

Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service (NFRS)

Outline of cost recovery amendment to NFRS Unwanted Fire Signals Policy (UWFS)

FEBRUARY 2018

Outline of the introduction of a cost recovery process by Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service's (NFRS) response to repeated Unwanted Fire Signals (UwFS) at premises which are regulated under the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 (RRO).

Forword:

An Unwanted Fire Signal (UwFS) is defined by the British Fire Protection System Association as “any alarm signal other than a genuine fire or test signal”. Any false alarm which is subsequently passed to the Fire and Rescue Service is classed as an “Unwanted Fire Signal”.

In an attempt to reduce unnecessary attendances Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service, as of 01/June/2018, are to introduce a policy to recover costs for attendance at UwFS where persistent actuations are occurring.

The ability to recover costs through charging for persistent unwanted fire signals is achieved through the Fire Services Act 2004 (FRSA), as amended by the Localism Act 2011. As a result fire and rescue services may charge under section 18C of the FRSA.

In recent years NFRS have been proactively reducing the number of responses to UwFS within the county of Northumberland. Cost recovery is another tool to enhance the Service's approach to reducing unnecessary calls and to encourage better management and maintenance of automatic fire alarm systems.

The purpose of applying a cost recovery process is to stimulate an improvement in the local management of automatic fire alarm systems at premises where a persistent issue is identified. This is expected to have the following impact:

- An improvement in local alarm management practices.
- An increase in the general standard of fire safety at the premises.
- An improvement in the local response to potential emergency situations.
- A reduction in the unnecessary burden on NFRS resources.
- An increase in the availability of appliances & staff for real emergencies and training.
- An improvement in efficiency resulting in better value Fire and Rescue Service provision to the people of Northumberland

A consultation process has been carried out for NFRS's Fire and Rescue Plan 2017 - 2021 and this contained a number of questions relating to the introduction of cost recovery, the responses received were supportive of the proposal. Prior to the introduction of a cost recovery process, further opinion is being requested from premises affected by the introduction of a cost recovery process by NFRS.

This document is relevant to: Premises within the county of Northumberland which are regulated under the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 (RRO).

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Even when appropriate measures are in place, false alarms or will occur. However, a false alarm is not necessarily a reason in itself to call the emergency services and if they occur regularly, action should be taken to prevent the Service being called out unnecessarily.
- 1.2 Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service (NFRS) recognises the value of fire alarms in protecting people from fire and reducing the numbers of fire deaths and injuries. NFRS's objective through the introduction of a cost recovery process is to encourage proper use of fire alarm systems. As well as ensure that those responsible have a suitable system with appropriate management processes in place, so as to reduce the number of false alarms caused by these systems. Additionally where there is a persistent concern with automatic false alarm systems generating UwFS's and where it is appropriate to do so, ensure that filtering is applied to prevent unnecessary calls being made to NRFS.
- 1.3 NFRS have endeavoured to reduce the burden of UwFS's on the Service's resources. We have worked with responsible persons at premises to identify poor practice and incorrect alarm installations which have been responsible for the false alarm being generated. The following initiatives have been employed to reduce the unnecessary deployment of resources.

- Call Challenge (introduced in Sept 2012) - any alarm signal received from a premises or via an Alarm Receiving Centre will be 'challenged' by the Service. No attendance will be mobilised, between the hours of 08:00 and 18:00, unless the alarm signal is backed up with a 999 call from the premises to identify that a fire is present. This applies to the following premises types
 - Business Commercial premises
 - Hospitals
 - Residential Care premises

The following premises types are exempt from the call challenge (none attendance) process;

- Schools
 - Sheltered Housing Schemes
 - Single Private Dwellings
 - Social Housing Bungalows
- Fire Safety Officers working with responsible persons to review passive fire protection management practices in premises where repeated UwFS's are generated.

1.4 NFRS UwFS statistics for Non-Residential and Other Residential from 2011 to 2017

Year	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
Total	568	460	453	448	321	376

- 1.5 Statistics show that the Service has made reductions in UwFS's over the previous six years however, if the burden on the Service's resources is to be reduced further, then additional measures are required to improve performance at premises where persistent alarm actuations are generated.
- 1.6 If required we can help you and provide advice on reducing calls to UwFS incidents. Please contact our Fire Safety team on 01670 621140 or by emailing firesafety1@northumberland.gov.uk
- 1.7 Legal basis for introducing cost recovery

The legal basis for charging comes from the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 (FRSA) as amended by the Localism Act 2011.

The Authority has no legal power to make a profit from any charges. Section 18A (5) of the FRSA says *"In setting the amount of the charge a FRA must secure that, taking one financial year with another, the authority's income from charges does not exceed the cost to the authority of taking the action for which the charges are imposed."*

The Localism Act has also amended the FRSA by introducing a new power, which allows the Authority to charge for attendance at unwanted fire signals due to an automatic fire alarm (AFA).

