







Protection Strategy

2024-2028



Contents

 Introduction	4
 Fire Safety Audits	6
 Ops Fire Safety Checks	7
 Unwanted Fire Signals (UwFS)	8
 Building Regulations	9
 Licensing	10
 Fire Investigation	11

Avon Fire & Rescue Service is committed to ensuring our documents are accessible to all members of the community. If you have difficulty reading this document because English is not your first language and you would like a translation, please contact:

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Introduction

This protection strategy aims to give clarity and direction on how Avon Fire and Rescue Service (AF&RS) will deliver our protection services. Protection is a legal responsibility and is an integral part of keeping our communities safe in our commercial and public buildings. This strategy provides details of how we will deliver our protection activities across Bristol, Bath and North East Somerset, South Gloucestershire and North Somerset. Our protection department will lead and coordinate our activities utilising our specialist fire safety inspectors, operational firefighters and through our partnerships and collaborative work with blue light partners, local authorities and other agencies.

In discharging our statutory responsibilities under the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 (FSO) and the more recent Fire Safety Act 2021 and the Building Safety Act 2022, we will work with our partners and duty holders. We will work in line with the Regulators Code, however if required we will use our enforcement powers to make premises safe. This helps to protect people, property, and the environment by preventing fires from occurring and limiting the effects when they do.

Our Risk-Based Inspection Programme (RBIP) ensures that our protection activities prioritise those premises where people are most at risk from fire. To increase capacity, our wholetime firefighters carry out Ops fire safety checks on lower risk buildings. Our dedicated protection staff focus on premises that are more complex and deemed a higher risk. This makes the most appropriate use of resources we have available, enabling us to ensure we allocate resources according to risk.

The Service has the power to investigate fires to determine the origin, cause and the development of fire. The impacts of fire can be devastating in terms of property loss and disruption to families and business. Sadly a few fires lead to injury and fatalities. As a Service we continue to invest and develop our staff to investigate fires and share learning with other departments and external partners to assist in the prevention of future fires. This strategy provides details of how we will do this over the next four years.



The Service continues to work with partners to reduce the number of Unwanted Fire Signals (UwFS) that are generated from premises protected by automatic fire detection and fire alarm (AFA) systems. Due to the work carried out in 2021/22, the Service only attended 37 percent of automatic fire alarm calls which is much lower than the national rate of 64 percent. However, we recognise we can do more, and this strategy details our work over the next four years.

The Service is committed to its protection work through our overarching Service Plan. This plan details how the Service aims to manage and reduce fire risks by preventing fires and other emergencies from happening in the first place and protecting the community in its buildings. This strategy provides a summary of how we plan to meet these challenges and risks and how we will prioritise our work within the protection department.

We aim to demonstrate inclusivity by recognising the diversity of our community and providing equality of access to protection activities. We will work with our Diversity, Inclusion, Cohesion and Equality (DICE) team and alongside our diverse community groups to create a culture of collaboration and trust to protect those most vulnerable.



Fire Safety Audits



AF&RS staff has a dedicated Business Fire Safety (BFS) department within service delivery that conduct fire safety audits. A fire safety audit is an examination of the premises and relevant documents to ascertain how the premises are being managed with regards to fire safety. Protection staff conduct fire safety audits on business premises to ensure they comply with the requirements of the FSO. We provide advice and support to duty holders and work in accordance with the regulators code.

Our inspections are targeted based on our RBIP. The RBIP utilises several data sources to generate a risk rating which defines the level of risk for the premises. Our dedicated protection staff carry out fire safety audits on the premises deemed the very highest and highest risk. The premises include High Rise Residential Buildings (HRRB), hospitals, care homes and other commercial premises.

Fire safety audits are also carried out when our intelligence tells us that certain premises are at a greater risk. We will conduct audits after the fire and following complaints as well as carrying out thematic inspections to provide advice and support. In addition to our work to support compliance, we work with our partners across the four unitary areas to reduce the risk for vulnerable residents by taking a coordinated approach to ensuring that accommodation in regulated premises is safe from fire. We have two Primary Authority partners where audits are carried out and advice given.

Our work is undertaken by qualified staff. All staff work towards achieving competency aligned to the National Fire Chief Council (NFCC) Competency Framework for Fire Regulators. Protection is an area that requires a specific and complex skill set and our communities rightfully expect a high standard of knowledge and expertise in a wide range of protection matters throughout our organisation. We will ensure our staff are trained to the highest standards and we will carry out quality assurance to maintain these high standards.

