

10. Reduction in Attendance at Automatic Fire Alarms – Consultation Feedback

Purpose of report

1. To bring to the attention of the Fire and Rescue Authority the responses to consultation regarding the proposed reduction of attendances at Automatic Fire Alarms (AFAs) and to seek permission to implement the recommendations contained in this paper.

Recommendations

The Chief Fire Officer recommends that the Authority 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 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 a one fire appliance attendance to calls from Automatic Fire Alarms for a period of 12 months, during this 12 months a full assessment of each hospital be made to establish if a single fire appliance or a non-attendance is appropriate;*
- vii) attendance will not be made to non residential premises (includes offices, shops, factories, warehouses, other buildings);*
- viii) all restricted attendances be implemented at all times of day and night, this will be specifically reviewed after 12 months;*
- ix) Automatic Fire Alarms to unoccupied premises will not receive an attendance;*
- x) the Service's Command and Control Centre will apply a "full" filter procedure to Automatic Fire Alarm calls from non-residential premises and hospitals. (This complements Recommendation (v). They will apply a "light" filter procedure to Automatic Fire Alarm calls*

from dwellings, schools, residential care and other residential properties);

xi) the Service may implement a non-attendance policy to repeat offenders, following Technical Fire Safety intervention, unless a confirmed fire is reported; and

xii) the Authority will not adopt a 'Charging for Automatic Fire Alarms' policy at this time.

Background

2. The IRMP action plan 2011/12 Recommendation 3 proposed a review and changes to the established practices that will reduce the number of attendances that Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service (HWFRS) makes to unwanted fire signals (UwFS). This review was completed earlier this year and makes a series of proposals to address the key issues. The review will also assist in future decision making by the provision of data, statistical analysis, staff engagement, consultation and professional judgement.
3. This recommendation to review UwFS was previously consulted upon for twelve weeks in 2010, as part of the IRMP action plan for 2011/12. Recommendation 3 not only stated the intent to review this issue, but to also implement the outcomes based upon its findings, in order to "*reduce the level of attendances at this type of incident*". This report highlights the findings of the review and details consultation with key stakeholders which has taken place since summer 2011. Further consultation on the outcomes of the review has allowed the Service to make minor amendments to the original recommendations submitted to the Policy and Resources Committee earlier this year.
4. There are now enabling mechanisms contained within the Localism Act 2011, which in principle allow Fire and Rescue Services to charge for attendance at incidents where faulty apparatus, or a repeat offender are the cause. However the outcomes of this review do not recommend pursuing this as an option, as there is currently insufficient clarity on how this may be applied.

Overview

5. The Service currently attends over 3,000 AFAs per year (over a third of all incidents attended), of which only a very small fraction subsequently turn out to be "real" fires. Significant direct firefighting action by H&WFRS firefighters was only used to extinguish 25 incidents out of 6,067 incidents that originated as AFA calls (0.4% of AFA calls) over a recorded two year period¹.
6. It is also worthy of note that the approximately 3,000 incidents a year often involve multiple FRS vehicle movements per incident, therefore any reduction in levels of response and changes in current practice will have a greater effect than one appliance per incident. Over 3,000 incidents per year with all the associated vehicle movements, mainly on blue lights pose an increased level of risk to the staff responding and the public. There are many reasons to adopt the

¹ IRMP 2011-12 Action Plan Recommendation 3, *Review of Attendance at False Alarms caused by Automatic Fire Alarms*, P.13

recommendations in this review, including realising staff capacity, ensuring more appliances are available for real emergencies and promoting higher levels of awareness and ownership amongst those affected. However, the reduction in road journeys and the risks faced for over a third of the Services activity that rarely results in significant fires is a substantial consideration alone.

Our Consultation Programme

Headlines

7. A twelve week consultation period for the IRMP Action Plan in 2010, was completed prior to this review being undertaken. On completion of this review a more direct program of engagement has been undertaken with stakeholders likely to be affected by the outcomes. A total of 650 premises from the business sectors were contacted via a letter. A wider campaign of partner, public, professional and representative body engagement, was managed through existing networks. The Service also undertook a media campaign.
8. A range of briefings with key business groups was undertaken, both proactively, and based on request, which allowed the Service to capture salient comments from our stakeholders. In support of this approach, the Service provided an online support help desk to answer questions from consultees, or to receive and record any comments.
9. The consultation targeted the most relevant premises and stakeholders affected by these proposals. This targeting was primarily achieved through the analysis of AFA data over the last 3 years. This allowed for the accurate pinpointing of addresses most affected. A full list of our consultation stakeholders can be seen within Appendix 1.
10. In summary the main results of our consultation feedback showed that:
 - There was a limited business response to this consultation exercise, with a total of only 16 responses received. There were however, a number of partner discussions that took place to inform the outcomes of this report.
 - Of the responses received some consultees did express concern about the Service's proposed non attendance at hospitals. Based upon these concerns the relevant proposal has been amended.
 - A small proportion of consultees questioned our attendance at AFAs using normal road speed rather than a blue light emergency response.
 - A percentage of responses from the consultation asked only for clarity as to their individual responsibilities in relation to these recommendations, and not to comment or object to the proposals.
 - The Service did receive comments that were supportive of the recommendations.

How did we consult with stakeholders?

