



## **TRI-SERVICE PROCEDURE**

### **UNWANTED FIRE SIGNALS**

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## 1 Introduction

- 1.1 This procedure aims to reduce the impact of Unwanted Fire Signals (UwFS's) and false alarms generated from Automatic Fire Alarm (AFA) systems within Derbyshire, Leicestershire, and Nottinghamshire.
- 1.2 The number of AFA systems installed across the three Service areas Leicestershire, Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire is not known. As the respective services have no control of these systems, there needs to be a pro-active approach, common across all three Services, to influence the management of such systems, with the aim of reducing the adverse impact caused by UwFS's.
- 1.3 The definition of a false alarm is 'a fire signal resulting from a cause other than fire', in which a fire alarm system has responded, as designed (or as the technology can be reasonably expected to respond) to any of the following:
  - A fire like phenomenon or environmental influence (e.g., smoke from a nearby bonfire, dust or insects, processes that produce smoke or flame or environmental effects that can render certain types of detectors unstable, such as rapid air flow).
  - Accidental damage.
  - Inappropriate human action (e.g. operation of a system for test or maintenance purposes without prior warning to building occupants and/or a Fire Alarm Monitoring Organisation or malicious actuation of call points).
  - Equipment false alarms, in which the fire alarm has resulted from a fault in the system. (BS 5839 - 1: 2017 clause 3.19).
- 1.4 A false alarm becomes a UwFS at the point the Fire and Rescue Service is requested to attend. They are avoidable through good system design, management practice, procedure, maintenance and the appropriate use of space within the premises.

## 2 Responsibilities



- 2.1 The Responsible Person (RP), as defined by Article 3 of the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 (FSO), has responsibility for the alarm system and for all fire safety measures in the premises.
- 2.2 All parties involved in the specification, design, installation, commissioning management and maintenance of Automatic Fire Alarm systems have their responsibilities outlined in British Standard BS 5839 - 1: 2017.
- 2.3 Operational personnel will assist the RP with the investigation and every effort should be made to identify the cause. This may include talking to persons who were in the area at the time.
- 2.4 Individual Fire and Rescue Services will make their own arrangements for logging, recording and following up premises.

### **3 Call challenge**

- 3.1 To reduce the impact of UwFS's, the procedure for handling calls where fire alarms are sounding differs from the standard request for assistance.
- 3.2 On receipt of a call stating that fire alarms are sounding; Fire Control will call challenge to identify the premises and determine if an attendance will be made.
- 3.3 Call challenge will operate in all three services 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.
- 3.4 Calls from premises which are classed as 'exempt' will not be challenged.

The following premises types will be exempt;

- Domestic premises including Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO), Residential flats & Sheltered housing.
- Residential care and nursing homes.
- Local Primary Care Trust Hospitals and private Hospitals which have sleeping on site.
- Hotels during night-time hours only (21:00hrs - 08:00hrs). During the day, hotels will be call challenged.
- Other sleeping risks.
- Sites that are subject to Site Specific Risk Information (SSRI) - National PORIS Levels 3, 4 and 5.
- Heritage sites listed as Grade 1 or Grade II\* by Historic England.
- High Rise Premises with sleeping risk.
  
- A premises not conforming to the above criteria but is locally determined to be unsuitable for call challenging.



## **4 Fire Control procedure**

4.1 On receipt of a call, Fire Control will ascertain if the premises is exempt or not. If exempt, they will mobilise the appropriate attendance.

4.2 *Calls from Alarm Receiving Centre (ARC) – See Appendix 1*

On receipt of a call from an ARC, Fire Control operators will ask if they have contacted the premises. If not, they will be asked to contact the premises to determine the cause or request that the occupier carries out an investigation, confirming the outcome with Fire Control. The call will be deferred for 20 minutes.

4.3 If the ARC has tried to make contact with no success, Fire Control will request that the ARC contacts a key holder. Fire Control will advise that no response will be made unless a call is received from the premises confirming a fire. The call will be deferred for 20 minutes.