Where appropriate, BFS staff will share risk information following the audit with our operational crews and Service Control. This will ensure that appropriate tactical response plans can be devised and risk critical information about the premises can be available at scene to help support the safe resolution of any incident.

Operational Fire Safety Checks



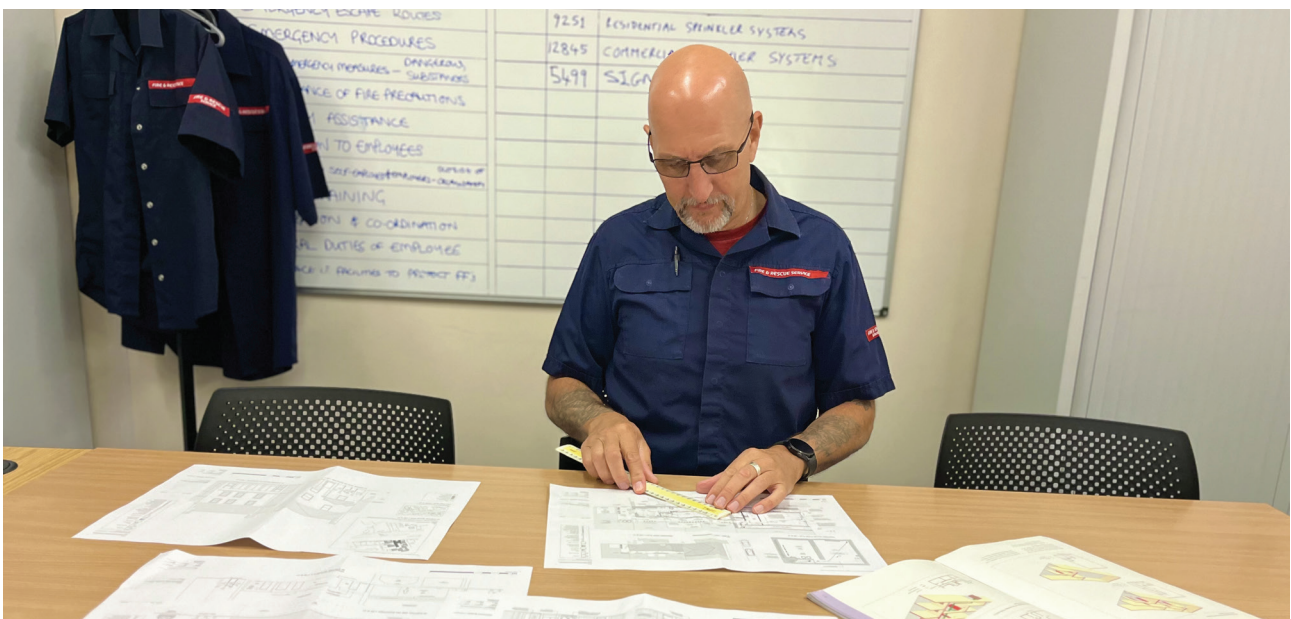
As an enforcing authority, we undertake a range of activities to support businesses and to help ensure they remain safe and compliant with their duties under the FSO. An operational fire safety check is just one activity aimed at promoting fire safety and assisting businesses to remain compliant. The aim of the Operational fire safety check is to help and support businesses in ensuring that they comply with the legal responsibilities under the FSO.

Operational fire safety checks are carried out at small premises with a simple layout such as small shops, offices or industrial units with non-complex means of escape. The check is informal and operational crews can provide advice and guidance. Where further advice is needed, or serious concerns are raised, operational crews will refer to the specialist BFS team.

Over the next four years we will continue to provide appropriate fire safety training to all operational staff. We will continue with our face-to-face operational fire safety training and produce training aids, guidance documents and videos to support their development. We will also continue to allocate Level 2 training to all Watch and Crew Managers in line with the NFCC Competency Framework for Fire Regulators.

Operational fire safety checks also provide the opportunity for operational crews to check on tactical response plans and ensure information is updated which can be shared and used when responding to an operational incident.

We will continue to monitor the effectiveness of the checks and provide appropriate quality assurance of our staff to ensure we are providing appropriate and correct advice to duty holders and occupants of premises.