11. The table below outlines our engagement strategy for all groups:

Group	Method of engagement
Business	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Face to face meetings with key stakeholders conducted by Technical Fire Safety (TFS) officers• Business Support helpdesk facilitated by TFS officers• Presentations to key stakeholders by TFS officers• Media coverage promulgated by Service on 2 separate occasions.• 650 targeted letters to key businesses based on data analysis
Public	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Opportunity to comment against recommendations in IRMP Action plan 10/11• Media coverage promulgated by Service on 2 separate occasions.• Support helpdesk established to respond to consultee responses• Service website publishing details of Recommendations
Partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Email to individuals and organisations, informing them of the proposals• Meeting Herefordshire Partnership Executive Group• Meeting Worcestershire County Council• Meeting Wye Valley NHS Trust• Worcestershire Health and Care NHS Trust• Worcestershire County Council Area Care Homes Manager
Professional bodies	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fire Industry Association• Fire Protection Association
Representative Bodies	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A process of consultation has taken place between the Authority and Representative Bodies concerning these proposals (FBU Response)
Staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Key staff with responsibility for the implementation of any changes have been consulted regarding these proposals

Media Coverage

12. The purpose of engaging the media in this process was to publicise the consultation programme to business sectors, partners and the wider public, and to also allow journalists to understand the key facts about the proposals in the event that they were contacted by staff or the public. By adopting this strategy the Service took a proactive approach to working with the media, rather than have to

work reactively. In this regard, media coverage has been positive with excellent support from key media partners.

News Releases and Coverage

13. Copyright will not allow for the publication of news reports within this report; however their release, distribution, and release dates are summarised below.

Publication	Date
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Worcester News	8 September
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Hereford Times	22 September
<ul style="list-style-type: none">BBC News Hereford and Worcester	23 September
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Evesham Journal	24 September
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Worcester Standard	26 September
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Bromsgrove Standard	27 September
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Worcester News	28 September
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Redditch and Alcester Standard	29 September
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Worcester News	10 November

Final Recommendations from the Review and Subsequent Consultation

14. Below are the final proposed amended recommendations from this review, having taken into consideration the key points from stakeholders. A detailed overview of consultation findings is included in Appendix 2.

Recommendation 1

All Pre-Determined Attendances to AFA calls to be one pumping appliance only, except where risk factors and Intel (intelligence) information indicate otherwise.

Key Consultation Themes

- What risk factors determine our response?
- What can only one fire engine achieve if it attends a fire?

Our response

It is not the Service's intention to apply a blanket approach to all premise types. Wherever premises are assessed and identified as having the appropriate risk factors they will be afforded an amended response, in most cases this will be completed prior to implementation.

In relation to the efficacy of a single fire appliance attendance, on the very rare occasion (less than 0.4% based on previous two years data), that a fire may have developed within a property it is nearly always supported by calls indicating a real fire. This would then attract a full attendance on blue lights. On occasions where this may not be the case, personnel responding are professional firefighters that are

highly trained and they will operate within clear defined safe systems of work. Each incident to which the Service responds will be assessed by the Incident Commander and the appropriate level of intervention will be in accordance with the risk. It is currently common practice for a single fire appliance to attend a fire and commence appropriate operations prior to other appliances (if required) attending.

Recommendation 2

Implement robust call filtering in the Service's Command and Control Centre.

Key Themes

- What training will staff receive?
- What is the definition of a low risk site?
- How will the Service work with Alarm Receiving Centres?

Our response

The Service will embark upon an extensive communication exercise in the lead up to the implementation of this Policy, which we would estimate going live in mid 2012 and in conjunction with the new Fire Control. During this period we will further engage with our key stakeholders and provide information to those affected as to their individual responsibilities in relation to the Policy. We will provide wider support to those in the commercial sector as to how they can introduce effective controls to minimise individual impacts to their businesses.

In relation to Alarm Receiving Centres they are, and will continue to be, a key stakeholder in this process and will be part of our communications strategy. The Service will continue to work with this stakeholder group to ensure a common understanding of any Policy change.

The Service is committed to providing its staff with high quality training and this will be implemented accordingly in this matter. To date, considerable preparatory work has been undertaken between the Service's Technical Fire Safety department and our Service's Control staff to assist in the transition to the proposed new arrangements

Recommendation 3

Implement return en route when a caller confirms any previous call as now a false alarm.

Key Themes

- Staffing capacity at premises will sometimes not allow for the investigation of an AFA
- This recommendation will see extended times before a fire is noticed if the fire service do not attend
- How will information of the specific fire alarm events be captured if we return en route?
- This approach will not allow the Service to assist the owner occupier in dealing with the fault.

Our response

An AFA system installed to provide the occupants with an early warning of fire through detection. The management of the (commercial standard) system is the responsibility of the owner/occupier. It is their legal obligation under the Regulatory Reform Order (Fire Safety) 2005 to provide management arrangements for these eventualities. Currently nearly all AFA actuations that the Service attends do not result in a fire of any description. If there is no obvious sign of fire we have no legal basis on which to gain or force entry to the premises. This can result in fire appliances waiting for the attendance of a key holder. This is not an efficient use of our resources and potentially diverts resources away from real emergencies.

The Service will consider how data could be recorded from these occurrences so as to allow the Service to both support individual businesses who require it and to ensure that all activity that the Service undertakes is recorded.

There are currently occasions where a return en route protocol is being applied. The Service will ensure that definitive guidance is promulgated through a new Policy.

Recommendation 4

All responses to AFAs to be at normal road speeds unless the Officer in Charge of the appliance deems otherwise.

Key themes

- Is the discretionary use of blue lights not ambiguous?

Our response

Whether a call to an incident requires an emergency response is the decision of the Officer in Charge (OIC) and a judgement must be made to inform the driver as appropriate. However there may be circumstances where the OIC of the appliance may require the flexibility to apply his/her professional judgement such as locality, time of day etc, in order to ensure a reasonable response. The flexibility to do this is already in existing policy, SPI 6, Sec 19, 6.6, 6.8 & Appendix B.

Further clarity on this matter will be provided through the appropriate policies.

Recommendation 5

Attendance will be made to AFAs received to dwellings (includes houses in multiple occupation, flats) schools, residential care and other residential (includes special units, sheltered housing, hotels, hostels).

