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Protecting local
communities

Unwanted Fire Signals Strategy

Policy No 52

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Delivery Area:	Unwanted Fire Signals Strategy
Strategy Process:	Detail
Authored by:	
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CFA Approved:	
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1 Introduction

1.1 Unwanted Fire Signals (UwFS) are a specific type of call. They are either generated by an Automatic Fire Alarm system (AFA) comprising of a fire detector of the smoke, heat or carbon monoxide types or by persons believing there to be a fire. They are classified as an UwFS when no fire situation exists. The calls can be passed to Fire Control via an Alarm Receiving Centre (ARC) or via the 999 network.

1.2 A considerable amount of work has been carried out in relation to UwFS in the past few years. We introduced the first iteration of this strategy in October 2017 which we monitored closely, resulting in an impact assessment being undertaken which presented the impressive improvements made in reducing the number of UwFS which we attend.

1.3 Definition of an Unwanted Fire Signal:-

An Unwanted Fire Signal (UwFS) is defined by the British Fire Protection System Association as “any alarm signal other than a genuine fire or test signal”. Any false alarm which is subsequently passed to the Fire and Rescue Service is classed as an Unwanted Fire Signal.

2 Scope of Strategy

2.1 It is widely recognised that the installation of modern fire safety management systems and the increasing use of Automatic Fire Detection (AFD) systems, provide the earliest possible warning of fire. They are a key factor in providing an early warning of fire for the occupants of a building. However, UwFS's have a significant impact on Cleveland Fire Brigade's resources, an issue which is being addressed effectively through procedures associated with this strategy.

2.2 Strategy Statement

The purpose of the UwFS strategy is to support Cleveland Fire Authority's UwFS policy and to:

- Reduce the number of false alarm activations generated by fire detection and alarm systems which results in unnecessary demand on our Control room.
- Deliver significant reductions in appliance movements and reduce 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 responses.
- Ensure Responsible Persons manage their fire safety systems appropriately
- Maximise appliance availability through reducing resources committed to non-fire related incidents.

3 Background

3.1 The approach of Cleveland Fire Brigade is to strive to reduce the number of UwFS whilst ensuring that the safety of the community is not compromised. This is done utilising an integrated approach of all our services to achieve such a goal.

3.2 Prior to the introduction of the UwFS strategy Cleveland Fire Brigade (CFB) has responded to automatic fire alarm calls (AFA's) by sending a predetermined response to all activations received. From the table below we can see a significant reduction in attendances and subsequent savings attendances in 2020/21 represented only 5.2% of total incidents.

Financial Year	24-hours Period	Economic Cost
2017/18	706	£2,092,584
2018/19	534	£1,625,330
2019/20	503	£1,528,114
2020/21	404	£1,227,352

Table shows all AFA calls to I&C premises which we attended since 2017.

Source: The Economic Cost of Fire for 2004 based on average cost for false alarms which has been extrapolated to include inflation.

3.3 Following a policy of 'Call Questioning', the purpose of which is not to instigate an investigation by the caller but to confirm obvious false alarms and to inform the premises of Cleveland Fire Brigade's policy which was not to respond to false alarms.

Despite the improvements made in reducing the attendance to UwFS through the previous Policy, CFB appreciate that these types of incidents will continue to occur and therefore a procedure covering the risk assessed approach to attendance is required. CFB therefore introduced a new policy and strategy whereby fire appliances respond to commercial or non-domestic premises that experience AFAs based on an assessment of risk, which was agreed and introduced in October 2017 which this strategy has built upon.

3.4 In 2017 we changed the question posed to callers including call receiving centres from 'is this a false alarm?' to 'can you confirm there is a fire?' a subtle but distinct difference.

The strategy applies to premises subject to the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 (FSO), however, to ensure the safety of our community we incorporated some exceptions and provided for exemptions where a clear case to support this is presented.

3.5 CFB are committed to improving the service that the public within Cleveland receive and, in-line with the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 will continue to provide advice to the commercial sector regarding how to reduce false alarms and unwanted fire signals. CFB will take every opportunity to proactively promote 'best practice' during fire safety audits and other visits.

