



# AUTOMATIC FIRE ALARM POLICY

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## 1 PURPOSE

This Policy explains the strategy to reduce the incidence of Automatic Fire Alarms (AFA) generated by automatic fire detection and alarm systems from premises within Staffordshire.

To achieve this purpose Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) will monitor the impact of AFA's, make a suitable and informed response to each call received, carry out the relevant interventions and work with owners of premises in order to eradicate Unwanted Fire Signals (UwFS).

SFRS will adopt a policy of responding to all calls to confirmed fires with an attendance determined by the intelligence available to Fire Control at the time of the call.

Upon receipt of a call to a fire alarm actuating, Fire Control will challenge that call (where appropriate) in line with procedures detailed below.

## 2 DEFINITION OF UNWANTED FIRE SIGNALS

Any false alarm that is subsequently passed to the Fire and Rescue Service is defined as an UwFS.

## 3 MEASURES

### Organisational Measures

- Number of calls received that are determined as UwFS to all premises by month of the year

- These UwFS broken down into type of premises and number of calls received to each premises
- Rolling measure of top ten premises
- Effectiveness of arrangements with Alarm Receiving Centres (ARC's). The true savings to the organisation in terms of reduced appliance mobilisations returns en-route, reduction in standby arrangements and over the border costs.

#### **Service Delivery Group Measures**

- Number of calls received by the Service Delivery Group that are determined as UwFS to all premises by month of the year
- These broken down into type of premises and number of calls received to each premises
- Rolling measure of top ten premises and interventions taken
- Number of forms received to reflect the number of UwFS received
- The impact our Fire Safety Officers are having on businesses following an UwFS. Improvement in policies and procedures? Increased efficiencies for businesses (financial or productivity)?

## **4 RESPONSE ARRANGEMENTS**

SFRS will respond to all calls to fires with the appropriate attendance determined by the intelligence gained at the time of the call. With regard to a notification of a fire alarm actuation, Fire Control will challenge that call in line with the procedure detailed below:

#### **Domestic, Residential care premises, Sheltered housing or Hospitals**

- **All Calls** (including from ARC's) from Domestic premises, Sheltered housing, Residential care premises and Hospitals will receive an attendance determined by the intelligence gained at the time of the call

#### **Premises other than Domestic, Residential care premises, Sheltered housing or Hospitals**

- Calls received from ARCs will receive a response determined by the intelligence gained at the time of the call
- If the caller confirms that there is no fire and the alarms are actuating for some other reason, no attendance will be made
- Where the caller is unsure why the alarm has actuated they will be informed that an investigation should take place to determine if there is a fire and a 999 call made to confirm when an attendance will be made

- Where a call turns out to be an UwFS, Service Delivery Group personnel will discuss the way forward with the responsible person in order that no further responses will be made except to confirmed fires.

## 5 CALL CHALLENGING

For all calls received from a premises Control will adopt the “Call Challenging” procedure as detailed in [Appendix 1 Call Challenging Procedure](#).

- Where the caller confirms that a fire is in progress an attendance based on the intelligence gathered for the premises will be mobilised
- Where the caller confirms there is no fire and the cause of the alarm activation is known to be something other than a fire (such as burnt toast, dust from a contractor, aerosol spray, etc.) the caller will be informed that we will not be attending
- Where the caller cannot confirm whether or not a fire has occurred the caller will be informed that a member of staff should investigate the cause of the alarm actuation and a callback via 999 should be made. Until that time no response would be made.

**NOTE:** this point does not apply for Domestic, Residential Care Premises, Sheltered housing, Hospitals.

The Fire Control Supervisor will at all times retain the ability to mobilise resources at their own discretion based on the information available to them at the time.

**Calls Received from Alarm Receiving Centres** (ARCs – also known as Monitoring Stations, Collector Stations, etc).

- No response will be made unless the ARC operator confirms that a fire is actually in progress, due to some additional contact with the premises, or operation of a ‘double-knock’, heat detector activation, coincidence alarm or a suppression system.