Hospitals will receive a one fire appliance attendance to calls from AFAs for a period of 12 months. During this 12 months a full assessment of each hospital will be made to establish if a single fire appliance or a non-attendance is appropriate.

Attendance will not be made to non residential (includes offices, shops, factories, warehouses, other buildings).

Key Themes

- Why are hospitals not being attended?
- What about premises whose key holders live considerable distances away?

Our response

Hospitals, although providing care differ from care homes in terms of staffing, levels of training, security and management systems, which are much higher. Hospitals have many highly trained staff on duty 24/7 and there is no direct correlation between our historical data and the national fire death statistics. However, the Service will apply a risk based analysis to all known hospitals to ascertain the impact of this proposal on each location. A decision will be made as to attendance or not at these respective premises, based upon risk.

However taking into consideration consultation responses, hospitals will continue to receive an attendance for a 12 month period. During this period each hospital will be risk assessed to establish if an attendance to an AFA call is appropriate. This risk assessment will consider the management of the premises, staff training, active and passive fire precautions and the history of any fires.

Recommendation 6

All restricted attendances will be implemented at all times of day and night. This will be specifically reviewed after 12 months.

Key Themes

- Clarity is required as to what time of day restrictions actually means
- Further consultation would be required before further implementation
- Why not implement time of day restrictions from the start?

Our response

The Service feels that its recommended approach, which is to consider introducing this proposal after 12 months, will allow for a period of monitoring and information to be gathered, to support any further decisions. This will support better decision making as to whether this recommendation would be necessary or effective. We will base any future restrictions on risk and data from the preceding 12 month implementation period.

The definition and detail regarding time of day can be found in Appendix 2²

Recommendation 7

AFAs to unoccupied premises will not receive an attendance.

² IRMP 2011-12 Action Plan Recommendation 3, *Review of Attendance at False Alarms caused by Automatic Fire Alarms*, P.24

Key Themes

- How will unoccupied premises be identified?
- What if specific risks or circumstances are identified in unoccupied premises?
- This will increase the time that a fire will be identified and dealt with.

Our Response

Identified within this recommendation is the caveat that where through our risk assessment process, elevated risk factors are clearly identified within a premises, attendance will be made to that premises.

As stated previously we will assist stakeholders with understanding their responsibilities in relation to unoccupied premises.

Recommendation 8

The Service's Command and Control Centre will apply "full" filter procedure to AFA calls from non-residential premises and hospitals. This complements Recommendation 5. They will apply a "light" filter procedure to AFA calls from dwellings, schools, residential care and other residential properties.

Key Themes

- What is the difference between the filtering procedures?
- Hereford and Worcester are setting a precedent with this approach

Our Response

As defined within the Chief Fire Officers Association's (CFOA) guidance³, call filters are the steps taken to limit the possibility of a false alarm being transmitted to a FRS as an Unwanted Fire Signal. Call filtering enables information to be gathered to aide the decision making process of Fire Control staff. The light filter is designed to obtain the information without delaying mobilisation. The full filter will be applied to premises types that do not attract any response, unless a fire is confirmed. We will modify our approach to attendance at hospitals as result of this consultation process.

Recommendation 9

The Service may implement a non-attendance policy to repeat offenders, following Technical Fire Safety intervention, unless a confirmed fire is reported.

Key Themes

- Why not educate rather than penalise owner /occupiers?
- What is the definition of a repeat offender?
- With limited capacity to investigate AFAs at certain times premises may, by default, become repeat offenders

³ CFOA Protocol for the Reduction of False Alarms & Unwanted Fire Signals, Sept 2010, P.9

- Professional bodies can assist the Service in the administering of this recommendation

Our Response

Education and support for repeated offenders will take place (as is current practice) in the form of TFS education programmes prior to intervention. There is no simple definition for repeat offenders, as it depends on a range of factors (such as size or building(s), number of detector heads or the processes being carried out) and will be considered on a case by case basis.

We will engage with our key stakeholders and provide information to those affected as to their individual responsibilities in relation to the proposed Policy. We will provide wider support to those in the commercial sector as to how they can introduce effective controls to minimise individual impacts to their businesses.

Recommendation 10

The Authority will not adopt a ‘Charging for AFA’ policy at this time.

Key Themes

- Why is the Service not adopting a charging Policy?
- This approach is welcomed

Our Response

Education and non attendance is preferable to charging in the Service’s opinion, as we are trying to avoid resources being unnecessarily wasted and keep them available for “real” emergencies. As described previously within this report there are now enabling mechanisms contained within the Localism Act 2011, which in principle, will allow Fire and Rescue Service to recover costs for attendance at incidents where faulty apparatus or repeat offenders of that attendance are the cause. However, it is deemed at this point that there is insufficient clarity and detail by which the Service can pursue this option. There is also the potential for the cost, of cost recovery measures, to exceed the income generated.

Recommendation Implement in full

Conclusion

15. The Service is confident that it has listened to its stakeholders and modified its approach in line with their comments as appropriate. We will continue to work with stakeholders in implementing this policy as effectively as possible and further engagement and communication will be undertaken to support this. Whilst not everybody agrees with all the proposals, it is undeniable that reduced journeys on our roads, more appliances available for emergencies, more staff time available for training and community safety and greater ownership and awareness in the communities, are good reasons for undertaking these measures. It is not our intention to implement this policy in isolation, rather to continually monitor and work with our communities and partners to ensure a successful and sustainable outcome.

Financial Considerations

Consideration	Yes/No	Reference in Report i.e. paragraph no.
There are financial issues that require consideration	No	

Legal Considerations

Consideration	Yes/No	Reference in Report i.e. paragraph no.
There are legal issues e.g. contractual and procurement, reputational issues that require consideration	Yes	

Additional Considerations

16. The table below sets out any additional issues arising from the proposals contained in this report and identifies the relevant paragraphs in the report where such issues are addressed.

