

Unwanted Fire Signals (UwFS) Reduction Policy, Procedure – EDOCS-266

The purpose of this policy is to explain the methodology and procedures to reduce the occurrence of unwanted fire signals and associated unnecessary appliance movements, and to ensure attendance is managed on a risk appropriate basis.

OWNER	Head of Prevention & Protection
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CROSS REFERENCES

[Regulatory Reform \(Fire Safety\) Order 2005](#)

[Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004](#)

[The Control of Major Accident Hazards Regulations 2015](#)

[The Radiation \(Emergency Preparedness and Public Information\) Regulations 2019](#)

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PART 1 – POLICY SECTION

1. Scope of Policy

- 1.1. It is widely recognised that the installation of modern fire safety management systems and the increasing use of Automatic Fire Detection (AFD) systems, provides the earliest possible warning of fire. They are a key factor in providing an early warning of fire for building occupants. The occurrence of UwFS do however, have a significant impact on fire and rescue service resources, an issue which is addressed through the procedures detailed in this policy.
- 1.2. The purpose of the UwFS policy is to:
 - a) Reduce the number of false alarm activations generated by fire detection and fire alarm systems;
 - b) Deliver significant reductions in appliance movements, unnecessary cost expenditure and disruption to both Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service (the Service) and the business community; and
 - c) Reduce the risk to the public and firefighters through unnecessary emergency responses.
- 1.3. This policy explicitly covers the response to UwFS in non-domestic/commercial premises unless stated otherwise.

2. Definition of an Unwanted Fire Signal

- 2.1. 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”.

3. Impact of Unwanted Fire Signals

- 3.1. The Service attends hundreds of UwFS every year from premises with AFD systems. On average only 1.8% are found on arrival to be confirmed fires, with less than 1% requiring firefighting action by the Service. Mobilising appliances to each of these calls causes a significant impact on the Service for the following reasons:
 - Fire appliances are not available to respond to genuine life-threatening emergencies.
 - Responding to UwFS under blue-light conditions poses an unnecessary risk to staff and other road users.
 - Operational crews are disrupted whilst undertaking other core tasks such as training and community safety activities.
 - Financial costs are incurred for fuel and there is an associated impact on the environment caused by the appliance movements.

- On-Call firefighters require payment for being alerted and are unnecessarily disrupted from their primary employment.

4. Roles and Responsibilities

4.1. The effective reduction of UwFS is reliant on all members of Service staff who interact with premises where UwFS might activate.

4.2. Fire Control

- 4.2.1. To receive calls and use these procedures to apply a 'call challenge' as detailed in Appendices 1-4 of this policy.
- 4.2.2. NWFC will retain responsibility for updating the mobilising system with information relating to specific premises which will assist in the call challenge and enforcement process.
- 4.2.3. To assist in the monitoring and enforcement process, Control staff will ensure that where possible a specific address is taken during the call handling process. This is particularly important on large sites with multiple occupiers which are often classified as one premises for mobilising purposes.
- 4.2.4. Where ARCs do not comply with the requirements of the standard agreement, Control staff will inform the relevant Protection Unitary area office.
- 4.2.5. The Duty Control Manager will monitor the application of this policy by Fire Control Operators and support them in the decision-making process.
- 4.2.6. The Duty Control Manager will retain the discretion to adapt the mobilised attendance based on information available to them throughout the call handling process, at all times.

4.3. Operational Crews and Incident Commanders

- 4.3.1. Operational crews will attend AFA calls to which they are mobilised and identify whether the alarm has been caused by an UwFS. The cause will be thoroughly investigated and communicated to the occupier to ensure all reasonable measures are implemented to prevent a re-occurrence.
- 4.3.2. To accurately record and analyse data relating to UwFS attendances, Incident Commanders should ensure that an accurate address, contact name, cause and location within the building is obtained.

4.4. Protection Station Managers

- 4.4.1. Protection Station Managers in each Unitary area will have responsibility for ensuring the policy is implemented effectively across their respective Unitary area and will serve as the first point of contact

for any queries that their team have regarding its application.

