Hampshire Fire and Rescue Authority

Performance Review and Scrutiny Committee **Item 9**

16 April 2013

Preventable Incidents

Report of the Chief Officer

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1 Summary

1.1 This paper provides a progress report relating to our 'preventable incidents' strategy. It highlights our performance in reducing and driving down the number of calls to preventable incidents. These include three key areas of focus and activity (automatic fire alarms (AFAs), lift incidents, and acetylene incidents).

1.2 The report sets out our performance in recent years for these types of incidents, and identifies successes by way of a maintained downward trend and the completion of our ambitions laid out in the corporate objectives set within recent service plans.

1.3 Whilst we have had clear success in these areas over recent years we need to recognise the law of diminishing returns and maintain momentum in these key areas to ensure future reductions. We have therefore placed the future guardianship of these activities and risk reduction responsibilities within our Business Fire Safety department.

2 Recommendation

2.1 That the Committee support the progress made and note the achievement of our corporate objectives relating to 'preventable incidents'.

3 Introduction and background

3.1 The preventable incidents strategy was first conceived within our Integrated Risk Management Plan 2006 to 2009 to reduce automatic fire alarms due to the volume of resources being used on these types of calls. A specialist AFA reduction team was established within the then Business Education Unit. Their remit was to reduce unwanted fire signals from fire detection systems. Guidance was issued by the Chief Fire Officers Association (CFOA) in 2008 which Hampshire helped to shape. Two more projects were formed aimed at reducing non emergency lift incidents, due to the large number of calls, and reducing incidents involving Acetylene, due to the high impact of such incidents. These were formulated in the corporate objectives in the Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service plan 2008 to 2011.

4 Automatic fire alarms (AFA)

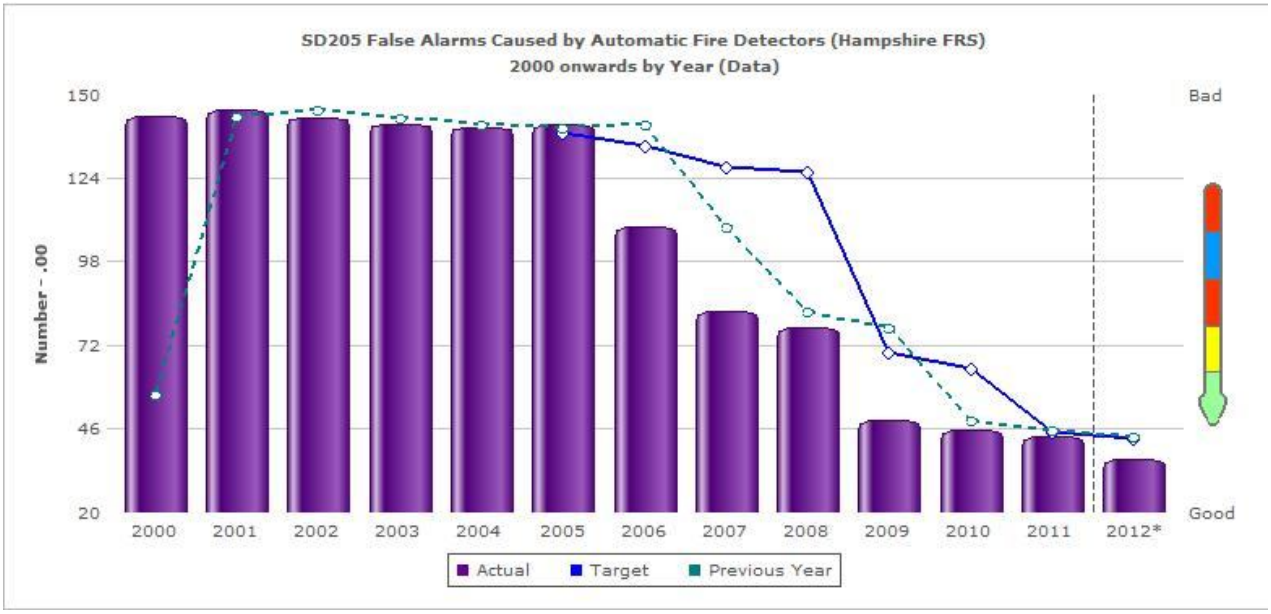
4.1 The corporate objective within our Integrated Risk Management Plan 2006 to 2009 stated:

"We will take a phased approach to the reduction of false alarm calls, currently in excess of 6,500 a year, which are generated by automatic fire alarm equipment. We will firstly focus on working with the business community and when there is still no reduction, we will investigate alternative methods of responding. The impact of these calls is a significant risk because they divert our frontline resources from being available to respond to real emergencies".