Unwanted Fire Signals (UwFS)



Over many years, AF&RS have been working with partners to reduce the number of Unwanted Fire Signals (UwFS) that are generated from premises protected by automatic fire detection and fire alarm (AFA) systems. This work has seen a significant reduction and in 2021/22 the service only attended 37 percent of automatic fire alarm calls, which is much lower than the national rate of 64 percent. However, we recognise we can do more and have given ourselves actions within our Service Plan to reduce this further. We acknowledge the impact false alarms have on the Service, business and the economy.

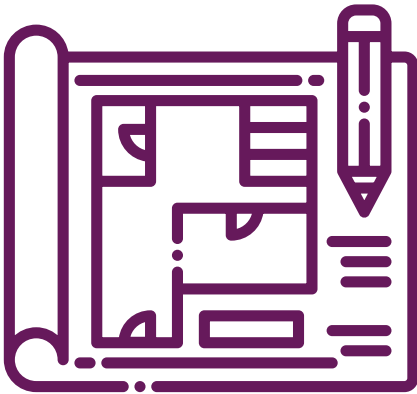
We will work with partners and responsible duty holders to provide advice and support about how to reduce the number of false alarms. We will use our operational crews to provide education and advice to duty holders and occupants following attendance at a false alarm. Operational crews will also use this time to carry out a small fire safety inspection of the affected areas and rectify any minor deficiencies. If further support is needed, advice can be sought from our specialist team.

We will design and produce new educational materials which can be shared with responsible persons and occupants. We will also provide further materials and education to our operational crews to assist them in their interactions with duty holders and occupiers at commercial premises.

Our BFS team will develop and maintain a recording system to monitor the number of false alarms received. Where we see a consistent number of false alarms at a premises, one of our specialist fire safety inspectors from our BFS team will visit the premises to provide further advice and support to the duty holders and occupants.

The NFCC provides guidance and protocols. We recognise that we need to consider new response strategies to AFA systems to reduce the overall cost of such calls and to meet the requirements of our locally determined Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP). The service will continue to engage with local and national working groups to ensure approaches remain aligned to risk and we are consistent in our approach. Local station plans will support proactive interventions to reduce UwFS.

Building Regulations



AF&RS is a statutory consultee at the building control stage of development. This means that building control bodies are required to consult with the fire and rescue service when an application is made for building control approval. This enables the Service to try and raise the standards of fire safety where development or refurbishment is being carried out. The Service will continue to influence the safe design of new buildings by responding to consultations from building control bodies in accordance with national guidance and, where appropriate, contribute our expertise at the design stage. Our specialist fire safety inspectors will work

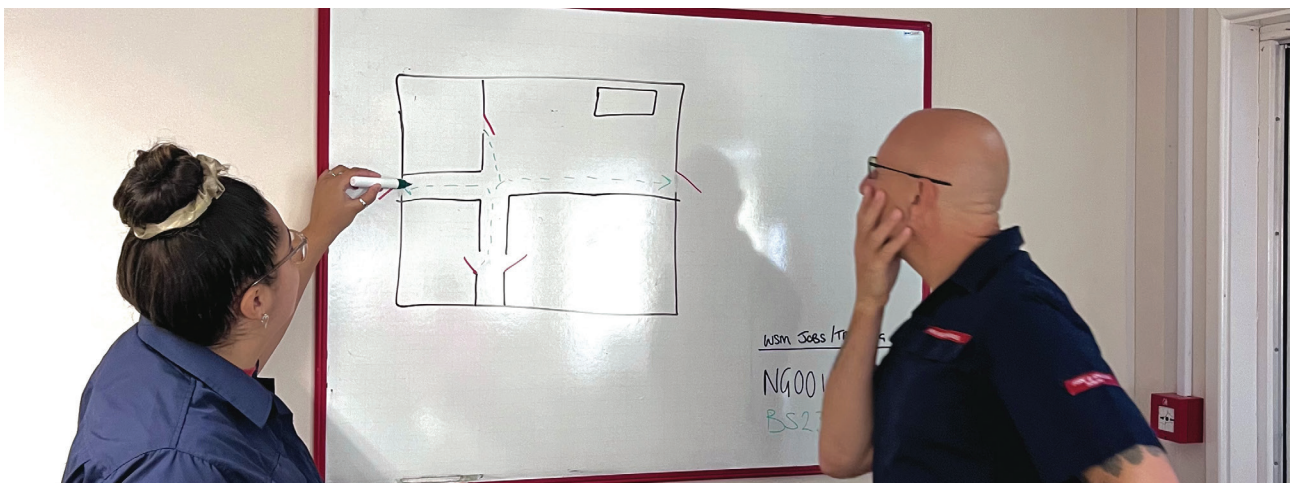
alongside partners to ensure every opportunity is taken to inform future building design and ensure appropriate safety measures are put in place.

