



AGENDA ITEM: 11

NORTH WALES FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY EXECUTIVE PANEL

19th July 2010

UNWANTED FIRE SIGNALS GENERATED BY AUTOMATIC FIRE DETECTION SYSTEMS

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Purpose of Report

- 1 To provide Members with an overview of Oxfordshire Fire & Rescue Service's model on dealing with Unwanted Fire Signals (UFSs) generated by remotely monitored Automatic Fire Alarm (AFA) systems.

Background

- 2 For some years Oxfordshire Fire & Rescue Service has had a strategy aimed at reducing the incidence of Unwanted Fire Signals. The strategy in the form of a policy is divided into four main parts.
 - a. Part 1 - Improved advice at the planning and design stage - This involves Legislative Fire Safety Officers giving advice to relevant stakeholders on managing automatic fire alarms based on national guidance and best practice from the relevant guides.
 - b. Part 2 - Effective local event management and fire alarm testing and maintenance by the Responsible Person - Each premises should ascertain the cause of the alarm before calling the Fire & Rescue Service. Alarm Receiving Centres (ARCs) are encouraged to adopt off-line mode during normal working hours.

- c. Part 3 - Standard agreements with Alarm Receiving Centres (ARCs) - A clearly defined written agreement with ARCs to ensure consistency and a standard approach therefore promoting a shared responsibility culture.
- d. Part 4 Improved identification of problem premises and use of powers under RRO - Oxfordshire FRS does not reset AFA systems as a matter of course, thereby making occupiers of buildings more aware of problems associated with false alarms and more proactive in dealing with them.

Reduction Principle

- 3 Oxfordshire's reduction strategy is achieved by the non attendance of the Service to UFS generated by AFA systems unless there is a confirmed fire, except in the following circumstances:
 - a. where the premises is unoccupied;
 - b. where there are vulnerable persons and there are no, or insufficient, staff available to effect a check of the premises;
 - c. where a risk assessment by the Fire & Rescue Service indicates an attendance should be made;
 - d. where other circumstances determine that an attendance should be made.

Results

- 4 The Oxfordshire model has had the effect of reducing UFS and the number recorded, however the Service did initially see an increase in the attendance at 999 calls to fire alarm systems which has now reduced due to local management.
- 5 A further development to the model is that when Oxfordshire receive a call from a monitored system, they contact the premises involved to ascertain if there is a need for fire service attendance and respond accordingly. If there is no response from the premises an attendance is made by the FRS

North Wales Position

- 6** Although NWFRS has not adopted the Oxfordshire model, the Service uses similar principles to the model in achieving a year on year reduction in UFS based on close monitoring and local management.
- 7** The number of attendances made to AFAs in non-domestic premises across North Wales has reduced over recent years as the table below shows:

Year	2005/2006	2006/2007	2007/2008	2008/2009	2009/2010
Total	2,202	2,092	2,020	1,707	1,646

- 8** This reduction has been due to the ongoing work carried out by the Service with premises across North Wales, in particular those identified as problem premises owing to above average repetition of UFS. The general hospitals are working on improving their systems and methods of notification which is ongoing work. Bangor University has over 300 monitored buildings which will increase due to new halls of residence coming online. The University is consulting with local Officers and installing more modern intelligent systems and developing a more robust management system.
- 9** To further increase the reduction in the number of attendances to premises NWFRS are to use members of the central legislative team to investigate the problem premises across the service area and carry out fire safety audits under the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 (RRO). These audits will focus on the fire alarm system and the responsible person. Premises where UFS are generated by poorly maintained or unsuitable fire alarm systems will be dealt with under the RRO.
- 10** Consideration is also being given reacting to AFAs from monitoring companies in a similar way to the Oxfordshire model by contacting the premises affected before mobilising resources to identify a suitable response.

Balance of Problem

- 11** The imperative to reduce the incidence of UFS should never compromise the need for a system to provide an early detection of fire and to provide a warning to occupants which initiates the premises emergency fire action plan including the immediate evacuation of all people frequenting the premises.

Recommendation

- 12** That Members note the improvements achieved by the Service over the last 5 years and that it is continuing to work to maintain this reduction.