4.4 If the ARC refuses, Fire Control will advise them that no response will be made unless a call is received from the premises confirming a fire.

4.5 *Calls from Occupiers – See Appendix 2*

### **Fire Control operators should ask the following questions:**

#### **Q.1 - Is there a confirmed fire?**

YES – Mobilise PDA for the premises type and/or risk.

NO or don't know – go to Question 2.

#### **Q.2 - Has an investigation been carried out?**

YES – go to Question 3.

NO – go to Question 4.

#### **Q.3 - Can you confirm this is a false alarm?**

YES – No mobilisation.

NO – go to question 4.

#### **Q.4 - Are you able to investigate the cause of the alarm?**



YES – Investigate cause and call back if we are required to attend.

NO, or unwilling to investigate – Fire Control operator should determine the reasons and explain our non-attendance deferring call for 20 mins.

#### 4.6 *Calls from members of the public/passers-by – See Appendix 3*

- Alarm sounding and/or fire seen - Mobilise PDA for the premises type and/or risk.
- Alarm sounding but no external signs of fire – Mobilise one appliance.

**Under no circumstances should members of the public be encouraged to investigate or enter a premises.**

#### 4.7 Decision Flexibility / Discretion

To ensure that the most appropriate response is made, Fire Control have the authority to assess each fire alarm signal and decide if a response should be made, or not. Each fire alarm signal is different and should be assessed to decide if an attendance is required or not. 4.8 identifies other information that may be pertinent in deciding to mobilise to a non-exempt premises.

#### 4.8 Strong indicators of fire

The following are strong indicators of fire and suggest that a false alarm is less likely.

- Activation of a suppression system
- More than one detector activating
- Detectors in multiple zones activating
- Activation of a multi-detector
- No history of false alarms

The exempt list does not prevent Fire Control from further questioning occupiers to collect useful information. Fire Control Operators may elect to ask similar questions to those in 4.5.

#### 4.9 Hospitals



For a confirmed fire, mobilise full PDA.

Report of AFA actuation – Mobilise one appliance to check and ask if they are investigating the cause?

If YES – Advise that an appliance has been mobilised. Request the site calls back to confirm if the cause is a false alarm. On receipt of confirmation, Fire Control will stand the appliance down.

If NO – Request that the person investigates but advise that an appliance is on route.

If confirmation that the call is a false alarm is received, Fire Control operator should log the name and position of the person, then stand the appliance down.

If the caller states that the cause is unknown, Fire Control operator must inform the crew attending and the appliance will continue to proceed to check.

#### 4.10 Unoccupied or vacant buildings

If a call is received from an ARC, and the Fire Control operator is told the building is unoccupied, the ARC will be asked to mobilise a keyholder. No attendance will be made as per 4.3 above.

If the call is received from a member of the public, the Fire Control operator will follow procedures as per paragraph 4.6 above.

#### 4.11 Derelict buildings

Building classed as void or derelict and will not form part of this procedure and mobilising will be based on locally held SSRI.

#### 4.12 Heritage buildings

Mobilising to buildings that have site specific risk information will be as per the plans and not call challenged. This typically includes premises classed as Grade I or Grade II\* by Historic England.

Many heritage buildings that are listed are in private ownership so an attendance will be made in most cases.

## 5 Levels of attendance



- 5.1 As the mobilising system is common across all three Services, the basic levels of attendance have been agreed as follows:
- 5.2 Confirmed fire – Pre-determined attendance for the premises which will proceed on emergency response (blue lights).
- 5.3 AFA – One appliance to attend which will proceed on emergency response.
- 5.4 AFA with cause confirmed by follow up call – Appliance will be either stood down or proceed to check at normal road speed.
- 5.5 AFA confirmed false alarm at initial call – No attendance by FRS.
- 5.6 The only variations will be those that are in place through site specific risk information.

## **6 Operational Personnel procedure**

- 6.1 The primary responsibility of Operational personnel attending any premises where the alarm system has actuated is to establish that the alarm has not actuated as a result of a fire situation.

