CHESHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY

MEETING OF: PERFORMANCE AND OVERVIEW COMMITTEE
DATE: 24 AUGUST 2016
REPORT OF: HEAD OF PROTECTION
AUTHOR: IAN KAY

SUBJECT: **Unwanted Fire Signals Performance Review (2015/16)**

Purpose of Report

1. This report provides a review of the Unwanted Fire Signal (UwFS) performance in 2015/16.

Recommended that:

[1]   the report be noted.

Background

2. The Service's original UwFS policy was introduced in 2007. In July 2012 the policy was revised significantly following extensive consultation and briefing sessions with both internal and external stakeholders. The main features of the revised policy were:

   - the introduction of a call challenge procedure;
   - a change to the pre-determined attendance to AFAs;
   - the enhancement of the advice given in response to single UwFSs; and
   - the implementation of more robust ways of managing the Service's relationship with the parties responsible for premises with unacceptably high levels of AFAs.

3. The objectives of the revised policy were:

   - to secure a reduction in the number of false alarms generated by automatic fire detection and alarm systems, by encouraging improved maintenance of systems,
   - to reduce appliance movements, unnecessary costs and disruption to both the Service and the business community, and
   - to reduce the risk to the public and Service personnel through unnecessary emergency responses.

4. In February 2014 the UwFS policy was amended again following consideration of the first twelve month's performance and lessons learned. Member's approved a move to non-attendance at non-sleeping risk commercial buildings between 09.00 and 17.00 hours unless the caller is at the building and reasonably believes a fire has broken out. Outside of these hours (17.00-09.00) non-sleeping risk premises continue to be subject to the call challenge process.

5. The call challenge procedure does not currently apply to any sleeping risk premises (sleeping risk premises include hospitals and residential care homes) and these premises continue to receive an emergency attendance.

6. Industrial sites which are licensed under either the Control of Major Accident Hazards (COMAH) or Radiation (Emergency Preparedness and Public Information) (REPPIR) regulations are excluded from the non-attendance policy due to their unique risk.

Performance summary

7. The current UwFS policy has now been in effect for almost two years and since 2014 the Service has achieved a reduction of 23%. It is now appropriate to review the policy and consider proposals to reduce activity further. This will have a positive impact on administrative burdens, increase whole-time crew capacity to carry out other work and contribute to a reduction in on-call costs.

8. Tables 1 and 2 show that a 16% reduction was achieved in 2015/16 (compared to the same period in the previous year). During 2015-16 the Service attended 1,048 AFAs which when compared to the total number of 7,718 incidents attended by the Service over the same period, equates to 14% of all calls.

9. The 46% reduction in incidents is equivalent to attending 898 fewer incidents last year compared to 5 years ago, an average of over 2.4 fewer every day.

Table 1: Number of AFAs over last 5 years (including % reduction)

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total	Annual Change*	5 Year Change
2011/12	436	538	500	472	1,946		
2012/13	473	432	399	357	1,661	-15%	
2013/14	346	459	408	279	1,492	-10%	
2014/15	283	428	316	225	1,252	-16%	
2015/16	226	306	278	238	1,048	-16%	-46%
Total**	1,764	2,163	1,901	1,571	7,399		

* Annual Change denotes % reduction on previous year's figures.
** Total number of AFA's.

