

## **TRI-SERVICE PROCEDURE**

### **UNWANTED FIRE ALARM SIGNALS**

#### **FEBRUARY 2019**

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DFRS Appendix to Tri Control Procedure

## 1 Introduction

1.1 This procedure aims to reduce the impact of Unwanted Fire Alarm Signals (UFASs) and false alarms generated from automatic fire detection (AFD) systems within Derbyshire, Leicestershire and Nottinghamshire.

1.2 The number of AFD 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 UFASs.

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 detector 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), and;
- 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 UFAS 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 5839 – 1; 2013.

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 UFAS, 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, 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 from call challenging:-

- 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 21:00 - 08:00. During the day, hotels will be call challenged
- Other sleeping risks
- Sites that are subject to Site Specific Risk Information (SSRI) National PORIS Level 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

**Schools and colleges will be exempt from call challenging within Derbyshire for a 6 month trial period. This will begin May 2021 to be reviewed and evaluated November 2021.**

**Following the review by Derbyshire it has been agreed to extend the call challenging exemption for schools and colleges until the end of April 2022, at which point they will**



revert back to normal call challenging procedures in line with Leicestershire and Nottinghamshire.

#### **4 Fire Control procedure**

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

4.2 Calls from Alarm Receiving Centre (ARC) –

On receipt of a call from an ARC, 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 Control. The call will be deferred for 20 minutes.

4.3 If the ARC has tried to make contact with no success, Control will request that the ARC contacts a key holder. 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, 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 –

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 – Control operator should determine the reasons and explain our non-attendance deferring call for 20 mins

#### 4.6 Calls from members of the public -

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 investigate or enter a premises.**

#### 4.7 Decision Flexibility

In order to ensure that the most appropriate response is made, Control have the discretion to assess each fire alarm signal and decide if the standard procedure should be followed, or modified. Each fire alarm signal is different and mobilisation should be assessed to decide if an attendance is required or not. 4.8 suggests information that may be pertinent if 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 -

Main Hospitals

For a confirmed fire, mobilise full PDA

Report of AFA actuation – mobilise one appliance (or as specified by SSRI) to check and ask if they are investigating the cause.

- 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, Control will stand the appliance down.

- 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, Control operator should take the name and position of the person, then stand the appliance down.

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

#### 4.10 Unoccupied or vacant buildings

If a call is received from an ARC, and the 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 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. This depends on the strength of information obtained by Control.

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.

### **Operational personnel will not 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. In order to effectively reduce UFASs', it is important that the RP takes ownership of the system
- It may render the Service liable in the event of a future failure of the system during a fire situation, and;
- 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 log book 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 UFAS

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 except for 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.

