



SCOTTISH
FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

Working together for a safer Scotland

Report to: COMMUNITY SAFETY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date: 22 FEBRUARY 2016

Report By: GROUP MANAGER STEVE GOURLAY

Subject: UNWANTED FIRE ALARM SIGNALS (UFAS)

1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 To provide the Scrutiny Committee with information relating to the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) policy for managing Unwanted Fire Alarm Signals (UFAS), how it has been implemented in East Lothian and information on developments in this area.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That East Lothian Community Safety Scrutiny Committee notes the contents of this report.

3 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The UFAS policy went live across Scotland on the 1st of December 2014.
- 3.2 A UFAS incident may be defined as “an event which has required an operational attendance by the fire and rescue service due to the unwanted actuation of a fire alarm system”
- 3.2 Annually accounting for approximately 56% of all SFRS emergency calls, in excess of 120,000 unnecessary blue light vehicle movements and an

estimated cost of £1970 per incident it is clear this continues to be an unacceptable drain on public service expenditure.

- 3.3 The policy was implemented to allow a consistent approach across Scotland to engage with those responsible for the premises where there are frequent numbers of UFAS calls.
- 3.4 In the reporting year 2014/15, a total of 788 UFAS calls were recorded in East Lothian with 622 of these due to equipment failures.
- 3.5 Using the estimated cost per incident of £1970 the cost to the SFRS in East Lothian is in excess of £1.5 million.
- 3.6 In the UK, estimated losses of around £1 billion a year have been attributed to false alarms due largely to the disruption and loss of productivity in businesses.
- 3.7 It is also widely recognised that false alarms reduce confidence of the public in fire alarms and can lead to complacency that may increase risk due to delays in taking action.
- 3.8 Priority 5 of the East Lothian Local Fire and Rescue Plan is to reduce unwanted fire alarm signals and is reported through the quarterly performance-reporting framework.

4 UFAS POLICY UPDATE

- 4.1 In East Lothian, the UFAS policy and associated procedure were implemented fully by the commencement date, 1st December 2014.
- 4.2 The focus of those involved with delivery has been to:
 - Examine ways to reduce overall numbers of mobilisations to UFAS incidents across the County.
 - Ensure calls are filtered, by Operations Control (Edinburgh), to ensure that an appropriate operational response is always dispatched to premises in East Lothian.
 - Introduce a system, overseen by the Prevention and Protection Station manager, which identifies premises that create demand and implements a robust multi-stage action plan, as detailed in the SFRS procedure, to reduce future occurrences.

- Utilise East Lothian firefighters and fire safety enforcement staff to engage directly with stakeholders and advise them of actions which can be taken by themselves and also the SFRS to manage UFAS incidents.
- Examine fire safety enforcement options for encouraging Duty Holders to take more responsibility for UFAS reductions.

4.3 An internal SFRS review of the policy implementation has taken place and a number of locally delivered actions will result from this. At present, it is likely that a national UFAS recording system will come on line, April 2016, and additional training requirements will be required for East Lothian personnel. The training will reinforce the importance of first stage investigations, at the point of first call, as well as giving more in depth knowledge and understanding of the Fire Safety legislation covering premises experiencing UFAS incidents.

4.4 A major study, very recently published, by the Building Research Establishment (BRE) in conjunction with the SFRS and others, has provided a valuable insight into causes of fire alarm actuations and provided 35 recommendations. These recommendations require actions from the SFRS, alarm-receiving centres, duty holders/responsible persons, alarm contractors and certification/inspection bodies to name a few which combined could have a very positive effect on the number of unwanted calls.

Link to study:

<http://www.bre.co.uk/filelibrary/Briefing%20papers/107086-Live-False-Alarms-Investigations.pdf>

4.5 A report by HM Chief Inspector of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service entitled “Managing automatic fire signals” was published mid-2015 and also provided 4 recommendations which the SFRS will action in the internal policy review and action plan.

Link to HMIFS report: <http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0048/00486519.pdf>

4.6 On completion of the internal SFRS review a UFAS reduction action plan will be prepared to cover East Lothian, taking into account any changes, training requirements and specific reduction actions necessary to reduce the UFAS incidents and meet the needs of priority 5 in the Local Fire and Rescue Plan and the Communities in East Lothian.