**NOTE:** this point does not apply for Domestic, Residential Care Premises, Sheltered housing, Hospitals

These incidents, where there is no definitive confirmation of a fire occurring, are referred to as calls to ‘alarms operating’.

### Returning en-route

As part of the call challenge procedure, if Fire Control are informed from the premises that the incident is an UwFS they will notify any responding appliances and return them en-route. There is no need for the appliance to continue to the premises to gather information. However, an UwFS form must be completed and forwarded to the relevant Service Delivery Group.

## 5 INTERVENTIONS

The first stage of the prevention of an UwFS is that work carried out during the **planning and**

## design stage.

Service Delivery Groups should ensure that the appropriate guidance and advice is provided within the design and planning stage, this will reduce the potential for future system failures. This policy seeks to ensure that, through both statutory consultations and informal advice, the relevant stakeholders incorporate these considerations into the system design.

All Fire Safety Officers will ensure that relevant technical guidance is provided to the appropriate individuals responsible for all new building projects and alterations to existing buildings.

Advice on how to manage automatic fire alarm systems will be specifically added to the information utilised by Fire Safety Officers and will be incorporated within any responses made in respect to the Building Regulations consultation process.

## Effective Local Management

Each individual premises should have an emergency fire action plan, which includes the actions to be taken on activation of their alarm system or when a fire is discovered. This plan must form part of the fire risk assessment under the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 for the premises and must ensure the safety of persons carrying out such checks.

All premises should identify a person responsible for the fire warning system and should ensure that the system is adequately tested and maintained in accordance with British Standard 5839.

## 7 ACTIONS BY EMERGENCY RESPONSE CREWS

Appliances mobilised to either confirmed fires or calls to 'alarms operating' will respond under normal emergency response conditions. On arrival at the premises the Incident Commander will investigate whether a fire has occurred and take appropriate firefighting actions as required. If a fire is in progress and additional appliances are required a **"Fire in Progress" message should be sent with the appropriate "Assistance Message"** (if required) i.e. *"Assistance Message at incident 1234, fire in progress, make pumps 3 for BA"* or *"Fire in progress, no further appliances required at this time"* to initiate the appropriate response upon the intelligence gained.

If no fire has occurred the call will be classed as an UwFS and an investigation into the cause **will be undertaken for all premises**.

SFRS personnel may silence the alarms on a system, but **under NO circumstances** will SFRS personnel reset alarm systems.

## 8 INVESTIGATION PROCESS

Operational personnel should investigate the cause of the alarm to determine the cause and what actions should be taken to prevent a re-occurrence of the alarm.

A responsible person should be identified within the premises (if no responsible person available and property / premises empty, please see section 9 of this policy) and should be involved in the investigation into the cause of the alarm operation or call to SFRS. This person should be informed of

the results of the investigation and informed that they should take the necessary actions to rectify the situation and prevent further unwanted activations of their alarm system.

The Incident Commander should ensure all reasonable measures are taken to prevent a re-occurrence of the unwanted fire signal.

Personnel should discuss ways that false alarms could be prevented such as closing doors, opening windows, operating extractor fans whilst cooking, moving toasters, etc. but, they should never discuss or recommend any changes to the fire alarm system unless they are qualified to do so. All such issues should be referred to the relevant Technical Fire Safety Officer.

The responsible person should be advised to contact their alarm maintenance contractor to assist in investigating the cause of the UwFS if appropriate. If appropriate the responsible person should be advised that the premises should remain on "999" only until the attendance of the Alarm Engineer.

Ensure the responsible person/occupier is aware that the system may be inoperative and it is their responsibility to ensure the fire safety of the premises and occupants.

Make an entry in the premises Fire Alarm System log book.

As part of the investigation the Unwanted Fire Signal Investigation Form will be **completed with as much detail as possible**, to include details of the Responsible Person, and forwarded to Service Delivery Group. This form **must be completed for all premises** even if a responsible person cannot be identified.

## **9 UNOCCUPIED PREMISES**

Where the premises are unoccupied make an early request for the attendance of a key holder. If a key holder does not attend within 20 minutes, the Incident Commander may close the incident following a dynamic risk assessment. Consideration should be given to accessing responsible person details via the SSRI for the premises (if available).

