

**Working together
for a safer Scotland**



**SCOTTISH
FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE**

Working together for a safer Scotland

Scottish Fire and Rescue Service Thematic Report

Unwanted Fire Alarm Signals (UFAS) in Aberdeen City

Safety. Teamwork. Respect. Innovation.

1. Purpose

- 1.1 This report provides an overview of the demands placed on the SFRS and the impact on local businesses across Aberdeen City due to Unwanted Fire Alarm Signals (UFAS). The report reflects on the effect of this incident type since the implementation of a new response model adopted by the SFRS on 01 July 2023.
- 1.2 The report provides the opportunity for Committee members to maintain scrutiny of UFAS incidents, to ensure positive outcomes for the businesses within Aberdeen City.

2. Background

- 2.1 Within Aberdeen City there are several sources of fire alarms, both automatic (signal goes to an alarm receiving centre 24hrs a day) and manual (once the alarm has activated a 999 call is made from the premises).
- 2.2 As highlighted through previous SFRS Performance Reports to the Committee, there has been a significant volume of calls and mobilisation of SFRS resources to attend such actuations. A large percentage of these calls have subsequently been deemed to be UFAS due to the actuation being determined as a false alarm.
- 2.3 The five main premises types for these activations within Aberdeen City are:

01 April 2019 to 31 March 2023	01 July 2023 to 30 June 2024
1. Hospitals / Medical Care	1. Residential Homes - Nursing / Care
2. Residential Home – Nursing / Care	2. Hospitals / Medical Care
3. Education (Infant/Primary School)	3. Student Halls of Residence
4. Offices and Call Centres	4. Hotels / Motels
5. Education (Secondary School)	5. Sheltered Housing (not self-contained).

- 2.4 The five main causes of the unwanted actuations within Aberdeen City are:

01 April 2019 to 31 March 2023	01 July 2023 to 30 June 2024
Human – Accidentally/carelessly set off	1. Human – Cooking/burnt toast
2. Smoke alarm - Fault	2. Human – Accidentally/carelessly set off
3. System – Fault	3. Smoke alarm - Fault
4. Contaminants - Dust	4. Apparatus – Unknown cause
5. Human – Cooking/burnt toast	5. System – Fault

- 2.5 Historically, the SFRS responded to all AFA system actuations. However, there is no legal responsibility for us to respond to these systems to establish

if there is a fire. It is the legal responsibility of dutyholders to take appropriate action in the event of an AFA activation, including the safe evacuation of persons within, investigate the cause of the alarm and to notify us of any fire. This should be informed from an appropriate Fire Risk Assessment as required by Part 3 of the Fire (Scotland) Act 2005.

3. New UFAS Mobilisation Procedure

3.1 In order to address the unnecessary mobilisations, the SFRS went to public consultation in 2021 on a change of policy / response model. Following approval of recommendations by the SFRS Board (December 2021), an extensive communication strategy, including working with those who would be affected by the change to prepare them for implementation, commenced early 2022. Subsequently, after this significant lead in period, the new response model went live on 01 July 2023.

3.2 The main differences were: -

- The SFRS will not automatically respond to an Automatic Fire Alarm (AFA) unless there is a confirmed fire or sign of fire, or where the premises is one where people sleep;
- All calls received to the SFRS as a consequence of an AFA activation will be subject to a call challenge process to determine the level of attendance necessary in line with the UFAS response model;
- The SFRS will treat any fire alarm as a sign of fire, other than from a single smoke alarm. Other signs of fire include: visual flame/smoke, smell of burning, or any other fire alarm signal.

3.3 In this regard, the procedure details a sequence of effective actions which are considered measured, appropriate and includes a process of continuous monitoring.

3.4 The change of procedure only relates to non-domestic premises. It will not affect the way SFRS responds to alarms activating in a domestic setting or linked through a domestic telecare provider. We are only changing how we respond to false alarms in workplaces (non-domestic premises) that have fire safety responsibilities under Fire (Scotland) Act 2005.

3.5 By implementing the procedure, SFRS aimed to:

- Deliver a consistent UFAS procedure that can be applied across Scotland, thereby removing and rescinding previous local arrangements;
- Reduce the overall number of mobilisations to UFAS incidents;
- Filter calls generated by fire alarm systems, thus ensuring an appropriate operational response is always dispatched;
- Identify premises that create demand and implement a robust system to reduce future UFAS incidents;

- Engage with stakeholders in order to advise them of the actions which may be taken by themselves and the SFRS to manage UFAS incidents; and
- Support Fire Safety Enforcement activities.

