



# BFRS response to Automatic Fire Alarm Activations (Consultation) – Supporting Information

## Introduction

“As the senior project sponsor, I am thrilled to announce the launch of our consultation on our future response to Automatic Fire Alarms (AFA).

This initiative has been a long time in the making, driven by our Public Safety Plan 2020-2025 commitment to improve effectiveness and efficiency in our operations.

The decision to consider changes in our AFA response is not taken lightly. It stems from a review of current practices and the potential benefits of a more tailored and risk-based approach, which started as a pilot initiative in July this year.

By evaluating our AFA response procedures, we aim to enhance our service delivery, reduce unnecessary disruptions, and ensure that our resources are utilised where they are needed most.

This consultation is a crucial step in shaping a more effective and responsive service. The input of our community, staff and partners is invaluable to us, and we are eager to hear from a diverse range of voices whose perspective will help us make informed decisions that benefit everyone.

This feedback will be instrumental in guiding our future policies and ensuring that our response strategies continue to serve our communities in the best possible way.”

**Assistant Chief Fire Officer, Simon Tuffley**

## What is an Automatic Fire Alarm (AFA)?

An AFA is a type of system that warns people of a possible fire.

When activated, by automatic or manual means, the occupants of a building should manage the response to the alarm.

Depending on the local arrangements an AFA may notify a remote alarm receiving centre (ARC) which will contact the fire and rescue service.

Historically, our approach has been for a fire appliance (pump) and crew to attend every instance of an AFA activation in Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes, even if a follow-up call is received to state the alarm was not caused by a fire.



Our policy was to respond to all calls for emergency assistance using our existing mobilising criteria. We did not delay our attendance based on any previous alarm activation or the type of premises.

**“Between 1 April 2023 and 31 March 2024 firefighters responded to 1,693 AFA activations in in non-domestic buildings in Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes.”**

BFRS Data – October 2024

While it has meant that we have been able to categorically confirm that a fire has or has not occurred, provide advice, and carry out on-site visual inspection and firefighter relevant property risk assessment; this routine response to all AFAs has seen additional demand put upon our available resources.

We are aware that, on occasions, responding to an AFA that has not been caused by a fire has diverted our firefighters from other duties, including key prevention and training activities.

**“Of the 1,693 AFA activations responded to in Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes between 1 April 2023 and 31 March 2024, 16 (0.9 per cent) were recorded as having resulted in a fire.”**

BFRS Data – October 2024

## Why is BFRS considering a permanent change to its response to AFA Activation?

AFAs alert to potential fires. However, many of these alerts are false alarms (also known as Unwanted Fire Signals or UwFS), which:

- Divert our resources from genuine emergencies.
- Divert our crews from valuable work to make our communities safer, such as prevention activities and critical training.
- Costs the Service money.

Incident data compiled between 1 April 2018 and 31 March 2024 tells us that of the 9,295 non-domestic AFA activations we attended during that period, 98.9 per cent did not involve a fire.



### BFRS incident data 1 April 2018 to 31 March 2024:

	2018 to 2019	2019 to 2020	2020 to 2021	2021 to 2022	2022 to 2023	2023 to 2024		Total
Number of non-domestic AFAs	1,590	1,674	1,408	1,457	1,473	1,693		9,295
Number that resulted in a fire	22	16	15	15	16	16		100
Percentage of non-domestic AFAs that resulted in a fire	1.4%	1.0%	1.0%	1.0%	1.1%	0.9%		1.1%

### BFRS Data – October 2024

False alarms can be caused by several issues, for example:

- Aerosol sprays.
- Cooking fumes.
- A fire alarm system that hasn't been serviced properly.
- A fault in the fire alarm system.
- Someone accidentally setting off the alarm.
- System testing.

In our [Public Safety Plan 2020-2025](#), we pledged to review our approach to attending AFAs.

**“We may change how we mobilise to incidents, the capabilities we use, and where we mobilise from. Specifically, we will review our approach to attending reports of automatic fire alarm (AFA) systems operating.**

**“If the outcome of the review recommends significant changes to our current policy, we will consult with affected stakeholders before making any decisions.”**

BFRS Public Safety Plan 2020 - 2025

This commitment was reinforced following the 2023 inspection by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS).

The Inspectorate concluded that: “The service isn't taking action to reduce the burden of false alarms.” It highlighted in [its report](#) the need for us to review our response to false



alarms, to ensure the effective use of protection and operational resources and cited this as an area of improvement for us.

**“The service should review its response to false alarms to ensure that protection and operational resources are used effectively.”**

HMICFRS Inspection Report of BFRS 2023 - 2025

When we published our PSP the perceived benefit from reviewing our AFA response policy was primarily freeing-up firefighter capacity to deal with higher risk incident types.

**“What we plan to do to mitigate the emerging risks within Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes:**

**“Consider changing current response to automatic fire alarms policy, potentially freeing up capacity to deal with an increase in higher risk incident types.”**

BFRS Public Safety Plan 2020 - 2025

However, since we published the PSP, we have identified further potential benefits.

These include (but are not limited to):

- Improved use of work time for activities such as Prevention, Protection and Training.
- Reduced inherent road risk from fewer blue-light appliance movements.
- Reduced costs and environmental impacts through fewer appliance movements.
- Reduced use of over the border appliances.

We also believe that reviewing our response to AFA's and seeking ways to align with that of Oxfordshire and Royal Berkshire fire and rescues services, could deliver efficiencies for Thames Valley Fire Control Service (TVFCS).

TVFCS operators receive 999 calls for the three fire and rescues services operating across the Thames Valley, and allocate and mobilise appropriate resources (fire engines, firefighters, and officers) in response.



