



NORTHAMPTONSHIRE FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

Unwanted Fire Signal (UFS) Reduction policy

SERVICE INFORMATION SYSTEM

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Executive summary	This policy is designed to reduce the impact of UFS generated by automatic fire detection systems on service delivery, business and commerce, and to improve the safety of the communities in Northamptonshire by ensuring that our service is more readily available for genuine emergencies.

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1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this policy is to explain the strategy and processes required to reduce the incidence of UFS generated by automatic fire detection systems, allowing resources to be available for genuine emergencies and community safety initiatives.

A UFS is defined as a signal transmitted by an Automatic Fire Alarm (AFA) system reporting a fire where upon arrival of the fire service it is found that a fire has not occurred.

NFRS have no legal duty to attend premises because the automatic fire detection system has activated.

Under Section 7 of The Fire Services Act 2004 a responsibility is placed on Fire Authorities to make provision for firefighting and not to attend premises to ascertain if a fire exists. This duty lies with the person who has responsibility for the premises.

NFRS employ an incremental approach to UFS reduction, before Pre-Determined Attendances (PDAs) are amended or reduced an analysis of incident data is carried out and a risk assessment undertaken to allocate the appropriate resources to the risk.

Mobilising to calls generated by automatic fire detection systems will be in accordance with policy B1 – Operational Response Mobilising, no specific mobilising detail is contained within this policy.

This policy recognises that key to the effective performance of automatic fire detection and fire alarm systems is the design, installation, commissioning, certification, acceptance and maintenance processes. Third party verification of the fire alarm system by a competent person is strongly recommended and this is fully supported by NFRS.

A UFS policy has been in place within NFRS since 2009 and from that initial implementation the service has seen a reduction of approximately 80% in these types of calls.

2 IMPACT OF UFS

NFRS has no direct control of AFA systems, but by working pro-actively to promote the appropriate management of such systems we aim to reduce the adverse impact caused by UFS.

The impact of UFS on the Service includes:

- Diverting essential services from attending other more serious emergencies (performing rescues and saving lives)
- Increased risk of accidents and collisions as a result of the service responding under emergency conditions
- Demoralising to personnel to repeatedly attend false alarms
- Disruption to the programmed activity of NFRS e.g. community safety activities, including Home Fire Safety Checks (HFSCs)
- Significant financial burden in fuel costs and wear and tear on appliances

The impact of UFS on the community includes:

- Disruption to business (downtime and time wasted, loss of revenue)
- Loss of credibility in the alarm system which may result in occupant complacency leading to inappropriate response in the event of a real fire
- Cost to business from Retained Duty System (RDS) firefighters being released from duty to attend a UFS
- Impact on the environment caused by unnecessary appliance movements, increase in carbon emissions
- Drain on public finances, UFS are a waste of tax payers' money

3 KEY ELEMENTS

In order to reduce the impact of UFS on service delivery and business and commerce and to subsequently improve the safety of the community, NFRS will:

- Respond quickly and effectively to those AFAs where signs of fire are confirmed (this will include an increased PDA in the majority of cases)
- Risk assess, determine and then deploy alternative levels of response to AFAs where signs of fire cannot be confirmed (this may include non-attendance)
- Identify the worst UFS offenders and promote the appropriate management of UFS to the Responsible Person to drive improvements
- Consider the use of statutory powers held within the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 where progress to reduce UFS fail to realise improvements

4 UFS REDUCTION STRATEGY

The strategy for reducing our response to UFS calls is based on the following principles:

- An incremental approach to UFS reduction based on data analysis and risk assessment
- The use of clear protocols for call challenging by fire control staff (in most circumstances the caller will be asked to establish the cause of the activation before fire control mobilize any PDA to the premises)
- Educate and inform the Responsible Person of their duties as detailed in the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005

5 FIRE CONTROL PROCEDURE

5.1 Call challenging

In the majority of cases and in order to ascertain whether or not there is a confirmed fire, fire control will be required to 'call challenge' the potential UFS and mobilise (or not) as appropriate.

However, there will be certain premises that will not be subject to a call challenge, as follows:

5.2 Call challenge – exemptions

Premises with a confirmed sleeping risk, for example:

- Domestic premises
- Houses in Multiple Occupancy (HMO)
- Residential flats

- Sheltered housing
- Residential care and nursing homes
- High rise buildings
- Hospitals **8pm-8am**
- Hotels

On receipt of the call, fire control will ascertain whether or not there is a potential sleeping risk and once this is confirmed then the relevant attendance will be mobilised. See guidance note 3.