4.4.2. Each Manager will also ensure that their team monitor the overall performance of the policy in delivering a reduced number of calls.

4.4.3. To ensure continuous improvement, any need for adaptation or change to the policy will be reported to the HQ Team by the Protection Station Managers.

4.5. Fire Safety Inspecting Officers

4.5.1. In accordance with the approach outlined in Section 14, Fire Safety Inspecting Officers will monitor the number of UwFS calls received from premises in their Unitary area and take the action described; including site visits and action planning/enforcement for problem premises.

4.5.2. Where premises have been granted an increase in the Pre-determined Attendance (PDA) for AFA calls, the relevant Fire Safety Inspecting Officers will be responsible (Section 5) for liaising with the Responsible Person. It is likely to be appropriate to provide bespoke advice and guidance to improve fire safety at the premises and reduce the PDA accordingly.

4.5.3. To ensure accurate application of this policy, Fire Safety Inspecting Officers must ensure that they confirm the accuracy of addresses where we have attended UwFS, particularly where activation takes place in complex premises or sites with multiple occupiers.

4.6. Business Safety Manager

4.6.1. The Business Safety Manager will work closely with Corporate Communications to deliver a communications plan which informs both Service employees, individuals responsible for premises in Cheshire and any other relevant stakeholders affected by the policy.

4.6.2. Any communication in relation to UwFS will be congruent with the Service's 4-year Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) objectives.

PART 2 – PROCEDURE

5. Pre-Determined Attendance (PDA) to AFA Calls

- 5.1. For AFAs the appropriate PDA will be mobilised by Northwest Fire Control (NWFC).
- 5.2. In exceptional circumstances it may be necessary to increase the PDA for an AFA. Such premises would initially be identified by:
 - a) Operational Crews through the SSRI process, or;
 - b) Fire Safety Inspecting Officers who will complete a risk flagging form.
- 5.3. The process for increasing the PDA for all premises (available on the Service "*Risk Flagging Form*" intranet page) should be followed:
 - 5.3.1. For Protection staff, the relevant parts of the orange and green form should be populated. The form should be sent to the "Domestic Flag inbox". The request for an additional flag will be triaged by the Unitary Admin Hub Manager who will seek approval from the appropriate Station Manager.
 - 5.3.2. Authorised increases in PDAs typically only apply on a temporary basis and must satisfy one of the property types posing an increased risk. Typically, this would only be complex premises with a sleeping risk (e.g. a hospital undergoing major construction work) unless otherwise agreed at Technical Policy Group in consultation with the Operational Policy and Assurance Department.
 - 5.3.3. Where a permanent flag is placed on a premises, it will be reviewed, retained and removed where appropriate in accordance with the Service's retention policy (EDOCS-1253).
- 5.4. Prior to any increase in PDA, locally based Fire Safety Inspecting Officers will liaise with the Responsible Person for the premises to develop a premises-specific action plan. This plan will work to improve the premises' fire safety management systems and return the premises to the standard PDA.
- 5.5. Upon completion, the respective Protection Station Manager for the Unitary area will notify Northwest Fire Control (NWFC) of the return to the normal PDA, at which point NWFC will remove the flag.

6. Call Challenging and Mobilisation

- 6.1. On occasions when Automatic Fire alarm (AFA) calls are received by the Service, NWFC will adopt a call challenging procedure (*APPENDICES 1-4*).

