

## ***Delegated Decisions by Cabinet Member for Public Health, Inequalities & Community Safety***

***Tuesday, 9 January 2024 at 1.00 pm  
Room 3 - County Hall, New Road, Oxford OX1 1ND***

If you wish to view proceedings, please click on this [Live Stream Link](#).  
However, that will not allow you to participate in the meeting.

### ***Items for Decision***

The items for decision under individual Cabinet Members' delegated powers are listed overleaf, with indicative timings, and the related reports are attached. Decisions taken will become effective at the end of the working day on 16 January 2024 unless called in by that date for review by the appropriate Scrutiny Committee.

Copies of the reports are circulated (by e-mail) to all members of the County Council.

**These proceedings are open to the public**



Martin Reeves  
Chief Executive

December 2023

Committee Officer: **Democratic Services Team**  
*committeesdemocraticservices@oxfordshire.gov.uk*

Note: Date of next meeting: 6 February 2024

<p><b>If you have any special requirements (such as a large print version of these papers or special access facilities) please contact the officer named on the front page, but please give as much notice as possible before the meeting.</b></p>
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## Items for Decision

### 1. Declarations of Interest

See guidance below.

### 2. Questions from County Councillors

Any county councillor may, by giving notice to the Proper Officer by 9 am two working days before the meeting, ask a question on any matter in respect of the Cabinet Member's delegated powers.

The number of questions which may be asked by any councillor at any one meeting is limited to two (or one question with notice and a supplementary question at the meeting) and the time for questions will be limited to 30 minutes in total. As with questions at Council, any questions which remain unanswered at the end of this item will receive a written response.

Questions submitted prior to the agenda being despatched are shown below and will be the subject of a response from the appropriate Cabinet Member or such other councillor or officer as is determined by the Cabinet Member and shall not be the subject of further debate at this meeting. Questions received after the despatch of the agenda, but before the deadline, will be shown on the Schedule of Addenda circulated at the meeting, together with any written response which is available at that time.

### 3. Petitions and Public Address

Members of the public who wish to speak at this meeting can attend the meeting in person or 'virtually' through an online connection.

Requests to speak must be submitted by no later than 9am four working days before the meeting. Requests to speak should be sent to [committeesdemocraticservices@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:committeesdemocraticservices@oxfordshire.gov.uk) .

If you are speaking 'virtually', you may submit a written statement of your presentation to ensure that if the technology fails, then your views can still be taken into account. A written copy of your statement can be provided no later than 9 am 2 working days before the meeting. Written submissions should be no longer than 1 A4 sheet.

### 4. Automatic Fire Alarm Attendance Policy (Pages 1 - 6)

*Forward Plan Ref: 2023/352*

*Contact: Jason Crapper, Area Manager, [Jason.crapper@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:Jason.crapper@oxfordshire.gov.uk)*

Report by Corporate Director for Public Health and Community Safety.

**The Cabinet Member is RECOMMENDED to authorise the Chief Fire Officer to proceed with a public consultation for changes to the Fire and Rescue Service's automatic fire alarm attendance policy.**

## **Councillors declaring interests**

### **General duty**

You must declare any disclosable pecuniary interests when the meeting reaches the item on the agenda headed 'Declarations of Interest' or as soon as it becomes apparent to you.

### **What is a disclosable pecuniary interest?**

Disclosable pecuniary interests relate to your employment; sponsorship (i.e. payment for expenses incurred by you in carrying out your duties as a councillor or towards your election expenses); contracts; land in the Council's area; licenses for land in the Council's area; corporate tenancies; and securities. These declarations must be recorded in each councillor's Register of Interests which is publicly available on the Council's website.

Disclosable pecuniary interests that must be declared are not only those of the member her or himself but also those member's spouse, civil partner or person they are living with as husband or wife or as if they were civil partners.

### **Declaring an interest**

Where any matter disclosed in your Register of Interests is being considered at a meeting, you must declare that you have an interest. You should also disclose the nature as well as the existence of the interest. If you have a disclosable pecuniary interest, after having declared it at the meeting you must not participate in discussion or voting on the item and must withdraw from the meeting whilst the matter is discussed.

### **Members' Code of Conduct and public perception**

Even if you do not have a disclosable pecuniary interest in a matter, the Members' Code of Conduct says that a member 'must serve only the public interest and must never improperly confer an advantage or disadvantage on any person including yourself' and that 'you must not place yourself in situations where your honesty and integrity may be questioned'.

