

REPORT REFERENCE NO.	CSC/24/6
MEETING	COMMUNITY SAFETY COMMITTEE
DATE OF MEETING	26 APRIL 2024
SUBJECT OF REPORT	CHARGING FOR RESPONSE TO UNWANTED FIRE SIGNALS
LEAD OFFICER	ACFO GERALD TAYLOR, DIRECTOR OF SERVICE DELIVERY
RECOMMENDATIONS	<i>That this paper is noted</i>
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	<p>Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service can recover costs for responding to unwanted fire signals under the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 (Section 18c), which was later substantiated by the Department for Communities and Local Government Localism Act 2011 Section 10 (section 10 includes section 18c of the FRS Act 2004).</p> <p>The Service sets a four-stage process ahead of commencing cost recovery action and any charges are readily available to the public as detailed on the Services website.</p>
RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS	As indicated in the paper.
APPENDICES	None.
BACKGROUND PAPERS	<p>Management Guidance Note No.25</p> <p>Standard Charges DSFRS Policy</p>

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 This paper will look at the Service’s charging processes for reducing unwanted fire signals (“UWFS”) and how the process can be further improved and standardised across the Service.

2. THE LAW AND SERVICE POLICY

2.1 Unwanted Fire Signal costs can be recovered under the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 (Section 18c). This was substantiated by the Department for Communities and Local Government Localism Act 2011 Section 10 (section 10 includes section 18c of the FRS Act 2004).

2.2 Devon and Somerset Fire & Rescue Service (“The Service”) Management Guidance Note No. 25 states that once stage four of the guidance has been reached “recovering costs” activity commences. The trigger points are either 2 or more actuations within 4 weeks, or 3 or more actuations within 26 weeks. These are identified through a UWFS monthly report. (The trigger points are discussed more in the next section).

3. TOTAL UNWANTED FIRE SIGNAL INCIDENTS PER YEAR

Year	Total
2021	4494
2022	4868
2023	5463
2024	1385 <i>(As of 08 April 2024)</i>

4. CHARGING TRIGGERS (POLICY, REPEAT OFFENDERS Etc)

4.1 The Service adopts the following four-stage approach. UWFS become an issue when the following trigger points are met; either two or more actuations within four weeks or three or more actuations within 26 weeks. These are identified through a UWFS monthly report.

4.2 Once a trigger is met, the four stages are as follows:

- (Stage 1) Leaflet left at premises;
- (Stage 2) Letter sent to premises;
- (Stage 3) Officer contacts/meets Responsible Person and advises on cost recovery;
- (Stage 4) Cost recovery commences.

4.3 At Stage 2, a Fire Safety Officer will be allocated to the premises for further liaison.

5. CHARGING OVERVIEW

5.1 The charge per hour is £440.68 (as of April 2024) plus £28 for a major appliance (this is indicated on the Services website under 'Standard Charges') with a £28 admin charge.

How is the above cost figure calculated or arrived at?

5.2 The hourly rate is calculated based upon the total cost of;

- the total salary cost of each firefighter rank including Pension and National Insurance ("NI");
- a proportion of the support department charges (e.g. ICT/HR/Estates);
- the average cost of a vehicle which is set as the Medium Rescue Pump hourly rate.

What does the figure include? (e.g. staff wages, vehicle fuel, vehicle wear and tear)

5.3 Total salary cost (including on costs which is made up of Employers Pension, National Insurance and allowances), vehicle costs (depreciation, maintenance, fuel and insurance). The cost of an appliance also includes all the standard equipment that is carried on it, including the cost of the vehicle itself.

What is the process to change the amount?

5.4 The Finance department updates the figure as part of an annual review, this review includes predictions for pay awards and inflation. This information is not always formally communicated to staff. A review of this process could therefore be undertaken to establish a formal communication to ensure charge updates are shared.

6. MOVING FORWARD

6.1 A communication plan will be implemented to the wider community about Service UWFS Policy charges. Presently, regular communications are maintained with the building owners that are repeat offenders. Reaction is varied, from listening and implementing the positive advice given, to other building owners comfortable for us to attend their premises and subsequently pay the respective charges.

7. FUTURE IMPROVEMENTS

7.1 The existing approach is predominantly driven by Administrative Support within the office, monitoring the CFRMIS ("Community Fire Risk Management Information System") report and implement the various stages of repeat attendances, through working with the allocated officer to each premise. The process is then actioned via the relevant paperwork with the finance department (i.e. invoicing) generating the cost recovery letters and logging a record of cost

recovery totals. This is an approach the Service aims to apply across all commands, to enable this to become a standardised approach.

8. CHARGES TO DATE

- 8.1 The Finance department advised that the total cost recovery for the year 2023-24 was just under £9,500.

**ACFO GERALD TAYLOR
DIRECTOR OF SERVICE DELIVERY**