Section 18C of the FRSA 2004 states

Cases where a charge may be made for responding to report of fire etc

- (1) This section applies for the purposes of section 18B(3).
 - (2) This section applies to a report of fire, or explosion, at sea or under the sea.
 - (3) This section applies to a report of fire if—
 - (a) the report is of fire at premises that are **not domestic** premises,
 - (b) the **report is false**,
 - (c) **the report is made as a direct or indirect result of warning equipment having malfunctioned or been misinstalled**, and
 - (d) there is a **persistent problem with false reports** of fire at the premises that are made as a direct or indirect result of warning equipment under common control having malfunctioned or been misinstalled.
- 1.8 NFRS are introducing a cost recovery process to reduce the burden on Service resources and improve the fire safety management in premises where persistent UwFS's are generated.

2. Cost Recovery Process

- 2.1 NFRS are to introduce the following procedures to respond to alarm signals received from all premises where the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 applies.
- 2.2 NFRS will apply a cost recovery procedure to premises where there have been four or more actuations in a rolling twelve month period.
- 2.3 The Service will follow up the third UwFS with contact from a fire safety officer to establish any underlying cause for the UwFS and identify any potential misinstallation of alarm systems. Following the third actuation the Service will reduce the predetermined attendance to one appliance, for inspection only. If further applicable alarm UwFS's are received within the rolling twelve month period from the date of the first actuation then cost recovery procedure will be applied to this and subsequent UwFS's (see process table below).
- 2.3 Private dwellings will be exempt from any cost recovery process introduced by NFRS. If the UwFS is generated in the common areas (which are regulated under the RRO) of premises where multiple dwellings are located, this will be subject to any cost recovery process. No other exemptions will apply to any proposed cost recovery process.
- 2.4 Using the guidelines for cost recovery issued by the National Fire Chief's Council a sum of £207.74 + VAT has been calculated to establish the cost of NFRS responding to a call with one fire appliance.

Breakdown of costs

• 1 x Officer in Charge	£18.59
• 4 x Firefighter (£14.89 each)	£59.56
• Appliance charge	£100
• Retained Duty System call out fee (£3.94 x 5)	£19.70
• 5% administration charge	£9.89
	£207.74 + VAT

(reviewed annually to account for staffing costs)

Process Table

Rolling 12 month period from date of first actuation	1. Automatic Fire Alarm System generates an unwanted fire signal	Full predetermined attendance by NFRS
	2. Automatic Fire Alarm System generates second unwanted fire signal	Full predetermined attendance by NFRS
	3. Automatic Fire Alarm System generates third unwanted fire signal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Full predetermined attendance by NFRS. • Fire Safety Officer contacts the responsible person to identify any underlying causes • Predetermined attendance reduced to one appliance for any further calls within the twelve month period from date of first actuation.
	4. Automatic Fire Alarm System generates fourth unwanted fire signal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduced attendance (one appliance) • Cost recovered at £207.74 + VAT
	5. Automatic Fire Alarm System generates further unwanted fire signals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduced attendance (one appliance) • Cost recovered at £207.74 + VAT

3. How to respond

1. When responding, please state whether you are doing so as an individual or representing the views of an organisation.
2. The Consultation Response form is available electronically at <http://www.northumberland.gov.uk/Fire/Consultations.aspx> (until the consultation closes). The form can be submitted by email or by letter to:

Email: firesafety1@northumberland.gov.uk

Posted to:

Craig Ducat

Head of Business Fire Safety
West Hartford Community Fire Station
West Hartford Business Park
Cramlington
Northumberland
NE23 3JP

Tel: 01670 621135

4. Confidentiality & Data Protection

- Information provided in response to this consultation, including personal information, may be subject to publication or release to other parties or to disclosure in accordance with the access to information regimes (these are primarily the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA), the Data Protection Act 1998 (DPA) and the Environmental Information Regulations 2004). If you wish for information, including personal data that you provide to be treated as confidential, please be aware that, under the FOIA, there is a statutory Code of Practice with which public authorities must comply and which deals, amongst other things, with obligations of confidence.
- In view of this it would be helpful if you could explain to us why you regard the information you have provided as confidential. If we receive a request for disclosure of the information we will take full account of your explanation, but we cannot give an assurance that confidentiality can be maintained in all circumstances. An automatic confidentiality disclaimer generated by your IT system will not, of itself, be regarded as binding on the Department.

5. Help with queries

9. Questions about the policy issues raised in the document should be addressed to:

Craig Ducat
Head of Business Fire Safety
West Hartford Community Fire Station
West Hartford Business Park
Cramlington
Northumberland
NE23 3JP

Tel: 01670 621135

Email: firesafety1@northumberland.gov.uk

6. Consultation questions

6.1 Below are the questions we would greatly appreciate your responses to.

Name of person completing form	
Company	
Date	

Question 1: Do you think the cost recovery process will achieve its aims of: reducing unwanted fire signals to Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service?

--

Questions 2: Do you think that paragraphs 1.1 - 1.8 accurately set out the need for Northumberland Fire and rescue Service to introduce a cost recovery process?

Question 3: Do you feel the identified cost recovery amount of £207.74 + VAT is reasonable?

Question 4: Do you agree with the benefits Northumberland Fire and Rescue service believes the changes will bring (paragraph 1.3)?

Question 5: What is your view on Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service 's identified trigger point for cost recovery to be instigated (paragraph 2.2)?

Question 6: General rating of the proposal.

Question 7: Do you have any other comments that might aid the consultation process as a whole?