- 6.2. The call challenge process is designed to enhance the quantity and quality of information regarding the situation, allowing the Fire Control Operator to mobilise the most appropriate operational response. In most circumstances, only when confirmation of a fire can be given by the caller will an operational response be mobilised.
- 6.3. Twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week there is no automatic attendance to non-sleeping risk premises (except for those listed in *APPENDIX 5* or as below), unless the caller is at the building and reasonably believes a fire has broken out.
- 6.3.1. A call received from the CCTV control room in Chester stating that the aspirating smoke detection system situated on The Rows in Chester has activated will be treated as a confirmed fire and full PDA for inside Chester City walls will be mobilised.
- 6.3.2. Where listed in *APPENDIX 5*, industrial sites which are licensed under either the Control Of Major Accident Hazards (COMAH) Regulations 2015 or The Radiation (Emergency Preparedness and Public Information) (REPPPIR) Regulations 2019 are excluded due to their unique off-site risk and will be treated as a confirmed fire and full PDA will be mobilised.
- 6.3.3. Due to the nature of premises which contain persons who may be asleep or bedridden (listed as “sleeping risk premises” in *APPENDIX 5*), the call challenge procedure will not apply and these premises will be treated as a confirmed fire and full PDA will be mobilised.
- 6.4. Whilst the process should be adhered to as a form of structured guidance, the Duty Control Manager will at all times retain the discretion to vary the attendance based on the information available to them at the time.

7. Calls Received from Alarm Receiving Centres (ARCs) (*APPENDIX 1*)

- 7.1. For premises where the AFA signals an ARC, the ARC will contact the premises and confirm fire, prior to informing NWFC. In most situations, this will ensure that the Service is not needlessly informed of UwFS calls, to which no response is required.
- 7.2. There may be occasions where this procedure is not followed and calls reporting AFA signals will be received from ARCs. In these circumstances the following ‘call challenge’ should be applied.
- 7.3. In the case that calls are received from ARCs which have not completed a ‘call back’ to the premises, the ARC should be asked to make a ‘call back’ and advise the premises to ring 999 should they discover a fire. If the ARC is uncooperative and refuses to undertake a ‘call back’, they should be informed that the Service will not be attending and the procedures in Section 8.2 followed.

- 7.4. If a call is received from an ARC which has not been able to make contact with anybody at the premises, they should be informed that the Service will not be attending, followed by the procedures outlined in Section 8.2.

8. Agreements with ARCs

- 8.1. To facilitate the call challenging approach, close co-operation will be required between the Service and the various ARCs that monitor premises across the county. For the purposes of this policy, the term ARC is inclusive of all Telecare Service Providers who have responsibility for monitoring domestic premises and passing alarm calls to the Service.

The Protection Unitary offices and respective Fire Safety Inspecting Officers are the first point of contact for queries from NWFC and ARCs

- 8.2. In some circumstances, such as those given in Section 7.4, it may be difficult to apply this policy during the call handling process. In this situation, NWFC Operational Support will email details of any issues encountered to the relevant Unitary Protection office at Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service. Fire Safety Inspecting Officers will then contact the responsible person for the premises to encourage them to liaise with their ARC.

9. Calls Received Directly from Occupiers (**APPENDIX 2**)

- 9.1. The occupier will be asked to confirm if there is a fire. If it is confirmed, the full PDA will be mobilised for the premises.
- 9.2. Where the caller cannot confirm the cause of the alarm, they will be asked to investigate and are to be advised that **"No response will be made by the fire and rescue service unless you are able to confirm there is a fire"**. Callers must be informed that should they discover a fire they should immediately ring 999 to enable an emergency response to be mobilised.

10. Calls Received from a Passer-by (**APPENDIX 3**)

- 10.1. On occasions where calls are received from a passer-by to report a fire alarm sounding, the PDA for an AFA will be mobilised. Callers should not be challenged to attempt an investigation as they are unable to represent the Responsible Person and do not have knowledge of the premises fire safety management systems.
- 10.2. The caller should also be asked if there are any additional signs of fire (e.g. smell of burning, smoke issuing), allowing the Fire Control Operator to mobilise the full PDA if appropriate.

11. Calls Received from Auto-Dial Systems

- 11.1. When calls are received from Auto-Dial systems and a contactable telephone number is available, the Fire Control Operator should return the call and advise the premises that **"No response will be made by**

the fire and rescue service unless you are able to confirm there is a fire". The premises must be informed that should they discover a fire they should immediately ring 999 to enable an emergency response to be mobilised.

