

**HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL  
COMMUNITY INFORMATION AND PROTECTION  
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE  
TUESDAY 12 MARCH 2002 at 10.30AM**

**Agenda Item No.**

**2**

**HER MAJESTY'S INSPECTORATE OF FIRE SERVICES INSPECTION  
REPORT 2001 - UPDATE ON UNWANTED CALLS**

*Report of the Chief Fire Officer*

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**1. Purpose of report**

This report is presented in response to the October 2001 Select Committee's request for an update on work to remedy the poor performance in the area of unwanted fire calls.

**2. Summary**

- 2.1 Data within the report and on two appendices informs members of the Scrutiny Committee of the progress being made by the Hertfordshire Fire & Rescue Service in reducing the number of unwanted calls it receives, with particular emphasis on calls emanating from automatic systems.
- 2.2 Although it is only six months since the last report, some positive progress has been made.
- 2.3 Members' attention is drawn to the fact that the data upon which Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI) formed his opinion dated from 1998. As such progress from that time is analysed.
- 2.4 Overall the Service has improved when measured against the Best Value Performance Indicator (BVPI). This improvement is in all areas measured, i.e. within peer group, against all brigades and in number of calls.

### **3. Conclusion**

The Scrutiny Committee are asked to note that the Fire and Rescue Service has improved its performance since the time of the October report to Select Committee. End of year estimates are positive with a predicted 6.25% reduction in Automatic Fire Alarm calls. Sustaining improvement is a long term project which may require policy changes.

Members are invited to consider whether or not they wish to undertake further scrutiny of this issue or refer the matter to the Fire Service Panel.

## **1. Background**

- 1.1 During their inspection in February 2001, the Fire Service Inspectorate was concerned at the level of unwanted fire calls arising from Automatic Fire Detection Systems within Hertfordshire.
- 1.2 The Fire Service Inspectorate themselves published a thematic report in March 2001 on reducing false alarms. Such calls are a nuisance for businesses and the Fire Service as they cause disruption to the normal activities of business and cause a drain on Fire Service resources. False alarms generated by automatic systems can also prejudice the safety of a building's occupants, who may react incorrectly when the system responds to a real fire if historically they have experienced a number of false alarms.
- 1.3 A reduction in the number of false alarms will also reduce the occasions that Fire Service vehicles are on the road under 'blue light' conditions. This will impact on the health and safety of both members of the public and Fire Service personnel.
- 1.4 The HMI Report was brought to the Select Committee at their meeting in October 2001. Members registered concern at the comment that despite achieving a 10% reduction in such calls since 1996/97, "The Service performance is however, poor when compared to that of other authorities, and is among the worst in the country". Members asked for a further report in six months to provide evidence of improvement.

## **2. Work Undertaken**

- 2.1 A report making recommendations was put before the Fire Service Management Board; it identified a number of initiatives that could be introduced which may reduce the number of unwanted calls received. Some of the changes made have resulted in improvement. This is reflected in the graph at Appendix 1 which shows that since 1998 Hertfordshire Fire & Rescue Service has moved up three places (15<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup>) against its peer group BVPI comparators. This measure is significant as the Inspector's commitments were based upon data from 1998.

In the same time frame, Hertfordshire Fire & Rescue Service has improved by eight places (45<sup>th</sup> to 37<sup>th</sup>) when measured against all Brigades data.

- 2.2 Work over the last six months is starting to have an effect and it is anticipated that the current year will end with a further reduction in calls of some 6% against the figures for the previous year (Appendix 2).
- 2.3 Good progress has been made with a number of 'regular offenders' who are visited and advised of some Best Practice options to prevent calls. Call information is

being monitored and shared across the Service by the Performance and Audit Department.

- 2.4 Two Officers have been tasked to identify Best Practice in other Brigades, which can be adopted in Hertfordshire to reduce unwanted calls. Early work has shown that there are an increasing number of false alarms being generated due to the increasing number of domestic alarm systems that are being installed. Such systems in houses are often linked to burglar alarms and careful monitoring is currently underway.
- 2.5 To ensure the Service tackles all areas of unwanted calls, a Policy document is currently being written which enables Control Operators to challenge people making a 999 call where it is thought that the call is being made maliciously. Although the Inspector's report was complimentary about the statistics for hoax calls, the Service continues to develop policies in this area of performance.

### **3. Financial Implications**

There are no financial implications arising from this report.