5.3 Other potential high risk premises

There are certain premises which have been subject to risk assessment and are predefined as high risk. These premises are deemed by the Service to require a relevant PDA and are exempt from call challenge. As part of the on-going risk profiling undertaken within the county, these premises will initially be identified by the Joint Operations Team (JOT) and the premises details within the mobilising system will be amended to reflect the required attendance (example premises are the BP terminal in Northampton and Scott Bader at Wollaston).

5.4 Call challenge principle

When Fire Control receives a call regarding the actuation of a fire alarm (other than those exceptions detailed above), Fire Control will advise the caller that no response will be made unless signs of fire are confirmed i.e. seen, heard or smelt. It is important that we are clear that we are encouraging them to investigate for signs of fire and not locate the fire itself.

The mobilising flowchart ([appendix A](#)) outlines the procedures for Fire Control when dealing with a possible UFS.

5.5 Calls from an Alarm Receiving Centre (ARC)

On receipt of a report of a fire signal from an ARC, Fire Control will request, where necessary, that the ARC re-contact the premises to establish the cause of the alarm and establish if “signs of fire” can be confirmed. If “signs of fire” cannot be confirmed then no attendance will be made and the call will be recorded as false alarm no attendance made.

If the ARC is unable to contact the premises for verification of cause of alarm, or the ARC deem the premises to be “unoccupied” no response will be made.

If however the ARC is unable to confirm the premises type and Fire Control do not know the premises type, (i.e. potentially it may contain a sleeping risk) then the relevant PDA will be mobilised.

5.6 Calls from the occupier/responsible person

On receipt of a call directly from the premises stating the fire alarm has actuated, Fire Control will request that the cause of the alarm be established and “signs of fire” confirmed. If “signs of fire” are not confirmed then no attendance will be made and the call will be recorded as false alarm no attendance made.

5.7 Calls from passers-by

On receipt of a call directly from a passer by stating that a fire alarm is actuating and with no other source of information, Fire Control will ask the caller to confirm “signs of fire” before mobilising. If signs of fire are confirmed the full PDA will be mobilised. If signs of fire cannot be confirmed then no attendance will be made.

The mobilising flowchart ([appendix A](#)) outlines the procedures for Fire Control when dealing with a possible UFS.

6 OPERATIONAL PROCEDURE

The primary responsibility of crews attending any premises where the fire alarm system has actuated is to establish if the alarm has actuated as a result of a fire.

Whilst crews may need to silence the alarm for their own health and safety; NFRS personnel will **NOT** reset the fire alarm system.

Re-setting the fire alarm system on behalf of the Responsible Person has the following negative consequences:

- It removes the responsibility from the Responsible Person to address the problems with the system. For NFRS to reduce UFS, it is important that the Responsible Person takes ‘ownership’ of their fire alarm system. It renders the Service liable in the event of a future failure of the system during a fire situation
- It hinders the efforts of the alarm engineers to establish the precise nature of a system fault

Note: The manufacturing standard for fire control panels EN54 Part 2 recommends that if a panel is silenced (not reset) then the sounders remain silent until another zone goes into ‘fire’.

Operational personnel will assist the Responsible Person with the investigation into the cause of the alarm as per the attendance flowchart for fire crews ([appendix C](#)). Every effort should be made to ascertain the reason for the activation; this may include talking to persons who were in the area at the time of actuation. Advice can be given on a good will basis only.

All UFS incidents are now recorded on BOSS. Once the cause of the actuation has been established, appropriate advice can be given to the Responsible Person aimed at preventing the circumstances that led to the actuation from happening again in the future. The cause of the actuation **MUST** be included in the stop message, along with the appropriate fire alarm zone, location and any fire service action that was taken.

Operational crews should consider instructing the Responsible Person to take the fire alarm system “off line” if a false alarm has occurred, and use 999 in an emergency until the problem has been satisfactorily corrected. This is the best advice at the **FIRST** occurrence of a false alarm, and is especially important when environmental conditions prevail causing false alarms. Crews should inform Fire Control, the Responsible Person **MUST** ensure that all staff are aware their fire alarm system is “offline” so any fire occurring at the premises **MUST** result in a 999 call being made. If applicable, their ARC should also be made aware that the fire alarm system is “offline”. See guidance note 2.