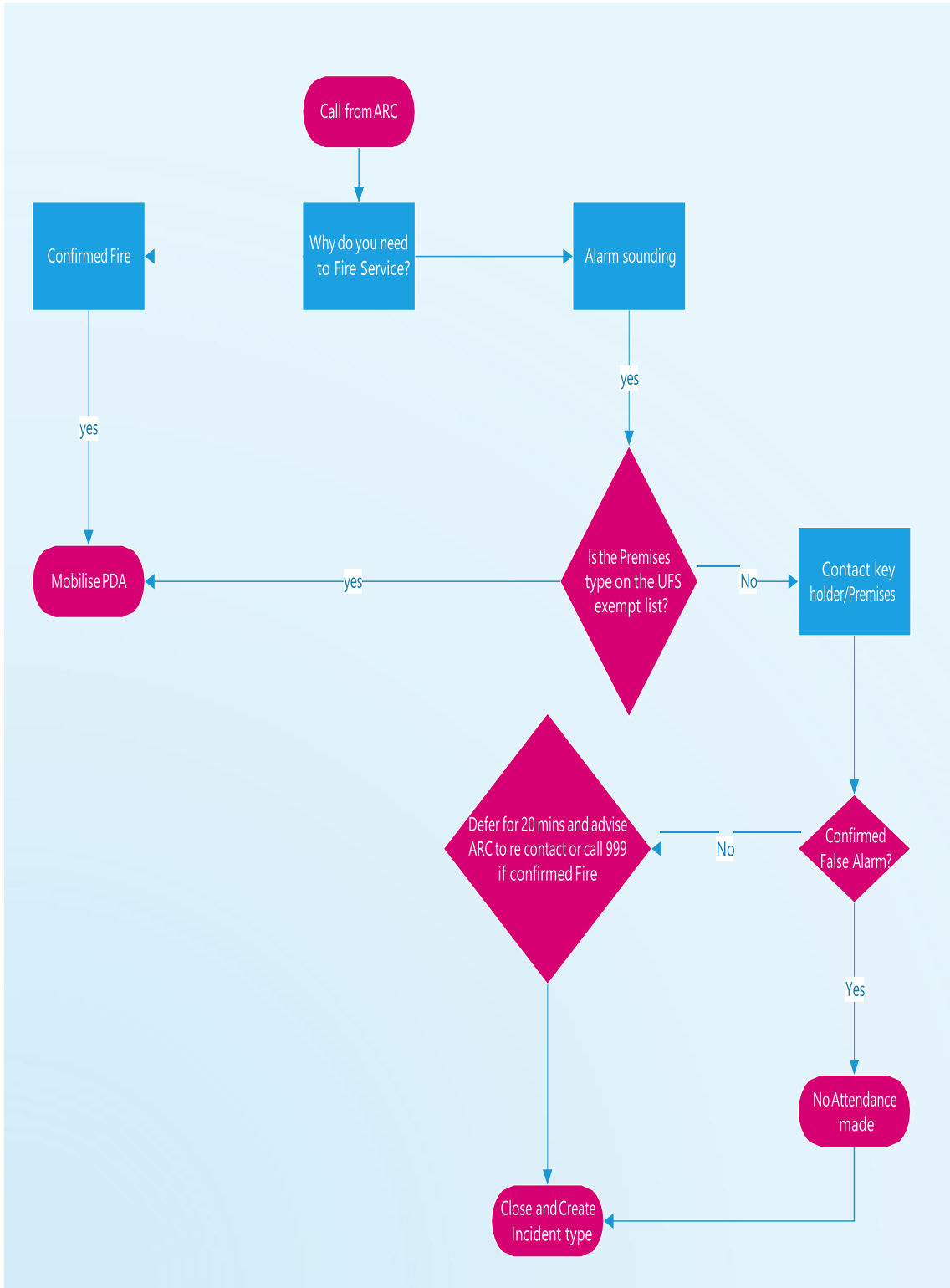


7.3 Responsible Person – Supervises all matters relating to the fire alarm system. This may be themselves, or a nominated person. Where the system is remotely monitored by an ARC, the RP is recommended to provide at least two key holders with a 20 minute response to the premises.