If the Key holder or RP is not present then crews should check the building with a thermal image camera looking for signs of fire as thorough as possible. Crews should remain in attendance for at least 20 mins before leaving the premises.

- 6.2 If the key holder or RP is present, the Incident Commander (IC) should make their way with them to the alarm panel and determine the details of the actuation.
- 6.3 If the premises have been fully evacuated, the alarm can be silenced. This should be done by the RP, although it is recognised that alarms may need to be silenced by personnel in order to protect hearing.
- 6.4 The IC should go to the area of actuation with the RP to investigate. If confirmed as a false alarm, the panel may be reset by the RP.

**Under no circumstances should operational personnel reset the fire alarm panel.**

- 6.5 Resetting the alarm on behalf of the RP may result in the following negative impacts:



- It removes responsibility from the RP to address any problems with the system. To effectively reduce UwFS's, it is important that the RP takes ownership of the system.
- It may render the respective Fire Authority liable in the event of a future failure of the system during a fire situation.
- It may hinder engineers establish the exact nature of a system fault.

6.6 If the alarm resets without any problem, the IC should make sure the event is recorded in the logbook by the RP and provide relevant advice to prevent re-occurrence.

6.7 If previous faults have not been addressed by the RP, these should be highlighted to remind them of their responsibilities under the FSO. In such circumstances, it may be appropriate to advise the RP to take the alarm off line until any maintenance issues have been dealt with. Advice should also include any extra fire safety control measures, such as marshalling the affected area(s) of the premises. A Fire Protection Officer may be contacted for advice.

**Note** – Ensure any information regarding cause and actions taken are recorded on the IRS under section 10.4.

6.8 If the alarm cannot be reset by the RP, the IC should advise them to contact their maintenance company for further advice or attendance. It is important that the RP understands their responsibility and the IC should inform them that they must call 999 in the event of a fire as the alarm will not be received by the Fire and Rescue Service if it is off-line.

6.9 Additional guidance for the RP to reduce UwFS

The RP should be encouraged to liaise with the ARC to confirm that correct details are held for the business, for example; open and closed times, contact details, key holder details and instructions on what to do when the fire alarm actuates.

6.10 For all premises, with the exception of residential care homes, RP's can arrange for the ARC to call the premises on receipt of an actuation signal or following a pre-determined period of time to allow an investigation to take place to confirm whether it is a false alarm before calling the Fire and Rescue Service.

6.11 Operational Personnel are reminded that at any point It may be necessary to seek advice from a Fire Protection officer.