This 'off line' option should only be considered where the premises have suitable arrangements in place to investigate all fire alarm actuations. If Operational crews are concerned whether this is the case they should always consult the duty Fire Protection Officer (FPO) before making such a request.

Whilst in attendance at the UFS incident, the point of contact could be any one of the persons listed below:

Responsible person: The person with control of the building as defined in article 3 of the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005, the responsible person is required by law under Article 17 of the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 to ensure that the fire alarm system is '**subject to a suitable system of maintenance and is maintained in an efficient state, in efficient order and in good repair**'.

Competent person: The person appointed by the Responsible Person to assist them in the undertaking of the protective and preventative measures – as defined by the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order (Article 18). This person will have knowledge of the alarm system and will be empowered to make changes to the system as and when required.

Available person: Where neither of the above persons are available, any other person who is on site whilst the fire service is in attendance. This may be a key holder, security guard, receptionist or any other person who is able to assist with the fire alarm investigation and is able to ensure that relevant information is passed to the Responsible Person.

Note: For the purposes of this policy this definition for the Responsible Person has been used in all cases. However, this can be taken to mean any of the above and crews should always try to deal with the Responsible Person, if available.

Unoccupied premises

Normally crews will **NOT** be mobilised to unoccupied premises. Where crews attend a premises and find the premises to be unoccupied a key holder should be requested, a full external examination of the premises should be carried out for signs of fire. If the key holder fails to attend after a period of 20 minutes, the Incident Commander (IC), following a dynamic risk assessment and thermal scan of the building using a Thermal Imaging Camera may consider taking no further action and return all appliances to station having sent the appropriate stop message.

7 ENFORCEMENT HIERARCHY

If the level of UFS at specific premises remains unacceptably high, the Fire Protection Team Leader (or person nominated by them) will make arrangements to talk to the Responsible Person in an attempt to identify the cause or trends relating to the high levels of UFS. Dependent on the type of premises, consideration should be given to placing the premises 'off line' for a pre-determined period, thereby allowing the premises to resolve any identified problems and reducing the risk of further UFS.

For guidance only, the UFS triggers for making contact with the Responsible Person are:

- Two or more UFS in any period of four weeks
- Three or more UFS in any period of twenty six weeks
- Larger premises with more complex fire alarm systems and larger numbers of detectors will have their performance monitored by the Fire Protection team leader on a monthly basis

If the response of the Responsible Person is poor and/or levels of UFS remain unacceptably high the premises should be considered for possible enforcement action. This may include a formal action plan or enforcement notice to achieve the UFS reduction. It is likely that a full audit of the premises will be required to ascertain the full fire safety compliance levels within the premises.

8 DUTIES BY ROLE

8.1 Fire Protection Team Leader

- Implement the UFS policy within the team area
- Monitor the number of UFS within the team area on a monthly basis
- Contact premises Responsible Person and implement reduction strategies when UFS levels rise above the guidance given in [section 7](#)
- Allocate UFS work to Protection Team members