### **Members Code – Other registrable interests**

Where a matter arises at a meeting which directly relates to the financial interest or wellbeing of one of your other registerable interests then you must declare an interest. You must not participate in discussion or voting on the item and you must withdraw from the meeting whilst the matter is discussed.

Wellbeing can be described as a condition of contentedness, healthiness and happiness; anything that could be said to affect a person's quality of life, either positively or negatively, is likely to affect their wellbeing.

Other registrable interests include:

- a) Any unpaid directorships

- b) Any body of which you are a member or are in a position of general control or management and to which you are nominated or appointed by your authority.
- c) Any body (i) exercising functions of a public nature (ii) directed to charitable purposes or (iii) one of whose principal purposes includes the influence of public opinion or policy (including any political party or trade union) of which you are a member or in a position of general control or management.

### **Members Code – Non-registrable interests**

Where a matter arises at a meeting which directly relates to your financial interest or wellbeing (and does not fall under disclosable pecuniary interests), or the financial interest or wellbeing of a relative or close associate, you must declare the interest.

Where a matter arises at a meeting which affects your own financial interest or wellbeing, a financial interest or wellbeing of a relative or close associate or a financial interest or wellbeing of a body included under other registrable interests, then you must declare the interest.

In order to determine whether you can remain in the meeting after disclosing your interest the following test should be applied:

Where a matter affects the financial interest or well-being:

- a) to a greater extent than it affects the financial interests of the majority of inhabitants of the ward affected by the decision and;
- b) a reasonable member of the public knowing all the facts would believe that it would affect your view of the wider public interest.

You may speak on the matter only if members of the public are also allowed to speak at the meeting. Otherwise you must not take part in any discussion or vote on the matter and must not remain in the room unless you have been granted a dispensation.

## Divisions Affected – All divisions

### **CABINET MEMBER FOR PUBLIC HEALTH, INEQUALITIES AND COMMUNITY SAFETY**

**9 January 2024**

#### **Automatic Fire Alarm Attendance Policy**

#### **Report by Corporate Director for Public Health and Community Safety**

### **RECOMMENDATION**

1. **The Cabinet Member is RECOMMENDED to**

Authorise the Chief Fire Officer to proceed with a public consultation for changes to the Fire and Rescue Service's automatic fire alarm attendance policy.

### **Executive Summary**

2. This paper outlines the national and local issues with respect to the high incidence of false alarms from automatic fire alarms systems and proposes a public consultation regarding changes to the Fire and Rescue Service's policy for attending automatic fire alarm incidents. The paper highlights that several efficiency and effectiveness benefits could be delivered for OCC through reduced incidents being attended by the Fire and Rescue Service, financial efficiencies, reduced associated vehicle mileage, reduced vehicle emissions, higher productivity for Fire and Rescue Service employees and a reduction in unnecessary blue light mobilisations that pose a risk to the public.

### **Background**

3. The Fire and Rescue Service published its Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) for 2022-26 which sets out how the service will continue to manage and reduce the fire related risks to Oxfordshire, as well as contributing to our broader community safety work within Public Health. There are several challenges that the service continues to face including financial pressures, availability of our On-Call firefighters, meeting our response standards, and providing an agile service that addresses current and emerging risks such as climate adaptation, increased population, social deprivation, and changes to County infrastructure.

Community Safety Services, which includes the Fire and Rescue Service, is currently undertaking a fundamental internal review, encompassing all departments and service-areas, to identify changes to services which provide opportunities for improvement in efficiency and effectiveness and economy. This wider programme of review is inherently linked to supporting the principle of constant learning and

improvement within Community Safety Services and supports the fiscal health of the wider council.

One area that presents itself as an opportunity as far as the Community Safety Service's review is concerned is the high rate of false alarms that has been a theme of fire and rescue service inspection since His Majesty's Inspector of Constabularies and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) began the modern era of fire and rescue inspection in 2018. In the very first 'State of Fire' report in 2019, HMICFRS identified that *"False alarms continue to be the biggest demand services face. In 2018/19, across England 40.1 percent (231,067) of all incidents attended by [fire and rescue services] FRSs were fire false alarms"*. HMICFRS also identified that *"nearly two-thirds (65 percent, 150,967) [of these fire false alarms] were due to apparatus such as a smoke alarm or sprinkler being triggered"*. This report will focus on this subset of false alarms from automatic fire alarm systems.

