



DEVON & SOMERSET FIRE & RESCUE AUTHORITY

REPORT REFERENCE NO.	DSFRA/12/1
MEETING	DEVON & SOMERSET FIRE & RESCUE AUTHORITY (BUDGET MEETING)
DATE OF MEETING	17 FEBRUARY 2012
SUBJECT OF REPORT	RESULTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS ARISING FROM CONSULTATION ON THE DEVON & SOMERSET FIRE & RESCUE AUTHORITY CORPORATE PLAN 2012/13 TO 2014/15 AND A PROPOSAL TO AMEND THE RESPONSE TO AUTOMATIC FIRE ALARM (AFA) CALLS
LEAD OFFICER	Chief Fire Officer
RECOMMENDATIONS	<p>a) <i>that the outcome of the consultation on the Draft Corporate Plan 2012/13 to 2014/15 be noted;</i></p> <p>b) <i>that, arising from the consultation, the following be approved:</i></p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;"><i>i. Recommendation 1</i></p> <p style="padding-left: 80px;"><i>to indicate that the requirements of Integrated Risk Management Planning are integrated within the Corporate Plan 2012/13 to 2014/15; and</i></p> <p style="padding-left: 80px;"><i>to make prevention, protection and response performance information, demonstrating how our outcomes support our Corporate Plan, more easily accessible to the public.</i></p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;"><i>ii. Recommendation 2</i></p> <p style="padding-left: 80px;"><i>that the domestic element of the Automatic Fire Alarms (AFA) proposal, as outlined in the consultation document, be implemented.</i></p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;"><i>iii. Recommendation 3</i></p> <p style="padding-left: 80px;"><i>That, after consulting widely on the proposal to change the response to non-domestic (non-residential) automatic fire alarm calls, as outlined in the consultation document, the changes should not be implemented at this time.</i></p>

	<p><i>Although there is public support for non-attendance, there is a need to provide more information and guidance to businesses to give them an opportunity to reduce unwanted calls to the fire and rescue service prior to a non-attendance policy being implemented. The existing arrangements already approved by the fire authority and the rigorous application of the Chief Fire Officers' Association protocol will assist the reduction of false alarms. If these arrangements do not prove to be effective, a subsequent paper to the fire authority will be presented using the results of this consultation as a basis.</i></p> <p><i>iv. Recommendation 4</i></p> <p><i>that the existing automatic fire alarm policy for managing down non-domestic AFAs be amended to include cost recovery as allowed by the Localism Act 2011, and which was approved by the DSFRA, following public consultation, on 27 May 2011 (Minute ref. DSFRA/11 refers).</i></p> <p><i>Note: This change would apply to all non-domestic properties in the Service area.</i></p>
<p>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</p>	<p>This report presents a summary of the results and recommendations from the consultation on the Draft Corporate Plan 2012/13 – 2014/15 and the automatic fire alarm proposal. The consultation took place over a thirteen week period between 3 October 2011 and 4 January 2012.</p> <p>The questionnaire results show that most respondents agreed with the proposals to change the Service's response to domestic and non-domestic automatic fire alarms. However, opinions gathered from focus groups with staff, members of the public and businesses, also supplemented by written comments received from surveys, letters and emails, show that there are various concerns relating to specific details of the proposal. Having listened to these opinions and carefully considered them, this report contains recommendations that amend the element of the original proposal relating to non-domestic properties.</p>
<p>RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS</p>	<p>As indicated in the report.</p>
<p>EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT</p>	<p>Where required, the proposals contained in the consultation on the draft Corporate Plan 2012/123 to 2014/15 have been subject either to an Equality Impact Assessment or its successor, an Equality Risks and Benefits Analysis (in the case of the AFA proposal). These can be made available on request.</p>
<p>APPENDICES</p>	<p>A Detailed Consultation Report (page numbered and enclosed separately with the agenda for this meeting)</p>
<p>LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS</p>	<p>Report DSFRA/11/11 as submitted to the meeting of the Authority held on 27 May 2011.</p> <p>Report DSFRA/11/23 as submitted to the meeting of the Authority held on 29 September 2011.</p>

1. INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

- 1.1 Following approval by Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue Authority on 29 September 2011 consultation commenced on the Draft Corporate Plan 2012/13 to 2014/15. The consultation included a specific focus on the proposal to change the response to automatic fire alarms as presented in the draft plan. The thirteen week consultation period started on 3 October 2011 and closed on 4 January 2011, which incorporated an additional week for the Christmas and New Year holiday period.
- 1.4 As in previous years, the annual requirement to produce an Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) has been integrated with the production of the Corporate Plan. The draft plan was also presented in a new more concise style to make it more reader friendly. Its structure is based on the framework of the three strategic principles established in the organisational strategy 'Towards 2014'.
- 1.5 Due to the delay of the government grant announcement in 2010 the consultation on the 2011/12 to 2013/14 Corporate Plan was undertaken at the start of 2011. This imposed constraint has meant that consultation on two corporate plans has been undertaken in one calendar year.
- 1.6 The consultation on the Draft Corporate Plan was again set against the context of the uncertainty surrounding the level of savings that the Service will need to make in the future. The Draft Corporate Plan presents plans for operating under the current expectation to make savings of between four and nine million pounds by 2014/15.
- 1.7 The proposal to change the response to automatic fire alarms focuses on false alarm reduction rather than financial savings. The proposal considers domestic and non-domestic (non-residential) automatic fire alarms separately. This proposal was specifically chosen for consultation as it affects the service received by the community.
- 1.8 This report presents a high level summary of the key consultation results together with recommendations for consideration by the Authority. A full detailed report on the consultation is attached in Appendix A.

2. SUMMARY OF DRAFT CORPORATE PLAN RESULTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 The responses to the content of the whole Draft Corporate Plan were limited with only three responses received. All other responses received in the consultation related to the automatic fire alarms (See Section 3). Two responses were from representative bodies (Fire Brigades Union and Unison) and one came from a member of staff.
- 2.2 The responses from the Fire Brigades Union, Unison and member of staff are summarised in Appendix A and, where appropriate, a Service response has been provided in italics.

Recommendation 1

Having considered the consultation responses from the Representative Bodies and member of staff, the following changes are recommended:

to indicate that the requirements of Integrated Risk Management Planning are integrated within the Corporate Plan 2012/13 to 2014/15; and;

to make prevention, protection and response performance information, demonstrating how our outcomes support our Corporate Plan, more easily accessible to the public.

2.3 It is recommended to the Fire Authority that these arrangements are adopted.

3. SUMMARY OF THE DOMESTIC AFA PROPOSAL, RESULTS AND RECOMMENDATION

3.1 Consultation was undertaken on the proposal to change the way the Service responds to automatic fire alarms at domestic properties. The proposed change is outlined below.

3.2 The proposed change for all domestic properties:

Attendance at domestic (residential) automatic fire alarm (AFA) calls should be reduced from two fire engines to one, between 8.00am and 6.00pm, unless the person reporting the alarm can confirm that there is a fire.

Results

3.3 The results of the consultation on the domestic element of the proposal indicate that there is support to reduce attendance at automatic fire alarms, between the hours of 8.00am and 6.00pm, from two fire engines to one. External stakeholders showed strongest support for the proposal. The quantitative consultation results for the domestic proposal are summarised in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Quantitative results (agree only) for the domestic proposal

	Questionnaire		Focus groups			
	Agree with proposal		Agree with proposal (Vote 1)		Agree with proposal (Vote 2)	
	%	#	%	#	%	#
Online and paper questionnaires	79.9	139				
Public focus group			86.9	40	84.7	39
Business focus group			77.6	23	88.5	23
Minority advocate focus group			66.7	4	66.7	4
Staff focus group			21.4	3	11.1	1

3.4 The free text responses returned with completed questionnaires suggest that most respondents supported the domestic and non-domestic proposals. Few concerns were raised about the domestic proposal from the focus groups, but where concerns were highlighted they referred to:

- 3.5 The policy should consider the building type, construction, use and location on a risk basis:
- There were concerns about a 'one size fits all' approach considering the range of property types within different classifications and the differences between rural and urban sites across the Service area. There appears to be a significant 'grey area' in terms of the in-scope properties that requires clarification, and this includes how the policy relates to site-specific risk assessments.
- 3.6 The policy will increase risk to public and fire fighter safety:
- Asking members of the public to confirm signs of fire potentially puts them in danger, and more established fires are more dangerous to both members of the public and to firefighters. Reduced attendance may be fine for false alarms, but what happens when there is a real fire? Would the delay encourage people to fight fires themselves?
- 3.7 The concerns relating to the consideration of risk were raised in most focus groups, and the proposal will consider these aspects by retaining pre-determined attendance criteria for properties deemed to be high risk. It should be noted that the proposal does not include non-domestic (residential) properties such as hospitals, hotels or care homes.
- 3.8 Staff and others raised concerns about the operational consequences of responding with one fire engine if it is only crewed by four firefighters. Whilst the preferred arrangement is to mobilise with five firefighters, there are occasions where a fire engine is mobilised with four firefighters. Given the perceived risk in relation to automatic fire alarms is low, it is for the officer in charge of the first attendance to make an assessment for any additional resources they deem necessary to ensure firefighter and public safety. If the domestic proposal is implemented this operational policy would not change.
- 3.9 The need to clearly communicate any changes to DSFRS service provision, following consultation, was identified as necessary and important. Feedback from the consultation highlighted the contradiction between existing fire safety messages and the perceived intentions of the proposal. The need to manage the expectations of the community and to communicate with them during the implementation of any changes should be borne in mind when considering the following recommendations.

Recommendation 2

That the domestic element of the AFA proposal, as outlined in the consultation document be implemented.

- 3.10 It is recommended to the Fire Authority that this arrangement be adopted.

4. SUMMARY OF THE NON-DOMESTIC AFA PROPOSAL, RESULTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1 Consultation was undertaken on the proposal to change the way the Service responds to automatic fire alarms at non-domestic properties. The proposed change is outlined below.

4.2 The proposed change for specified types of non-domestic (non-residential) premises (see Table 2 below):

Attendance at the listed non-domestic (non-residential) properties should be stopped between 8.00am and 6.00pm unless the person making the automatic fire alarm (AFA) call can confirm that there is a fire on the premises.

Table 2: Non-residential property types to which the non-domestic element of the proposal would apply

Education	Religious
Entertainment and Culture	Retail
Food and Drink	Sporting Venues
Industrial Manufacturing	Transport Buildings
Industrial Processing	Type Not Specified
Offices and Call Centres	Vehicle Repair
Public Administration	Warehouses and Bulk Storage

Results

4.3 The results of the consultation on the non-domestic element of the proposal indicates that there is support to no longer attend certain types of business premises when there is an automatic fire alarm unless the person making the call can confirm there is a fire. The quantitative consultation results for the non-domestic proposal are summarised in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Quantitative results (agree only) for the non-domestic proposal

	Questionnaire		Focus groups			
	Agree with proposal		Agree with proposal (Vote 1)		Agree with proposal (Vote 2)	
	%	#	%	#	%	#
Online and paper questionnaires	63.7	114				
Public focus group			73.4	33	78.2	36
Business focus group			56.7	17	65.4	17
Minority advocate focus group			83.4	5	100.0	6
Staff focus group			28.6	4	22.2	2

