; gender reassignment; marriage and civil partnership; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion and belief, sex and sexual orientation.
- 7.4 The decision does not alter the attendance of emergency resources, however the increased challenging of attendances and actions of 'responsible persons' in relation to their premises may have an impact upon vulnerable residents which will be monitored by the Service.