

Reference: RM/JC/CB

Nick Bourke and John Shuker
Fire Brigades Union

VIA EMAIL

**Oxfordshire County Council
Fire and Rescue Service
Headquarters
Sterling Road
Kidlington
Oxfordshire OX5 2DU**

**Rob MacDougall
Chief Fire Officer and Director
of Community Safety**

Date: 18th June 2024

Dear Nick and John,

Re: FBU submission - Consultation on Options for Responding to Automatic Fire Alarms

Thank you for responding to our public consultation on proposals to reduce the number of false alarms from automatic fire alarms systems. We appreciate and welcome your comments and will attempt to address them via this response using the headings that themed the feedback that you provided.

Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service has long been a champion of reducing the impact of false alarms from automatic fire alarms systems, including both the negative impact on business and on the fire and rescue service itself. We began this journey as far back as 2004 with the implementation of fire control call challenging protocols and in the resourcing of business engagement with respect to false alarms. However, the learning we have gathered since, together with the experiences of other fire and rescue services, mean that we now believe that additional change is required to further reduce the incidence of false alarms.

Consultation with FBU representatives

In 2021, we consulted on our [Community Risk Management Plan for 2022-2026](#) within which we stated that we “*are working with the other fire and rescue services across the Thames Valley to look at new ways of reducing the amount of false alarms we attend*”.

Prior to the recent public consultation, we presented to the On-Call forum to help understand how our proposals specifically affected that key stakeholder group and we shared a detailed internal county paper with yourselves on 7 December 2023 which included possible proposals for the public consultation.

We also view the public consultation as a legitimate route for consulting all stakeholders whether they be external to the service or internal such, as the Fire Brigades Union as part of our normal trade union protocols. We also expect the consultation with yourselves to continue beyond the closure of the public consultation.

Risks to wholetime and retained firefighters

We are of the view that our proposals increase the relative safety of firefighters. Attending fire alarms activations represents a very real road safety risk to firefighters, as well as to other road users. Reducing our attendance to false alarms generated by automatic fire alarm systems will dramatically reduce this risk. Additionally, our proposals will afford additional opportunities for firefighters to perform other duties, including training and risk familiarisation which will help to maintain high levels of competence.

Our proposals have been designed specifically to manage down the risk to both firefighters and the public by ensuring that any factors that pose a heightened risk to either cause a building to be classified as a 'high risk' such that it continues to receive an emergency response to automatic fire alarm activations.

Risks to control staff

The service has carried out consultation with Thames Valley Fire Control employees during our project and we will continue involve them. The views of this critical employee group of have helped us to develop our thoughts and proposals and they will be important going forward in the design of work processes used to implement them.

The consultation has carefully considered the impact to Thames Valley Fire Control employees and a clear objective of the proposals and collaborative drive have been to align ways of working across the Thames Valley to reduce the complexity of their high-pressured work environment. We remain committed to providing any support that we can to Thames Valley Fire Control employees.

As ever, we remain to committed to working with the Fire Brigades Union for the benefit of the service, its employees and local communities and look forward to working with further in relation to these matters.

Yours sincerely



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Chief Fire Officer and Director of Community Safety

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