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**SCOTTISH  
FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE**  
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## **Reducing Unwanted Fire Alarm Signals – Evaluating Options for Responding to Automatic Fire Alarms Staff and Stakeholder Workshop - 24 February 2021**

### **BACKGROUND**

The Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) has embarked on a journey, to change the way it manages the level of demand created by responding to automatic fire alarms (AFA) actuations, that turn out to be unwanted fire alarm signals (UFAS). Despite the efforts of the SFRS and partners, reducing this type of false alarm continues to be a very challenging area and is having an unnecessary impact on our services, businesses and wider communities.

By changing the way in which SFRS manages UFAS demand, the Service has prioritised evaluating different models for responding to AFA actuations and is making decisions through an options appraisal process. The SFRS wants staff and stakeholders to be part of this decision-making process and therefore key stakeholders were invited to participate in an event, that would explore feasible options for responding to AFA actuations. The options are summarised as follows:

- Option 1 - Maintaining a Status Quo
- Option 2 - COVID-19 Interim Response – immediate blanket one pump response. Exemptions apply to high risk premises
- Option 3 - Call challenge all AFA's from non-domestic premises. Exemptions apply to sleeping risk premises
- Option 4 - Call challenge all AFA's from non-domestic premises. No exemptions to call challenging apply
- Option 5 - Non-attendance to all AFA's from non-domestic premises. Exemptions apply to sleeping risk premises

## STAKEHOLDERS

Through the process of stakeholder mapping, groups classified as high influence/high interest were invited to attend an online stakeholder engagement event on 24 February and to evaluate options for responding to AFA actuations that have the potential to reduce the impact of UFAS. Representation included staff from the SFRS, the Fire Brigades Union (FBU), the Fire Safety Industry, the NHS, Business and the Higher/Further Education sector.

Prior to the event, stakeholders were provided with an information booklet and a detailed information pack, providing context to the options identified and guidance to help them prepare and fully participate in the process of evaluating each option.

### STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT EVENT – 24 FEBRUARY

Staff and stakeholders participated in a Zoom online engagement event. The purpose was to explore the benefits and risks for each of the five options shortlisted for evaluation, therefore enabling key staff and stakeholders to become an integral part of the Service's decision-making process.

A total of 16 staff and 26 stakeholders participated on the day and were represented as follows:

Staff	Numbers	Stakeholders	Numbers
SFRS UFAS Champions	3	Duty Holders	15
Retained and Voluntary Duty System (RVDS)	4	Fire Industry / Insurance Industry	5
Operations Control (OC)	3	FBU	1
Wholetime Watch Based	3	National Associations	5
Prevention & Protection (P&P) Local Managers	3		

The online event was hosted by Animate Consulting, an independent organisation that specialises in facilitating groups to reach consensus on matters of importance where all participants have a stake in the outcome. Using a third party to facilitate the event ensured constructive dialogue

and a degree of impartiality when participants were evaluating each option. Animate Consulting organised the participants into five diverse panels to assess and score the benefits and risks of each option. An independent report, covering the findings has been produced by Animate Consulting and made available to the participants.

## SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND SFRS RESPONSE

The findings of the five panels, following an assessment of the benefits and risks of each option, are summarised below.

### Assessment of Benefits

The panel scores were reviewed and converted into a table by the Service's Performance Data Team. This table helps to visualise and consider the overall benefit increases of each option.

	Option 1	Option 2	Option 3	Option 4	Option 5
Overall benefits score - Panel 1	None	Small	Small	Large	Moderate
Overall benefits score - Panel 2	None	Small	Moderate	Large	Moderate
Overall benefits score - Panel 3	None	Small	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate
Overall benefits score - Panel 4	None	Small	Small	Moderate	Large
Overall benefits score - Panel 5	None	Marginal	Moderate	Large	Large

- Option 4 offers the largest increase in benefits, with Option 1 (status quo) at the other end of the scale, assessed as offering no benefits. This reaffirms that there is a need for change; status quo is not an option and should only be used as the comparator for assessing options against.
- Option 2, 3 & 5 also all offer an increase in benefits, with the benefits rising in that sequence.

