

**OFFICIAL**

**Unwanted Fire Signals Policy**

Policy No 52



**August 2024**

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| **Delivery Area** | **Unwanted Fire Signals Policy** |
| **Policy Process** | **Detail** |
| **Authored by:** | **Lee Brown: Senior Head of Prevention,** **Protection and Engagement** |
| **ELT Approved:** | **29 August 2024** |
| **FBU Consultation:** | **N/A** |
| **Unison Consultation:** | **N/A** |
| **Executive Committee Approved:** | **N/A** |
| **CFA Approved:** | **N/A**  |
| **Policy Register Review Date:** | **May 2027** |
| **Implementing Officer:** | **Joe Flounders: Head of Protection** |

# **Policy**

* 1. This policy is designed to reduce the impact of ‘False Alarm’ calls generated from automatic fire detection systems. A False Alarm is defined as a signal resulting from a cause or causes other than a fire.
	2. Cleveland Fire Authority (CFA) categorise calls to premises, where on attendance, there is found to be no fire as ‘False Alarms’. These calls include calls from individuals which may be genuine but turned out to be incorrect (these are recorded as a false alarm - good Intent) or malicious in nature (recorded as false alarm - malicious). There is a third category of false alarm calls, those that result from automatic fire alarm systems passed to the Brigade from both non-domestic and domestic premises (recorded as Unwanted Fire signals (UwFS).
	3. CFA recognises the value of fire detection in protecting people from fire and reducing the number of fire deaths and injuries. The objective of this Policy through challenging calls received taking a staged response to poor performance and where necessary recovering costs is to encourage proper use and management of these systems. To ensure that those responsible have a suitable system with appropriate management processes in place and reduce the number of false alarms caused by these systems.
	4. The inclusion of suitable automatic fire detection in certain circumstances within the Building Regulations and the requirements imposed on certain types of premises under fire safety legislation means that the potential for false alarms will continue to increase year on year. Therefore, there must be a robust procedure in place to ensure that premises giving rise to persistent UwFS are identified and proportional action taken if the Brigade is to continue to reduce the number of UwFS attended each year.
	5. The policy will outline the how we will respond to calls from alarm receiving centres and premises because of an automatic detection and alarm system actuating and provide the rationale for implementing a cost recovery process and detail the criteria as to which premises are identified for cost recovery and how this can be applied.

# **Policy Objectives**

* 1. This policy will be delivered against our strategic direction and goal of a safer, stronger community, with a corporate outcome of safer buildings and is detailed in the Community Risk Management Plan 2022-2026, through the following objectives:
* Reduce the number of false alarm activations generated by fire detection and alarm systems.
* Deliver significant reductions in appliance movements therefore reducing the disruption to operational crews undertaking other core tasks such as training and community safety activities.
* Reduce the risk to the public and operational staff through unnecessary movement of emergency responders.
	1. The purpose of applying a cost recovery process in relation to attending persistent false alarms at a premises is to stimulate an improvement in the organisations management of their automatic fire alarm system. This is expected to have the following impact:
* An improvement in organisations alarm management practices
* An increase in the general standard of fire safety at premises
* An improvement in the local response to potential emergency situations
* A reduction in the unnecessary burden on Cleveland Fire Brigade’s resources
* An increase in the availability of appliances and staff for real emergencies, training, prevention and protection activities

# **Scope**

* 1. This Policy applies to all elements of Cleveland Fire Brigade whether in direct delivery of services or in support of that service delivery.

# **Policy Category**

* 1. The policy is categorised as ‘Authority’ within the key document framework.