8.2 Fire Protection Teams

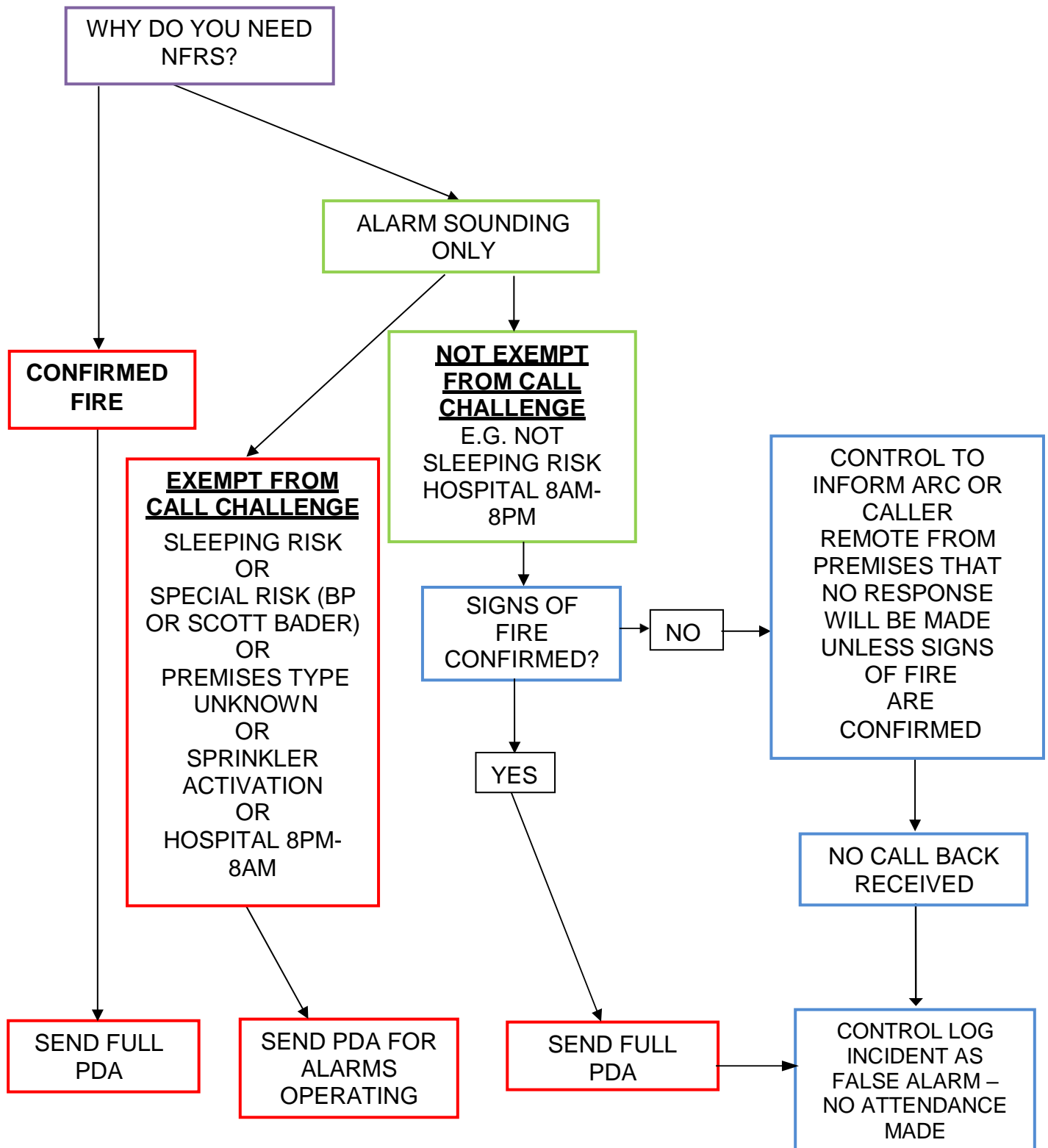
- Support the Fire Protection Team Leader and operational crews to improve UFS levels particularly where a solution of a more technical nature may be required to solve the problem
- Establish premises UFS history prior to a programmed audit, advise on UFS reduction strategies during the audit if applicable
- Provide best practice advice in respect of new building projects and alterations to existing buildings to ensure that the appropriate fire detection system is employed to reduce the incidence of UFS; **UFS advice where appropriate will be included in all building regulation consultations**
- Maintain consistent and proportionate enforcement decisions relating to UFS enforcement
- On all premises visits, FPOs will take the opportunity to discuss the management of the fire alarm system and UFS reduction where appropriate to do so. In multi-occupied premises they will ensure that adequate cooperation and coordination has taken place between the Responsible Person(s) in relation to the management of the fire alarm system.