We have never anticipated the AFA review generating financial savings, and it has always been our aim that any direct costs will be met through existing budgets.

Part of the review process will ensure that financial implications, and any benefits and costs, will be captured and incorporated into the evaluation.

Five years on from the publication of the PSP, we still anticipate that the main success criteria for the review will be the extent to which staff time can be redirected to more productive activities.

## Legal Duties

According to UK law, every fire and rescue authority (FRA) must make provision for extinguishing fires, and for protecting life and property in the event of fires.

Each FRA must also make arrangements for dealing with calls for help when there is a fire.

However, there is no legal duty on the FRA to respond to calls originating from AFA systems for the purpose of establishing whether there is a fire.

In non-domestic premises covered by the [Regulatory Reform \(Fire Safety\) Order 2005](#), the employer, the owner or someone else who has control of the premises (the designated 'Responsible Person') must ensure as far as is reasonably practicable that the premises are safe for its occupants in the event of a fire.

These arrangements would include the actions that would be taken if the AFA system was activated, and who will investigate the cause.

## How we work with businesses and their designated Responsible Person

We provide advice and guidance to those responsible for business and commercial buildings throughout Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes on:

- Fire risk assessment and compliance – helping businesses understand their legal obligations and ensuring fire safety compliance through robust fire risk assessment.
- Fire safety equipment and systems – making sure businesses have the right fire safety systems in place, such as fire doors, alarms, and extinguishers.
- Fire safety training and preparedness – equipping teams with the skills and knowledge to respond effectively to fire emergencies.



- Inspections and enforcement – ensuring businesses understand why we undertake fire safety inspections and how to stay compliant to avoid the need for us to undertake enforcement action.

As well as information published on our website, we have a dedicated team of Protection Officers who work alongside our Business Engagement Team, engaging and collaborating with local businesses to provide advice and support to navigate fire safety regulations, offer guidance on fire risk assessments, and provide ongoing support for compliance.

## Collaboration across the Thames Valley

Under local agreement we have chosen to identify opportunities for us to collaborate with our neighbouring fire and rescue services in Thames Valley.

Responding to AFAs has been identified by the Thames Valley Collaboration Steering Group as a priority workstream and a collaborative opportunity.

Our officers have been working closely with fire and rescue service colleagues in Oxfordshire and Royal Berkshire, to develop an aligned proposal for consideration as a Thames Valley AFA mobilising policy.

An agreed position has been reached across the three services in relation to categorising premises by low, medium, or high risk. A range of options for amending the mobilising policy have also been developed for consideration by the three services.

Oxfordshire and Royal Berkshire fire and rescue services have already undertaken public consultation around their AFA policy options and have implemented changes to their response as a result. The two Services are now operating an aligned approach, mobilising to all AFA calls involving higher-risk buildings and locations where people sleep, as well as any confirmed fire, or signs of fire, in any building. The Services have both stopped automatically sending a pump in response to AFAs in low and medium-risk buildings.

[Royal Berkshire](#) Fire and Rescue Service went live with its new policy on 20 September 2024, while [Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service](#) went live with its new response on 10 October 2024.

## Classifying Risk

[The Fire Services Act 2004 – Part 2 section 7\(2\)d](#) requires all fire authorities to: “make arrangements for obtaining information needed to help it extinguish fires in its area, and to protect life and property in the event of a fire in its area.”



We undertake a process called a Site Specific Risk Assessment (SSRA) to help us obtain information about non-domestic buildings or sites for firefighting purposes. The information also helps us to strategically plan for a situation where our crews are called to attend the location to deal with an emergency incident.

The SSRA provides us with Site Specific Risk Information (SSRI) which takes the form of an electronic interactive risk card with associated supporting site, and building, plans, and photographs where applicable.

This information helps to support our decision-making process on which buildings in our area we deem to be high, medium, or low risk.

### *High-risk buildings*

Buildings we define as high risk are those that:

- Specifically house vulnerable people, or
- Provide sleeping accommodation for people or,
- Represent a critical community asset that would be locally, nationally, or internationally damaging if lost or seriously damaged by fire, or
- May pose a significant risk to firefighter or community safety or to the safety the environment.

Our high-risk buildings include:

- Private homes/dwellings including residential flats, mobile homes, house boats etc.
- Residential care homes, nursing homes, children's homes.
- Sheltered housing for more vulnerable persons.
- Primary and secondary schools, schools with boarding accommodation, as well as any establishment where people take A-level exams.
- Secure facilities including prisons, young offender institutions and detention centres.
- Hospitals and hospices.
- Hotels.



- High profile heritage buildings such as Waddesdon Manor, Stowe House and Cliveden House.
- Critical community infrastructure such as telecoms and utilities infrastructure, for example pumping stations, substations, telephone exchanges.

#### *Medium-risk buildings:*

Buildings we define as medium risk are those that we view to be important community assets.

Our medium-risk buildings include:

- Police, ambulance stations and fire stations.
- Pre-school education.
- Health centres.
- Local and central government buildings.
- Major transport hubs such as train stations.

#### *Low-risk buildings:*

Buildings we define as low risk are those that do not accommodate people sleeping, and which do not otherwise pose a significant risk to firefighter safety, community safety, or to the safety of animals and the environment.

Our low-risk buildings include:

- Commercial buildings (unless classified as a medium or high risk for another reason).
- Further education buildings.
- Major sporting stadiums.
- Entertainment buildings such as cinemas, theatres, and night clubs.
- Other buildings not classified elsewhere in this table.





## Gathering public opinion

As a public sector organisation, we must consult with our community before implementing any changes to the core service we provide.

