

Report to	Executive Panel
Date	19 June 2023
Lead Officer	Stuart Millington, Assistant Chief Fire Officer
Contact Officer	Stuart Millington, Assistant Chief Fire Officer
Subject	Audit Wales – False Alarms Reduction



PURPOSE OF REPORT

1. To provide members with an overview of the findings following a recent audit of false fire alarms that was undertaken by Audit Wales.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2. Between November 2022 and March 2023, Audit Wales reviewed North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority's (the Authority) approach to the reduction of false fire alarms, focussing primarily on its approach to attendance at non-domestic premises.
3. The question posed that the review sought to answer was: **Is the Authority doing all that it can to reduce the prevalence and responses to non-domestic fire false alarms?**
4. The audit team found that: **The Authority has significantly reduced the number of non-domestic false fire alarms it attends but needs to address financial risks and capacity issues to ensure its risk-based approach is sustainable.**
5. Whilst recognising that the Authority is addressing the issue of false alarm reduction in non-domestic premises well, the report makes three recommendations about how this could be further improved.
6. The first recommendation relates to how the Authority is able to demonstrate the impact of false fire alarms from a financial perspective, to include enhanced data capture and analysis to ensure that efficiencies are correctly realised and presented.
7. The second recommendation focusses on how Automatic Fire Alarm (AFA) data can be integrated or provided to others, as well as how it can add value specifically to the work of Business Fire Safety teams.
8. The third and final recommendation relates to building resilience into how false fire alarms are managed, set against a context of significant organisational capacity challenges.

RECOMMENDATIONS

9. It is recommended that Members:
 - i) note the content of the Audit Wales False Fire Alarms reduction report.

BACKGROUND

10. Between November 2022 and March 2023, staff members at different levels from across North Wales were asked a series of questions with a clear focus on the efforts that had already been made, as well as where potential existed to further reduce the number of occasions when a resource was unnecessarily mobilised to a false alarm in a non-domestic setting.
11. Similar audits were completed of both Mid and West Wales Fire and Rescue Authority and South Wales Fire Authority.
12. Audit Wales provided a draft report to officers and comments were submitted for consideration. These comments mostly focussed on making a clearer differentiation between false alarms in non-domestic and domestic properties.
13. Audit Wales developed a log of these comments and have subsequently provided a response as to where changes to the document have been made and where North Wales Fire and Rescue Service (the Service) observations have been noted, accepted or partially accepted.

INFORMATION

14. The audit considered all false alarms related policy, how it was developed and how it is currently being implemented; as well as how false alarm reduction is monitored and evaluated.
15. The report provides both a summary and a detailed report, with the detailed report referencing
 - How the fire and rescue services are facing the most challenging financial and operational environment in a generation;
 - What a false fire alarm is and why reductions are important; and
 - How false alarms are managed by North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority.
16. In relation to financial and operational challenges, the report describes Welsh Governments' aspirations for a reduction in false alarms in order to release resources and capacity.
17. It also reflects how any resulting increase in capacity could be better utilised, as part of a broader firefighter role or to improve the time available for firefighters to maintain their own operational competencies.

18. In the section regarding what a false alarm is the Home Office Incident Reporting System (IRS) categories for false alarms are described. The information that is shown in this section reflects the positive work that has been undertaken over a number of years to challenge those who may place malicious calls to the Service, but also highlights that the largest proportion of false alarms result from faulty automatic fire alarm systems.
19. A point to note here is that this will also include false alarms in domestic settings. False alarms in domestic settings are out of scope for this review and there is no desire to reduce attendance to incidents of this type, as they assist our staff to get over the thresholds and provide support to those who are most at risk from fire.
20. The report goes on to highlight financial implications of unnecessary attendance at false fire alarms, whilst also identifying the complexities of accurately quantifying any real terms savings. Examples are provided of when Services in England have begun to recover costs through charging for attendance to those who are chronic repeat offenders.
21. Environmental and road safety implications of attendance at incidents when not required are also described.
22. The final section of the report examines the current policy that NWFRS employs, as well as performance data that describes a significant reduction since 2015/16, with a cautionary note to point out slight increases in 2021/22. Again, we must recognise that this section refers to an increase in domestic and non-domestic properties collectively. Nevertheless, there is a need to continuously monitor any increases, specifically in non-domestic settings.