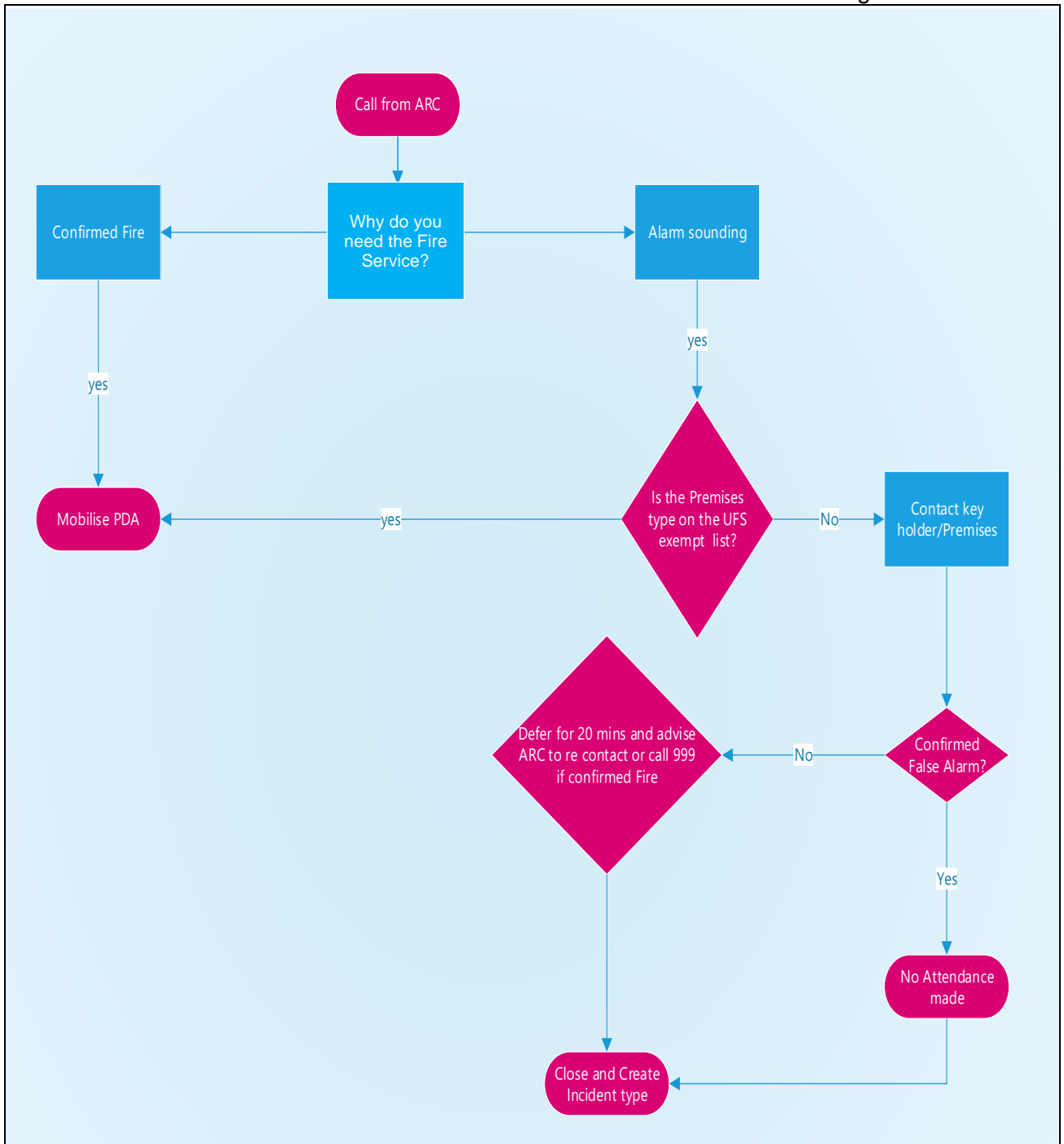
## **7 Duties by Role**

- 7.1 Fire Control - To receive calls from the public and ARCs and, where appropriate call challenge as per current procedure.
- 7.2 Operational personnel - Attend AFAs to assist RPs in establishing cause and provide advice to prevent future reoccurrence of UFAS's.
- 7.3 Responsible Person – Supervises all matters relating to the fire alarm system. This may be themselves, or a nominated person. Where the system is remotely monitored by an ARC, the RP is recommended to provide at least two key holders with a 20-minute response to the premises.