To ensure efficient use of financial resource and identify if our community were in support of a review to any adjustment on this type of incident response, we incorporated questions around AFAs and UWFS into the listening and engagement consultation used to help us shape our 2025 – 2030 CRMP.

[Public engagement sessions](#) with a diverse group of residents living across Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes, as well as response to a staff questionnaire, provided valuable insight on public and staff opinion between June and August 2023.

When we asked about how we should respond to AFAs given the large number that turn out to be false alarm activations, public opinion was divided between keeping the existing policy and changing.

In contrast, 83 per cent of our staff who participated in the consultation favoured one of the reduced response options.

We sought views on five possible options for AFA activation response. Each option was listed, and participants asked to rank them in order of preference:

- Option 1: Only attend an AFA if an actual fire is reported or the owner/occupiers of the building cannot be contacted.
- Option 2: Attend all AFAs in high-risk premises and AFAs in lower-risk premises when an actual fire is reported, or the owner/occupier of the building cannot be contacted.
- Option 3: Attend all AFAs in high-risk premises and AFAs in lower-risk premises when an actual fire is reported.
- Option 4: Respond to AFAs at normal road speed (without blue lights and sirens).
- Option 5: Continue to respond to all AFAs as an emergency.

**“Participants were divided on whether BFRS should consider making changes to its AFA procedures. Those who felt it should continue to respond to all AFAs as an emergency (Option 5) considered it too risky to do otherwise, both operationally and reputationally.**

**If the Service does wish to make changes, although there was some support for Option 1 (only attend an AFA if an actual fire is reported or the owner/occupiers of the building cannot be contacted), Option 2 (attend all AFAs in high-risk premises**



**and AFAs in lower-risk premises when an actual fire is reported, or the owner/occupier of the building cannot be contacted) was most favoured.**

**Options 3 (attend all AFAs in high-risk premises and AFAs in lower-risk premises when an actual fire is reported) and 4 (respond to AFAs at normal road speed i.e., on ‘non-blue lights’) received least support.”**

CRMP 2025-2030 Public Engagement Report by Opinion Research Services July 2023

Our next step was to obtain data which would support our decision-making for a long-term proposal on how we respond to AFA activations in the future.

### Gathering data to support our decision making:

In February 2024 [we sought approval from Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Fire Authority to run a six-month pilot](#), during which TVFCS would call-challenge AFA activations in non-domestic buildings, before assigning and mobilising crews to respond.

We offered the Authority five options for the pilot, and provided a recommendation that our preferred option (Option E - based on the public and staff views gathered in the earlier listening and engagement process) was piloted for a six-month period to enable data to be gathered and inform a subsequent proposal for change.

#### Option A:

- Attend automatic fire alarm activations in higher-risk and medium-risk buildings.
- Not attend low-risk buildings between 9am and 6pm unless there is a fire or there are signs of fire.
- Attend automatic fire alarm incidents in low-risk buildings outside of these times unless the building is occupied and there are no signs of fire.

#### Option B:

- Continue to attend automatic fire alarm activations in higher-risk and medium-risk buildings.
- Not attend low-risk buildings 24 hours a day unless there is a fire or there are signs of fire.



#### Option C:

- Continue to attend automatic fire alarm activations in higher-risk buildings.
- Not attend both low and medium-risk buildings between 9am and 6pm only unless there is a fire or there are signs of fire.
- Attend automatic fire alarm incidents in low and medium-risk buildings outside of these times unless the building is occupied and there are no signs of fire. 32% reduction attendance to in false alarms.

#### Option D:

- Continue to attend automatic fire alarm activations in higher-risk buildings.
- Not attend low risk buildings 24 hours a day unless there is a fire or there are signs of fire.
- Not attend medium-risk buildings between 9am and 6pm only unless there is a fire or there are signs of fire.
- Attend automatic fire alarm incidents in medium-risk buildings outside of these times unless the building is occupied and there are no signs of fire.

#### Option E:

- Continue to attend automatic fire alarm activations in higher-risk buildings.
- Not attend automatic fire alarm systems for both low and medium-risk buildings 24 hours a day unless there is a fire or there are signs of fire.

We also considered statistics for each option which had been shared by Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service (OFRS) when undertaking its own review into its response to AFA activations.

#### OFRS statistics:

- Option A) Expected to deliver a 28 per cent reduction in attendance to false alarms.
- Option B) Expected to deliver a 49 per cent reduction in attendance to false alarms.
- Option C) Expected to deliver a 49 per cent reduction in attendance to false alarms.
- Option D) Expected to deliver a 53 per cent reduction in attendance to false alarms.



- Option E) Expected to deliver a 59 per cent reduction in attendance to false alarms.

BMKFA gave its approval, for us to start a review into the Automatic Fire Alarm (AFA) mobilising policy, and for that review to include a six-month pilot trial of one of the options (A to E), with the Chief Fire Officer delegated the authority to decide which option to pilot.

### Our AFA mobilisation during the BFRS pilot

At 9am on 8 July 2024 the BFRS pilot response to AFA activation, based on our recommended option (Option E), went live, and is currently scheduled to run until 8 January 2025.

During the pilot, TVFCS call-challenges all calls in relation to non-domestic AFA activations in Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes.

If the AFA activation involves a high-risk site, or a building that may include a sleeping risk, there are no changes in how we respond. Firefighters continue to respond.

However, if the building occupiers confirm to TVFCS that it is a false alarm/UWFS before our crews arrive, the firefighters will be alerted by TVFCS and “stood down” from incident response. This means that their attendance is no longer required at the scene, and they can return to the duties they were previously undertaking.

