

Report of the Community Safety Committee meeting held on 18th January 2007

Present: Councillors: R Butcher, D Harty, L W McGuire, M Smith (Chairman)

This report contains items considered by the Committee which are submitted to the Fire Authority for information. This provides background information on the proposed inclusion within the Service Improvement Plan 2007/08 of a review of the Authority's policy relating to Automatic Fire Alarms. A separate report is included on the Fire Authority's agenda for decision on the Service Improvement Plan 2007/08

1. AUTOMATIC FIRE ALARMS

The Committee has considered a report on the incidence of unwanted fire signals, the workload and costs arising, and whether the Authority's policy for responding to such signals should be reviewed.

Nationally the number of calls to false fire alarms has increased from 81,000 in 1989 to 281,000 in 2002. In 97% of cases there was no fire and in the majority of cases where there was a fire, it was either out on arrival or there was no significant fire damage and the fire was dealt with by one fire appliance. Within Cambridgeshire, this equated to 0.77% of attendances requiring some sort of fire service intervention, or 113 fires from 14,120 calls during a 4 year review period.

During 2006, it was estimated that the cost of responding to automatic fire alarms was £706,000, of which £174,000 represented potential cashable savings from the retained fire service, and £532,000 was non-cashable but represented the potential time and effort that could be applied to other community safety related purposes. There were also risks associated with appliances responding to unwanted fire signals, both to the crews themselves and particularly that the appliance would not be available to respond to other genuine calls.

The Committee has noted:

- The prime purpose of automatic fire alarms is to warn the occupiers of a building of the existence of a fire so that they might evacuate the building. The automatic routing of a call to the Fire and Rescue service is a secondary function. Historically Fire and Rescue services have responded to such calls, particularly as grant funding was related to the number of call

outs and charges could be levied for false alarms. Both the grant regime and the ability to charge for call outs have changed in recent years.

- The Chief Fire Officers Association policy on responding to unwanted fire signals proposes that services would not respond to automatic alarms from premises with a long history of false calls who, after assistance and intervention from the fire service, were unable to reduce the number of calls. However, it would take 2 or 3 years for this policy to have any significant impact.
- The Service has appointed a Fire Signals Manager whose role is to work with organisations to reduce the incidence of unwanted fire signals. A policy has been introduced at Addenbrookes Hospital which means that Addenbrookes staff would check the circumstances of a fire alarm and appliances would only attend if confirmation was received from them or if a further alarm was raised by a second detector.

The Committee has agreed that there is a strong case for a review of the Authority's policies in this area and that this should build on and develop earlier work undertaken in 2004 and also review the impact of policies in other parts of the Country.

The Committee has therefore agreed that a proposed review of the Authority's policy of responding to automatic fire alarms should be added to the draft Service Improvement Plan 2007/08 and that periodic reports on progress with the review be made to the Committee.

CHAIRMAN

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Source Documents	Location	Contact
Agenda, reports and minutes of the Community Safety Committee – 18/01/07	Hinchingbrooke Cottage Brampton Road Huntingdon	Michael Brown 01480 444572 michael.brown@cambsfire.gov.uk