12. Calls Received from CCTV Control Room in Chester (APPENDIX 4)

- 12.1. A sophisticated aspirating smoke detection system has been installed in The Rows in Chester. This system has been designed to protect the safety of the historical listed buildings; located on Northgate Street, Bridge Street, Watergate Street and Eastgate Street.
- 12.2. The aspirating smoke detection system is made up of independent sampling pipes with multiple sampling holes that will continuously monitor and sample the open air for smoke.
- 12.3. If the aspirating smoke detection system detects smoke, it will send an alert to the fire alarm panel located in the CCTV control room in Chester.
- 12.4. Chester CCTV control room will make a 999-emergency call to NWFC informing them of an activation of the aspirating smoke detection system. **This will be treated as a confirmed fire and the full PDA for inside Chester City walls will be mobilised.**
- 12.5. Chester CCTV control room will pass details such as the aspirator number, street name, post code and any other additional visual information that can be provided. For example, the CCTV operator may be able to pan the camera toward the area of the activation and state that they can see thick black smoke.
- 12.6. This change in mobilisation should not be confused with NWFC receiving a call from an ARC to an automatic fire alarm activation **within a shop** on The Rows in Chester. Currently without confirmation of fire following an AFA, an AFA PDA response will be mobilised within the Chester City walls.

13. Subsequent Calls Providing Additional Information

- 13.1. Where an appliance has been mobilised to an AFA call and NWFC receive further information to indicate that this is a confirmed false alarm, the attendance should be cancelled.

14. Process for Protection Officers to action UwFS

14.1. Confirmed UwFS recorded on FireCore

14.1.1. Find these incidents by opening FireCore:

- Clicking on the *Performance* tab
- Under *Manage Incidents and Targets* tab, click on *Manage BV149i*
- Click on drop down arrow next to *Station* tab and press *Group By This Field*

- UwFS for each Station area will now be displayed.

14.2. Fire Safety Inspecting Officers can access IRS for further information such as the address of the premises if this information is missing from FireCore

The Fire Safety Inspecting Officer who is the reference holder(s) for UwFS in each Unitary Office will:

- Contact the premises to investigate and determine the cause of the alarm and provide advice as required.
- Record any engagement with the premises/Responsible Person on SAFFIRE as an 'Unwanted Fire Signals job' and complete the 'UwFS Log' which is saved in SAFFIRE as a letter template (APPENDIX 5).
- Where appropriate, contact the Officer in Charge of the incident to gather further information and discuss the IRS information.
- Seek further advice from their respective Protection Station Manager if they are not satisfied with the proposed action to be taken by the Responsible Person/premises.
- Following discussion and agreement with their Protection Station Manager, Fire Safety Inspecting Officers may email the Fire Analysis team using [REDACTED] if it is agreed that the wrong type of premises has been captured on IRS and needs to be updated.

14.3. Premises with sleeping risks

14.3.1. If the Service responds to 2 or more UwFS in a rolling 28-day period for sleeping risk premises, the following actions will be taken:

- A Fire Safety Inspecting Officer will contact the premises to investigate the cause of the alarm and where appropriate may consider issuing an action plan to improve reductions.
- In the case of sleeping risk premises, a full Fire Safety Audit will be undertaken if one has not been completed in the previous 12 months.
- The Service will continue to apply the same call challenging procedures (Sections 6 – 12) to the property and respond as appropriate.

14.4. For all other premises

14.4.1. If the Service responds to any commercial premises where there is not a sleeping risk, the following actions will be taken. This is to determine why we have attended outside of policy:

- Scrutinise incident information using FireCore and INET viewer electronic database (each Protection Watch Manager has access

to INET).

- Contact the Responsible Person to discuss UwFS and reiterate the Service policy for attendance at non-sleeping risk premises.
- Ask the Responsible Person for the premises to speak with their ARC and confirm that the premises is correctly recorded as a non-sleeping risk premises and amend if required.
- Where no reason for the attendance can be ascertained, the Service response should be referred to the Service's NWFC SPOC.
- Record all action taken on SAFFIRE as an 'Unwanted Fire Signals job' and complete the UwFS log which is saved in SAFFIRE as a letter template (APPENDIX 5).