Where more than one appliance is in attendance, the Incident Commander should consider making appliances available.

## **10 INSPECT PREMISES EXTERNALLY**

As part of the dynamic risk assessment the Incident Commander should consider the following areas.

- Can the entire premises be observed?
- Are the premises secured?
- Where possible identify:
  - Location of Indicator panel
  - Zone where alarm is operating.

Other considerations:

- History of alarms at the premises
- Use of CCTV security systems to view premises

- Use of TIC for external thermal scanning.

Where it is suspected that a fire could be developing unobserved, make a forced entry. Inform Control of tactical mode.

## **11 FORCED ENTRY**

Consider:

- Entry points that give access to the entire premises
- Minimal damage to property – break glass not timber, cut chains not locks
- Premises security.

Where boarding up will be required make an early request to Control, see Staffnet - [Unsecured Premises - Boarding and Glazing](#)

### **IF IN DOUBT, INVESTIGATE FURTHER**

See Staffnet - [Unsecured Premises - Boarding and Glazing](#)

## **12 ROLE OF THE SERVICE DELIVERY GROUP**

Once a premises has generated an UwFS the responsible person at the premises should be contacted to discuss their alarm system and procedures.

The responsible person should be informed that suitable procedures should be instigated to ensure that on activation of the alarm system an investigation is undertaken to ascertain the reason why the alarm has operated and to make a 999 call to SFRS.

For all premises other than Domestic, Residential Care premises, Sheltered housing or Hospitals, a professional judgement should be made of the risk in the premises and appropriate procedures and timescales agreed (minimum 28 days) to ensure that SFRS do not respond to any further calls to the premises apart from confirmed fires.

The information gained from calls to UwFS at a Domestic premise should be passed onto the relevant Prevent teams so that it can be followed up by the relevant intervention dependent upon intelligence gained.

### **Role of the Fire Safety Officer**

The responsible Fire Safety Officer should assist premises that generate UwFS to identify ways to reduce such occurrences. This may include:

- Changes to arrangements and procedures in the premises
- Closing of doors, use of extractors, etc.
- Changes to the alarm and detection system
- Taking the system “off line” when the premises are occupied

- Time delays on the alarm system
- Maintenance of the alarm system
- Duties of the Responsible Person
- Availability of key holders.

Premises should be informed that they should introduce procedures to investigate the cause of any activation of their alarm system so that an early 999 call can be made to either confirm a fire is in progress, and initiate a full PDA response, or, if a response has already been made so it can be returned en-route in the event of a false alarm.

The Fire Safety Officer should instigate a fire safety audit if appropriate, and if necessary, use the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 to advise or enforce any improvements required to either the system or management arrangements to prevent unwanted fire signals.

### **Role of the Manager Responsible for UwFS**

The Manager responsible for UwFS will review the UwFS in their area and ensure that suitable arrangements are put in place to deal with those premises where UwFS occur.

### **Business Support Team**

The Business Support Team will include training on fire warning and detection systems in its packages of training courses offered to business, with specific emphasis on reducing and avoiding false alarms and investigating alarm activations.

The Business Support Team will also assist Delivery groups and Fire Safety Officers to support businesses to reduce UwFS. Support may be provided to specific premises as required to support training of personnel to investigate the cause of alarm activations prior to calling the FRS.

## **13 EXCEPTIONS**

The standard response to all calls of “alarms operating” will be based on the intelligence gained at the time of the call.