4.2 We established systems and triggers that identified the highest callers and methodically visited their premises. Through providing guidance and supporting them with new procedures we sought to reduce the risk within business premises, which also helped to reduce the impact of business downtime due to the unwanted AFA. We also used our enforcement powers where this approach failed to see an improvement.

4.3 Since 2005 we have significantly reduced our automatic fire alarm incidents by 68%.

4.4 The graph below shows the figure for the number of false alarms caused by automatic fire detectors in non domestic properties per 1,000 non domestic properties between April 2000 to March 2011, with the main reduction from 2006.



4.5 The figures demonstrate a slowing in the reduction of automatic fire alarms, as Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service have worked with all the "main offenders" to reduce their incidents, leaving most premises in Hampshire within the tolerable limit of false alarms to number of detector ratio, described in the British Standard. The downward trend will continue with the ongoing work of the Business Fire Safety team.

4.6 Looking to future developments and continuous improvement in this area, national trials are currently being undertaken in specified locations (within which Hampshire will be contributing) whereby technological advancements in smoke/heat detection and fire alarm systems will greatly reduce the likelihood of an unwanted fire signal raising the alarm. This type of system has the potential of virtually eradicating a false alarm where they are installed.

5 Non-emergency lift incidents

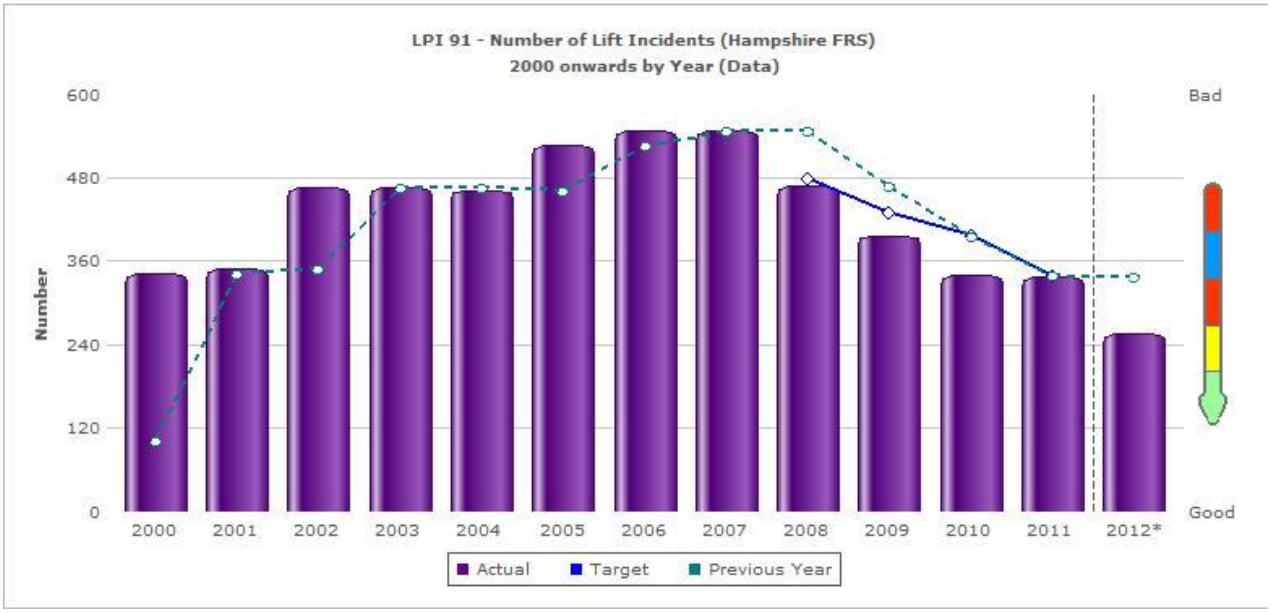
5.1 Objective 01 within the Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service Plan 2008 to 2011 - Reducing preventable incidents, stated:

"We will focus our resources on the reduction and impact of the number of preventable incidents to which we currently respond. This includes incidents when people are stuck inside defective lifts.

From April 2008, we will work with building occupiers and owners to reduce these calls by 25% by March 2011."

5.2 The Business Education Unit developed a trigger mechanism to identify those experiencing the highest number of calls, and by educating and supporting them, were able to improve their own procedures and reduce calls significantly.