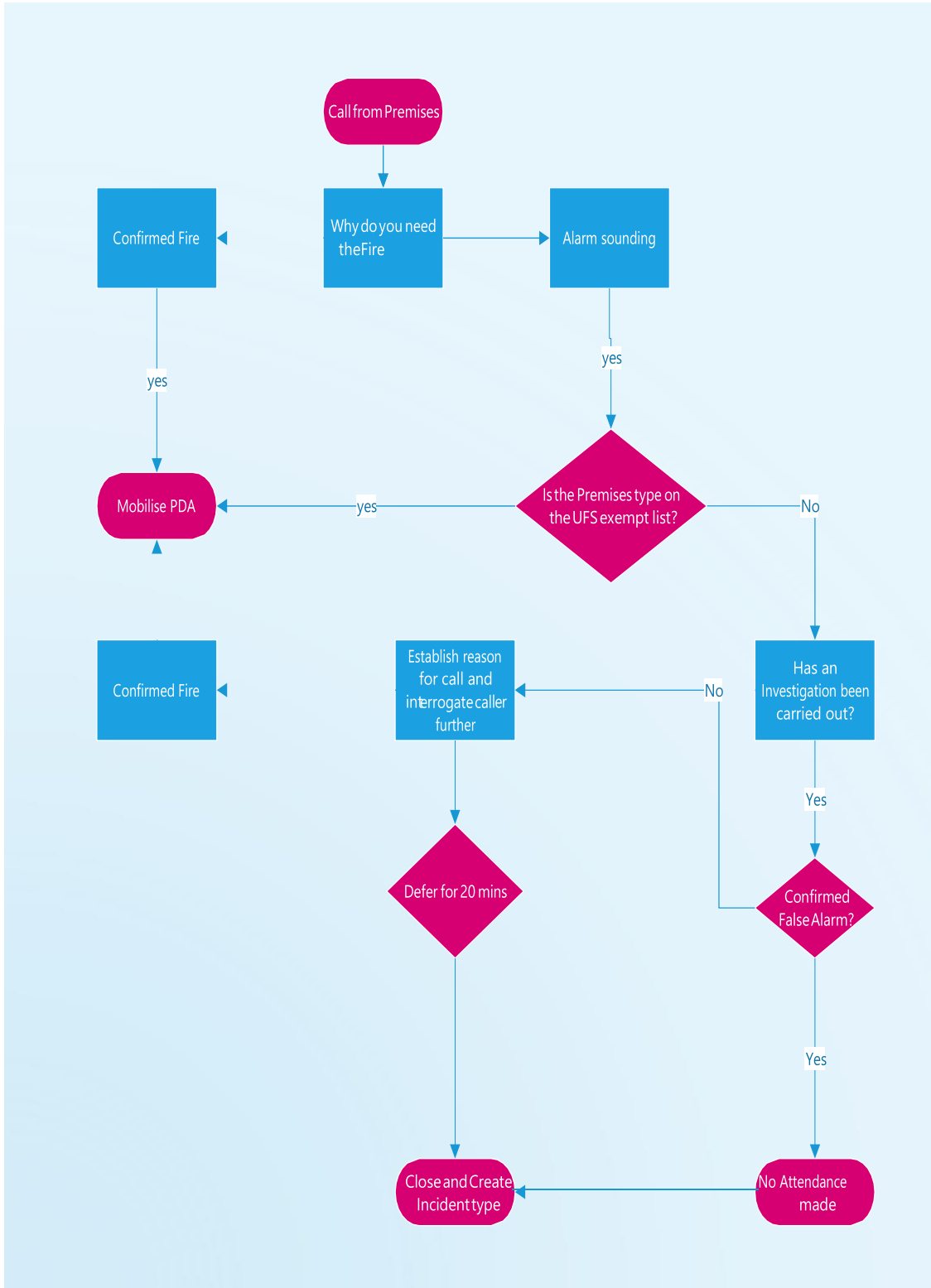
## **8 Performance monitoring, reporting and follow up enforcement**