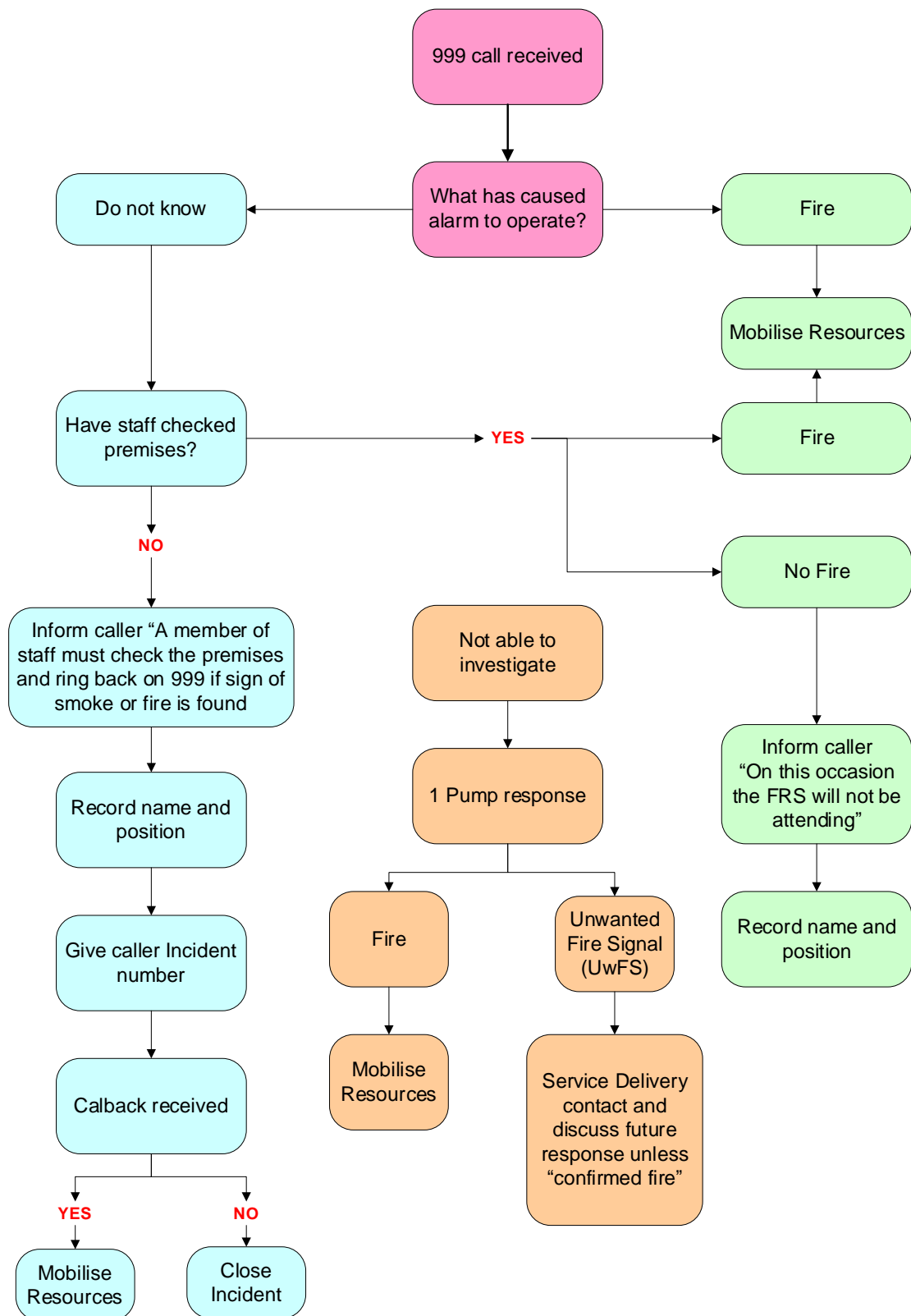
If premises contain such risks that they require more than the standard response of one pump the Delivery Group will determine the appropriate response for these premises and inform Fire Control so that the Command and Control system can be amended accordingly. Any such enhancements should be justified. The necessary action will then be taken with these premises in order to improve the procedures or fire safety arrangements such that an enhanced attendance can be reduced once no longer necessary.

## **14 PERFORMANCE MONITORING AND EVALUATION**

Service Delivery groups are responsible for the effective implementation of this Automatic Fire Alarm Policy and will also be responsible for monitoring and taking the appropriate action for any premises that trigger UwFS.