- 4.4 The quantitative results in Table 3 indicate support for the proposed policy and this was mirrored in the public focus groups where support for the proposal was the most frequently expressed opinion.
- 4.5 In both the public and business focus groups a common theme was that businesses and members of the public need to manage their own risks; that emergency plan implementation should not depend on the DSFRS. For businesses this is already a requirement of the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order.
- 4.6 The qualitative comments received during discussions at the focus groups and submitted in letters, emails and the questionnaires did highlight several areas of concern with the non-domestic proposal. The key areas of concern are:
- 4.7 The policy should consider the building type, construction, use and location on a risk basis:
There were concerns about a 'one size fits all' approach considering the range of property types within different classifications and the differences between rural and urban sites across the Service area. There appears to be a significant 'grey area' that requires clarification and this includes how the policy relates to site specific risk assessments.
- 4.8 Concern about the proposed times of operation:
Times seen as arbitrary and not reflective of the needs of businesses / habits of individuals.
The policy will increase risk to public and fire fighter safety:
Asking members of the public to confirm signs of fire potentially puts them in danger, while more established fires are more dangerous to both members of the public who are trapped and to firefighters. Reduced attendance may be fine for false alarms, but what happens when there is a real fire? Would the delay encourage people to fight fires themselves?
Lack of availability/time delay of person to confirm there is a fire will increase risk:
Where premises are not occupied 24hrs/day seven days/week, delays in obtaining confirmation may allow small fires to become established and may lead to an increase in the number of serious fires
- 4.9 The staff focus group also emphasised that the existing automatic fire alarm policy should be applied more rigorously.
- 4.10 Having listened to and carefully considered all the opinions expressed, it is recognised that, despite quantitative support of 63.7%, the qualitative feedback highlights concerns about the proposed policy change to the standard non-domestic response. To fully investigate these concerns and give them due consideration will require time, and it is therefore not recommended that the proposed policy change as outlined above be implemented at this time.

Recommendation 3

That, after consulting widely on the proposal to change the response to non-domestic (non-residential) automatic fire alarm calls, as outlined in the consultation document, the changes should not be implemented at this time.

Although there is public support for non-attendance, there is a need to provide more information and guidance to businesses to give them an opportunity to reduce unwanted calls to the fire and rescue service prior to a non-attendance policy being implemented. The existing arrangements already approved by the fire authority and the rigorous application of the Chief Fire Officers' Association protocol will assist the reduction of false alarms. If these arrangements do not prove to be effective, a subsequent paper to the fire authority will be presented using the results of this consultation as a basis.

- 4.11 It is recommended to the Fire Authority that this arrangement be adopted.
- 4.12 Alternative proposals suggested included, among others: charging for attending false alarms; applying the proposed policy 24 hours a day; and having reduced attendance but not non-attendance.
- 4.13 The existing DSFRS Unwanted Fire Signals Policy operates within the scope and intent of the current CFOA protocol. It uses a four stage approach to help poor performing non-domestic properties reduce the number of AFA calls that come from their systems. The fourth stage of the current policy allows the use of remedial action, including reduction of attendance, if poor performance persists. DSFRS proposes to enhance its existing approach to managing the reduction of AFA calls through the introduction of cost recovery as a replacement for reduced attendance.
- 4.14 In 2011 the Authority approved, following public consultation (Minute ref. DSFRA/11 (27/05/2011)) to adopt, on its becoming law, the powers contained with the Localism Bill 2010 that would permit the recovery of costs incurred in attending repeat calls to false alarms caused by poorly maintained or defective automatic fire alarms systems at non-domestic properties. The Bill received Royal Assent in November 2011 and the Authority expects to be able to recover costs from April 2012 when the relevant section of the Act is predicted to commence.

Recommendation 4

That the existing automatic fire alarm policy for managing down non-domestic AFAs be amended to include cost recovery as allowed by the Localism Act 2011, and which was approved by the DSFRA, following public consultation, on 27/05/2011 (Minute ref. DSFRA/11).

Note: This change would apply to all non-domestic properties in the Service area.

- 4.15 It is recommended to the Fire Authority that this arrangement be adopted.
- 4.16 The arrangements outlined within this plan support our strategic intent to protect the public of Devon and Somerset and become a more efficient and effective organisation at the same time. Changes have been made to the original proposals after taking into account comments from staff, businesses and the public and I commend the report to the Fire Authority.

LEE HOWELL
Chief Fire Officer