This is a change to our previous response, where firefighters would continue their journey and arrive at the building, even if a call had been made to say the AFA was an UWFS.

If the AFA activation involves a low or medium-risk non-domestic site, TVFCS operators have the discretion to mobilise firefighters based on the information provided during the call-challenge process.

Firefighters will only be alerted to respond when a fire has been confirmed, either by a 999 call, or where there are visible signs of a fire at the location.

This is a change to our previous response, where firefighters would be mobilised to the building without any delay.

This pilot aims to reduce the number of times our firefighters respond to unnecessary false alarms, ensuring that our resources are available for life-risk incidents, enhancing the overall safety and efficiency of our operations.



This mobilisation policy also aligns with our neighbouring fire and rescue services in the Thames Valley, and to most UK fire and rescue services.

### Risk management strategy:

- *Risk of firefighters not responding to a fire*

To mitigate this risk, any report of a fire made to TVFCS will receive a fire service response.

- *Risk of delayed mobilisation to a fire in a low or medium risk building:*

We acknowledge that during the pilot there is a low risk that TVFCS will not mobilise an appliance to an AFA activation in a low or medium risk building which subsequently turns out to be a real fire.

This could mean that our crews respond to a fire later than they would have done before the pilot, when our policy was to respond to all AFA activations. Should this situation arise, we will undertake a thorough investigation, gathering all relevant data and information, which will then be fed into our post-pilot findings and reviewed as part of the evaluation. This information will be considered when determining our next steps.

- *Risk of delayed mobilisation to building where people are sleeping:*

Our SSRA process evaluates the risk of a building during firefighting operations. We also have a process to review the level of risk and adjust that level if required.

High risk premises, including all properties with a sleeping risk, continue to receive a response to all AFA activations, without call-challenge by TVFCS.

- *Risk of responding appliance being involved in a collision*

When our pumps respond to emergency situations there is an inherent risk associated with emergency response driving, for firefighters and the public.

During the pilot, we expect that our crews will be required to respond to less AFA activations in low and medium risk buildings.

By reducing the number of times our pumps are required to undertake emergency response driving, we believe the risk for firefighters and the public will be reduced.

- *Risk to the environment*

By reducing the number of times our pumps are required to respond to AFA activations in low and medium risk buildings during the pilot, we anticipate a reduction in the amount of diesel being used by our pumps, a reduction in the emissions produced, and a reduction in wear and tear on our vehicles.



- *Risk of low and medium risk businesses being unaware of changes during pilot*

Our Business Engagement Team have been working to ensure local businesses are aware of the pilot period and are able to feed into the consultation process.

We have also ensured details about the pilot have been published on our website, and used social media, and partnership networks, to help signpost to the pilot information.

### Further consultation:

We are now three months into the pilot and are in a position where we can start to review the early data and what impact our pilot approach to AFA response is having.

We are also inviting members of the public, our business community, staff and partners to view the pilot data, alongside our historical data, to compare the results and provide feedback through [public consultation](#).

All feedback will be reviewed once the public consultation period closes on Monday 2 December 2024 and will be used to help us shape how we respond to AFA activations after the pilot period.

We will continue to collect data throughout the remaining pilot period, and will evaluate it, and the consultation feedback, to determine our next steps, and help us decide whether we will officially adopt the revised AFA policy as a permanent change to our response procedures.

### How to get involved:

We would greatly appreciate it if you could spare some time to complete and return the consultation questionnaire by 11.59pm on Monday 2 December 2024.

Participation is open to anyone aged 16 or over, representatives from businesses, public and voluntary organisations as well as our own staff.

If you have any questions about the survey or you would like the AFA consultation information pack or the questionnaire in a different format, please email us at [cteam@bucksfire.gov.uk](mailto:cteam@bucksfire.gov.uk).

Thank you in advance for your participation and valuable input!

### Online version:

If you are viewing an electronic copy of the AFA consultation information pack you can do this online, simply [click this link](#) to access the questionnaire.

If you are reading a hardcopy version, please follow the 'Hardcopy Version' instructions below.



### Hardcopy version:

If you are reading a hardcopy version of this document and would like to feedback your thoughts, please go to: [www.opinionresearch.co.uk/AFA\\_2024](http://www.opinionresearch.co.uk/AFA_2024)

Hard copies of the AFA consultation questionnaire can be requested by:

**Email:** cteam@bucksfire.gov.uk

**Post:** Communication Team, Buckinghamshire Fire & Rescue Service Headquarters, Stocklake, Aylesbury, HP20 1BD

### Historical data:

The following data has been provided by the BFRS Data Team, in October 2024:

- All incidents recorded in Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes between 1 April 2018 and 31 March 2024:*

	2018 to 2019	2019 to 2020	2020 to 2021	2021 to 2022	2022 to 2023	2023 to 2024		Total
<b>Total Incidents attended in Bucks and MK</b>	7,613	7,198	6,404	6,828	7,567	7,384		42,994
<b>Number of incidents found to be false alarms</b>	3,340	3,317	2,818	2,934	3,175	3,561		19,145
<b>False alarm incidents as a percentage of total incidents attended.</b>	43.9%	46.1%	44.0%	43.0%	42.0%	48.2%		44.5%