# **Organising**

* 1. **Cleveland Fire Authority (CFA) is responsible for:**
		1. Delivering its statutory requirements,
		2. Setting the Authority’s strategic direction regarding protection services which includes UwFS.
	2. **The Brigade’s Executive Leadership Team is responsible for:**
	+ Agreeing the structure, configuration and the resourcing of protection services to deliver the policy and strategy,
	+ Setting policies and strategies in relation to the reduction of UwFS,
	+ Ensuring all relevant legislation is adhered to.
	1. **The Assistant Chief fire Officer, Director of Community Protection is responsible for:**
		1. Advising ELT on strategic protection matters relating to UwFS,
	+ Overseeing, monitoring and scrutinising UwFS arrangements.
	1. **The Area Manager overseeing Community Protection is responsible for:**
	+ Advising the Director of Community Protection on matters pertaining to UwFS,
	+ Developing and implementing arrangements to ensure this policy, the UwFS Strategy and associated procedures are robust,
	+ Ensuring that the organisation operates within any legal requirements such as The Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004.
	1. **The Head of Protection is responsible for:**
	+ Implementing the Authority’s UwFS strategy and associated arrangements,
	+ Ensuring that the strategy and associated procedures meet statutory requirements,
	+ Providing advice and guidance to managers and staff on the application of this policy and associated procedures,
	+ Developing effective partnership and communication relationships with public, private and voluntary agencies to ensure awareness of this policy,
	+ Measuring any impact on the Brigade following implementation of the policy.
	1. **District Managers, Warranted Officers and Station Based Advisors are responsible for:**
* Fairly and consistently applying this policy and associated procedure.
	1. **Individuals are responsible for:**

Ensuring that they comply with requirements of this policy and associated procedure.

* 1. **Trade unions are responsible for has been removed.**

# **Planning and Implementing**

* 1. This policy is underpinned and implemented through Community Risk Management Plan 2022/26, UwFS Strategy and Procedure; these documents should be read in conjunction with one and other.
	2. All new staff will be made aware of this Policy and its associated procedure as part of their induction.
	3. Existing staff will be informed of this policy and associated procedure, this will be made available on the Brigade’s intranet; no formal training is anticipated.
	4. The UwFS Policy and its associated procedures will be reviewed and implemented together to ensure that developments in the Brigade’s Protection arrangements are comprehensively communicated to staff, managers and Elected Members.

# **Resource Implications**

7.1 It is anticipated that there will be a positive impact on the finances of the organisation through a reduction in attendances and appliance movements. Where organisations reach the poor performance thresholds for false alarms, we will endeavour to recover those costs associated with attendances to UwFS, which will benefit the Brigade’s financial strategy.

# **Response to Calls**

* 1. The Authority will provide the following response to AFA’s:
1. For premises that do not provide sleeping accommodation.

Cleveland Fire Brigade will not attend AFA’s, unless a backup call is received from the premises via the 999 system, confirming there is a fire.

1. Special Risk (COMAH, High Hazard) will receive a single appliance to investigate the cause of the alarm as per Operational Procedure Note 61.
2. AFA’s from Alarm Receiving Centres (ARC)

If the call is received via an ARC they will need to confirm that either the premises provides sleeping accommodation, or no persons are present on the premises to investigate the cause of the alarm prior to control mobilising a single appliance.

1. Domestic premises are exempt from the strategy
2. On occasions where more than one device has actuated i.e. a ‘Double Knock’ then this will be treated as a confirmed fire and the full PDA dispatched.
	1. CFA will provide advice to the business community (in-line with resources available) to ensure that all non-domestic premises are aware of their responsibilities under the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005.
	2. Where a premises can demonstrate that there are exceptional circumstances for that premises to receive a full AFA PDA then an exception can be granted.
	3. The Authority recognises its ability to levy a charge for responding to a report of a fire where the call is made within certain circumstances associated with UwFS set out in the Localism Act 2011.

# **Cost Recovery**

* 1. The legal basis for charging comes from the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 (FRSA) as amended by the Localism Act 2011.
	2. The Authority has no legal power to make a profit from any charges. Section 18A (5) of the FRSA says “*In setting the amount of the charge …. a FRA must secure that, taking one financial year with another, the authority’s income from charges does not exceed the cost to the authority of taking the action for which the charges are imposed.”*
	3. The Localism Act has also amended the FRSA by introducing a new power, which allows the Authority to charge for attendance at unwanted fire signals due to an automatic fire alarm (AFA).
	4. Charging by Authorities is detailed within Section 18 of the FRSA extracts from the Act pertaining to cost recovery include.