4 Legal Advice and Fire Safety Order

- 4.1 In researching and developing this approach to reducing unwanted calls from fire alarm systems, consideration has been given to the legality of the process and advice has been received. It is clear from this that there is no statutory requirement for a fire and rescue service to respond to a call to a fire alarm sounding. In particular, given the balance between the number of calls received and the number that turn out to be fires it is reasonable for the service to consider any call reporting a fire alarm sounding to be a false alarm unless it is supported with confirmation of a fire or signs of fire either at the time of the original call or in a subsequent call.
- 4.2 In addition to the statutory constraints within which the fire service works, there is also legislation which requires those with an overall controlling responsibility for most buildings except single private dwellings, to effectively manage the precautionary measures in their buildings which includes having effective arrangements for implementing emergency and evacuation procedures and calling the fire service in the event of a fire. Duties are within regulations made under the health and Safety at Work Act 1974.

5 Cost recovery

- 5.1 The Localism Act 2011 brings into force changes to the FRS Act 2004. Three new sections have been added to the 2004 Act, Sections 18A, 18B and 18C. These allow Fire and Rescue Authorities to charge for responding to a report of a fire where the call is made within the following circumstances:
- There is a report of a fire.
 - The premises are not domestic premises.
 - The report is false.
 - The report is made as a direct or indirect result of warning equipment having malfunctioned or been miss-installed.
 - There is a persistent problem.
- 5.2 The levy issued for the attendance to a false alarm will be as per the Special Service Cost recovery 2019/2020 and will be charged per actuation. The charge issued for the attendance to a false alarm will be set at our special services rate and will be charged per actuation.
- 5.3 For the purposes of the strategy a persistent problem is defined within Cleveland Fire Authority as having more than four actuations within a rolling twelve months.

6 Planned Procedure

6.1 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.
2. Special Risk (COMAH, High Hazard) will receive a single appliance to investigate the cause of the alarm as per Operational Procedure Note 61.
3. AFA's from ARC's
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.
4. Domestic premises are exempt from the strategy
5. 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.

6.2 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.

6.3 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.

6.4 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. It is the intention of CFA that where poor performance is met as outlined within section 5 a levy will be applied.

7 Exceptional Circumstance (Exemptions)

- 7.1 Where the responsible person can demonstrate that there are exceptional circumstances with regards to the premises and require the full AFA PDA then an exception may be granted.
- 7.2 Any request for an exemption due to significant risk will be considered by CFA, the onus is on the responsible person to submit the case to the Authority. The case must be based upon that the Policy exposes relevant persons, critical infrastructure or premises/items of historical or scientific interest at high risk.
- 7.3 The premises must demonstrate good management of their fire alarm system.
- 7.4 The exception can be removed if the number of UwFS triggers further action stage 2 as detailed below:-

Stage 1 – Initial Unwanted call attended-

First occasion of an AFA at the premise, the Incident Commander is to liaise with the responsible person to identify and discuss the cause and any remedial action required. The Responsible Person will be notified that further activations may lead to Stage 2 action.

Stage 2 – A premise reaches the poor performance thresholds-

Poor performance threshold;

Two or more unwanted fire signals in any period of 4 weeks.

Three or more unwanted fire signals in any period of 26 weeks.

District Manager will determine if any further action is necessary and the premises may have the Exception removed.