8.1 Performance monitoring will be carried out as per each Services own procedures.

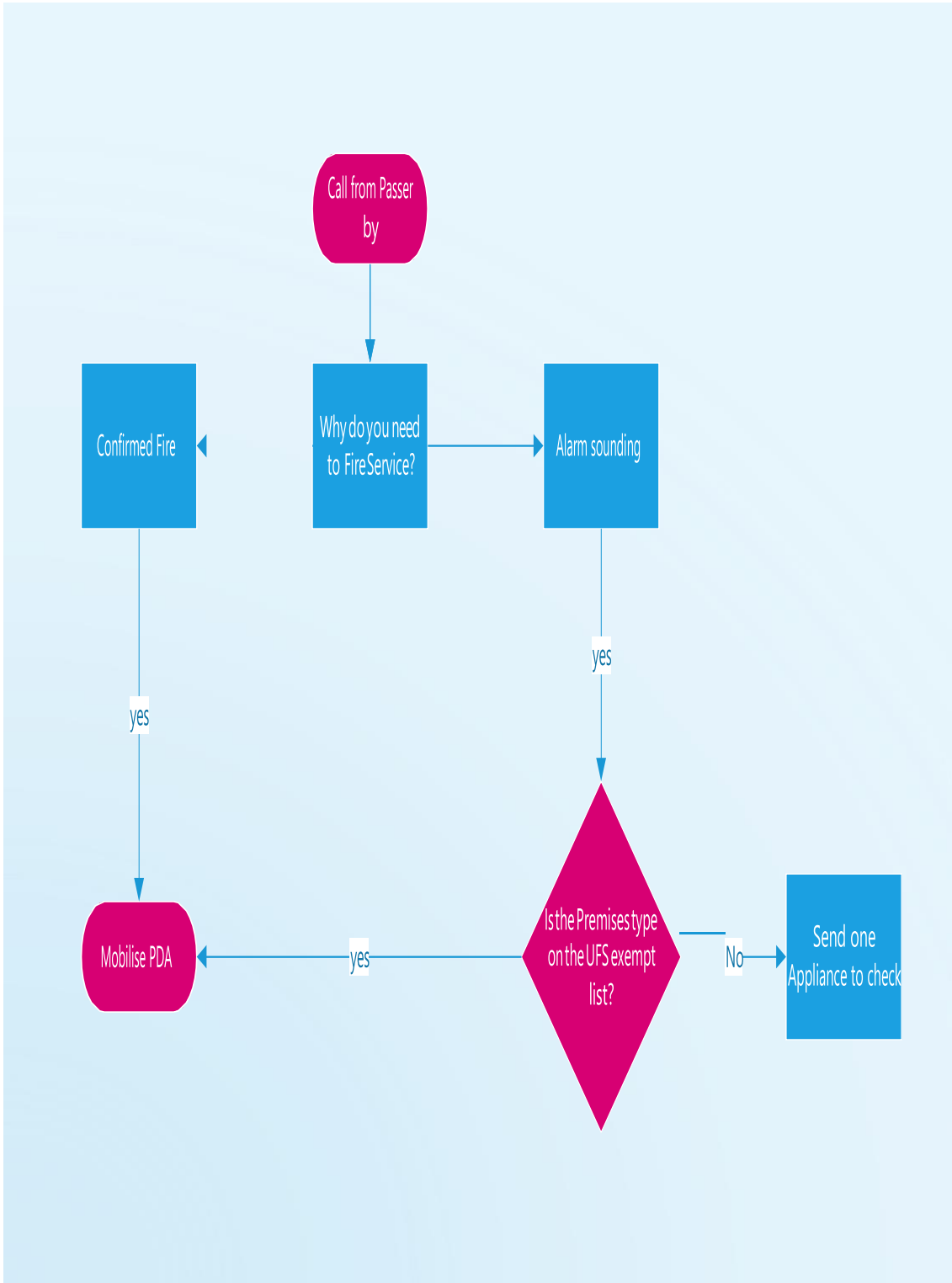
Alarm receiving centre:



**Call from the Premises:**



**Call from a Passer by:**





## DERBYSHIRE FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE



**Derbyshire**  
Fire & Rescue Service  
Making Derbyshire Safer

## APPENDIX TO TRI-SERVICE PROCEDURE

### UNWANTED FIRE ALARM SIGNALS

**JANUARY 2019**  
**VERSION 1.2**  
**STATUS: LIVE**

<b>CONTENTS</b>	<p>Fire Safety SSRI Lite Enforcement Hierarchy Procedure for Protection Personnel Performance Reporting / Monitoring Relevant Documents</p>
<b>FIRE SAFETY SSRI Lite</b>	<p>Crews attending <b>commercial premises</b> that have generated an Unwanted Fire Alarm Signal (UFAS) will carry out and complete an SSRI Lite.</p> <p>As outlined in the Fire Protection Enforcement Policy the Service will audit premises following fire incidents and in other circumstances where it is deemed appropriate.</p> <p>The SSRI Lite will be a simple check on the <b>means of escape, the condition of any fire fighting and fire/alarm detection equipment, emergency lighting, staff training and any concerns that personnel feel are relevant</b> whilst carrying out the check. The form is a basic 'yes/no' format with space to provide details of any problems encountered.</p> <p>The outcome of an SSRI Lite will be to promote the effective management of the premises and to ensure that reasonable Fire Safety standards are being maintained whilst highlighting problem premises where enforcement under the FSO may be considered.</p> <p>Derbyshire Fire &amp; Rescue Service will, give advice where appropriate, and enforce if necessary.</p> <p>The benefit to operational crews in conducting these SSRI Lite checks will be the application of their Fire Safety knowledge in a positive and pro-active manner whilst also familiarising themselves with the operational risks at premises they are attending.</p>