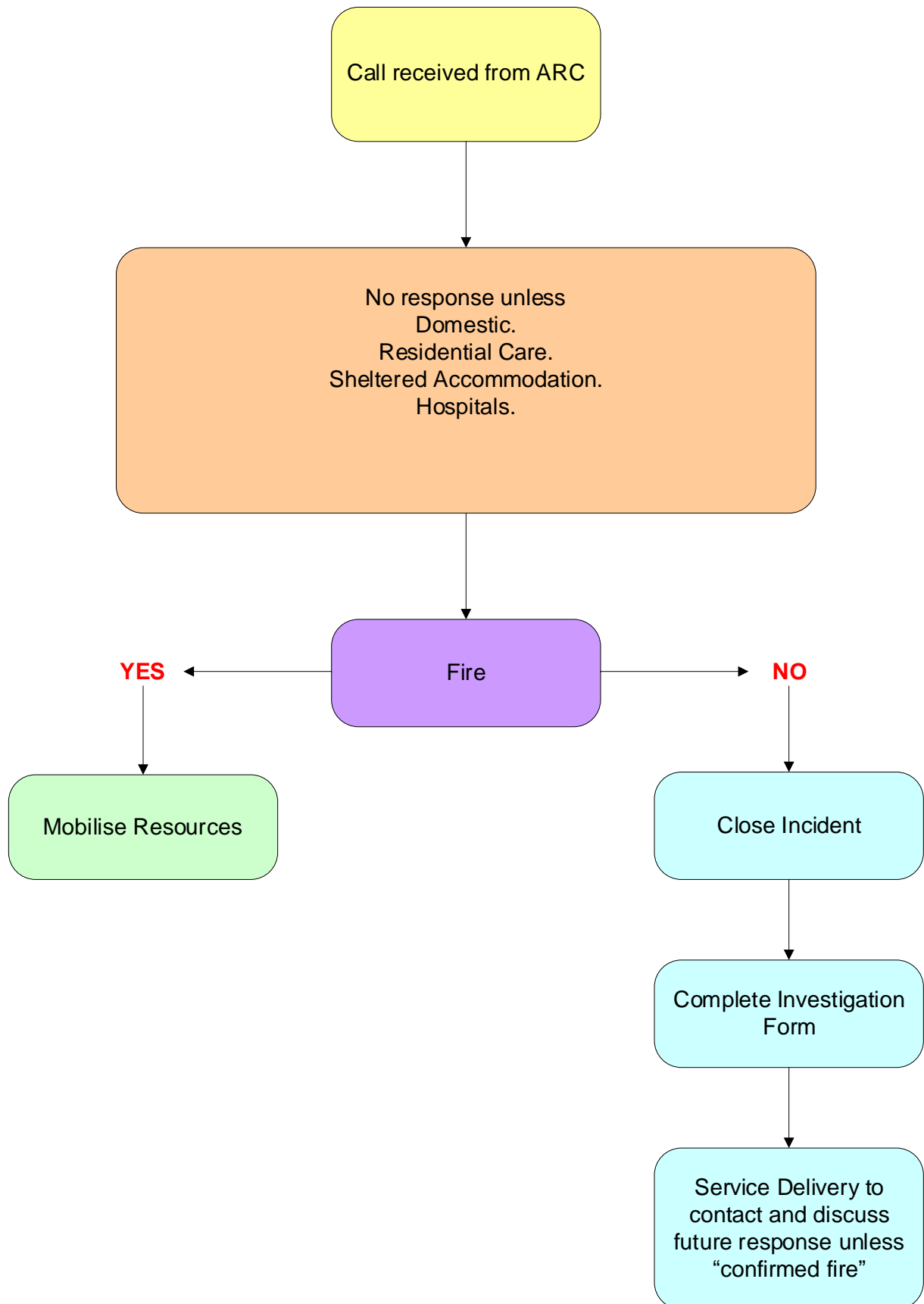
## APPENDIX 1 CALL CHALLENGING PROCEDURE

