
NORTH AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

29 November 2021

Police Fire and Rescue Committee

Title: **Scottish Fire and Rescue Service Consultation on Unwanted Fire Alarm Signals**

Purpose: To advise the Committee of the response submitted to the consultation request.

Recommendation: That the Committee notes the terms of the consultation response submitted.

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 The Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) gave a presentation on its consultation proposals for dealing with Unwanted Fire Alarm Signals (UFAS) to the Committee on 17th August 2021 and asked that the Council respond to the consultation request.
- 1.2 The response to the consultation was prepared in consultation with the Chair of the Committee and is detailed in Appendix 1. The Committee is asked to note the response.

2. Background

- 2.1 The Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) was consulting on proposals on how it responds to Unwanted Fire Alarm Signals (UFAS) and how it should best respond to Automatic Fire Alarm Signals to reduce the burden placed on the Service and partners by UFAS. The review sought the views of local authority elected members leading on scrutiny of SFRS activity.
- 2.2 A presentation was given to the Committee on the consultation proposals on 17th August 2021 and feedback was sought on three proposed options for SFRS response to UFAS. The Committee provided some initial feedback and recognised the challenges that responding to UFAS present with particular regard to potential consequential delay to emergency responses if fire appliances and personnel are dealing with false alarms.
- 2.3 A meeting was scheduled for 26th August 2021 to enable Elected Members to discuss the consultation document further. The meeting convened but was inquorate. The Head of Democratic Services therefore liaised with the Chair of the Committee to prepare and submit a response to the consultation which is detailed at Appendix 1

3. Proposals

3.1 That the Committee notes the consultation response submitted.

4. Implications/Socio-economic Duty

Financial

4.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report.

Human Resources

4.2 There are no Human Resources implications arising from this report.

Legal

4.3 There are no Legal implications arising from this report.

Equality/Socio-economic

4.4 SFRS will assess the outcomes of the consultation exercise for equality, diversity and socio-economic outcomes.

Environmental and Sustainability

4.5 There are no Environmental implications arising from this report.

Key Priorities

4.6 The response to the consultation contributes to the Council's priorities of developing and promoting Aspiring Communities in North Ayrshire with active and strong communities where residents and communities are safe.

Community Wealth Building

4.7 There are no Community Wealth Building benefits arising from this report.

5. Consultation

5.1 SFRS will consult on any actions they propose to take in response to the consultation responses received from members of the public and strategic partners.

Aileen Craig
Head of Service (Democratic)

For further information please contact **Aileen Craig, Head of Service (Democratic)**, on 01294 324125.

Background Papers

**Scottish Fire and Rescue Service
Consultation on Unwanted Fire Alarm Signals
Response from North Ayrshire Council**

Background and Consultation Request

The Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) is consulting on proposals on how it responds to Unwanted Fire Alarm Signals (UFAS) and how it best responds to Automatic Fire Alarm Signals to reduce the burden placed on the Service and partners by UFAS. The review seeks the views of local authority elected members leading on scrutiny of SFRS activity.

The Police Fire and Rescue Committee received a presentation from SFRS at its meeting on 17th August on the issues surrounding UFAS and the impact they have or could have on service delivery. The Committee noted the issues presented and provided some initial feedback to SFRS Officers present. The three options on how to deal with UFAS in future were put forward for consultation and it was noted that the status quo was not presented as an option.

The Options presented for consultation are as follows:-

Option A

Call challenge all AFAs from non-domestic premises, unless exempt

- No response is mobilised, if questioning confirms there is no fire, or signs of fire
- Sleeping risk premises are exempt from call challenging and will receive the following immediate response:
 - Residential Care Homes receive a PDA of two fire appliances regardless of time of day
 - All other sleeping risks receive a PDA of one fire appliance between 0700-1800hrs and two fire appliances out-with these hours

This may result in a 61% reduction on unnecessary call outs.

OPTION B

- Call challenge all AFAs from non-domestic premises
- No response is mobilised, if questioning confirms there is no fire, or signs of fire

- No exemptions to call challenging apply (i.e. all AFA calls received are call challenged, regardless of premises type and caller)

This may result in a reduction of 85% on unnecessary call outs.