### Assessment of Risks

Again, the panel scores were reviewed and converted into a table by our Performance Data Team. This table helps to visualise and consider the overall risk profile of each option.

	Option 1	Option 2	Option 3	Option 4	Option 5
Overall risk score - Panel 1	Very low	Very low	Very low	Low	Low
Overall risk score - Panel 2	Very low	Low	Medium	High	Medium
Overall risk score - Panel 3	Very low	Low	Low	Medium	Medium
Overall risk score - Panel 4	Very low	Low	Low	Medium	High
Overall risk score - Panel 5	Very low	Low	Medium	Medium	High

- Option 5 bears the highest overall risk when seeking to reduce UFAS. This result is not unexpected given that the non-attendance option is the greatest shift from the status quo.
- Option 1 (status quo) bears the lowest overall risk. Again, this result is not unexpected given the average weight of response of 2 pumps for every AFA actuation received by the Service. However, there are a number of inherent risks to consider if maintaining a status quo (e.g. resultant road risk from blue light journeys).
- Option 2 (COVID-19 Interim Response to AFA's) bears an overall low risk. This risk level is realistic and can be validated through the outcomes of a recent review of this interim response.
- Option 4 bears the second highest overall risk. This result is also not unexpected given that this option call challenges all AFA's, with no exemptions applying.
- Option 3 overall risk profile represents the middle ground relative to the other 4 options. The blend of call challenging all AFA's and exemptions applying to sleeping risk premises in this option, infers this overall risk profile is a reasonable representation.

### Key Discussion Points and SFRS Response

The key themes arising from the panel discussions have been reviewed by SFRS. The table below outlines the SFRS's response to each of these discussion points, including how they will influence the options and decision-making process going forward.

	Key discussion points	SFRS response
1	More detail required around the call challenge process being applied to Options 3 & 4.	The consultation document will include more details about the call challenge process. This information will also be covered in more detail during any engagement with OC staff and other key stakeholders, as part of our plans for public consultation.
2	The relative differences afforded by location of services – balancing a desire	The desire to reduce the impact of UFAS demand should not be perceived as an opportunity for closing any fire stations in Scotland, especially those located in more remote/rural

	for reduced demand on Central Belt reserves by remote/rural areas with the fact that fewer call outs may risk stations closing.	locations, that are predominantly served by RVDS staff. Often covering large geographical areas attending a diverse range of emergencies, RVDS stations are of critical importance to the safety and wellbeing of Scotland. Many of these stations also act as a focal point for the community, where they double up as social spaces and community resilience hubs. Reducing UFAS demand in communities served by RVDS stations, will help build capacity for responding to new and growing risks such as wildfires and spate flooding events.
3	The desire for ongoing involvement of organisations to measure the impact of the changes and to consider local arrangements	The SFRS is committed to involving staff and stakeholders throughout the decision-making process, and during the implementation and ongoing monitoring and review of any changes that take place. How we will do this, will be covered in our consultation document and any engagement planned during the public consultation.
4	That Options 3, 4 & 5 would increase the pressure on OC staff to manage 'moral dilemmas'.	We appreciate and recognise these concerns. Options 3, 4 & 5 will involve changes to the way that OC staff handle calls from AFA's. During the public consultation, we plan to hold discussions with our OC staff, to enable us to fully assess the impact of each option. This will enable us to reach a final decision on the best option, and how we implement it going forward. Training OC staff will be a key aspect of any plan, for implementing the preferred option.
5	Fewer call outs would lead to 'improved availability of resources for attending emergencies' and increased time available for training, prevention and diversionary activities' but this would not be evenly spread across the SFRS.	We recognise that the benefits of reduced UFAS calls when broken down, will be felt more by the stations that respond most frequently to these call-outs. However, we felt it was more appropriate to start from a position of what the benefits would be for the SFRS, rather than each individual station. These results would then be used as the basis for more detailed assessment. There is still some background work and analysis to be carried out as we progress through the next stages and towards developing a full business case. This will include building a more detailed picture of how the options will impact UFAS demand and what the benefits will look like at a more localised/station level.
6	There are sector/organisational specific variations – one size doesn't fit all (e.g. the NHS does not evacuate immediately in some instances).	We would like to get a better understanding of these variations and associated fire safety management practices to help shape the scope and purpose of our public consultation. We are therefore assessing the need for some pre-consultation engagement with the respective stakeholders.
7	Allocating scores when thinking about large complex sites was challenging. For example, the age and type of buildings could lead to very different risk scores for the same option. Or, whether the alarm is in a staffed or unstaffed area.	We appreciate and recognise assessing and scoring the options was a challenge, but it should be recognised that at this stage of the process, the information provided to support the workshop assessment and scoring was high level and, to an extent, relied on the perspectives of participants when allocating scores against benefits and risks criteria. We are very grateful to the five panels for giving their full consideration to assessing the options and for each of them coming to a consensus on the results of each option.
8	If speed of response is key, does a call challenge process automatically slow down a response?	As per discussion point one, the consultation document will include details about the call challenge process. This information will also be covered in detail during any engagement planned with Operations Control (OC), staff and other key stakeholders, as part of our plans for public consultation. It should also be noted that activations from an alarm system designed