Consideration	Yes/No	Reference in Report i.e. paragraph no.
Resources (e.g. Assets, ICT, Human Resources, Training & Development, Sustainability).	No	
Strategic Policy Links (e.g. IRMP, Authority Plan, Equality & Diversity, Partnerships, Environmental Impact).	Y	Entire report
Risk Management / Health & Safety (e.g. risk management and control measures, risk register score).	Y	Entire report
Consultation with Representative Bodies	Y	Concluded

Supporting Information

Appendix 1 – Consultation Programme

Appendix 2 – Feedback Analysis

Background Papers

IRMP 2011-12 Action Plan Recommendation 3: Review of Attendance at False Alarms caused by Automatic Fire Alarms

Policy & Resources Committee – 7 September 2011

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Appendix 1 – Consultation Programme

The following highlights the detail behind our consultation programme. This highlights who we corresponded with, or attempted to correspond with, and at what time. The purpose of this section is to demonstrate both the investment that we made in ensuring that this consultation was as full as possible and to be transparent in our processes.

Stakeholders	Date of face to face meetings	Communication Methods					Responded (*ongoing work continues)*
		Email	Letters	Telephone	Website	Press and Media	
Staff Representative bodies FBU RFU Unison/GMB/FOA	JCC Meeting – 18/10/11						Yes
Call Centres	✓ TBC		✓ 10/10/11	✓			No
Care Quality Commission (CQC)	Ref activity log	✓ 20/09/11					Yes
Chamber of Commerce		✓ 10/10/11		✓			No reply
Federation of Small Businesses				✓ 11/11/2011			No
Fire Authority Members							Yes
General Public – local Businesses			✓ 23/09/11		✓ 21/09/11	✓ 22/09/11	Yes
Hereford Partnership Executive Group (HPEG)	CFO – 05/10/11 (presentation)						Yes
Hospitals	Worcestershire Royal Hospital -19/10/11		✓ 23/09/11				Yes
Hotels	Taken place at Fownes Hotel - face to face with coordinator		✓ 23/09/11				Yes
National Trust		✓ 23/09/11					Yes
Operational staff Station Commander Forum Watch Commander Forum ROIC Meeting	26/09/11 14, 24, 28 October & 3 Nov 18/10/11						Yes
Other Residential Premises (Hostels)	Sanctuary Housing - 03/11/11 Worcester Community Housing - w/c 5th December (TBC)		✓ 23/09/11	✓ 21/10/11 (Apple Court Hostel)			Yes
Pubs/licensed premises trade group	Worcester Night Safe - TBC			✓			No*
Residential Care	07/11/11		✓ 23/09/11				Yes
Schools		✓ 28/09/11					Yes
Shopping Centres	Taken place at Reindeer Court - face to face with coordinator Crowngate Shopping Centre - 08/11/11 Cathedral Plaza Shopping Centre - 08/11/11	✓ 23/09/11	✓ 23/09/11				Yes
Support Staff							Yes
University of Worcester	Brief discussions have taken place during non AFA meeting. 14/10/2011 - DH had meeting with H&S Officer and Head of Campus Services.			✓ 19/09/11			Yes
Worcs County Council (Property Services)			✓ 23/09/11				Yes
Wye Valley NHS Trust - Herefordshire	03/11/11						Yes

Appendix 2 – Feedback Analysis

Recommendation 1

All Pre-Determined Attendances to AFA calls to be one appliance only except where risk factors and Intel information indicate otherwise.

What risk factors and Intel information will dictate the attendance of one appliance at these incidents? Would premises with a High Intel rating get a higher response than one appliance? [FBU]

In the event that the one appliance arrives to find a fire will they mobilise or call for back up before fighting the fire? [Fire Industry Association]

Recommendation 2

Implement robust call filtering in Control to ensure that persons calling in response to alarm actuations at lower risk premises are requested to investigate further the cause of the alarm (see Recommendation 8)

Who is providing our Control staff with the necessary training and will it be in place before the policy goes live? I would request that the Control FBU Rep be involved with this training. If the owner of the property that has the AFA system installed in the building, and, has a Policy that states you do not check for fire on activation of an AFA, you just leave the building, will the Service send an appliance? [FBU]

We assume that 'lower risk premises' will not include the community hospitals, mental health inpatient facilities and respite care facilities that the Trust owns and operates. That being so the major issue for the Trust will be availability of staff to respond to alarm actuations at low risk sites outside normal office hours as the majority of these are not staffed then. The Trust operates both a management and estates on call service out of hours. Potentially there will be significant delays between our switchboards informing a member of staff on call and that person attending the site where an AFA has activated. [Worcestershire Health and Care NHS Trust]

The FIA supports call filtering but it has to be remembered here that the Alarm Receiving Centre is the 'postman' and will only be able to do so much to ascertain whether there is a fire or not [Fire Industry Association]

Recommendation 3

Implement return en route as a policy, when a caller confirms any previous call as now a false alarm. This could be applied to all incident types.