Within Thames Valley, the subject of false alarms has been the subject of 'areas for improvement' following each of the two inspections that each of the three Thames Valley fire and rescue services received in 2018/19 and 2021/22 respectively. In the year to 31 March 2021, the percentage of all incidents attended by each of the three Thames Valley fire and rescue services that were false alarms was 50% (Oxfordshire), 39% (Buckinghamshire) and 48% (Royal Berkshire). False alarms ultimately represent an inefficient use of fire and rescue resources.

This report focuses on the intention for Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service (OFRS) to implement a revised automatic fire alarm attendance policy and procedure with a view to adoption across Thames Valley. This policy and procedure will be based on a review of mobilisation policies that have been implemented in other fire and rescue services around the UK.

## Key Issues

### Oxfordshire False Alarm Performance

4. OFRS has twice been told by HMICFRS that we need to effectively address the burden of false alarms. Our most recent attempts at improvement since September 2021 have been to weight our interventions more heavily towards persistent problem premises including the allocation of single points of contact for those premises to ensure we develop meaningful relationships. Despite this, we have been unable to meaningfully reduce our attendance at false alarms. Analysis of our last five years of incident data indicates:
  - That we attend on average around 1500 false alarms from automatic fire alarms per year.
  - Of these, around 1% are caused by a fire with the remaining 99% being false alarms<sup>1</sup>.

### Proposals for changes to automatic fire alarm attendance policy

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<sup>1</sup> Data taken from the national Incident Recording System.

5. A review of automatic fire alarm policies from other fire and rescue services in the UK highlight that a number<sup>2</sup> have introduced policies that involve call challenge (effectively asking premises to confirm whether the premises has been checked and whether a fire has been found) and call filtering to identify which incidents will and will not be attended based on the type of building involved. Following this review of automatic fire alarm attendance policies from several other fire and rescue services, it is proposed that OFRS pursue a policy of call challenge and call filtering via Thames Valley Fire Control Service (TVFCS) and that this is subject to a full public consultation as part of Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service's Community Risk Management Planning process.

The approach that will be consulted on will involve maintaining a reduced emergency response attendance (generally one fire engine as per the current policy) to the highest risk buildings. For lower risk buildings, the intention is to consult on a policy of not sending a fire engine to reports of automatic fire alarm actuation in these premises unless the call is backed up with a positive indication that there is a fire or that there are possible signs of a fire. The public consultation will propose additional detail and a rationale for how buildings are categorised.

## **Benefits**

6. The benefits that would be realised by implementing a revised automatic fire alarm policy will clearly be dependent on what is implemented following the outcomes of the public consultation. The general benefits for the communities of Oxfordshire are as follows:
- Reduction in false alarms being attended by the Fire and Rescue Service.
  - Reduced pay costs associated with a reduction in the mobilising of crews conditioned to the On-Call and day crewing duty systems.
  - Reduced disruption for On-Call primary employment which could improve the retention of On-Call firefighters over the longer term.
  - Increased fire appliance availability to respond to genuine emergency incidents.
  - Increased productivity of Wholetime firefighter crews.
  - Reduced vehicle costs associated with the attending false alarms.
  - Reduced road risk associated with attending automatic fire alarm activations.
  - Reduced vehicle emissions.

## **Corporate Policies and Priorities**

7. The proposed changes to the Fire and Rescue Service's automatic fire alarm attendance policy will ultimately allow the fire and rescue service to prioritise its limited resources on more productive tasks, including community safety work, which will enable the service to prioritise the health and wellbeing of residents (priority 9). An additional and indirect benefit will be in the reduction of incidents being attended

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<sup>2</sup> Services that have implemented policies of call challenge and incident filtering include Kent, West Sussex, Surrey, Lincolnshire, Manchester and Scotland Fire and Rescue Services.

by the service which will contribute in small way to help the council address the climate emergency (priority 1).

## Financial Implications

8. There are currently no significant costs identified for implementing a revised automatic fire alarm policy that is in line with this report. It is possible that some small costs might be associated with the technical implementation of revised policy within the Thames Valley Fire Control Service. Any such costs will be scoped as the project proceeds but are not expected to be significant and would be funded within the existing service budget.