	<p>In circumstances where a possible contravention of fire safety legislation has occurred or operational crews have highlighted a high level of UFAS's at a particular premises it will be appropriate for crews to seek guidance. Where a fire safety contravention has occurred it will be dealt with in accordance with Service policy by a suitably authorised officer.</p>
<b>ENFORCEMENT HIERARCHY</b>	<p>Protection personnel play a key role in reducing UFAS's. Protection personnel will engage with the RP of the premises when the following triggers are met:</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Two or more unwanted fire signals in any period of four weeks.</li> <li>• Three or more unwanted fire signals in any period of twenty six weeks.</li> <li>• Non attendance of keyholder</li> <li>• Alarm testing without notification</li> </ul> <p>This does not preclude Protection personnel from supporting other premises who have not met one of these triggers to reduce UFAS's.</p> <p>UFAS letters (UF letters) describe the process that Fire Safety personnel can follow to assist premises in reducing UFAS's.</p> <p>UF1, UF3 &amp; UF5 are to be used by Protection personnel to make initial contact with the premises following a trigger being met.</p> <p>UF2 requests a meeting at the premises and informs that an audit may be carried out.</p> <p>UF4 reinstatement of Fire Service response.</p> <p>UF6 withdrawal of Fire Service response.</p> <p>Protection personnel have the authority to shape their response to UFAS's in a way in which they feel will have the best result. The UF letters should be used as a general framework.</p>
<b>PROCEDURE FOR PROTECTION PERSONNEL</b>	<p>UFAS follow-up activities will be managed by the Area Fire Safety Offices. It is the responsibility of the Area Fire Safety Office to ascertain the extent of the problem at each of the problem premises and to give advice on the measures to be implemented to reduce the instances of UFAS's.</p>
	<p>Protection Policy act as an UFAS central point of contact. Protection Policy will offer support to Area Offices and will analyse and report on UFAS's.</p>



	<p><b><u>Information Gathering:</u></b></p> <p>Protection personnel will use data and information from a range of sources to decide if any action is required. This includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• UFAS report forms</li> <li>• Daily reports</li> <li>• EIS and IRS systems</li> <li>• SSRI data</li> </ul> <p>This information will allow Protection personnel to decide what the most appropriate course of action is.</p> <p><b><u>Site Meetings:</u></b></p> <p>Site meetings are an effective tool in tackling a problem premises. Especially where there is no reduction or the individual premises demonstrate an unwillingness to co-operate. The meeting should include (where appropriate):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fire Safety Inspector from the Area</li> <li>• Protection Policy Officer if required</li> <li>• Representative from the premises</li> <li>• Representative from the fire alarm maintenance company</li> </ul> <p>The purpose of the meeting is to discuss the issues and to formulate an action plan to reduce the level of UFAS's at the premises. A period of time will be agreed to implement the plan and to achieve a reduction in UFAS's. Where the levels of UFAS's signals have been reduced, no further action will be required.</p> <p>Where the level of UFAS's is not reduced within the agreed time period, a risk based decision will be made as to whether it would be appropriate to withdraw the FRS emergency response to a remotely monitored alarm system and to replace it with a 999 only response. This will be on approval of a senior manager.</p> <p>Enforcement action under the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 (Articles 13 and 17) should also be considered.</p>
<p><b>PERFORMANCE REPORTING / MONITORING</b></p>	<p>The following reporting procedure will be adopted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All activity regarding UFAS's will be recorded within the EIS system to provide an auditable trail to support possible future enforcement action.</li> <li>• Operational crews will record cause and actions on the IRS, section 10.4</li> <li>• Each Station will review their UFAS's on their Station Performance Dashboard and comment.</li> <li>• Fire Safety Managers will review the UFAS's in their area and comment on the Performance Dashboard.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Protection Policy will review attendances to UFAS's on a monthly and quarterly basis.</li> <li>• Control will monitor the effectiveness of Call Challenging arrangements on a regular basis.</li> </ul>
<b>RELEVANT DOCUMENTS</b>	Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 British Standard 5839-1:2013 British Standard 5979: 2007 Operational Note Unwanted Fire Signals Internal information within the Fire Safety Toolkit / document centre on the intranet including Unwanted Fire Alarm Signal Report Form and Standard Letters – UF 1 to 6

<b>DOCUMENT HISTORY</b>	
<b>Version no.</b>	1.2
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<b>Approved by</b>	AM C Stanbrook
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