Our responses will ensure we promote compliance with the FSO and limit the need for future regulatory intervention in new buildings. We will ensure that our specialist staff are trained to complete appropriate submissions and provide correct advice. Our staff will be trained to comply with the requirements of the NFCC Competency Framework for Fire Regulators.

As a Service we are not a statutory consultee at the planning stage for new buildings, meaning there is no obligation on us to respond to consultations we receive where developers are seeking planning permission. However, we recognise the importance of early interventions to ensure we maximise the opportunity to support the development of a safer built environment. Where appropriate we will comment on planning applications for HRRB and larger developments.

We will continue to share new planning applications and building regulations submissions with our operational crews. Details will be shared so that operational staff can complete a 72d inspection of the premises to ensure our firefighters have a suitable tactical response plan in place and ensure they are familiar with the premises and any associated risks.

Where risks are identified protection staff will share this information with crews and with Service Control, so they have up to date information on building hazards and evacuation strategies, particularly if it is a HRRB which is in interim measures.



Licensing



AF&RS is a statutory consultee under the licensing Act 2003. On receipt of an application, we have 28 days to respond. We will check the premises application and where necessary carry out a fire safety audit of the premises. Our specialist BFS team will provide representation where necessary to the issuing authority if we have concerns about the application.

We will continue to work as part of the joined-up approach with local authority and blue light partners in ensuring premises that require a licence are safe. We will actively engage in inspections

both pre-planned and during performance inspections to ensure licensing conditions are being adhered to. Where such conditions are being breached consideration will be given to taking enforcement action under the FSO.

We will share intelligence with our operational crews regarding licensed premises and those that due to size and numbers in occupation present a greater risk. This sharing of information will allow for tactical response plans to be formulated.

We will continue to be active partners in the safety advisory groups across the four unitary authorities. We will ensure that local station managers are included in the planning of temporary events and provide sufficient support and advice for event tactical plans to be produced and published. When relevant, operational staff will be utilised alongside specialist BFS staff to carry out inspections and to check for access and egress.

Over the next four years, we will provide guidance and training to our operational crews so they have a better understanding of the risks posed by licensed premises. This work will also support local operational crews gathering a richer picture of the risk profile of their station grounds.

Fire Investigation



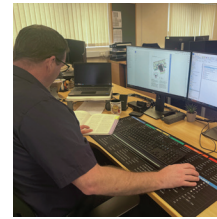
AF&RS will continue to carry out investigations to establish the fire's origin and its cause at every incident it attends. Accurate fire origin and cause determination is fundamental to focusing our community fire safety resources on appropriate preventative measures and campaigns. The Service conducts fire investigations at Tiers one to two as part of its powers and is developing a recognised level of competence for all the investigators which will ensure that fire investigations are conducted both professionally and at a high standard.

Tier one fire scene investigations can be defined as a routine fire investigation and are usually undertaken to provide information for the national Incident Recording System (IRS). In most cases that will be fire & rescue service incident commanders, normally at crew or watch manager level. Personnel undertaking these fire scene investigations currently receive a level of fire investigation awareness training which enables them to accurately complete the IRS. Over the next four years we will continue to support the development of our incident commanders by continuing their online level one training.

Tier two investigations are defined as complex fire and/or explosion incidents where the origin and cause are not easily established. Non-suspicious or non-crime related scene investigations may be carried out solely by FRS investigators. Those more complex and those involving injury and or fatality will be a multi-agency investigation.

We will continue to ensure that our flexi duty officers and specialist fire investigation project team carrying out Tier 2 investigations are trained and competent to a level equivalent to meet all of the Skills for Justice Level 5 Certificate in Fire Investigation assessment criteria and be working to the standards prescribed within the 'Code of Practice for Fire Investigators within the Criminal Justice System in the UK'.

Our fire investigation officers will also support the post-fire audit process which will seek to support business owners who have had a fire and where appropriate, work with our dedicated protection staff to ensure compliance with the Fire Safety Order. AF&RS has committed to working towards achieving ISO-17020 accreditation to ensure we can continue to support and participate in multi-agency investigations led by the police.



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