Table 2: Number of AFAs over last 5 years

AFAs in non domestic premises
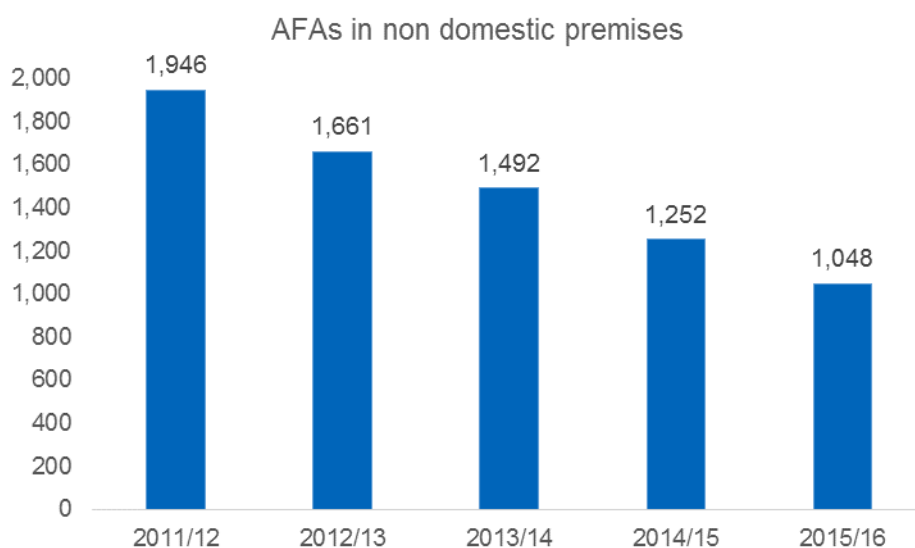
10. The 2015/16 Family Group 4 benchmark report summarises performance against key indicators for fire and rescue services (FRSs) with a similar demographic to our Service Area. For the purposes of this report, 16 services recorded data against the indicator for AFAs in non-domestic premises and the Service ranked 3rd overall for the annual and three-yearly reductions in these incidents. As a rate per 1,000 non-domestic premises, the Service ranked 6th overall with a rate of 31.20 compared to 9.18 in the best performing service (Staffordshire).

Main causes of AFAs in non-domestic premises

11. The cause of the AFAs throughout 15/16 is generally the same as those in previous years. The majority were caused by faulty alarms, normal human activity within buildings resulting in accidental or careless activation of the fire alarm, dust, cooking fumes and failure to inform alarm receiving centres (ARCs) when testing alarms. Table 3 provides a breakdown of the main causes of AFAs over the past 5 years.

Table 3: Main causes of AFAs in non-domestic premises

The top five reasons for AFA activation account for 79% of <u>all</u> activations over the past five years as follows:

Top five reasons for AFA activation	AFA's attended	% of all AFA's attended
Faulty	2,909	39%
Accidentally/carelessly set off	1,071	14%
Dust	728	10%
Cooking/burnt toast	640	9%
Testing	550	7%
Total	5,898	79%

12. Table 4 below shows the hours at which these incidents have happened as an average over the past five years, highlighting the impact the implementation of the 9 to 5 non-attendance has had.

13. It also tells us that previously the majority of AFAs occurred during daytime hours (yellow bars). The implementation of the 9 to 5 element of the UwFS policy has reduced this differential significantly. The premises producing the AFAs during the day are now mostly residential or other policy exempt premises. Therefore, further reduction measures need to be focused either on non-attendance to these types of premises during the day or extending the current policy to a non-attendance at non-residential non-domestic premises 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Table 4: 5 year average AFAs in non-domestic premises by hour

Yellow bars denote the average for 9-5 before the last policy implementation
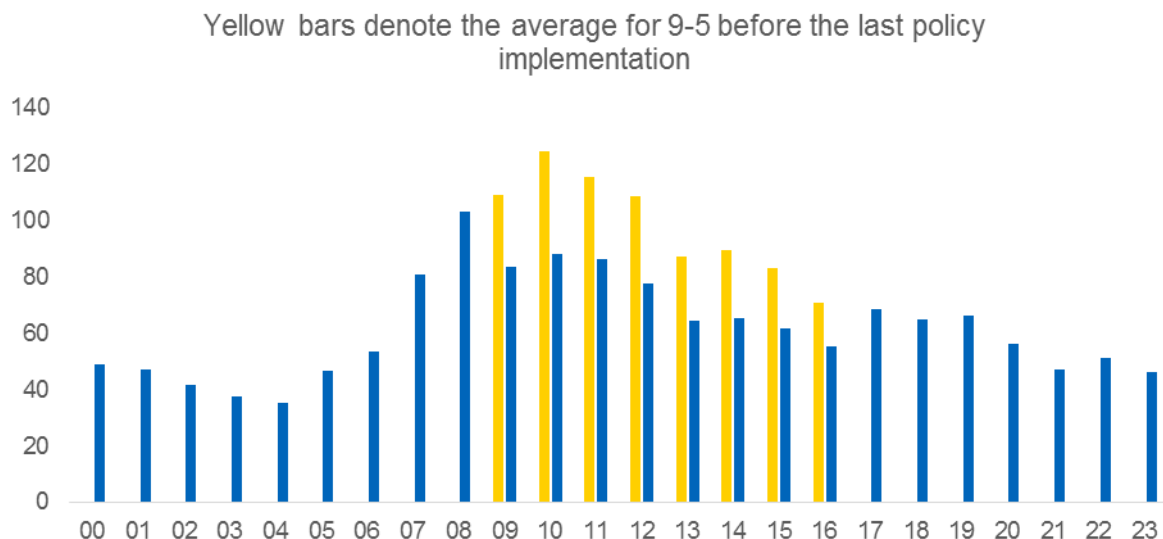
Types of building attended