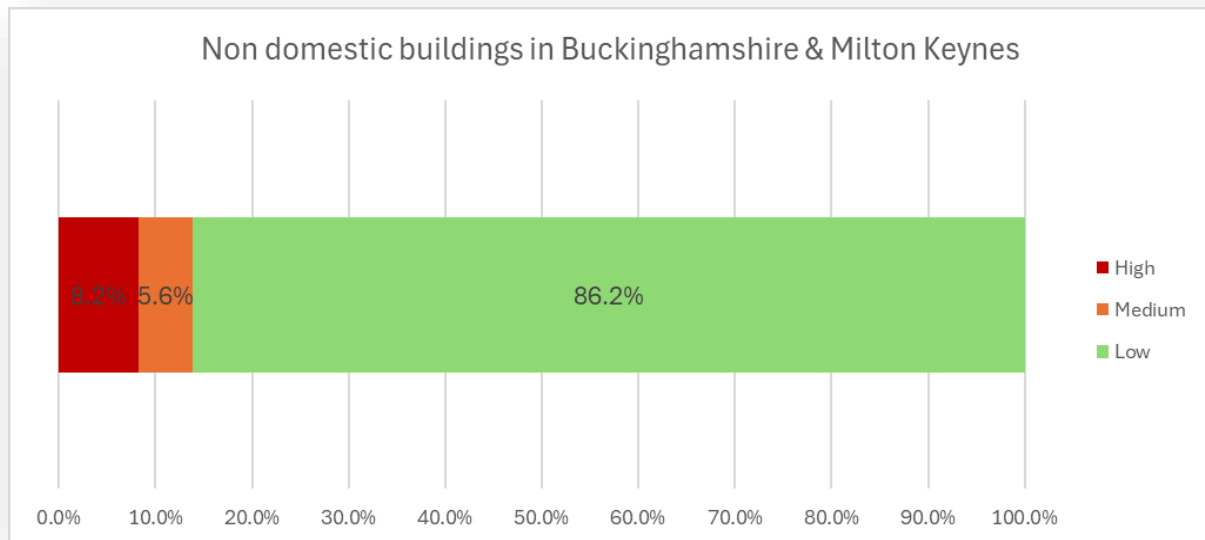




4. Of the 63 fires in medium and low risk non-domestic buildings in Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes, between 1 April 2018 and 31 March 2024, that BFRS were alerted to due to an AFA activation, the following extent of damage was recorded by the attending crews:

Extent of Damage recorded	Number of incidents
Whole building	0
Multiple floors	0
Limited to floor of origin	7
Limited to room of origin	5
External roof only	1
Limited to item 1 <sup>st</sup> ignited	7
Heat and smoke damage only	43

5. Chart showing the percentages of non-domestic buildings in Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes, which fall within our high, medium, and low-risk categories.



This chart shows:

- 8.2 per cent of our non-domestic buildings would fall within our high-risk category.



- 5.6 per cent of our non-domestic buildings would fall within our medium-risk category.
- 86.2 per cent (the largest percentage) of our non-domestic buildings would fall within our low-risk category.

6. *Number of responses to AFA activations in high, medium, and low risk non-domestic buildings, in Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes, by year, and how call challenge in line with BFRS preferred option (Option E) could have impacted.*

	2018 to 2019	2019 to 2020	2020 to 2021	2021 to 2022	2022 to 2023	2023 to 2024	1 April 2018 to 31 March 2024	Total which would have been attended under pilot conditions	Total which would NOT have been attended under pilot conditions	
<b>High-risk non-domestic buildings</b>	507	570	449	437	465	453	2,971	2,971	0	
<b>Medium-risk non-domestic buildings</b>	103	136	99	115	130	151	734	0	734	
<b>Low-risk non-domestic buildings</b>	980	968	860	905	878	998	5,589	0	5,589	
<b>Total</b>	1,590	1,674	1,408	1,457	1,473	1,692	9,294	2,971	6,323	
								Total %	32.0%	68.0%

BFRS incident data for the period 1 April 2018 to 31 March 2023, indicates that 32.0 per cent of AFA activations during that period occurred at buildings within our high-risk classification.

This data also shows that we attended 6,323 AFA activations in non-domestic buildings which would have been call challenged by TVFCS under the preferred option.



## Data gathered 1 April to 30 June 2024:

7. *Number of responses to AFA activations in high, medium, and low risk non-domestic buildings, April to June 2024, in Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes, and how call challenge in line with BFRS preferred option (Option E) could have impacted.*

	April 2024	May 2024	June 2024	Total which would have been attended under pilot conditions	Total which would NOT have been attended under pilot conditions
High-risk	41	49	43	133	0
Medium-risk	19	10	9	0	38
Low-risk	89	78	70	0	237
<b>Total</b>	147	133	121	32.6%	67.4%

## Advantages we expect to see the pilot delivering:

By changing our response to AFA activations in low and medium risk buildings, we expect to see less disruption to day-to-day activities for firefighters.

We expect the pilot to result in less disruption to vital community safety activity such as Home Fire Safety Visits and advising the public on fire safety in the home.

We also expect to see reduced disruption to community engagement sessions, such as drop-in sessions to obtain community safety advice, and events to support and engage armed forces veterans.

We expect our firefighters to experience less disruption as they progress our SSRI programme and consider how buildings will react in firefighting scenarios based on their design and construction, factoring in likelihood and potential severity of a fire, as well as any additional hazards present.

We anticipate less disruption to fire service training activities, which will ensure that our operational staff are able to maintain skills and training with less interruption.

With our fire appliances being asked to respond to fewer AFA activations in low and medium risk building, we anticipate a reduction in fuel costs, in carbon emissions, and mileage leading to less wear and tear on vehicles, ultimately resulting in lower maintenance costs and repair costs.