#### *Background Papers used by the author when compiling this report*

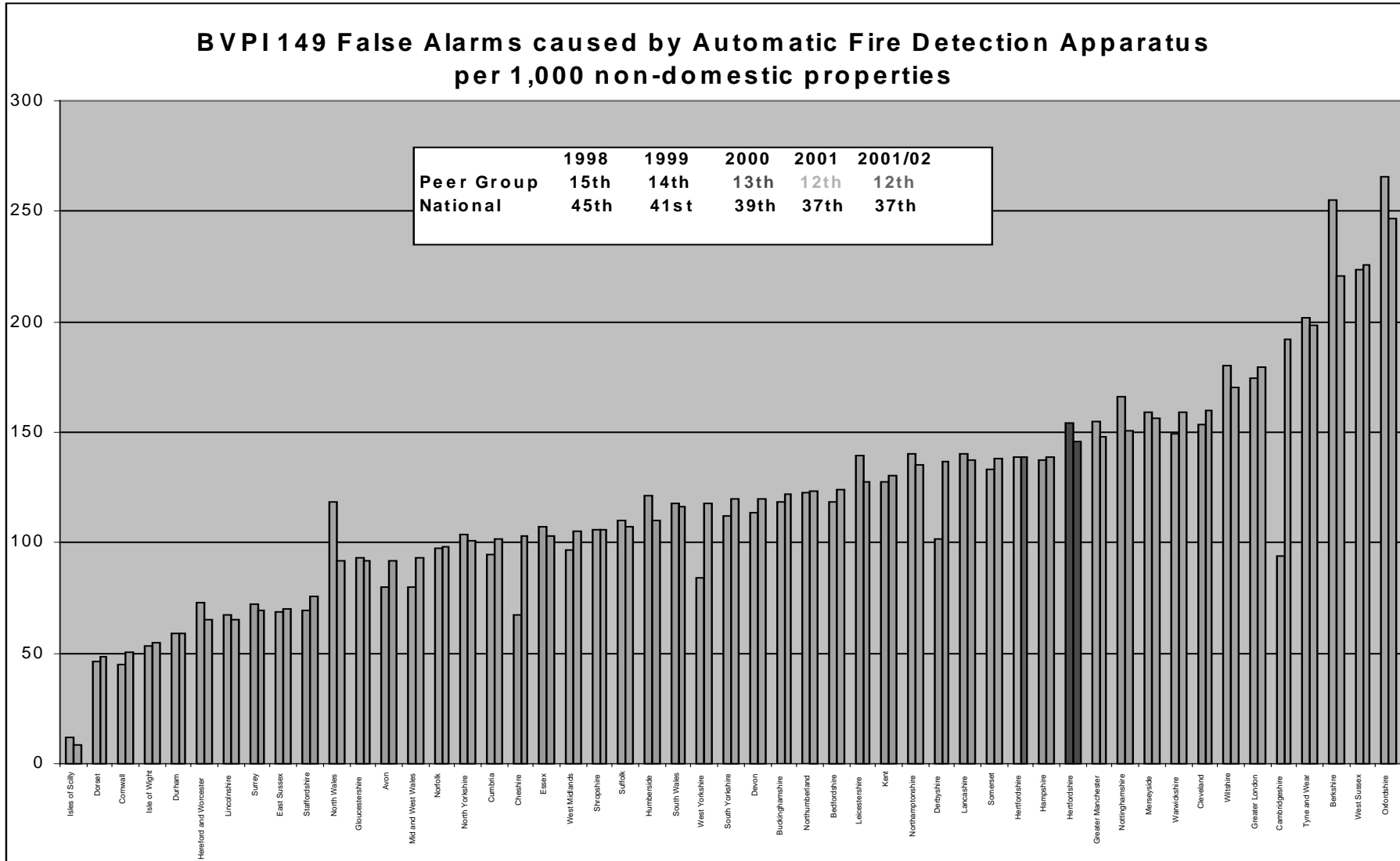
Report to Community Information and Protection Select Committee 30 October 2001 item 8.

Report of Her Majesty's Inspector HMI A R Currie – Hertfordshire Fire and Rescue Service – 14-15 February 2001

Report of Best Value and Other Performance Indicators Home Office 2001

Fire Statistics United Kingdom 2000 DTLR February 2002.

APPENDIX 1



APPENDIX 2