15. Monitoring and Enforcing Premises

15.1. Whilst the 'call challenge' process will reduce the number of UwFS calls attended, some premises may continue to have an unacceptably high number of activations (the call challenge is not applied to sleeping risk premises).

15.2. To target problem premises the Service monitors response to AFA calls and action based on the number of UwFS previously attended at the premises within a set time period.

15.3. For the purposes of monitoring, advising and enforcing complex premises or sites with multiple occupiers, Fire Safety Inspecting Officers should do so in consultation with their Protection Station Manager, who will advise on the application of this policy.

15.4. Hospitals

15.4.1. UwFS in hospitals are managed in accordance with specialist guidance, namely;

- Health Technical Memorandum (HTM) 05-03: Operational provisions Part B – Fire detection and alarm systems including the reduction of false alarm and unwanted fire signal.

15.4.2. The system of management and monitoring of these premises consists of:

- the reference holder(s) in each Unitary Protection office will monitor and record all hospital UwFS on the Hospital UWFS Tracker spreadsheet.
- Each quarter the UwFS data for each hospital will be saved on SAFFIRE.
- Delegates from each Unitary Protection office will attend the quarterly

Hospital Working Group to carry out trend analysis and discuss standardised approaches to overcoming recurring activations. Minutes are recorded for each meeting.

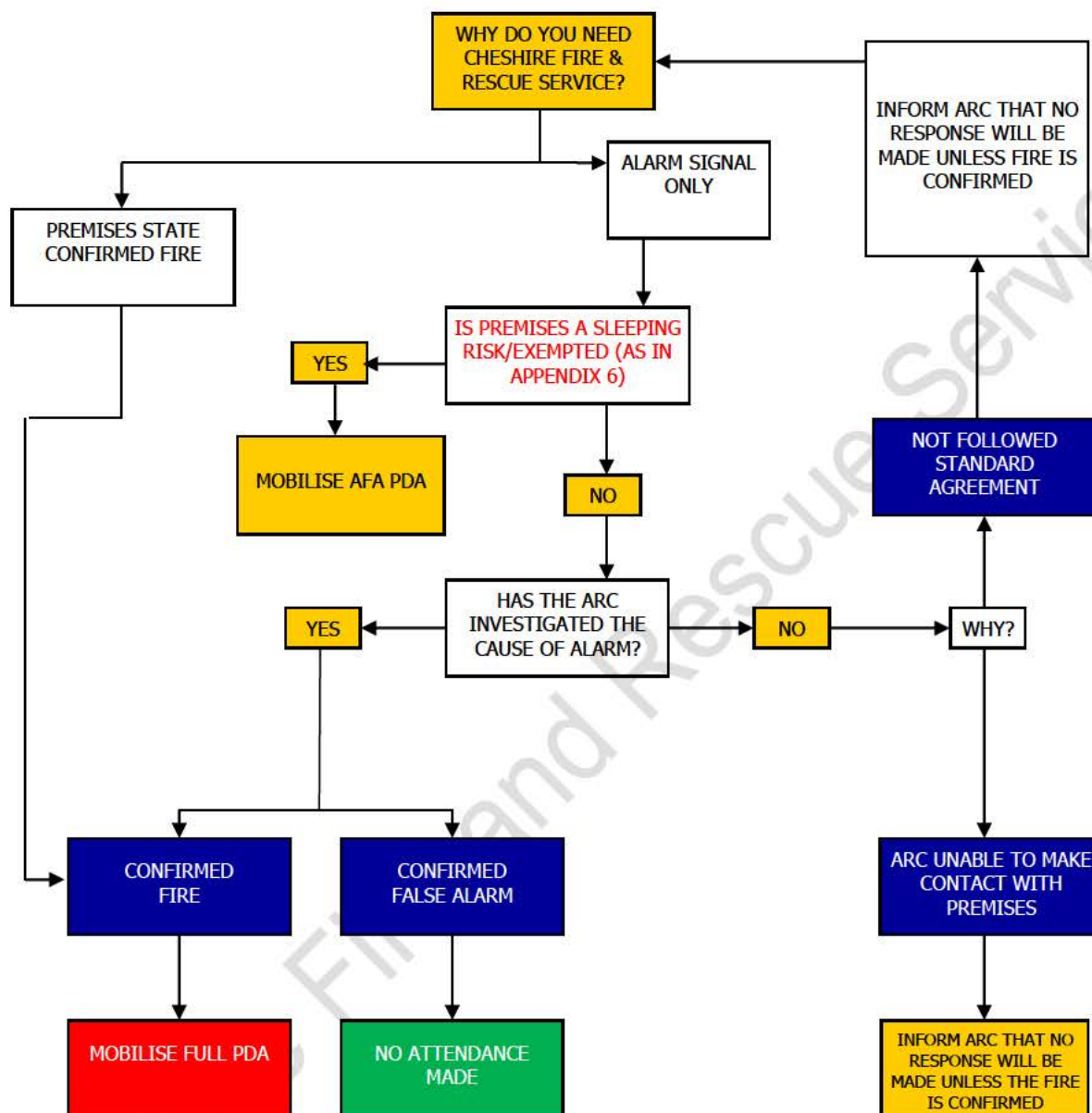
- To support the Hospital Working Group agenda, it is expected that the relevant liaison for each Hospital will share monthly, quarterly and annual reports to Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service's Fire Safety Inspecting Officers that outline their UwFS activity and any action taken to reduce these.
- Fire Safety Inspecting Officers will also attend face-to-face meetings with the relevant liaison for each Hospital, where appropriate.