## Data gathered during the pilot period:

The first three months of pilot data show the following:

### 8. TVFCS mobilisation data to AFA activations in Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes, during the first three months (8 July 2024 to 7 October 2024):

	<b>Month 1</b> (8 July to 7 August)	<b>Month 2</b> (8 August to 7 September)	<b>Month 3</b> (8 September to 7 October)
<b>AFA – no mobilisation (non-domestic)</b>	97	117	113
<b>AFA – cancelled mobilisation (confirmation of no fire prior to arrival)</b>	17	18	28
<b>AFA – no initial mobilisation but fire subsequently confirmed, and firefighters sent to building</b>	1	0	0
<b>AFA – mobilisation (to building believed to be non-domestic)</b>	102	94	115

- Row one (AFA - no mobilisation) shows the number of AFA activations in Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes where TVFCS have not mobilised any pumps to respond.
- Row two (AFA – cancelled mobilisation) shows the number of times TVFCS have “stood pumps down” from incident response after receiving updated information from the building.
- Row three (AFA - no initial mobilisation but fire subsequently confirmed) shows the number of incidents TVFCS did not initially mobilise a pump to but were subsequently found to involve a fire.
- Row four (AFA - mobilisation) - shows the number AFA activations in Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes where TVFCS have mobilised pumps to respond.



9. *Data showing the impact of the pilot on TVFCS call handling and mobilisation in Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes, during the first three months (8 July 2024 to 7 October 2024):*

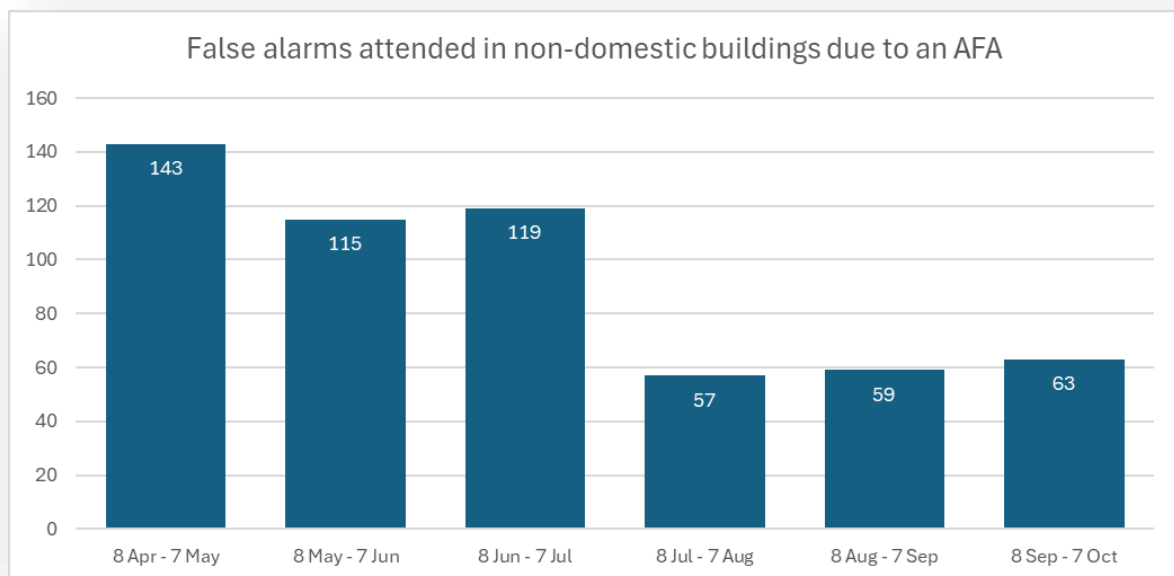
A risk considered before the pilot started was that we would see a negative impact on call handling times by TVFCS as a result of the call challenge process.

The data we have collected so far would indicate that while there is a slight increase in call handling times for AFA activations where a pump is subsequently mobilised to respond, this increase is marginal (less than 10 seconds).

	January 2024	February 2024	March 2024	April 2024	May 2024	June 2024	July 2024	August 2024	September 2024
<b>Call Handling – AFA attended</b>	01:13	01:18	01:11	01:14	01:16	01:04	01:16	01:22	01:23
<b>Call Handling – All Incidents</b>	01:36	01:38	01:38	01:37	01:32	01:33	01:39	01:35	01:46

\*Time is average call handling time, shown in minutes and seconds.

10. *Data showing number of false alarms attended in non-domestic buildings due to an AFA. This information covers the three months leading up to the pilot, and the first three months of the pilot.*