OPTION C

- Non-attendance to all AFAs from non-domestic premises, unless back-up 999 call confirming fire, or signs of fire is received
- Sleeping risk premises are exempt from non-attendance and will receive the following immediate response:
 - Residential Care Homes receive a PDA of two fire appliances regardless of time of day
 - All other sleeping risks receive a PDA of one fire appliance between 0700-1800hrs and two fire appliances out-with these hours

This may result in a reduction of 71% on unnecessary call outs

Response from North Ayrshire Council

The Committee provided some feedback on its concerns at what it perceived could be a diminution in service provision. The Committee did recognise the challenges that dealing with UFAS present with particular regard to emergencies which can occur and to which response may be delayed if fire appliances and personnel are dealing with false alarms. It further noted that attending to these alarms could detract from other training and preventative work undertaken by fire officers. The Committee also noted that there was no legal obligation on SFRS to respond to UFAS and that there were legal responsibilities relating to these issues resting with the duty holder of the commercial premises concerned. The Committee also noted the proposed mitigations.

The Committee noted that the SFRS had to amend their standard response to UFAS during Covid -19 for safety of firefighters and the public alike and that there were positives resulting from that. SFRS sent a single fire appliance to AFAs of certain property types which reduced blue light journeys by an average of 21%. This interim response, cut down on blue light journeys, reduced risk and minimised disruption enabling SFRS to adapt to the challenges of the pandemic. There were also positives in terms of minimising environmental and climate impact by reducing unnecessary journeys. SFRS reviewed the overall impact of this interim response during January 2021 and there was no evidence that its implementation had any detrimental impact. The Committee noted however that the Covid -19 response is not one of the options for consultation. The Options for consultation are A-C as outlined above.

It is noted that the Local Fire Plan 2017 states the following concerning UFAS:

“We will seek to reduce the instances of Unwanted Fire Alarms Signals by:

- *Investigating every cause of alarm and engaging with those responsible for fire warning systems following an operational attendance at a UFAS incident*
- *Analysing our UFAS attendances at those premises that give cause to frequent generation of false alarms to identify trends and support occupiers to develop demand reduction plans*
- *Instigating where required, formal fire safety enforcement measures to ensure appropriate demand reduction action is taken by those responsible for premises generating unacceptable levels of false alarms*

We will monitor the effectiveness of mobilising to Unwanted Fire Alarms Signals by:

- *Reviewing the number of attendances at non-domestic premises and the type of premises generating unwanted false alarm signals across North Ayrshire*
- *Evaluating the outcomes of occupier's demand reduction plans to review progress and identify and share good practice"*

The Committee agrees that the best way to deal with emergency is to prevent it from happening in the first place and wholly supports the efforts of SFRS in taking forward its preventative role to deliver fire safety messages and work with partners and organisations in fire prevention advice to create safer communities and improve the overall safety and wellbeing of the people of Scotland. The Committee noted that a critical part of the proposals involves reinvesting the time saved by responding to UFAS on working on fire prevention measures and with duty holders of commercial premises for better preparedness for emergencies and avoid the automatic fire alarms being unnecessarily deployed. The Committee recognises the balance to be struck and in the event that SFRS concludes that service response measures to UFAS are altered, a formal plan should be put in place to address measures to deal with UFAS including training as a further mitigatory and preventative measure.

Conclusion

The Council recognises the challenges presented by attending UFAS but has concerns about the possible diminution in service provision and the risks that may be associated with that. Similarly, the Council recognises the risks to responding quickly to other emergencies if appliances are engaged elsewhere on false alarms. In essence a balanced view based on full risk assessment requires to be undertaken. It is the Council's view that SFRS is best placed to make that assessment on the basis of their expertise coupled with the necessary evidence to make that considered decision based on full risk assessment. The Council is of the view however that Option C provides too much risk and that Option A would present least risk from the options presented. Ultimately the matter is a service level decision for the SFRS to make based on their expertise to deliver on their statutory responsibilities, provide rescue services and protect the public to the best of the Service's ability whilst at the same time maintaining public confidence in the service.

Aileen Craig
Head of Democratic Services
North Ayrshire Council