5.3 The graph below shows a reduction from a peak of 549 in the year 2007, to 338 for the year 2011. This is a 39% reduction.



5.4 The figures highlight a downward trend demonstrating the continual success of the policy. This will continue with the ongoing work of the Business Fire Safety team.

6 Fires involving Acetylene cylinders

6.1 Objective 01 within the Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service plan 2008 to 2011 - Reducing preventable incidents also stated:

"We will focus our resources on the reduction and impact of the number of preventable incidents to which we currently respond. This includes incidents involving acetylene cylinders. Acetylene cylinders are highly dangerous and when involved in fire these incidents cause widespread disruption to business and local communities that could undoubtedly be avoided.

We will encourage businesses and industry to use alternatives to acetylene cylinders for cutting and welding. We will reduce the number of high impact fires involving acetylene cylinders to zero by 2011."

6.2 The definition of 'High Impact' was determined to be an incident within 200 metres of:

- Railway lines
- Airports
- Main arterial roads
- Hospitals
- Schools, or
- High density housing;

And where Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service instigate their full acetylene operational procedures hence enforcing a 200m evacuation zone for 24 hours. This is one which has a major effect on the local economy, business community, the general public, or the main transport networks.

Our performance against the target of achieving a very ambitious 'zero' for high impact acetylene incidents by 2011 was missed by just one as we unfortunately had one incident in 2011.

6.3 To achieve this performance we utilised our operational resources and Business Fire Safety staff to identify premises where Acetylene was being used within their processes. We developed a programme to visit those premises within the high impact areas to encourage the removal of the cylinders or use alternatives which are less hazardous.

6.4 Since 2010 we have identified 458 premises using acetylene and managed the removal of 136 Acetylene cylinders from these businesses. This reduced the likelihood of an incident in high impact areas with these premises no longer having the risk inherent within the buildings. We have also assisted other premises who need to keep Acetylene within their processes to implement a removal strategy in the event of emergency so that the cylinder is not in the building when we arrive.

6.5 The introduction of a new acetylene operational response procedure has also led to a reduction in the duration and disruption of incidents. This procedure uses risk assessment to determine the likelihood of detonation and in most circumstances, where the fire is controlled; the evacuation zone can be reduced significantly, hence greatly reducing the likelihood of major disruption to the economy, businesses, and the local community.

6.6 Our Business Fire Safety team continue to monitor and manage our risk reduction activity with Acetylene cylinders.

7 Supporting our corporate aims and objectives

7.1 The strategy for preventable incidents was to target our resources on the reduction and impact of the number of preventable incidents to which we respond. This has resulted in a significant reduction in all preventable incidents.

8 Risk analysis

8.1 To continue to observe the successful outcomes of the strategy, Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service will need to monitor preventable incidents. This work is now business as usual within our Business Fire Safety team.

9 Impact Assessment

9.1 An impact assessment relating to people, environment, and economic factors has been produced with no significant impacts recorded.

10 Resource implications

10.1 The preventable incidents work has been absorbed into the established Business Fire Safety team. There are therefore no additional resource implications.

11 Conclusion

11.1 We have had significant success in reducing 'preventable incidents' over recent years and there is a largely continuing downward trend which we should celebrate. We do, however, recognise the law of diminishing returns and the need to ensure that we maintain momentum in reducing risk to our communities.

11.2 We will therefore continue to focus on these key areas of work and monitor our progress accordingly moving forwards and this important work is now embedded within the working practices and procedures of the Business Fire Safety teams across the county.

11.3 In terms of organisational learning from this it is clear that, for specific areas of focus for community risk reduction, investing in a dedicated team reaps rewards as they specifically focus on a narrow area of the business and establish effective working protocols before mainstreaming the work within the appropriate departments.

11.4 In terms of the future we are currently re-designing our overarching risk model which will enable us to ensure that we focus clearly on those most at risk in the future across a wide range of risk criteria (life risk, firefighter safety, heritage, economic loss, environmental etc) and that we match our resources to those risks accordingly. We will also seek opportunities from technological advancements that assist us in reducing risk to our communities and staff.

12 Background papers

12.1 The following documents disclose the facts or matters on which this report, or an important part of it, is based and has been relied upon to a material extent in the preparation of the report:

Acetylene Evaluation Report.doc
Performance indicators within Scorecard performance management system and our 'flight deck'. (Data extracted March 2013)

Note: The list excludes: (1) published works; and (2) documents that disclose exempt or confidential information defined in the Act.