This is already happening. [FBU]

Where the Trust has the capacity to direct staff to investigate an AFA to ascertain if it is a false alarm it is accepted that a tender dispatched to respond to an AFA should return to base. As indicated above the Trust's capacity to investigate AFAs will be severely limited outside normal hours. Although sites such as community hospitals, mental health inpatient facilities and respite care facilities are staffed 24 hours a day, outside normal hours and particularly overnight there are only small numbers of staff on duty. [Worcestershire Health and Care NHS Trust]

It follows from this recommendation that Fire and Rescue staff will no longer play a part in agreeing the stand down of a false fire alarm and resetting of a fire alarm panel. In the event of a false AFA outside normal hours it may be some time before the on call engineer can reach the site to reset the alarm panel. [Worcestershire Health and Care NHS Trust]

A Return En Route (RER) policy will reduce the figures in terms of how many attendances are made to AFA/UwFS calls. However, it should be borne in mind that these calls will still need to be recorded to highlight the disruption to Service activities such as training, school visits and HFSCs. No doubt there will be information requests (both internally and externally) for how many calls we mobilised to that resulted in a RER. The other consequence of RER would be that there is no record of the AFA, hence no cause or which detector head actuated etc which makes it impossible for the TFS department to address the problem. TFS action would be restricted to giving general advice, not specific assistance to particular premises. [Internal HWFRS member of staff]

Recommendation 4

All responses to AFA's to be at normal road speeds unless the Officer in Charge of the appliance deems otherwise

It is not the OIC's responsibility for the use of blue lights, it is either an emergency response or not. We have a strict driving policy which clearly defines the use of blue lights and audible warning sirens; this does not sit within this. [FBU]

*A general concern by a number of Commanders was the requirement of them to use their professional judgement when deciding whether to proceed to an AFA on blue lights or not.
[Watch Commander Forum]*

This seems entirely reasonable. [Worcestershire Health and Care NHS Trust]

The response to AFAs should be a definite "blues" or "no blues" response. It must not be ambiguous or left to individual officers to decide at the time. What would the be the justification given if a road user is killed as a pump went through a red light on blues, when the policy stated response should be "at normal road speed"? I believe that if the Service decides to attend an AFA in the first place, the Service obviously feels it is necessary; therefore an attendance should be made promptly on blues to deal with the incident. If the Service decides AFAs are not important enough to make an attendance on blues, then time of response is obviously not an issue and, therefore, why attend at all? In times of heavy traffic and with long travel distances from the fire station, it may take half an hour to attend at normal road speeds, which surely contradicts the Service aim of reducing the hours spent by crews attending AFAs. The only advantage would be that in that extended time, the matter may have been dealt with by the occupiers, Fire Control notified of the known false alarm and the fire appliance returned en route, thus reducing the statistics further! [Internal HWFRS member of staff]

Recommendation 5

Attendance at:

- **Dwellings (includes houses in multiple occupation, flats) schools, residential care and other residential (includes special units, sheltered housing, hotels, hostels).**

Non attendance at:

- **Hospitals and non residential (includes offices, shops, factories, warehouses, other buildings).**

Why a non-attendance at hospitals? These are exactly the same as care homes where patients are required stay overnight, thus making it a care facility. There will be patients that are immobile and will struggle to get out in event of fire. Also I believe as a so called humanitarian rendering Service, we have a duty of care to these patients. [FBU]

If we do not attend unoccupied buildings at the time of alarm, there is the potential for putting firefighters into a fully developed fire at a later stage rather than a developing fire, putting them at unnecessary greater risk and going against the mantra of firefighter safety; which at present is deemed a high priority to senior management. [FBU]

A number of Commanders felt that we should continue to attend AFA's at Hospitals due to substantial life risk and occupancy type [Watch Commander Forum]

Please see responses to recommendations 2 and 3. [Worcestershire Health and Care NHS Trust]

The FIA is amazed that there will be no attendance at hospitals. Surely this must be a mistake regardless of their record of false alarms? [Fire Industry Association]

It will need to be clarified whether attendance will still be made to dwellings and schools if they are unoccupied, as this contradicts Recommendation 7. I personally think the Service should not attend school AFAs, unless it involves sleeping accommodation. It would be more important, in my view, to attend schools outside normal opening times, due to the impact to the community if a fire were to occur when no-one was on the premises (Property protection rather than a life risk consideration).

If there has to be a change to the response then would it be possible for a 999 response during the working day and remain with an automated response out of hours? [A Worcestershire shopping centre]

As owners of the premises, we are some 50 miles remote, and will have no way of knowing whether the premises are alight, or whether anyone is inside, in the event the alarms are activated. [A Herefordshire estates company]

Recommendation 6

As well as the restriction on the types of premises that the Service attends as identified within Recommendation 5 (Premises Type), the Service can add further restrictions on FRS attendance based on the time of day. It is recommended that

this is considered for implementation after a 12 month review of the adopted changes.

Expansion on this statement is required, by explaining what these further restrictions are, what time of day they are to be used and the need for further restrictions, this statement is unclear in its intent. [FBU]

The Trust would ask to be consulted if it is subsequently proposed to review FRS attendance at community hospitals, mental health inpatient facilities and respite care facilities. [Worcestershire Health and Care NHS Trust]

Surely if you decide not to attend then it would have been more sensible to start with reduced attendance during the day rather than total non-attendance to certain categories of building? To further remove attendance at a later date just compounds the situation! [Fire Industry Association]

Recommendation 7

Do not attend unoccupied premises. Key holder to investigate and ring 999 if signs of fire discovered, unless identified as a specific risk through the Intel process.

Once again the Service will be allowing fires to develop, yet again putting firefighters at greater preventable risk. [FBU]

Please see response to recommendation 2. [Worcestershire Health and Care NHS Trust]

How are the ARC or FRS to confirm whether a building is occupied or not? Given the reduced manning levels in many industries and lone worker problems this looks a risky recommendation! [Fire Industry Association]

When notified that an AFA has actuated in a premises e.g. by Alarm Receiving Centre, how will the Service know whether the premises is occupied or not? Response will still be determined by premises type, presumably. [Internal HWFRS member of staff]

This is potentially a huge problem for the historic buildings with collections – by the time a staff member has got to either site to make a 999 call it's likely that hundreds of thousands of pounds worth of damage will be made.