15.1. Chester Rows – Aspirating System

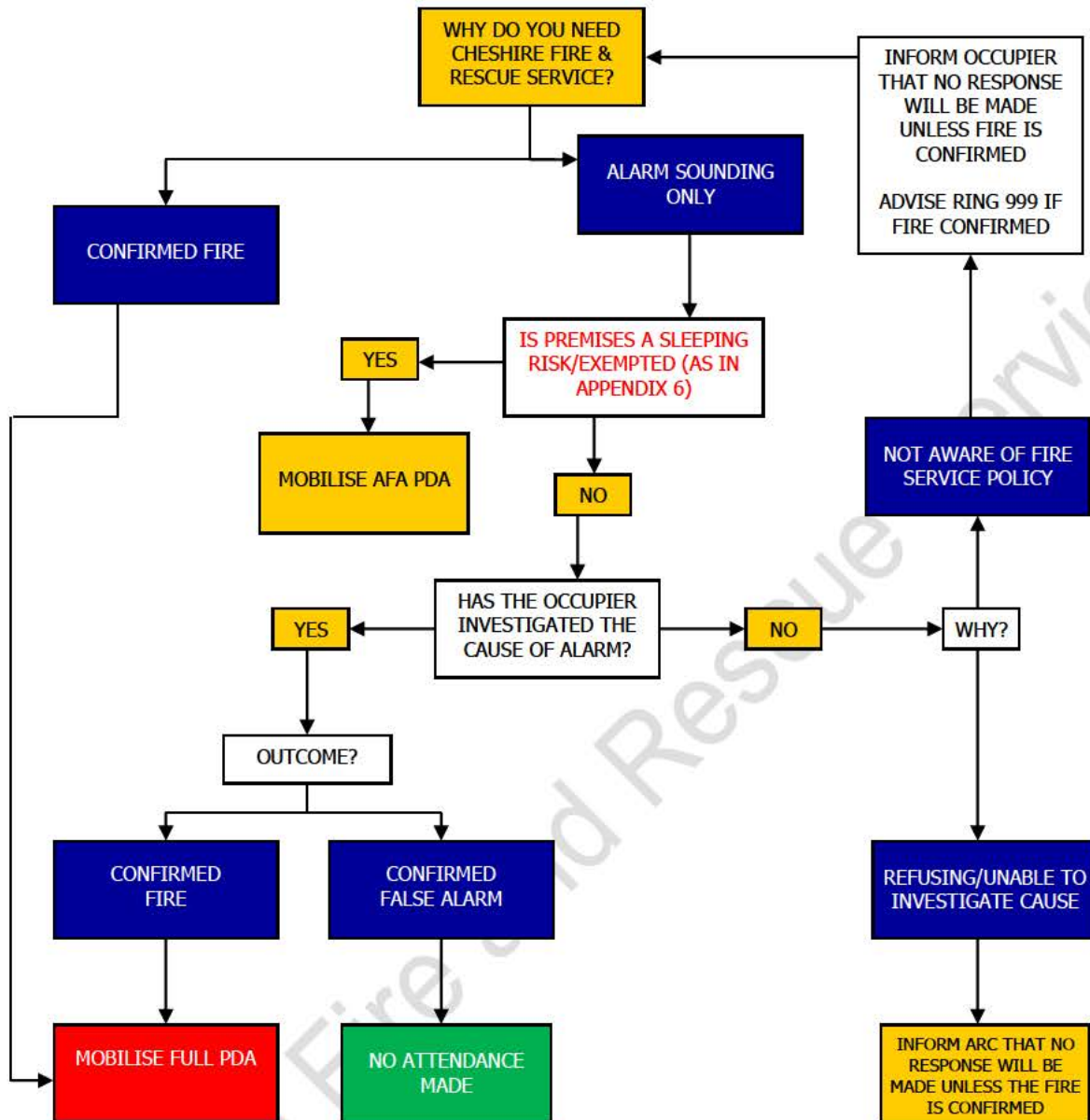
- 15.1.1. The project and installation of the aspirating smoke detection system is managed by Chester West and Cheshire (CWAC) Council in conjunction with Charles Thomas Heritage Fire