

TYNE AND WEAR FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

Item No 7

MEETING: 10 NOVEMBER 2014

**SUBJECT: RISK BASED ATTENDANCE POLICY FOR AUTOMATIC FIRE
ALARMS IN NON- RESIDENTIAL PREMISES**

REPORT OF THE CHIEF FIRE OFFICER

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek the approval of Members for TWFRS to adopt a revised, risk based attendance policy to calls for assistance from Automatic Fire Alarms (AFAs) in non-residential premises. The report will also set out the recommended implementation plan for this policy change should it be approved.

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 TWFRS recognise the valuable contribution that an effective and correctly functioning Automatic Fire Alarm (AFA) system can have to public safety and to the protection of property, through an early call for assistance to the Fire and Rescue Service before a fire has become fully developed. However it is recognised that the majority of AFA calls TWFRS attends are not as a result of a fire. There are two main categories of AFA calls. These are to either residential or non-residential premises. This report only proposes changes to the way the Service responds to AFA calls from non-residential premises.
- 2.2 TWFRS categorise the actuation of an AFA which has not been caused by a fire as an Unwanted Fire Signal (UwFS) these are also commonly known as 'false alarms'. The reduction in the number of UwFS will have a positive effect on the region's business, community, other sectors, and will support frontline appliances being immediately available for life risk calls, crews carrying out prevention activities in the community, and undertaking risk critical firefighter training.
- 2.3 From 2009/10 to 2013/14 there were 13,504 AFA calls from non-residential premises and of these 13,214 (97.9%) were UwFS. These 13,214 false alarms equate to 16% of all incidents attended by TWFRS. Only 1.8% (249) of these calls in the five year period resulted in fires. Of these 249 fires, only 35 resulted in the use of a hose reel or greater and 18 were between 0800- 1800 hrs. This equates to 4 incidents per year.
- 2.4 There were 18,010 appliance mobilisations to these 13,214 false alarms. 10,893 of these mobilisations were during the hours 0800 – 1800hrs. TWFRS

believe this time band is important because non-domestic premises are in general occupied during these hours, and therefore a confirmation call can be made to 999 if there is a fire.

- 2.5 Despite the excellent work of the Fire Safety Department and Service Delivery managers focussing on premises which displayed a pattern of repeated false alarm actuations, reductions in this call type remain modest, as 48% of non-domestic false alarm calls were from properties which had generated only one or two false alarm calls. This is further compounded by the increase in the number of systems and detector heads being fitted in the Service area.
- 2.6 A number of Metropolitan FRS do not now attend all AFA calls. Benchmarking visits were made to West Yorkshire FRS, West Midlands FRS and Merseyside FRS. This was a valuable exercise, with learning shared by our Metropolitan family group helping to form the basis for TWFRS' proposed new policy.
- 2.7 Within the Metropolitan FRSs group there is only London Fire Brigade that currently attends more false alarms to non-domestic properties per 10,000 properties than TWFRS.

3. PROPOSED POLICY

- 3.1 Between 0800 – 1800 hours TWFRS will not attend unconfirmed AFA calls to non-residential premises unless a backup call is received confirming a fire or physical sign of fire exists. Any call received reporting a confirmed fire or signs of fire will receive the full pre-determined attendance.
- 3.2 The following exemptions are proposed within the proposed policy. These premises will still receive the full pre-determined attendance:

3.2.1 Hospitals

Hospital premises will be exempt and will receive the current mobilisation of two pumping appliances for AFA calls, except ward blocks / areas which receive an increased attendance.

3.2.2 Education premises

Education premises such as universities, colleges and schools including pre-schools and nurseries will be exempt and will receive the current mobilisation of one pumping appliance for all AFA calls.

3.2.3 COMAH sites

The twenty COMAH sites in TWFRS area will be exempt and will receive the current pre-determined attendance for AFA calls.