## **8 Performance monitoring, reporting and follow up enforcement**

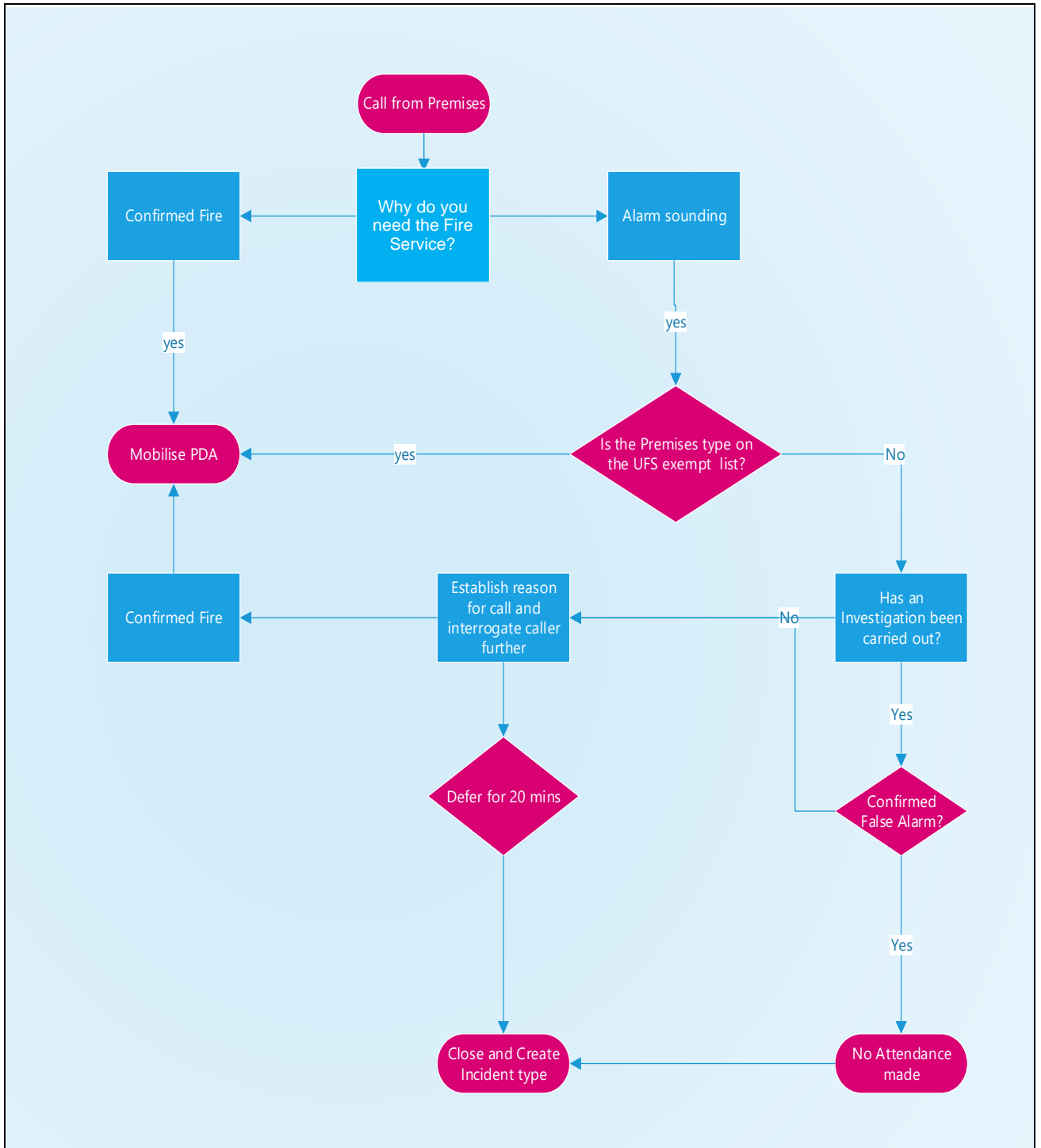
- 8.1 Performance monitoring will be carried out as per each Fire and Rescue Services own procedures.