3.6 When SFRS Operations Control (OC) receive a call from non-exempt premises advising of an alarm activation, OC will ‘call challenge’ to establish whether there is a fire or signs of fire:

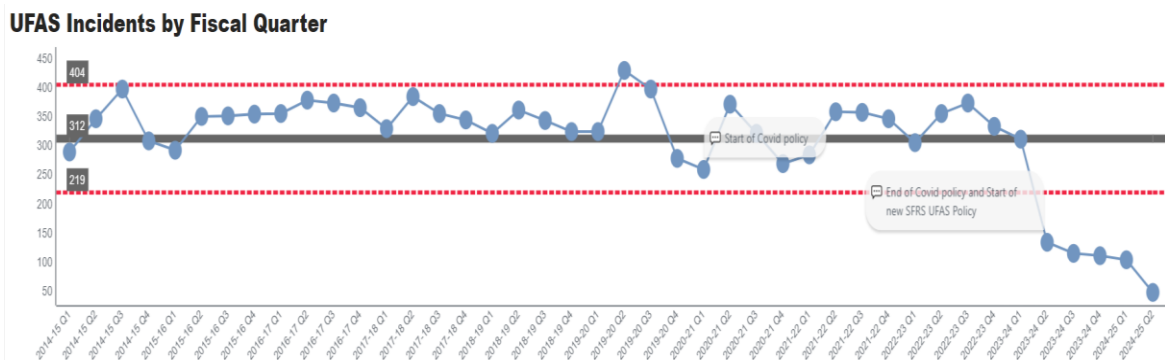
- If the call is from an Alarm Receiving Centre (ARC) or a 999 call and they are unable to confirm if there is a fire or signs of fire, then OC will request that an investigation is carried out to establish this and to call back. At this point, no response will be made by the SFRS;
- Should a subsequent call be received via an ARC or 999 advising there is no fire or signs of fire, this call is logged and closed as ‘No Attendance’;
- If an ARC / 999 Call is unable to confirm if a sleeping risk exists, OC will mobilise an appropriate Pre-Determined Attendance (PDA).

On all occasions, if a fire or signs of fire has been confirmed, then a full PDA will be immediately mobilised.

4. SFRS - AFA Statistics

4.1 The SFRS have attended 512 UFAS Incidents in Aberdeen City from 01 July 2023, which is a 61% reduction when considered against 804 Non-Attendance calls for the same period. A breakdown of this information can be found in Appendix A.

4.2 The graph below shows an overview of the SFRS attendance at UFAS Incidents in Aberdeen City over the past several years. There was a notable decrease in UFAS incidents during the COVID19 pandemic, due to many premises being un-occupied due to lockdown; this mitigating the human factor contributions to false alarms. There is also a significant reduction following the implementation of the SFRS UFAS Policy and Procedure, from July 2023.



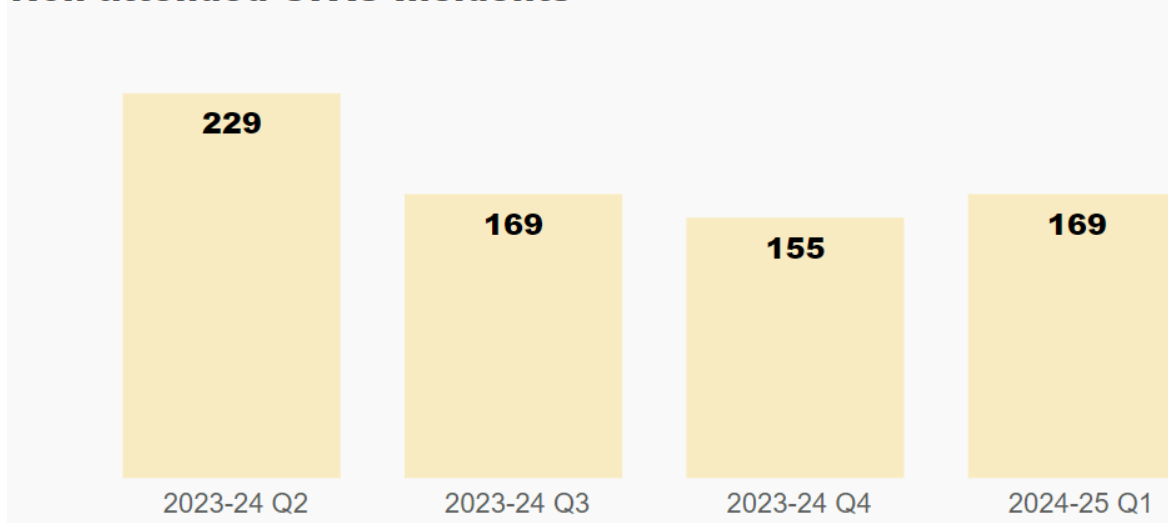
4.3 In the table below you will note the number of UFAS Incidents attended in the Aberdeen City area by Year / Quarter. Again, the significant decrease in UFAS Incidents attended from Q2 of 2023/24 is due to the procedural change.

UFAS Incidents by year/quarter

Fiscal Yr	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
2024-25	104	48			152
2023-24	311	134	115	111	671
2022-23	305	355	373	333	1,366
2021-22	284	358	357	346	1,345
2020-21	259	371	321	269	1,220
2019-20	324	429	397	278	1,428

- 4.4 The table below shows the number of UFAS Incidents, for Aberdeen City, not attended by the SFRS since the implementation of the changes. These are the calls which have been challenged by our Operations Control, with the staff / dutyholders having carried out an inspection and determined that the actuation is a false alarm.