3.2.4 Specific High Risk premises (determined by local operational intelligence)

Specific premises, identified by operational personnel where the extant risk requires the attendance of the full pre-determined attendance. Details of these premises are gathered by frontline staff as part of the Service's commitment to

gathering the most update information on the risk our crews face when fighting fires.

3.2.5 Premises Protected by Approved/Accredited Systems

Modern AFA systems utilise the 'Coincidence' approach (as per BS 5839 part 1) whereby if a detector/ sensor operates then the alarm will not be raised until a second detector/ sensor operates thus confirming the likelihood of a fire and reducing unwanted actuations. The provision of such systems lies with the responsible person. Where such a system is provided in premises, depending on approval by the Fire Safety Department, TWFRS will respond in accordance with the full pre-determined attendance.

This exemption will however be reviewed and may be withdrawn after any mobilisation to false alarms.

3.2.6 Exceptional Exemptions

This provides a further exemption process for premises that do not fit the above exemption criteria. Any responsible person that deems their premises have exceptional circumstances may submit a request to TWFRS.

Criteria will not be set for exceptional circumstances, each case will be considered on its own merits and the onus will be on the Responsible Person to submit their case to TWFRS, based upon high risk to persons resulting from the new Risk Based Attendance Policy.

4. BENEFITS OF PROPOSED POLICY

- 4.1 Reductions in the number of mobilisations to fire calls generated by AFA systems would increase appliance availability to respond to life risk incidents, reduce road risk to the public and our staff, and allow more time to be spent on risk critical training, prevention and Fire Safety duties as well as gathering risk critical operational information, and reduce the Service's environmental impact.

5 RISK MANAGEMENT

- 5.1 There is no legal requirement on TWFRS to respond to calls originating from an AFA system in order to establish if there is a fire.
- 5.2 The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 (the Fire Safety Order) states that the 'Responsible Person' at the premises is legally responsible and must have in place a Fire Risk Assessment that details, amongst other measures, what actions are to be taken upon actuation of the AFA system. It is not sufficient that the Fire Risk Assessment relies upon TWFRS to investigate the reason for the actuation of the AFA system but the Fire Risk Assessment should include action to notify TWFRS via the 999/112 system as soon as a fire, or physical signs of fire, are confirmed.

- 5.3 The proposed risk based approach to attendance to AFA will enhance our overall service to higher risk incidents in line with the IRMP Fire Cover Response Model Review.

6 IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

- 6.1 An implementation plan for the proposed risk based attendance policy has been developed. This proposes go live in June 2015.
- 6.2 A key component of the implementation plan is the communication plan for key internal and external stakeholders. This plan will be integral to the successful implementation of the new policy. Key messages, resources and detailed milestones are included within the plan.
- 6.3 The implementation plan includes provision for the ongoing monitoring and evaluation of the impact of this new approach. From the go-live date, data from the mobilising system and Incident Recording System will be used to monitor and evaluate the impact of the policy. Further evaluation will include quality assurance of AFA calls received into the control room and monitoring feedback.

7 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 The estimated cost for delivering this plan is approx. £15,000. This relates to a mailshot to all non-domestic premises in TWFRS area.
- 7.2 If approved this policy change will become part of the high level implementation plan of the IRMP Fire Cover Response Model Review and this cost will be met from the Change Management Reserve.

8 LEGISLATIVE IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 The relevant legislation in relation to response to AFAs is:
- Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005
 - Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004.

9 EQUALITY AND FAIRNESS IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 There are no equality and fairness implications in respect of this report.

10 HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 Any Health and Safety incidents will be monitored as part of the evaluation following implementation of the proposed policy.

11 RECOMMENDATIONS

11.1 The Authority is recommended to:

- a) Approve the introduction of the Risk Based Attendance Policy;
- b) Approve the implementation plan with a go-live date of June 2015;
- c) Receive further reports as appropriate.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

The under mentioned Background Papers refer to the subject matter of the above report:

- IRMP Review of the Fire Cover Response Model, 20th January 2014.