8 Next Steps

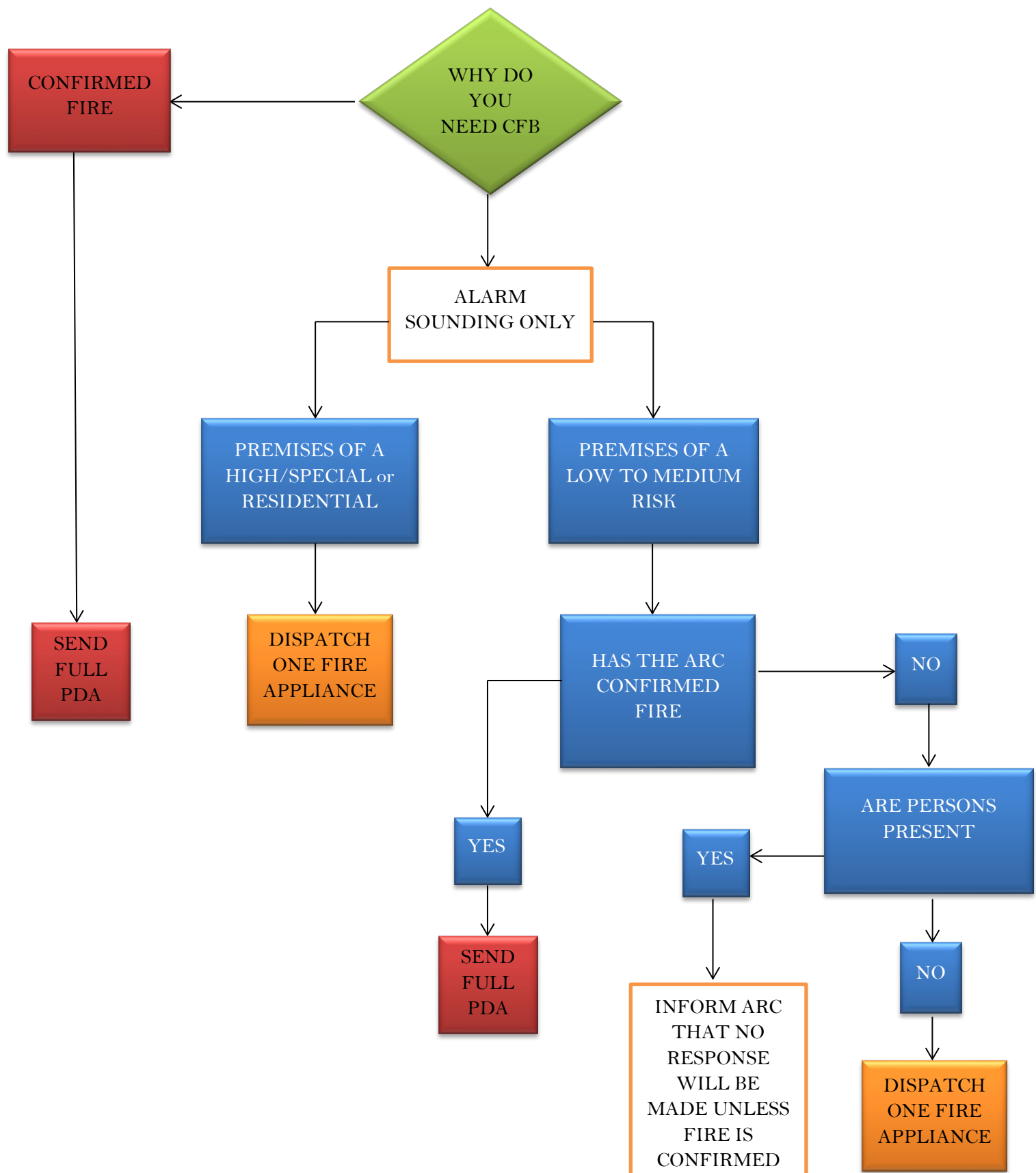
We will continue to review our strategy in line with the recommendations outlined within the impact assessment of the previous strategy. We will publish our findings through a further assessment to be presented to the Executive Leadership Team in 2021.