Plus it's going to mean we can't borrow anything from any other museum! [Museums Worcestershire]

Of further concern is the proposed policy regarding unoccupied premises: I am sure that you will be aware that a key-holder may take almost 20 minutes to reach the property where a fire may have started and properly been detected by the alarm system. From our understanding of your proposals, only then will you respond, leaving a further delay until a fire is tackled. In many cases the fire protection by doors and normal barriers will be overwhelmed at this point, so the building will have suffered severe damage, if indeed, it can be saved at all. As you know, in the months following a fire most businesses suffer not just the property damage and disruption, most lose orders, many lose jobs and a large number simply go bust. [Fire Protection Association]

Recommendation 8

Apply full filter procedure to AFA calls from non-residential premises and hospitals. This complements Recommendation 5.

Apply light filter procedure to AFA calls from dwellings, schools, residential care and other residential properties. This complements Recommendation 5.

Please explain the notions light and full filter. Why filter calls that we are going to attend anyway? [FBU]

Please see response to recommendation 2. [Worcestershire Health and Care NHS Trust]

We are concerned that Hereford and Worcester appears to be the first service in the UK to not exempt NHS and other hospitals from call screening procedures. [Fire Protection Association]

Recommendation 9

No attendance to be made to repeat offenders, following Technical Fire Safety intervention, unless a confirmed fire is reported.

Would it not be better to educate or even charge repeat offenders rather than punish them for repeat calls? Define repeat offenders? [FBU]

One Commander proposed that we focus only on repeated offenders i.e. after a reasonable amount of support and time with no improvement a non AFA response would then be imposed. [Watch Commander Forum]

Please see response to recommendation 3 with particular reference to community hospitals, mental health inpatient facilities and respite care facilities. Outside office hours areas beyond the wards are closed off and will not be familiar to ward staff even if they have the capacity to investigate AFAs. [Worcestershire Health and Care NHS Trust]

The FIA has helped FRS with repeat offenders in the past and would place this offer on the table for HWFRS, indeed we have run in conjunction with FRS and CFOA Seminars and Workshops to help the Responsible Person with their False Alarm problem. No attendance is in the FIA's opinion the 'nuclear option' for any premises that have sleeping accommodation and/or vulnerable people. [Fire Industry Association]

Recommendation 10

The Authority will not adopt a 'Charging for AFA' policy.

The Authority will no longer attend repeat offenders' premises in preference to charging (see Recommendation 9).

4. Additional Written Responses

4.1 The Fire Brigades Union provided a detailed response which addressed each recommendation and this input has been incorporated and attributed within Section 2 above. In addition, the FBU raised a number of additional comments and questions which are documented below:

Could you clarify how often AFA's have diverted essential services from real emergencies? An AFA is a real emergency until confirmed by Fire Service personnel to be a false alarm.

How are risks to the public and firefighters reduced by lessening the response to AFA's? Surely if appliances are being driven on blue lights, the firefighters and members of the public will be safer.

I would like to request a breakdown report of accidents involving Service vehicles on blue lights compared to accidents when not on blue lights.

The Service is cutting back on many of its community activities, so by stating that reducing our attendances at AFA's the Service is freeing up more time for community activities, this statement is misleading.

Please give evidence where the change to this policy is weighted against community and business risk, as I have not seen any.

The Policy states that mobilisation to certain incidents will need to continue on professional judgement and evidence, who's professional judgement and what evidence?

We tell home owners during HFSC visits, not to check for a fire, just leave the building if they suspect fire. Why is the Service suggesting to the contrary with businesses etc?

I would like to request the figures for how often RDS pumps provide cover for whole time stations where the majority of AFA's occur.

"Reducing mobilisation or not attending AFA's will demonstrate a common sense approach", who's common sense and how do you measure common sense?

"Most buildings will have someone to investigate the cause of the alarm", what if there is no one to investigate, will we attend this alarm?

*The person investigating the fire may be the only person in the building
And could already be overcome by smoke, so will be unable to contact the Service.*

Only recently this Service has experienced two major fires that were attended via AFA systems. If we had not attended these at all, the outcomes could have been very different, especially in regard to the incident in Market Street, Kidderminster, where the first pump in attendance was required to evacuate the café attached to the building. The Service has experienced considerable negative feedback on YouTube about its performance at this incident; this was due to being unable to fire fight because they were evacuating the building. Surely this should galvanise the Service into upping its attendance at AFA's rather than cutting them.

We should be listening to these responses as ultimately these people are our primary stakeholders who fund the Fire Service through the Council Tax.

Will the Service be reducing our Council Tax bill as we are giving the public a lesser service?

4.2 Wye Valley NHS Trust

Further to my recent meeting with Steve Fellowes of the H&WFRA I would like to make the following comments with regard to amended attendance to incidents in the Wye Valley NHS Trust Control.

I support your efforts to reduce the number of unwanted calls unreservedly, but as you can see from my comments in those buildings where we have patients I am anxious that we should still be able to rely upon fire brigade attendance and I am concerned about the possibility of staff delaying a call to the brigade for too long.

As the enquiries into the Rosepark Fire and the Great Ormond Street Fire demonstrated that a delay in the call to the emergency services can result in either heavy loss of life, or in a serious escalation of the situation affecting both the occupants and the attending fire crews I am concerned about increasing the risk to our patients and staff. The following comments are made but proposed actions will require approval by both the Trust's Fire Safety Committee and the Health and Safety Committee:

1. The Trust does not use any "autodial" facilities and all calls are made either by the person discovering a fire or a switchboard/reception operator in larger premises;
2. All automatic fire alarm systems within our control are fully maintained in accordance with British Standards. Where a smoke detector is considered likely to produce unwanted alarms it is immediately replaced;
3. Within the County Hospital it will be my recommendation to the Health and Safety Committee that use of the pre-alarm function, where provided, is re-evaluated and new procedures introduced to further reduce the possibility of unwanted calls to the fire brigade;
4. Within those premises where a pre-alarm function is not available, it will be my recommendation that "*where immediate knowledge that the cause of the alarm does not require fire brigade attendance*", that the call to the brigade be delayed and if possible avoided.
5. I am concerned that the effects of the proposed Localism Bill will further deter staff from calling the Brigade as many of the staff already believe that a charge can be made for an emergency call. I would suggest that operational officers are "briefed" on the realities of the bill as many staff are nervous about incurring costs by operating the automatic fire alarm.