14. Of the total, 1,048, AFAs in 2015-16, 348 (33%) were in sleeping-risk premises and 700 (67%) were at non-sleeping commercial buildings. Table 5 details the five most frequently attended premises types over the past five years that account for 43% of all activations. Notably, the non-residential premises represent 23% of this total.

Table 5: The top five property types involved in AFAs

Property type	AFAs attended	% of all AFAs attended
Hospital	1,045	14%
Purpose built office	677	9%
Infant/primary school	622	9%
Nursing/Care	466	6%
Single shop	388	5%
Total	3,238	43%

Number of primary fires attended that originated as AFAs

15. Upon receiving a call from an ARC, North West Fire Control (NWFC) will ask the ARC whether it is a confirmed fire.   It is the responsibility of the ARC to make contact with the premises and confirm if a fire exists prior to informing NWFC.   If calls are received from ARCs which have not completed a 'call back' to the premises the ARC should be asked to make 'call back' and advise the premises to ring 999 should they discover a fire. If the ARC is uncooperative and refuses to undertake a 'call back', they should be informed that the Service will not be attending.

16. Over the past five years, only 0.2% of all incidents attended were to non-domestic primary fires where the original call type was thought to be an AFA.   Notably, 69% of these fires required no firefighting as they were small and out on arrival.

Impact of responding to UwFSs

17. Mobilising appliances to each AFA call causes a significant impact on the Service for the following reasons:

    • Fire appliances are not available to respond to genuine life threatening emergencies.
    • Responding to AFAs under blue light conditions poses an unnecessary risk to staff and other road users.
    • Operational crews are disrupted whilst undertaking other core tasks such as training and community safety activities.
    • Financial costs are incurred for fuel and there is an associated impact on the environment caused by the appliance movements.
    • On-call firefighters require payment for being alerted and are unnecessarily disrupted from their primary employment.

18. In light of this performance review and lessons learned a number of ways in which the Service could achieve further reductions in the number of calls to AFAs have been identified.   A proposal outlining the options available for changing the way we respond to AFAs will be submitted to Members for consideration at the Planning Day in September.   This is in keeping with

the plan previously recommended by Members to incrementally change our response to AFAs.

Financial implications

19. All costs in relation to UwFS are met from existing budgets.

Legal implications

20. The Fire and Rescue Services Act (2004) Section 7 states:

    (1) A fire and rescue authority must make provision for the purpose of:

    a) extinguishing fires in its area, and
    b) protecting life and property in the event of fires in its area.

    (2) In making provision under subsection (1) a fire and rescue authority must in particular:

    c) make arrangements for dealing with calls for help and for summoning personnel, and
    d) make arrangements for ensuring that reasonable steps are taken to prevent or limit damage to property resulting from action taken for the purposes mentioned in subsection (1).

21. There is little case law relating to the activities of FRSs so it is difficult to be certain what these provisions mean precisely. For example, it is arguable that an AFA is not strictly a call for help, nor is there necessarily a fire (as the statistics show). However, notwithstanding this, it is important that the Service's approach is reasonable in all of the circumstances.

Equality and Diversity implications

22. An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) has previously been completed for the policy however, if new proposals within this policy were adopted then the EIA will be updated.

23. It is noted that in the last twelve months no equality and diversity issues have arisen.

Environmental implications

24. A reduced number of unnecessary appliance movements will have had a positive impact on the environment, mainly due to a decrease in emissions and fuel costs, contributing to an overall reduction in the Service's carbon footprint. The proposed policy changes will therefore contribute to a further reduction in the Service's carbon footprint.

BACKGROUND PAPERS: NONE