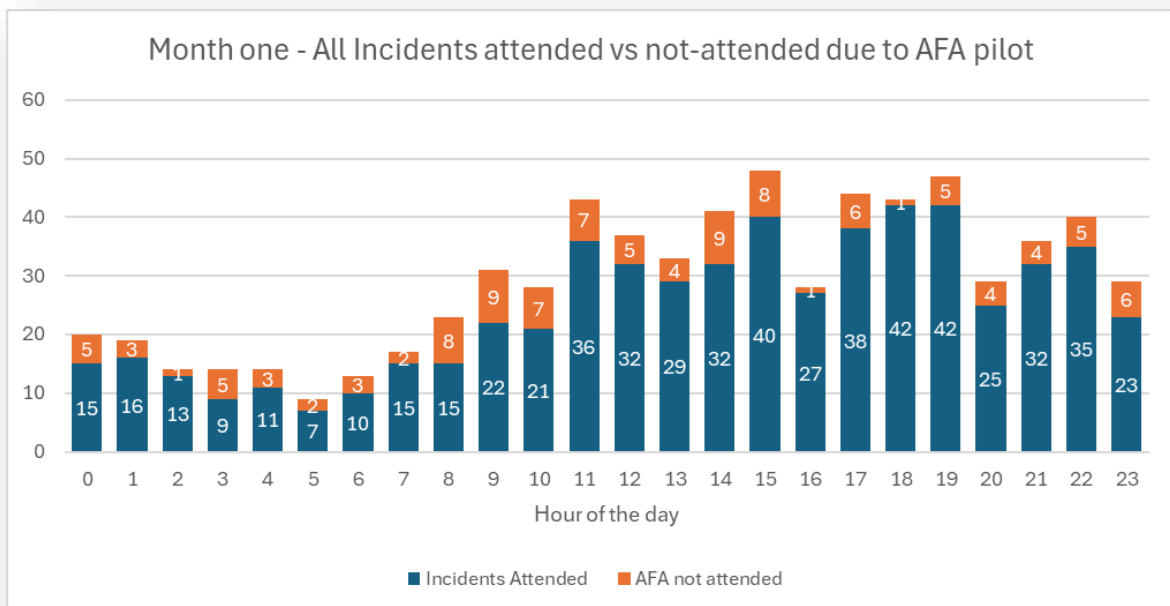


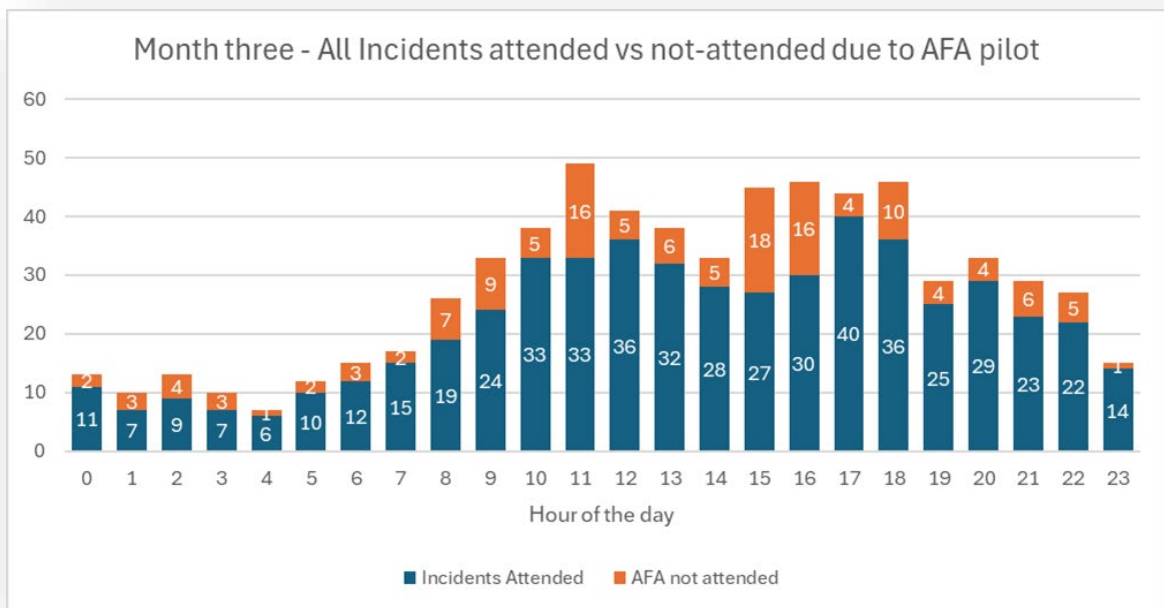
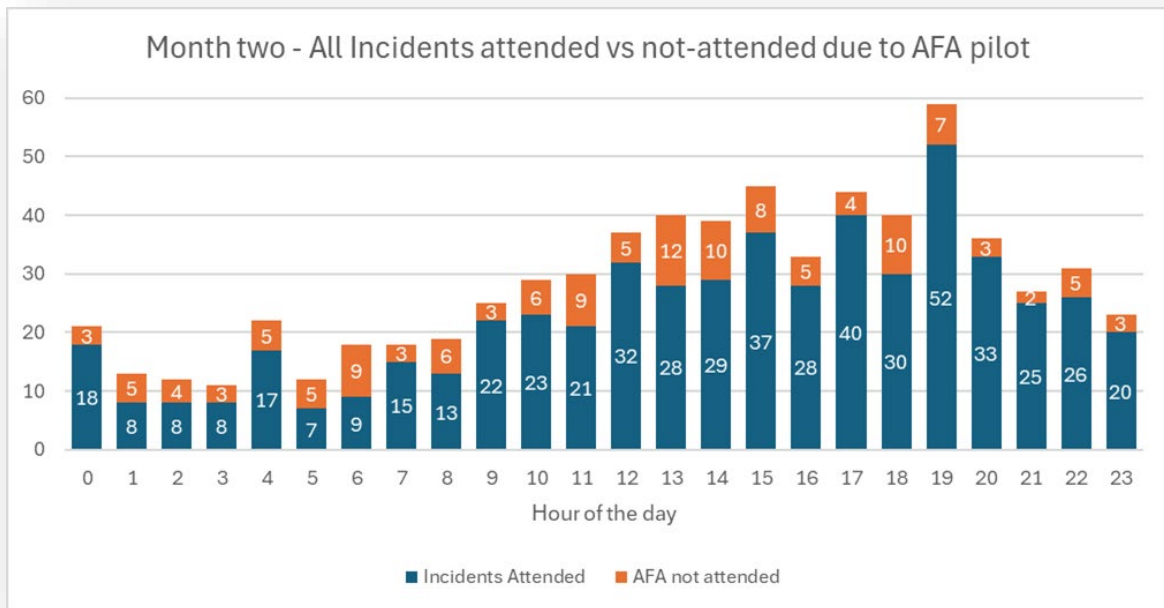
- 143 false alarms were attended in non-domestic buildings due to an AFA between 8 April and 7 May.
- 115 false alarms were attended in non-domestic buildings due to an AFA between 8 May and 7 June.
- 119 false alarms were attended in non-domestic buildings due to an AFA between 8 June and 7 July.