I have attached a spreadsheet with a list of our premises, and those operated by 2Gether [our providers of mental healthcare] that outline proposed actions. I hope that this will also prevent a reduction in the attendance by H&WFRA.

4.3 The Fire Industry Association provided a detailed response which addressed a number of specific recommendations and this input has been incorporated and attributed within Section 2 above. In addition, the FIA raised some general points which are documented below:

Industry is looking for a reasonably consistent policy across the country with regard to the way that the Fire and Rescue Services will attend and to date it would appear that Scotland is moving in this direction while the approach in England becomes ever more disparate. The more deviations from the norm there are on AFA attendance then the more likely industry is to cry postcode lottery and in the event of a fire that costs jobs or lives because of non-attendance then the good name of fire and rescue will be irreparably damaged. The FIA would ask once again why can't the English Fire and Rescue Services co-operate to produce a consistent policy on AFA attendance as fire knows no geographical boundaries?

4.4 The Worcestershire Health and Care NHS Trust

The Trust provided a detailed response which addressed a number of specific recommendations and this input has been incorporated and attributed within Section 2 above. In addition, it raised some general points which are documented below:

I anticipate that you will advise respondents to the consultation of the outcome and that if the recommendations are implemented as worded they will come into effect from a future date to be advised. Given the size of the estate that my Trust owns or leases and the number of staff that we employ the recommendations as worded will have significant implications for the organisation. Most importantly the fire safety training that is provided for our staff will need to be reviewed. It will take time to define and commission revised training programmes.

4.5 Museums Worcestershire

Museums Worcestershire expressed a specific concern with recommendation 7 and this input has been incorporated and attributed within Section 2 above. In addition, it provided further background information which is documented below:

We need to make sure this is looked at, either with a more sophisticated alarm system or to get the Fire brigade to recognise that our museum buildings are exceptions to this rule.

I do understand where the fire service is coming from – after all we're all facing cuts at the moment. I have to say we have had nothing but support from HWFRS over the years, particularly at The Commandery where we've worked really closely with them. I'm sure that with discussion we can come to something that works for all of us.

There are four museum sites in the county that we manage – Worcester City Art Gallery & Museum (we call this MAG internally), The Commandery, the County Museum at Hartlebury Castle and the Museums Worcestershire Collections Centre at Hartlebury Trading Estate. All but the last are important heritage buildings in their own right, plus all contain museum collections with high monetary and irreplaceable value as the heritage of the county.

The first three are staffed and open to the public either 6 or 7 days a week, but not staffed overnight. The Collections Centre doesn't have permanent staffing, but staffs (and researchers) work there on average 3 days a week. All buildings have security alarms and fire systems and call out procedures. The Collections Centre additionally has the call out of the trading estate staff.

We have some documents that show what we need to work with regarding borrowing exhibitions from elsewhere. The first is Government Indemnity which covers our borrowing from national museums. This is hugely long, but the key page is page 64 which summarises the conditions laid out in law. The second document is the facilities report that we have to supply every time we borrow an exhibit from another museum. It's a standard document that is used by all museums. You'll see there is a section all about the fire systems. If I had to include the proposed situation on this report, other museums would immediately say no to any loan.

There is also a national Security Advisor for museums based in Birmingham who can give us advice on this area.

4.6 The Fire Protection Association

The FPA provided a detailed response which addressed a number of specific recommendations and this input has been incorporated and attributed within Section 2 above. In addition, the FIA raised a number of general concerns which are documented below:

Re: Proposed Changes in AFA Response

I am writing to register our concern to the proposed changes in your response to calls from Automatic Fire Alarms and would urge you to reconsider and revise your current proposals. We do appreciate that action is required to reduce the number of false alarms the fire and rescue service is called to attend each year; however we are concerned at the impact on life safety, businesses, and property protection in Herefordshire & Worcestershire if the proposed changes are implemented.

FPA is the UK's national fire safety organisation and we also represent RISC Authority which conducts research on behalf of a group of UK's largest commercial insurers into risk mitigation measures from fire and security risks. Businesses and insurers throughout the UK are becoming increasingly concerned about the changes in response to fire alarm and ARC calls to fire control rooms. We have already begun a project on behalf of insurers and our members to understand the extent and impact of these changes.

Your proposed new policy represents yet another variation of the previously agreed CFOA policy, which it was hoped to bring some consistency in this area. Under this uncoordinated and disjointed approach any multi centred national or regional company or organisation has to formulate and train staff for a different procedure in almost every county in which they operate. This is a logistical challenge and more prone to human error in a serious fire.

We are also concerned that Hereford and Worcester appears to be the first service in the UK to not exempt NHS and other hospitals from call screening procedures.

Of further concern is the proposed policy regarding unoccupied premises: I am sure that you will be aware that a key-holder may take almost 20 minutes to reach the property where a fire may have started and properly been detected by the alarm system. From our understanding of your proposals, only then will you respond, leaving a further delay until a fire is tackled. In many cases the fire protection by doors and normal barriers will be overwhelmed at this point, so the building will have suffered severe damage, if indeed, it can be saved at all. As you know, in the months following a fire most businesses suffer not just the property damage and disruption, most lose orders, many lose jobs and a large number simply go bust.

