

Report of the Assistant Chief Fire Officer - Service Support

8. Automatic False Alarm (AFA) Reduction Policy

Purpose of report

1. To propose formal adoption of the existing Interim Automatic False Alarm Reduction (AFA) Policy into a new Policy.
-

Recommendations

It is recommended that the Fire and Rescue Authority (FRA) adopts the following in relation to Automatic Fire Alarms:

- i) all pre-determined attendances to Automatic Fire Alarm calls to be one pumping appliance only, except where risk factors and Intel (intelligence) information indicate otherwise;***
- ii) robust call filtering in the Service's Command and Control Centre be implemented;***
- iii) return en route be implemented when a caller confirms any previous call as now a false alarm;***
- iv) all responses to Automatic Fire Alarms to be at normal road speeds unless the Officer in Charge of the appliance deems otherwise;***
- v) attendance will be made to Automatic Fire Alarms received to dwellings (includes houses in multiple occupation, flats) schools, residential care and other residential (includes special units, sheltered housing, hotels, hostels);***
- vi) hospitals to receive one appliance attendance to calls from Automatic Fire Alarms, except where risk factors and Intel (intelligence) information indicate otherwise;***
- vii) the Authority will not adopt a 'charging for Automatic Fire Alarms' policy at this time; and***
- viii) implement a 'full' call filter procedure to Automatic Fire Alarms from non-residential premises and hospitals and a 'light' call filter procedure to Automatic Fire Alarms from dwellings, schools, residential care and other residential dwellings.***

Introduction and Background

2. In general terms an Automatic Fire Alarm system is a fire alarm system comprising of components for automatically detecting a fire, initiating an alarm of fire and other action as required; the system may include manual (break glass) call points. The purpose of an automatic fire alarm system is to give sufficient warning to relevant persons within a premise of possible fire conditions so that they can make their escape to a place of safety before conditions become untenable.

The actuation of an alarm system also allows for the summoning of an emergency response; this is facilitated in two ways:

- i) 999 System

On actuation of the fire alarm system, a designated person(s) contacts the Fire Service to inform them of the actuation.

- ii) ARC (Alarm Receiving Centre)

ARCs are commercial call handling centres that receive automated signals from monitored fire alarm systems and then pass the call details to the appropriate Fire and Rescue Service Control.

3. The Service undertook an in-depth and detailed review of all aspects of attendances at AFAs as part of the 2011/12 Integrated Risk Management Action Plan. Following consultation, this led to twelve specific recommendations for implementation that were formally accepted by the FRA on 14 December 2011.
4. As part of a phased implementation plan, the Service introduced seven of the original twelve proposals, as detailed in i – vii above, in the first instance, with a view to potentially implementing the remaining five proposals after a 12 month period of review. Therefore an Interim AFA Reduction Policy was published on 24 April 2012.
5. The following five proposals were not included in the Interim policy:
 - ***attendance will not be made to non-residential premises (includes offices, shops, factories, warehouses, other buildings); unless it is deemed necessary following a risk-assessment;***
 - ***all restricted attendances be implemented at all times of day and night, this will be specifically reviewed after 12 months Automatic Fire Alarms to unoccupied premises will not receive an attendance, unless it is deemed necessary following a risk assessment;***
 - ***implement robust call filtering, including full and light filtering mechanisms; and***

- ***the Service may implement a non-attendance policy to repeat offenders, following Technical Fire Safety intervention, unless a confirmed fire is reported.***
6. The primary reason for delaying the above five options was to align this piece of work to the new Fire Control system going live in September 2012. This also enabled the Service to evaluate the impact of these measures, assess the risk to the Authority and community and avoid sudden changes or disruption to the business community.

Key Findings and Analysis

7. Following the twelve month implementation period of the interim policy, data regarding AFA attendances has been analysed, with the aim of highlighting the differences in operational activity pre and post policy implementation. Data has been studied for the first full year since the interim policy was implemented and then compared with attendances under the old policy for the last full year of that instruction.
8. The interim policy has not achieved a significant reduction in the actual numbers of incidents attended, only the number of appliances responding. Following the twelve month implementation period of the interim policy the Service has reported an 8% reduction in AFA incidents which equates to 245 less incidents. It has also seen a 23% reduction in appliance mobilisations which equates to 770 less turnouts. These notable reductions are illustrated in more detail in Appendix 1 of this report.
9. As well as a reduction in risk to communities (through less blue light traffic), the introduction of the interim policy has also achieved the primary aim of releasing capacity within the Service to focus on other activities, such as community safety and training.
10. The Service has also seen an improvement in its emergency response to the community, with **34** simultaneous incidents recorded (where the Service attended another incident at the same time that an AFA occurred within the same Station area). Reducing attendance numbers at AFAs has allowed the Service to respond more quickly to other incidents close by, with resources now more readily available to deal with simultaneous incident occurrences.
11. During the interim policy period, there have been **73** incidents where the initial AFA call was reported as an AFA and then resulted in a primary fire being reported. Almost all of these incidents were very minor fires such as cooking appliances, including cookers and microwave ovens, wiring and cables, light fittings and other domestic appliances, many of which were out on arrival. This figure still only represents around 3% of the total AFAs incidents for the same period and demonstrates that the risk to communities has not increased as a result of these measures.
12. Although not introduced as a cost saving exercise, there has been a reduction in costs to the Service, of approximately £40,000, as a result of non-attendance at AFAs. These have been realised predominantly against Retained (on-call) costs due to a reduction in turnout fees.