Protection. The Cheshire Fire and Rescue Heritage Project Officer will monitor any UwFS received by NWFC and liaise accordingly with CWAC Council.

PART 3 – APPENDICES

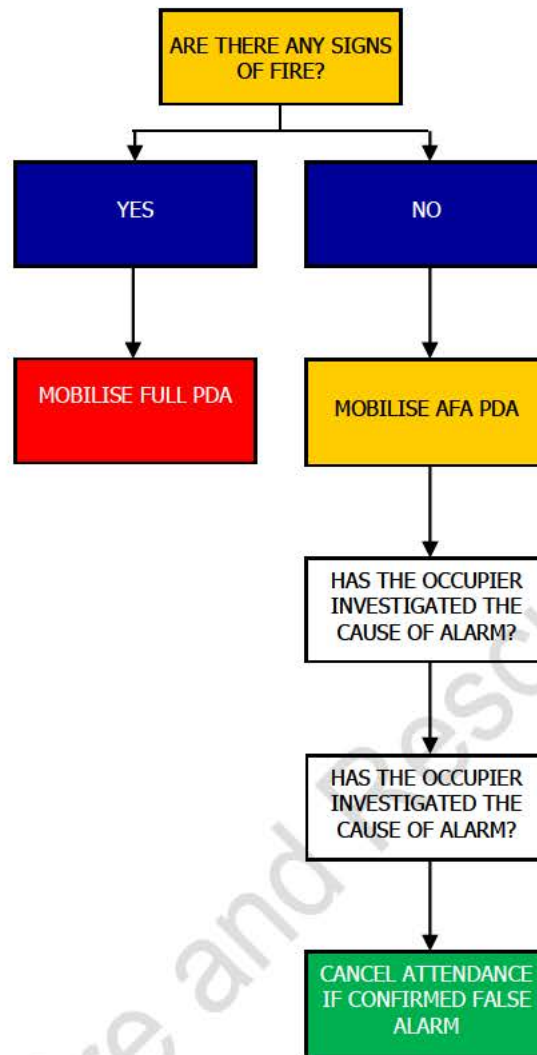
APPENDIX 1 – Calls Received from ARCs Flowchart