8.3 Responsible Person

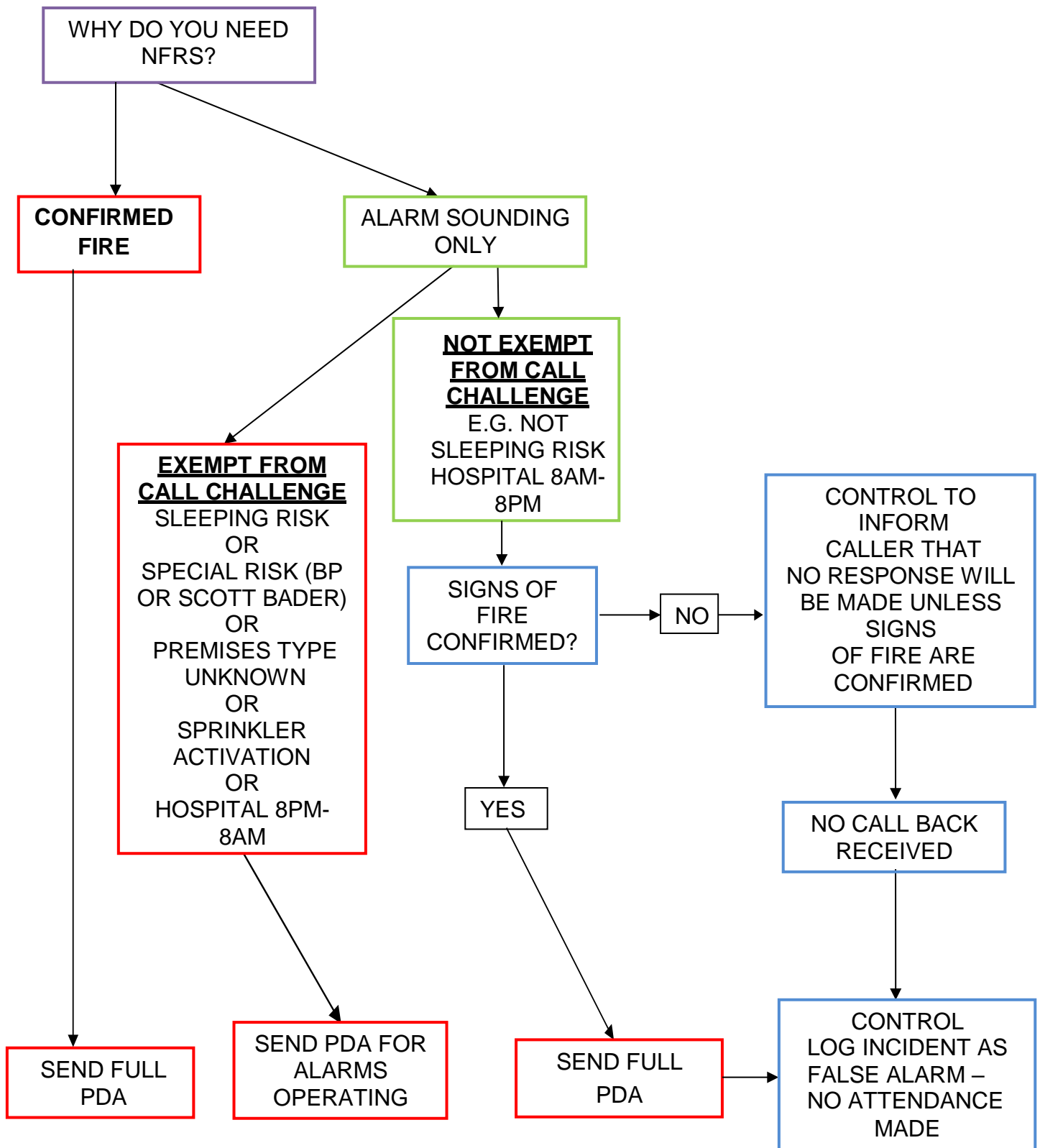
- The Responsible Person is the most important person in the chain of care of the fire alarm system, BS 5839 pt.1:2017 requires that the Responsible Person appoints 'a single named person to supervise all matters pertaining to the fire alarm system'. The Responsible Person can nominate themselves but the principle is that there is someone on the premises who takes ownership of the system, understands its purpose and is responsible for its day to day management.

- Where the fire alarm system is remotely monitored through an ARC we will request that the Responsible Person provide at least two key holders who can attend the premises within 20 minutes
- If the protocols described in BS 5839:2017 are followed, the probability of a UFS occurring is significantly reduced. In particular the Responsible Person for an automatic fire detection system should refer to BS 5839 pt1 section 3 “Limitation of false alarms” for further guidance in UFS reduction

MOBILISING FLOWCHART FOR CALLS RECEIVED FROM AN ARC



MOBILISING FLOWCHART FOR CALLS RECEIVED FROM PREMISES



ATTENDANCE FLOWCHART FOR THE FIRE CREW