Concern has also been expressed that the policy does not appear to give any recognition to signals emanating from sprinkler systems, which as you will be aware has only a 1 in 14 million chance of being a false alarm. We would however appreciate some clarification on this point.

4.7 A shopping centre in Worcestershire

The withdrawal of cover for commercial property, unless confirmed by a 999 call, is a dereliction of duty and measures to ensure the safety of the properties will cost each

business thousands of £s, i.e. 24/7 occupation to raise alarm, extra sprinkling facilities, increased Insurance premium costs etc which, in these financially difficult times, no funds are available to pay for.

This attitude, by public “services” that the commercial world, whilst still funding these services, can sort out problems themselves, was well illustrated by the police in the recent riots, when no protection was given to property.

We are being offered a second class service or no service at all, whilst still paying for gold plated salaries and pensions for the senior and middle managers of these organisations. I have no hesitation in paying a decent wage to the firefighters that actually put their lives at risk, but to their administrators I have serious objections.

Is this what the government intended when financial reins were put on these public service empires?

I cannot stress enough how detrimental to business this change of policy will be, how unacceptable that they can just decide to put the wealth creators at greater risk and that they are out of the control of the tax paying public that has to fund their lavish remunerations.

Please let me know what, if anything can be done to avert this catastrophic decision.

4.8 Herefordshire Partnership Executive Group [Minutes of a meeting held on Wednesday 5th October 2011 HWFRS Changes to Response to Automatic Fire Alarms – HWFRS CFO]

The CFO delivered a PowerPoint presentation. The covering report was previously circulated with the agenda. The main change is that the Fire & Rescue Service will no longer attend calls to fire alarms actuating at hospitals and non-residential premises (includes offices, shops, factories, warehouses and other buildings) unless a fire is confirmed. The Service’s review found that 40% of their calls had been false alarms, hence the need to address this. They will still respond to residential and school fire alarms. HPEG were in agreement of supporting the proposed changes. Implementation will occur in 2012.

5. Additional Comments from Briefings and Feedback Forms

5.1 AFA Key Contact Notes

Below are listed key points from face to face meetings with a number of premises.

A number of further meetings may take place with these premises as the policy is written

Worcester University

Require further clarification as mixed use site

Supportive of changes and have worked with fire service to reduce AFAs

Worcestershire Royal Hospital

Supportive of change

Will have alarm policy rewritten and retrain staff

St Paul's Hostel Worcester

General AFA review meeting

Hostel will see no change

Positive steps by hostel on AFA management including behaviour agreements with certain residents

Cathedral Plaza Shopping Centre

Question raised as centre is mixed use with hotel and residential flats

Already manage activations during day with investigation delay

Crown Gate Shopping Centre

Have been managing AFA response for some time using investigation delays

Will look to increase their investigation delay in new year

Once staff and tenants are retrained do not see major issues

Worcestershire County Council Area Care Home Manager Forum

Positive comments

Supported the service with better use of resources

Little change to present response seen by homes

5.2 Additional e-Response Summary Feedback

- (a) I was staggered to receive your letter dated 23rd Sept, relating to proposed changes to fire and rescue response to automatic fire alarms.

These proposals are most concerning, and will not only put property in danger, but life as well.

If I understand correctly, you propose that from Jan 12, the fire service will no longer respond to automated call out, and will only respond to 999 calls in the event the caller has either seen or smelt fire or smoke.

As owners of the premises, we are some 50 miles remote, and will have no way of knowing whether the premises are alight, or whether anyone is inside, in the event the alarms are activated.

Could it be possible therefore, that the fire alarm could be activated, that the emergency service could know that it has been activated, yet they will not attend the premises.

The consequences are shuddering.

- (b) I would like to confirm that we are a company in Berry Hill Industrial Estate, Droitwich with about 60 employees. The company runs two shifts (morning and afternoon 06:00-21:00) therefore after 9pm during working days, on most weekends and during public holidays, nobody will be available in the premises to dial 999 in case of a fire.

Some Production Coating equipment is run overnight unattended, for this reason we have installed automatic smoke beam detectors, which activate the fire alarm

in case of a fire. Our alarm system is connected to the fire brigade via an Independent Monitoring Centre. Our key holders live in Kidderminster and Worcester (20-30 min away from the premises), therefore by losing the immediate response from the fire brigade based on the recent changes suggested and by only relying on a 999 call, the risk of the fire spreading will significantly increase, which can increase the risk of explosion considering the compressed gases used in our Production Coating Processes.

Therefore, we would need to ask you to please consider our concerns prior to implementation of the suggested changes to Fire & Rescue Service response to Automatic Fire Alarms.

I would be grateful if you could please give this matter your urgent attention and advise us of any final decision on these changes.

- (c) In response to the changes being made to AFA response's I would like to know what percentage of False alarms are to Schools?

As in my experience, having lived next to a school for over 10 years, there are a HUGE number of alarms set off by the kids (intentionally, without cause), perhaps 2 or three a term and more in the summer term, and I'm sure most schools are the same, particularly secondary schools. Perhaps better education to these kids would help them understand why it's such a big deal to 'Cry Wolf'!

- (d) I am a Facilities Manager for a Secondary School in the area and note that we will still get an AFA response when our alarms go off. I also see that we should be able to report in if it is a false alarm. All of our AFA's over the time the school has been open (5 years) have been false alarms, I would welcome the chance to be able to cancel the response when this happens again. How do we go about being able to cancel the call? We always investigate the area of the activation and within 1 minute of the alarm going off someone within my team would be able to make a call if this was a false alarm.

Our alarms are monitored via a company called UK monitoring.

Many thanks for your help in this matter and we whole heartedly agree with this move forward.