		to pose a risk to life should always be accompanied with a back-up call by occupants confirming a fire. Where this is the case, all calls received by persons are treated as a priority and should not result in a notable delay in mobilisation.
9	How to weigh up the impact of the options on the different motivational factors for RVDS firefighters, if call outs were reduced.	We appreciate and recognise the different motivational factors identified during the panel discussions. During the public consultation, we plan to hold discussions with our RVDS staff, so we fully understand these factors and can make a more informed assessment of the impact of the options on these members of staff.

## RANKING THE OPTIONS

The independent report produced by Animate Consulting, details the five sets of scores and rankings that were produced by the panels, along with key discussion points and other panel observations. This information has been extremely useful, allowing us to compare and understand any variations arising in the rankings across the five panels and, as per the table above, the information will influence the options and decision-making process going forward.

The results from each panel have also provided us with an opportunity to harmonise the five sets of scores and rankings, so that as we move to the next stage, we have an overall benefits ranking of the options to consider and an overall risk ranking of the options to assess and compare against. These overall rankings are as follows, with the methodology showing how we arrived at these found in **Appendix One**.

Option	Overall Benefits Ranking	
Option 4	1	= Greatest Benefit
Option 5	2	
Option 3	3	
Option 2	4	
Option 1	5	= Least Benefit

Option	Overall Risk Ranking	
Option 5	1	= Highest Risk
Option 4	2	
Option 3	3	
Option 2	4	
Option 1	5	= Lowest Risk

In summary, the methodology in **Appendix One** is considered to provide a fair approach for determining the overall rankings of the options. At this stage, the option ranked highest in terms of overall benefits (Option 4) does not infer that this is the best option and does not rule out the

other options, or variations of these. Based on the overall rankings and supporting information from the independent report, the following conclusions have been drawn:

- Options 4 & 5 offer the greatest benefits, but bear the highest risks.
- Options 4 & 5 overall results were relatively close together.
- Options 3 overall results, provide a balance between benefits and risks.
- Options 3, 4 & 5 overall results confirm a step change in benefits when compared to Option 1 (Status Quo).
- Option 2 overall results offer improved benefits when compared to Option 1, but considered smaller when compared to the other options.

## **WHAT HAPPENS NEXT**

While the staff and stakeholder workshop was an important part of the options appraisal process, there are many other matters to be explored. Most of these will benefit from the insight of front line staff, duty holders and the wider stakeholder audience. Therefore, we plan to hold a 12-week public consultation on the options starting around July of this year.

Meantime, the Service will continue to develop the pre-consultation business case, taking opportunities to listen to views, raise awareness and ensure there continues to be sufficient scrutiny and oversight of this ongoing work. This may include further engagement with those who attended the workshop event. A review of the work to date will also be considered by the Service's Strategic Leadership Team (SLT) and the SFRS Board before proceeding to public consultation.