13. The interim policy has proven to be a successful and pragmatic way forward without any detrimental effect on the service provided to our communities. Evaluation of the interim policy seems to indicate that progression to non-attendance could provide further benefits but these do not appear proportionate to the potential subsequent impact on our communities.
14. Implementation of one additional already approved measure, as detailed in item viii above, which involves the application of full and light filtering mechanisms, offers further opportunity to reduce numbers of calls attended without significant change to the service provided. Full and light filtering mechanisms differ from general robust call filtering, which requires the Control Operator to apply standard challenge criteria to all calls, as it requires different degrees of challenge to the caller dependent upon whether the call is made from a domestic dwelling or a commercial premise. The Control Operator then has the ability to vary the mobilising arrangements to suit the call.
15. Other measures included in the interim policy have proven appropriate and have had no detrimental effect to the Service or community. Further implementation of non-attendance protocols for certain building types would reduce the numbers of AFA calls attended. However where an AFA call escalates to a 'real' fire the Service's attendance may be significantly delayed or non-existent, if no further call is made. It is not, therefore, proposed to progress these measures.
16. The original position regarding charging for these incident types remains unchanged and does not appear to be a viable or practical way forward.

Proposals

17. It is proposed that the seven specific measures detailed within the interim policy are no longer regarded as interim and should be adopted as formal policy going forward.
18. That the new policy is supplemented with additional call filtering and mobilising criteria, including full and light filtering mechanisms, to further reduce the number of calls attended.

Corporate Considerations

Resource Implications (identify and financial, legal, property or human resources issues)	There are no additional resource implications as a result of this proposal; however reduction in revenue costs of approximately £0.04m.
Strategic Policy Links (identify how proposals link in with current priorities and policy framework and if they do not identify any potential implications)	Implementation of this proposal will continue to support the Safer Firefighters and Safer Communities elements within 'Our Strategy'.

Risk Management / Health & Safety (identify any risks the proposed control measures and risk evaluation scores)	Implementation of this proposal will directly contribute to safer Firefighters and safer communities by ensuring a measured operational response is mobilised to all AFAs.
Consultation (identify any public or other consultation that has been carried out on this matter)	All consultation on this proposal has been concluded. Consultation was carried out with specific stakeholders likely to be affected e.g. business premises, partner organisations.
Equalities (has an Equalities Impact Assessment been completed? If not, why not?)	This proposal will provide a standard response applicable to all AFA incidents.

Supporting Information

Appendix 1: Data on AFA incidents attended

Background Papers

2011/12 Integrated Risk Management Action Plan
Authority Reports and Minutes – 14 December 2011
Interim AFA Reduction Policy - 24 April 2012

Contact Officer

John Hodges
Assistant Chief Fire Officer
(01905) 368248
Email: jhodges@hwfire.org.uk

APPENDIX 1

The Service attended **2397** AFA incidents in the period 20 April 2012 to 19 April 2013, compared with **2642** in the same period the year before. This represents an aggregate percentage reduction of **8.4%**. Table 1 shows the monthly breakdown of those incidents attended:

AFA Incidents attended	2011-12	2012-13	% Change
20 th –30 th April	69	69	0.0%
May	182	191	+4.9%
June	221	210	-5.0%
July	258	254	-1.6%
August	228	229	+0.4%
September	245	216	-11.8%
October	248	203	-18.1%
November	203	225	+10.8%
December	229	167	-26.8%
January	201	185	-27.0%
February	239	157	-34.3%
March	189	189	0.0%
1 st – 19 th April	130	102	-21.5%
Total	2642	2397	-8.4%

(Table 1 – AFA incidents attended 20th April 2011 to 19th April 2012 and 20th April 2012 to 19th April 2013)

Attendances (numbers of appliances attending incidents)

Table 2 below shows that the implementation of the interim policy has also produced a reduction in the number of appliances attending incidents going from **3316** attendances to **2546**. This represents a percentage reduction of **23.2%** and is primarily the result of adopting one pump pre-determined attendance for the majority of incidents. This reduction is seen as a major benefit to the introduction of the interim AFA policy, with the aim to reduce physical blue light traffic on our roads and to reduce risk to our communities.

AFA Attendances	2011-12	2012-13	% Change
20 th –30 th April	91	80	-12.1%
May	235	198	-15.7%
June	269	226	-16.0%
July	322	265	-17.7%
August	291	237	-18.6%
September	287	230	-24.8%
October	308	214	-30.5%
November	264	249	-5.7%
December	282	178	-36.9%
January	262	198	-24.4%
February	310	162	-47.7%
March	238	199	-16.4%
1 st – 19 th April	157	110	-29.9%
Total	3316	2546	-23.2%

(Table 2 – AFA attendances 20th April 2011 to 19th April 2012 and 20th April 2012 to 19th April 2013)