9 People Impact Assessment

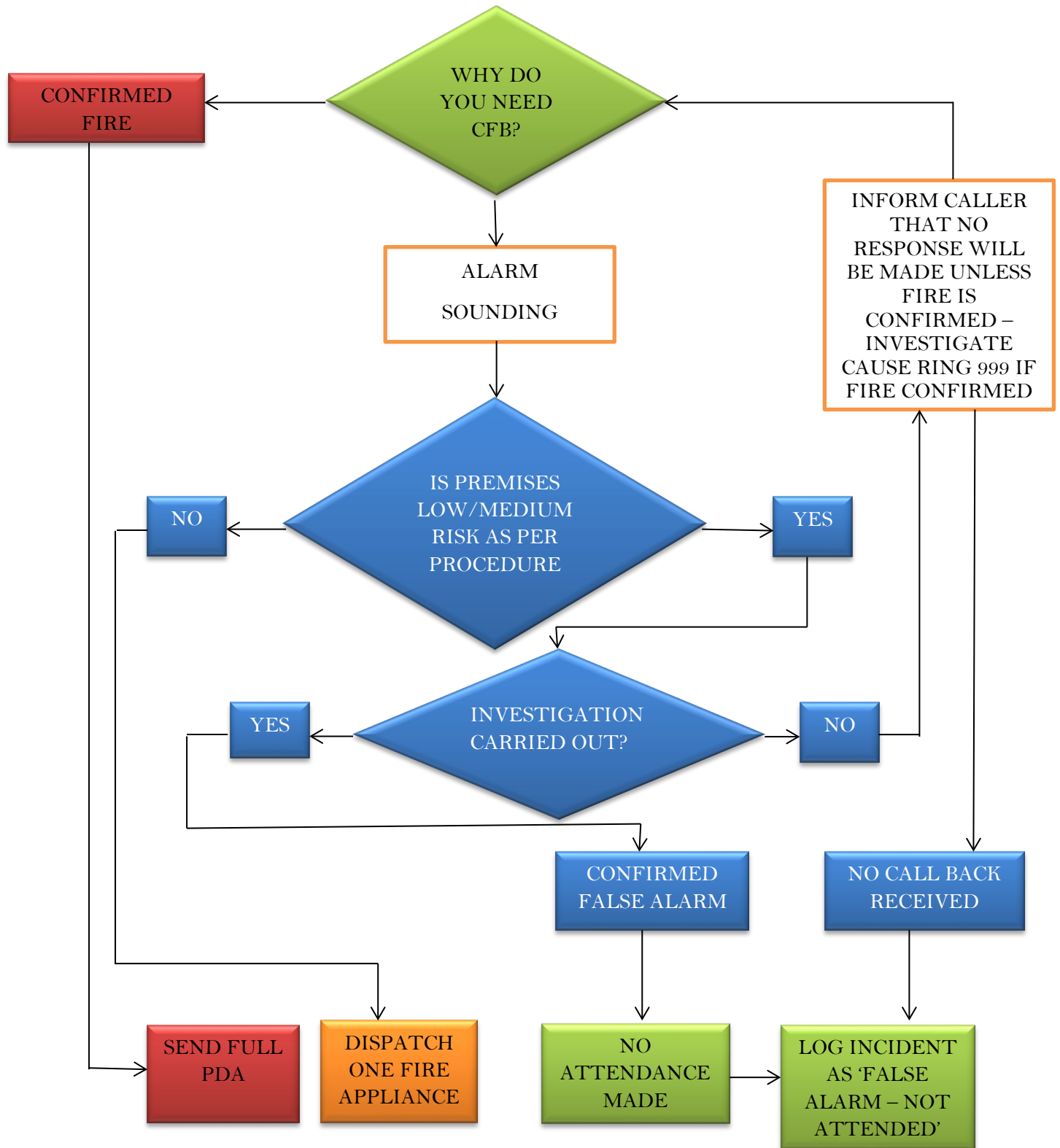
To ensure this strategy meets the needs of equality and diversity legislation an Impact Assessment has been carried out and is available via the Brigade's Directory, held by the Human Resources Department.

No significant issues were identified and therefore a full assessment has not been completed.

Appendix 1- Call Handling Flowchart- Call Received from ARC's



Appendix 2 - Call Handling flowcharts – calls received from occupier



Appendix 3 – Call Handling Flowchart – calls from passers-by