**18A Charging by authorities**

1. A fire and rescue authority may charge a person for any action taken by the authority—
2. in the United Kingdom or at sea or under the sea, and
3. otherwise, then for a commercial purpose, but this is subject to the provisions of this section and section 18B.

**18B Limits on charging under section 18A (1)**

1. Section 18A (1) authorises charging for action taken in response to a report of a fire or explosion only if section 18C applies to the report.

**18C Cases where a charge may be made for responding to report of fire etc**

1. This section applies for the purposes of section 18B (3).
2. This section applies to a report of fire, or explosion, at sea or under the sea.
3. This section applies to a report of fire if—
4. the report is of fire at premises that are not domestic premises**,**
5. the report is false
6. the report is made as a direct or indirect result of warning equipment having malfunctioned or been mis-installed, and
7. there is a persistent problem with false reports of fire at the premises that are made as a direct or indirect result of warning equipment under common control having malfunctioned or been mis-installed.
	1. Details relating to what constitutes poor performance and the recovery of cost rate can be found within the UwFS Procedure

# **Equality Impact Assessment**

* 1. In accordance with the requirements of the Public Sector Equality Duties, Equality Act and other relevant legislation, the potential impact of this policy and associated procedure have been taken into consideration, see appendix 1.

# **Monitoring**

* 1. The Risk and Performance Team will ensure the central monitoring of this policy and associated procedure and ensure that it is added to the Brigade’s Key Document Framework, this will be reviewed in line with timelines specified.

# **Audit**

* 1. This Policy will be audited in accordance with the procedure detailed within the Brigade’s policy framework.

# **Review**

* 1. The Area Manager responsible for Community Protection will undertake a review of this policy in line with our key document framework to ensure it is taking account of any new or emerging political, economic, social, technological, legislative, environmental, competitive, citizen or reputational factors.
	2. As part of this review, it has been established that the downward trend seen since its introduction in 2017 has reversed over the proceeding year. As a result, a more in-depth evaluation will be undertaken during 2024/25 with an options report compiled and presented to the executive team.