Non attended UFAS Incidents



- 4.5 This has realised a number of benefits not only for the SFRS but for the business community in Aberdeen City, such as
- The number of unnecessary blue light journeys have been significantly reduced. This has also reduced the road risk around these journeys and carbon emissions from our fire appliances;
 - SFRS Crews have had more time available for critical training and prevention initiatives;
 - Dutyholders / occupiers have taken more ownership of the alarm activations within their premises or site;

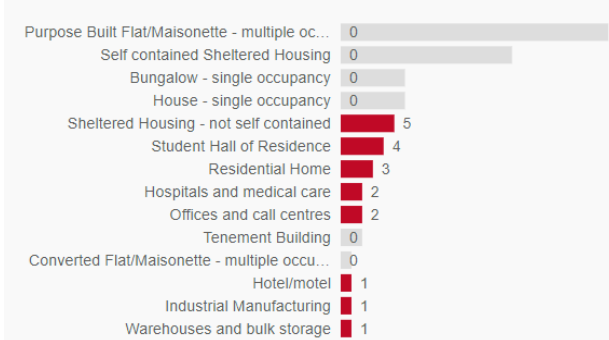
- The time lost by businesses while waiting for SFRS to arrive and verify a false alarm and been greatly reduced.

4.6 As highlighted in the tables below, there have been 13 instances within relevant (typically non-domestic) premises in Aberdeen City since the implementation of the new procedure until 30th June 2024, where a call source to an incident was an Automatic Fire Alarm (AFA), and the incident turned out to be a fire. These have all been designated as care risk and sleeping risk premises and the SFRS have attended automatically as part of our pre-determined attendance (PDA). The SFRS will always attend an incident where there is an AFA activation and the premise is one where people sleep. The other 3 instances (1 Warehouse, 1 Industrial Manufacturing, 1 Office / Call Centre) where the call source turned out to be a mobile phone / 999 call to our OC in addition to the alarm being raised via the AFA system and where the SFRS attended automatically as part of our PDA.

Fires where call source was AFA

Fiscal Yr	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
2024-25	1	2			3
2023-24	3	9	3	1	16

AFA call source fires by property type



5. How the SFRS Contributes to Reducing UFAS in Aberdeen City

- 5.1 The key focus of activity in the SFRS is to prevent UFAS incidents happening in the first place. Across Aberdeen City, this includes working closely with local dutyholders / business owners and large organisations such as the Local Authority and NHS Grampian to ensure they are aware of their responsibilities.
- 5.2 SFRS Fire Safety Protection Officers give advice while auditing premises and through consultations regarding alarm systems, including the positioning and type of detection, to reduce the likelihood of false alarms.









6. Conclusion

- 6.1 This report provides the Committee with an overview of the UFAS Incidents attended by the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service within the Aberdeen City Area.
- 6.2 The Scottish Fire and Rescue Service will continue to contribute towards reducing the number of Unwanted Fire Alarm Signals by engaging and supporting dutyholders to have appropriate management procedures / systems in place.
- 6.3 The Scottish Fire and Rescue Service will continue to deliver against prevention, protection and response priorities, to ensure the safety and wellbeing of the communities throughout Aberdeen City.

Appendix A – Aberdeen City

Since the introduction of the new UFAS policy on 1st July 2023....

Data shown is from 1st July to date, includes all control tagged non-attended UFAS and only IRS Incidents that has been completed and is therefore **subject to change**. If you require quarterly data in this format please contact the BI team who have prepared SFRS UFAS PowerPoint slides.

<p>Attended UFAS Incidents</p>  <p>512</p>	<p>Since the introduction of the new UFAS policy on 1st July 2023, SFRS has attended 512 UFAS Incidents.</p>
<p>Unattended UFAS</p>  <p>804</p>	<p>Control had tagged 804 UFAS Incidents as non attended. This is an average of 2 calls per day.</p>
<p>Reduction in UFAS Incidents</p>  <p>61%</p>	<p>The reduction in UFAS attendance over this time is 61% (% of non attended calls against total UFAS calls, which is calculated by adding non attended and attended Incidents)</p>
<p>Average UFAS Incidents attended per day</p>  <p>2</p>	<p>The daily average number of UFAS Incidents is now 2 compared to previous 5 year daily average 4 Incidents.</p>
<p>Care Premises</p>  <p>60.9%</p>	<p>60.9% of UFAS Incidents occurred in care and hospital premises</p>
<p>Sleeping Premises</p>  <p>27.7%</p>	<p>27.7% of UFAS Incidents occurred in sleeping premises</p>
<p>Non-Sleeping Premises</p>  <p>11.3%</p>	<p>11.3% of UFAS Incidents occurred in Non-Sleeping premises</p>
<p>UFAS % of all Incidents</p>  <p>16.6%</p>	<p>UFAS Incidents are now 16.6% of all SFRS attended Incidents compared to 35.3% in previous 5 years.</p>