## **Appendix 1: Alarm Receiving Centre (ARC)**



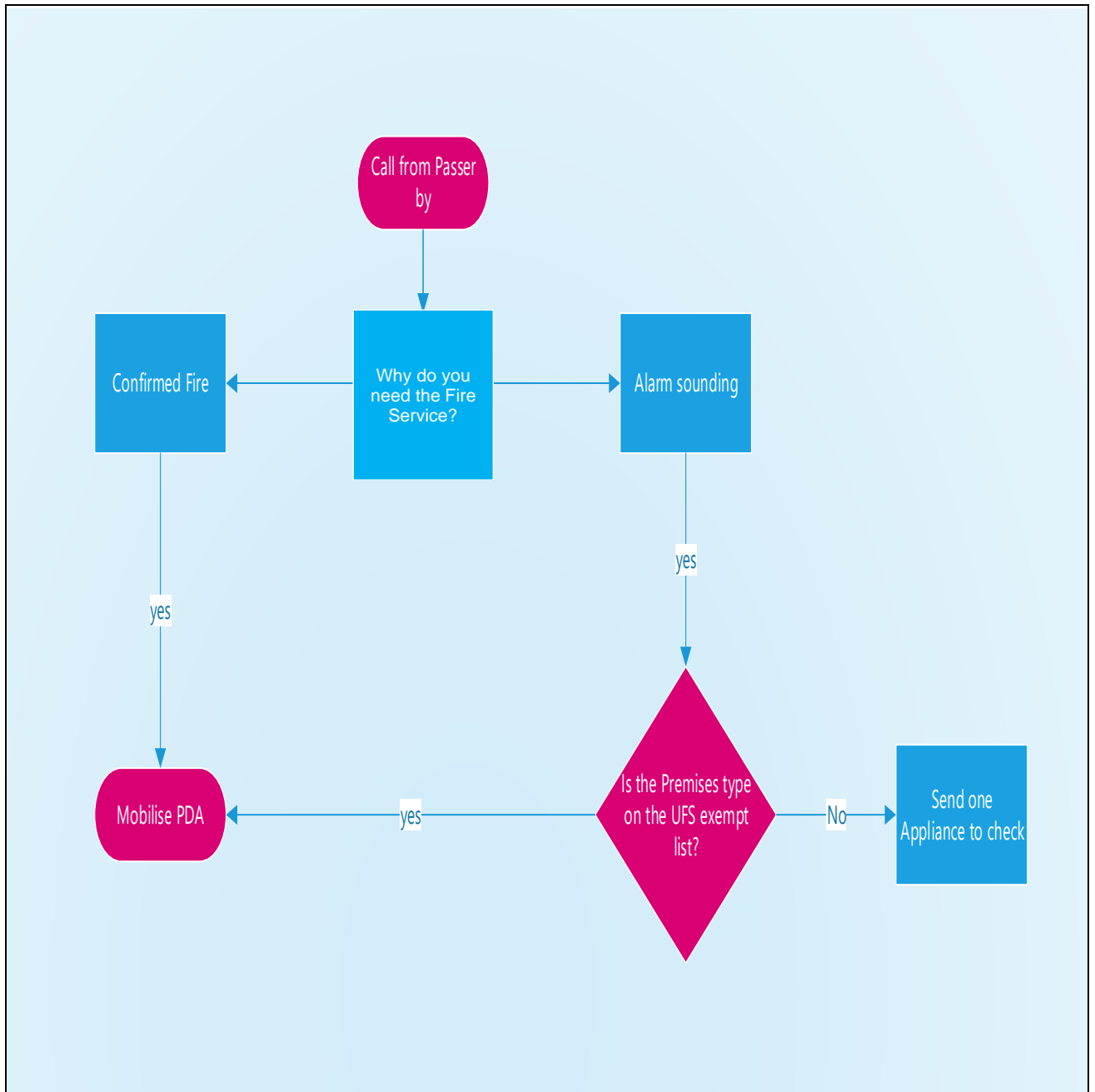


**Appendix 2: Call from the Premises**





**Appendix 3: Call from a member of the public/passers-by**





**AMENDMENT DOCUMENT**

DATE	BRIEF DESCRIPTION	APPROVED BY
Feb 2018	Policy modified by LFRS	LFRS
19/2/18	New Tri Service UFS Procedure	TS Strategic Board
01/11/2018	Document modified by NFRS	NFRS
22/03/2021	Minor amendment to wording of trial information	SM Leverton (DFRS)
25/01/2022	Minor amendment to wording of trial information	WM Hobson (DFRS)
30/01/2024	Full review of Policy. Removal of wording relating to trial information. Amendments to wording to apply consistency with NFCC terminology.	LFRS (GM Vince Hyde), DFRS (GM Adam Bleakman), NFRS (GM Jonathan Holford)