### CALL RECEIVED VIA "999" SYSTEM FROM OCCUPIER





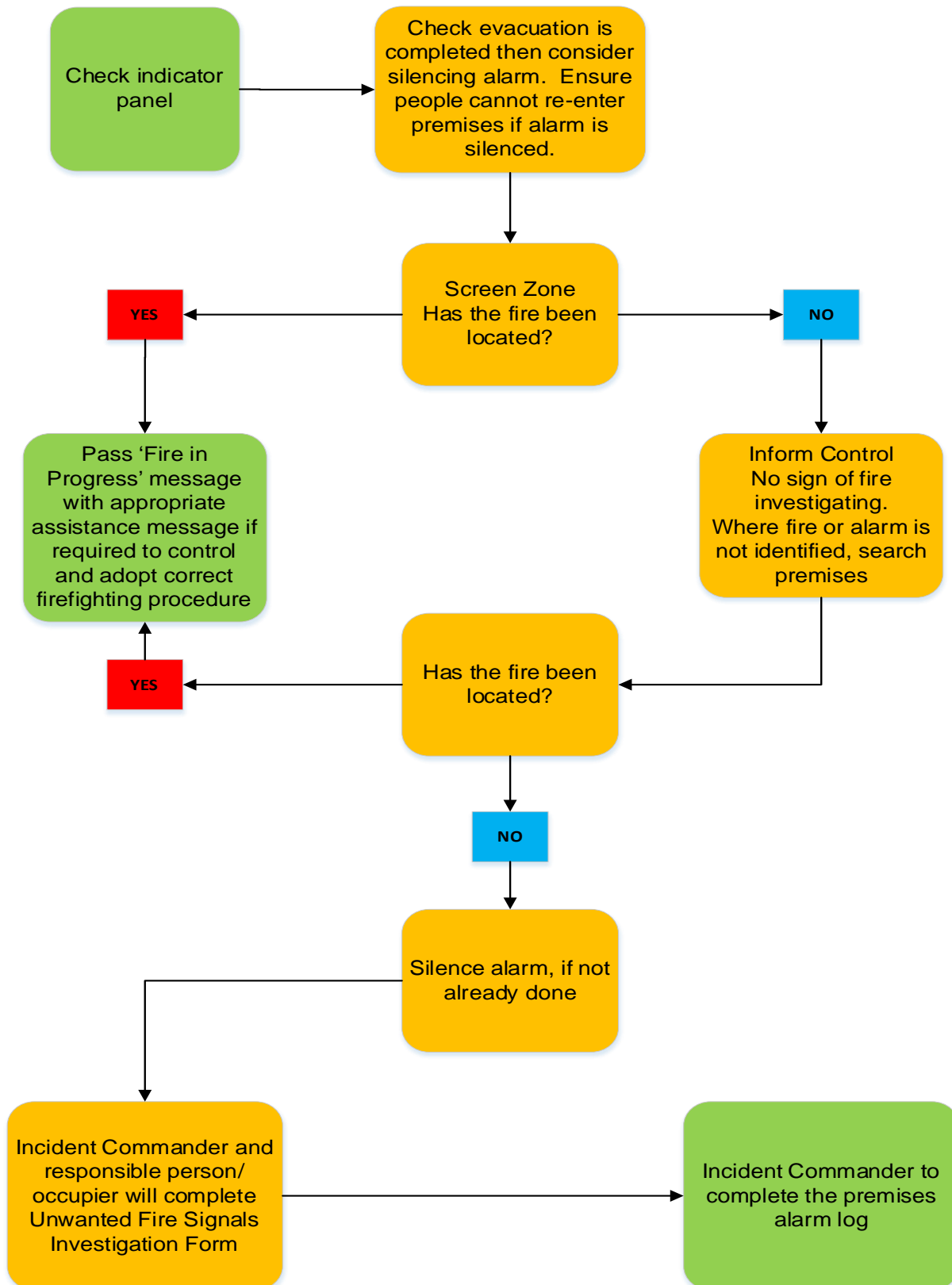
## APPENDIX 2 CALL RECEIVED FROM ALARM RECEIVING CENTRE OR AUTO-DIALLER



## APPENDIX 3 OPERATIONAL PROCEDURES

The actuation of calls from automatic fire alarm systems **must** be investigated on all occasions that crews are mobilised.

### Service Policy is NOT to re-set alarm systems



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