# **Appendix 1**

**EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Directorate | Department/Section | Managers Name | Contact details |
| Protection  | Fire Engineering | J Flounders | Ext 4012 |
| Title of policy/service/practice/procedure/action (\*referred to as the policy) |
| Unwanted Fire Signals Policy |
| Is this policy proposed, new, existing or changing? |
| Review of existing Policy |
| Describe the key activities/aim/objectives of the policy |
| The overall objective of the Unwanted Fire Signal Policy is to support the achievement of the Authority’s Vision to make a positive difference to the safety and quality of life for every local citizen; and the places where they live and work by building upon the existing prevention, protection and emergency response work that is presented in our Community Integrated Risk Management Plan. This Policy supports the delivery of our Strategic Goal ‘Safer Stronger Communities’ by a reduction in the number of attendances at UwFSThe introduction of a charging scheme is an additional tool which will encourage businesses to manage their fire alarms appropriately to reduce the number of false alarms they generate. It should not be viewed as an income generation stream but a process to enable us to recover costs where we have committed resources which, had the call not been received, would have been available for other real emergencies.The aim of the Unwanted Fire Signal Policy is to see the number of calls from alarm systems reduce, thereby reducing the impact on business, other building users as well as the fire service. Cleveland Fire Brigade will continue to support building managers by providing guidance and advice on reducing unwanted calls from fire alarm systems. |
| Who are the main stakeholders in relation to the policy? Examples: Authority, employees, partners, community. |
| The key stakeholders are;* CFA in approving the review of the existing UwFS Policy
* ELT in championing and directing the strategy and delivery of services
* All employees in driving, developing, monitoring and evaluating the strategy.
* Partners through collaboration, partnership development and delivery of services and activities
* Business Owners and members of the public in being service users and the shaping of future developments through customer feedback
 |
| Evidence to support the policy Examples: community & employee profiles, data sources, research & consultation, minutes. |
| Fire Services Act 2004, RR(FS)O 2005, Fire & Rescue National Framework for England, Localism Act 2011, NFCC priorities position statements and guidance, HMICFRS Inspection focus, CFBs CIRMP Outcomes, Vision, Mission, Goals and Values, Incident statistics and our Performance Management Framework. |
| What are the impacts for the organisation/employees or community?Due regard must be given to all of the protected characteristics and diversity related matters. |
| Age: Positive impact due to additional resources being available to complete additional community safety activities. |
| Gender (including gender identity): As above |
| Sexual orientation: As above |
| Disability (including non-visible): As above |
| Race (including ethnicity): As above |
| Religion or belief: As above |
| Transgender: As above |
| Marriage & Civil partnership: As above |
| Pregnancy & Maternity: As above |
| Any other diversity related matter:  |
| What action, if any, will be required to balance any impact identified above? |
| N/A - Positive impact for members of the community as a reduced number Unwanted Fire Signal calls will mean a reduced disruption to operational crews undertaking other core tasks such as community safety activities, Arson Reduction work and Fire Safety Audits.No mitigation actions required. |
| Community Cohesion. Are there any other socially excluded groups? Will the policy have an impact on relationships between or within communities? |
| Positive impact anticipated as the UwFS strategy will enable resources to be focused on attending actual incidents or undertaking Fire Prevention and Protection work as well as reducing risks to firefighters and the general public by reducing the number of mobilisations under blue light conditions.It is anticipated that this strategy will have a positive impact on community cohesion and relationships. |
| Is there any potential for adverse or positive public or media attention? |
| Potential for negligible negative impact from media due to perceived lack of response to incidents and charging for what is already seen as a service that has been paid for.Positive public and partnership as the strategy will enable resources to be focused on attending actual incidents or undertaking Fire Prevention and Protection work as well as reducing risks to firefighters and the general public in mobilising and attending unnecessary calls under the blue light conditions. |
| Are there any financial implications or cost benefits to the policy? |
| Positive Impact is anticipated as a result of responding to fewer false alarm calls. Positive financial impact on businesses due a reduced number of interruptions to business / services.Positive impact from costs being recovered from poor performing repeat offenders which can be re-invested into prevention and protection activities.  |
| Are there any Key Performance Indicators relevant to the policy?Examples: Local/National strategies, frameworks, benchmarking, KLOE, CAA, legislation etc. |
| Full details of all performance measures detailed within Brigades Performance Management and Assurance Frameworks and associated national FRS Statistics’ Of specific interest the following KPIs will be used:-* HMICFRS inspection regime
* Number of UwFS received
* Number of attendances at Non Domestic UwFS
* Percentage of eligible AFA’s where no fire is confirmed.
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| Given all of the information does this policy require a FULL EIA?This may be required if the impact is discriminating under legislation, individuals, groups or communities will be negatively disadvantaged or impacted, the policy is of high significance and has widespread consequences. Example; new fire stations.  |
| Not required |
| How will the policy be communicated to those involved? |
| A variety of methods will support the communication of this strategy; * Internal comms through FISH, Comms Forum, Firewire, District meetings, hard copies located on Brigade premises.
* Partnership comms through meetings and presentation at Safer Partnerships.
* Public communications through the Brigade website and where applicable public interaction.
* All commercial Premises, highlighted within the CFRMIS recording database have been sent a formal letter highlighting the purpose and scope of the strategy.
 |
| How and when will the policy be evaluated and reviewed? |
| The UwFS Policy is reviewed in line with the Key Document Framework.An evaluation is scheduled to be undertaken during 2024/25 |
| Action Taken & Future Plans – including review date(s) |
| Actions* Performance monitoring with District Managers
* Performance monitoring at Directorate meetings
* Policy Review
 | Timescales* Monthly
* Monthly/Quarterly
* Outlined within key document framework
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| EIA Review Date  | August 2026 |