Comments checked by:

Thomas James, Finance Business Partner, [thomas.james@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:thomas.james@oxfordshire.gov.uk)  
(Finance)

## Legal Implications

9. There is no strict duty for fire and rescue services to attend automatic fire alarm activations. Any policy that is based on non-attendance would have to be compatible with the statutory duty to make provision (sufficient personnel, services, equipment, effective arrangements for receiving and responding to calls for help and for obtaining information which the Fire and Rescue Service needs to carry out its functions) for the purposes of:
  - (a) Extinguishing fires in its area, and
  - (b) Protecting life and property in the event of fires in its areas
10. Under the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005, the responsible person has a duty to take general fire precautions. The responsible person includes the owner, employer, landlord, occupier or anyone in a control of the premises. This places the onus on the responsible person to undertake a fire risk assessment and consider if an automatic fire alarm system is required at the premises, ensure it is tested and maintained and take steps to manage false alarms.

Comments checked by:

Paul Grant, Head of Legal and Deputy Monitoring Officer,  
[paul.grant@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:paul.grant@oxfordshire.gov.uk) (Legal)

## Staff Implications

11. The staff resources for engaging with stakeholders as part of the public consultation and for implementing any new automatic fire alarm attendance policy and supporting procedures would be drawn from the Fire Protection department within the Fire and Rescue Service and with support from our partner organisation, Thames Valley Fire Control Service.



## **Equality & Inclusion Implications**

12. An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) has been drafted and will remain a live document throughout the internal and public consultation and decision making process. At this stage, the EIA indicates that any policy that is aligned with this report would not have any direct or indirect impact on protected groups.

## **Sustainability Implications**

13. A Climate impact Assessment has been drafted and will remain a live document throughout the internal and public consultation and decision making process. This assessment has indicated that any policy changes stemming from this work are only likely to result in a reduction in the incidents attended by the Fire and Rescue Service which will lead to less mileage being undertaken by fire engines and therefore less vehicle emissions. A net positive environmental benefit is therefore anticipated.

## **Risk Management**

14. There are five areas of possible risk that are introduced by implementing a revised policy and procedure aligned with this paper as follows:
  - i) The risk of a fire, fire-related fatality/injury or serious damage occurring in a premises due to a delayed fire and rescue attendance stemming from a revised fire alarm attendance policy. In the last five years, only around 1% of automatic fire alarm incidents have been caused by fires and these incidents have tended to not require much if any action on the part of the Fire and Rescue Service. However, whilst a very low risk, there is always a chance that a serious incident will occur in a building to which the service was alerted by an automatic fire alarm but did not respond.
  - ii) Damage to the service's reputation by pursuing a change to automatic fire alarm policy that wider stakeholders disagree with. It is felt that by pursuing arrangements that align with those that already exist within the wider fire and rescue sector, coupled with a structured public consultation exercise, the service can manage this risk to a low enough level that would allow it to proceed.
  - iii) Reduced incidents for crews on On-Call terms and conditions resulting in less pay for this group of employees. This loss of incidents and pay could result in reduced morale amongst these employees and exasperate current recruitment and retention issues. There is a possibility that some affected employees may welcome the reduction in disruption posed by attending false alarms.
  - iv) Increased average response times across the service due to a reduction in automatic fire alarm incidents in our more urban areas which has the consequence of our response performance being more influenced by our slightly slower response performance in our more rural areas. As this piece of work is part of a much wider review within Community Safety Services, the intention will be for this risk to be offset by changes and improvements to the operational response model within the Fire and Rescue Service.

- v) Increased risk to firefighter safety if faced with a more developed fire due to a delayed attendance. This is a very low risk for several reasons. Firstly, our ongoing firefighter training ensures that our highly trained crews can safely, competently, and effectively deal with serious fires and we will monitor and review incidents to ensure any lessons are learned. Also, our proposals ensure that the buildings that pose the highest risk to our firefighters are highlighted as requiring an attendance in the event of a fire alarm actuation anyway. Additionally, the increased road risk associated with responding to automatic fire alarms could arguably exceed any risk to firefighters from more developed fires given the training our crews receive.

Ansaf Azhar

Corporate Director – Public Health and Community Safety.

Contact Officer: Jason Crapper, Area Manager, Fire and Rescue Service,  
[jason.crapper@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:jason.crapper@oxfordshire.gov.uk), Tel. 07766498055

December 2023