**The pilot started on 8 July.**

- 57 false alarms were attended in non-domestic buildings due to an AFA between 8 July and 7 August.
- 59 false alarms were attended in non-domestic buildings due to an AFA between 8 August and 7 September.
- 63 false alarms were attended in non-domestic buildings due to an AFA between 8 September and 7 October.

11. Data showing the number of AFA activations that were not attended on top of ALL incidents that were attended in Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes during the first three months of the pilot.





## Background links:

- A. [Public Safety Plan 2020-2025](#) – see sections titled:
  - Views from the public – Future Options (page 16)



- The challenges ahead Infrastructure and population - What more do we need to do? (page 23)
  - Risk management Strategy proposals - What we plan to do to mitigate the risks (page 32)
- B. [CRMP 2025 – 2030 listening and engagement consultation outcomes - July 2023](#)  
– for reference to potential AFA review see:
- Page 9
  - Pages 25/26
- C. [Fire safety: guidance for those with legal duties – GOV.UK](#) provides comprehensive information on risk assessment and other crucial topics in line with current fire safety laws for the employer, the owner or someone else who has control of workplaces and common parts of buildings containing two or more domestic premises (ie the designated Responsible Person).
- D. [HMICFRS Inspection report 2023](#) – see the section titled:
- Protecting the public through fire regulation
- E. [Fire Authority Meeting – 14 February 2024](#) – see:
- Item 12: Automatic Fire Alarm (AFA) mobilising policy review
- F. [Fire Authority Annual Meeting - 12 June 2024](#) – see:
- Page 25/27 for the minutes of 14 February 2024 Fire Authority Meeting.
- G. [The Fire Services Act 2004 – Part 2 section 7\(2\)d](#)  
This Act places a responsibility on fire and rescue services to gather information on risks in their areas.
- H. [Regulatory Reform \(Fire Safety\) Order 2005](#)  
The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 – the Fire Safety Order – provides a framework for regulating fire safety in all non-domestic premises including workplaces and the parts of multi-occupied residential buildings used in common in England and Wales.
- I. [Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service AFA mobilising response](#)  
Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service changed its policy on responding to AFA calls on 20 September 2024, following a public consultation.
- K. [Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service AFA mobilising response](#)





Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service changed its policy on responding to AFA calls on 10 October 2024, following a public consultation.

## Glossary:

### **Automatic Fire Alarm (AFA)**

An automatic fire alarm (AFA) is a system which detects environmental changes like smoke or heat, and alerts occupants to evacuate. Some systems also notify an Alarm Receiving Centre (ARC) and activate fire control measures.

### **Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Fire Authority (BMKFA)**

Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Fire Authority is responsible for making decisions on policy, finance, and resources. It is made up of elected Councillors from Buckinghamshire Council and Milton Keynes City Council. The number of Members appointed from each council is proportionate to the number of local government electors in each area.

### **Call Challenge**

During our pilot, if a call is received in Thames Valley Fire Control Service that relates to the activation of an automatic fire alarm, the operator receiving the call will ask questions such as whether there are any signs of fire, if the alarm panel has been checked, or if there could be someone sleeping in the building. This call challenge procedure will help them identify the appropriate mobilisation process (whether firefighting resources are required, and how many) for the incident.

### **Combined Fire Authority (CFA)**

A fire authority made up of Members of multiple councils (for example Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Fire Authority is made up of Councillors from Buckinghamshire Council and Milton Keynes City Council).

### **Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP)**

A Community Risk Management Plan explains how we plan to mitigate identified risks and improve community safety, by aligning available resources with our key objectives and using them in the most effective way.



## **Enforcement**

If there is a failure to comply with any provision of the Fire Safety Order, our inspecting officers can issue an enforcement notice, which is a notification that actions must be taken, within a given timeframe, to remedy the issues that have been identified.

## **His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS)**

An independent body that assesses, in the public interest, the effectiveness, efficiency, and people aspects of police forces and fire and rescue services.

## **Home Fire Safety Visit**

A free service we offer to people who may be at increased risk of, or from, fire.

## **Non-domestic premises**

Building or place of work where people do not sleep, for example factories, shops, restaurants, pubs, public building etc.

## **Public Safety Plan (PSP)**

The previous version of our Community Risk Management Plan. The document which outlines the Service strategy and plan (blueprint) for how we will deliver fire and rescue services over the next five years. Also known as an integrated risk management plan.

## **Responsible Person**

The employer, the owner or someone else who has control of workplaces and common parts of buildings containing two or more domestic premises (ie the designated Responsible Person).

## **Site Specific Risk Assessment (SSRA)**



The process of visiting targeted a building (premises) or site to obtain information for firefighting purposes and strategic planning in the event of attending and dealing with an emergency incident.

### **Site Specific Risk Information (SSRI)**

The outcome of the SSRA process and takes the form of an electronic interactive risk card, associated supporting site and building plans and photographs where applicable.

### **Thames Valley Collaboration Steering Group**

A forum for all emergency services in the Thames Valley region to work together to improve outcomes for the public.

### **Unwanted Fire Signal (UFS)**

An Unwanted Fire Signal (UFS) is an activation of an automatic fire alarm where, upon investigation there is no fire situation. This can be caused by a number of factors for example, dust or contaminants, steam or fumes, poor maintenance, or faulty equipment. Unwanted fire signals can also disrupt the businesses where the alarms activate.