To be clear, we will not be entering the public consultation with a preferred option for responding to AFA actuations. This decision will not be made until the options have been through the public consultation stage and a final business case is presented to the SFRS Board for decision around December this year. As key stakeholders, we aim to keep you involved and informed as we progress through the next stages of the decision-making process.

If you have any comments, please email them to: [SFRS.P&PAdmin@firescotland.gov.uk](mailto:SFRS.P&PAdmin@firescotland.gov.uk)

## Appendix Two

### SENSITIVITY ANALYSIS

Option 1 - Status Quo (Base Case)

Option 2 - COVID-19 Interim Response – blanket one pump response

Option 3 - Call Challenge with exemptions time & risk variable response

Option 4 - Call Challenge, no exemptions, time & risk variable response

Option 5 - Non-attendance with exemptions, time & risk variable response

	Option 1	Option 2	Option 3	Option 4	Option 5
Overall risk score - Panel 1	Very low	Very low	Very low	Low	Low
Overall risk score - Panel 2	Very low	Low	Medium	High	Medium
Overall risk score - Panel 3	Very low	Low	Low	Medium	Medium
Overall risk score - Panel 4	Very low	Low	Low	Medium	High
Overall risk score - Panel 5	Very low	Low	Medium	Medium	High

Average Scoring Scenario	Option 1	Option 2	Option 3	Option 4	Option 5
Average Scoring Scenario	Very low	Low	Low	Medium	Medium
Ranking (1 = highest risk, 5= Lowest Risk)	5	4	3	2	1

Pessimistic Scoring Scenario	Option 1	Option 2	Option 3	Option 4	Option 5
Pessimistic Scoring Scenario	Very low	Low	Medium	High	High
Ranking (1 = highest risk, 5= Lowest Risk)	5	4	3	1	2

Optimistic Scoring Scenario	Option 1	Option 2	Option 3	Option 4	Option 5
Optimistic Scoring Scenario	Very low	Very low	Very low	Low	Low
Ranking (1 = highest risk, 5= Lowest Risk)	5	3	4	2	1

Total - All 3 Scoring Scenarios	Option 1	Option 2	Option 3	Option 4	Option 5
Total - All 3 Scoring Scenarios	Very low	Low	Low	Medium	Medium
Ranking (1 = highest risk, 5= Lowest Risk)	5	4	3	2	1

	Option 1	Option 2	Option 3	Option 4	Option 5
Overall benefits score - Panel 1	None	Small	Small	Large	Moderate
Overall benefits score - Panel 2	None	Small	Moderate	Large	Moderate
Overall benefits score - Panel 3	None	Small	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate
Overall benefits score - Panel 4	None	Small	Small	Moderate	Large
Overall benefits score - Panel 5	None	Marginal	Moderate	Large	Large

Average Scoring Scenario	Option 1	Option 2	Option 3	Option 4	Option 5
Average Scoring Scenario	None	Small	Small	Large	Moderate
Ranking (1 = greatest benefit, 5 Least Benefit)	5	4	3	1	2

Pessimistic Scoring Scenario	Option 1	Option 2	Option 3	Option 4	Option 5
Pessimistic Scoring Scenario	None	Small	Small	Moderate	Moderate
Ranking (1 = greatest benefit, 5 Least Benefit)	5	4	3	1	2

Optimistic Scoring Scenario	Option 1	Option 2	Option 3	Option 4	Option 5
Optimistic Scoring Scenario	None	Small	Moderate	Large	Large
Ranking (1 = greatest benefit, 5 Least Benefit)	5	4	3	1	1

Total - All 3 Scoring Scenarios	Option 1	Option 2	Option 3	Option 4	Option 5
Total - All 3 Scoring Scenarios	None	Small	Small	Moderate	Moderate
Ranking (1 = greatest benefit, 5 Least Benefit)	5	4	3	1	2