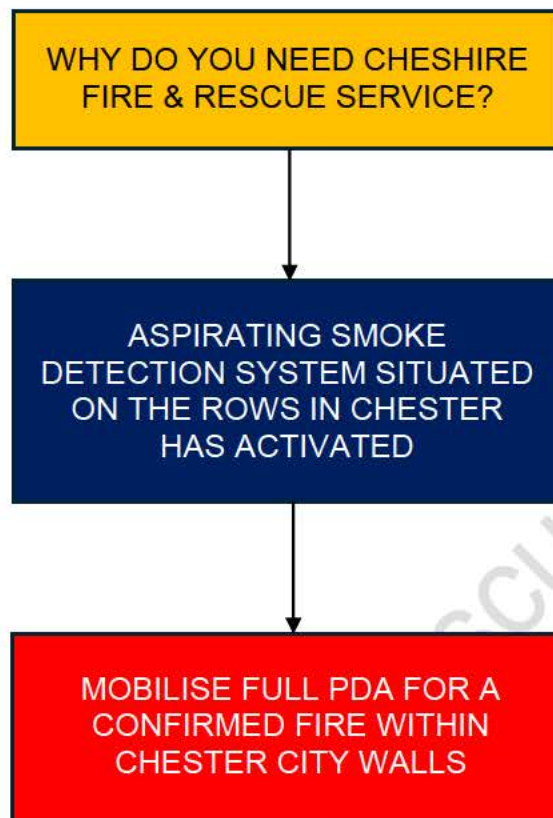
APPENDIX 2 – Calls Directly from Occupiers Flowchart



APPENDIX 3 – Calls from Passer-by Flowchart



APPENDIX 4 – Calls from CCTV Control Room in Chester Flowchart



APPENDIX 5 – List of sleeping risk/exempt premises

Boarding House/B&B for homeless/asylum seekers
Boarding House/B&B other
Boarding School accommodation
Chester Rows & premises within City walls
Children's Home
COMAH Sites and REPPIR sites
Domestic Premises
High-Rise Buildings
Hospital
Hostel (e.g. for homeless people)
Hotel/motel
Nurses'/Doctors' accommodation
Nursing/Care Residential Home
Other holiday residence (cottage, flat, chalet)
Other Residential Home
Prison
Retirement
Student Hall of Residence
Young offenders' unit
Youth hostel

APPENDIX 6 – UwFS Log – Letter template on SAFFIRE

UWFS LOG: <<PREMISES ID>> <<PREMISES OCCUPIER>>
<<PREMISES ADDRESS HORIZONTAL>>

INSPECTING OFFICER: <<CURRENT_USERNAME>>

UNWANTED FIRE SIGNAL (UWFS) DETAILS

Date and time of UWFS: [DATE]

Incident Number of UWFS: [INCIDENT NO.]

Description of UWFS:
[DESCRIPTION OF UWFS FROM FIRECORE]

Reason for Activation (i.e. cooking fumes): [INSERT CAUSE]

Reason for Attendance (i.e. ARC did not follow procedure): [INSERT REASON]

Was the RP aware of the Fire Service attendance: YES / NO

Is the RP aware of the UWFS policy: YES / NO

If NO, explain and signpost to website - <https://www.cheshirefire.gov.uk/fire-protection/business-owner-landlord-or-employee/false-alarms/>

ACTIONS TAKEN

[DESCRIPTION OF ACTION TAKEN INCLUDING DATES AND ORDER OF EVENTS]

Was this a valid 149? YES / NO

If NO, has the Officer in Charge or Organisational Intelligence been contacted to amend the record? YES / NO

Is a Fire Safety Audit required: YES / NO / DEFERRED

ANY OTHER COMMENTS

[DETAILS OF ANY OTHER RELEVANT INFORMATION]