

**HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL  
COMMUNITY INFORMATION AND PROTECTION  
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE  
TUESDAY 11 JUNE 2002 AT 10.30 a.m.**

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

*Report of the Chief Fire Officer*

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**1. Purpose of Report**

This report responds to the March, 2002 Community Information and Protection Scrutiny Committee's request for an update of work within the Brigade on the strategies for tackling hoax calls.

**2. Summary**

- 2.1 The report informs members of the Scrutiny Committee of the progress being made by Hertfordshire Fire and Rescue Service in developing strategies for tackling hoax calls.
- 2.2 Although it is only three months since the last report some positive progress has been made in developing these strategies. However, it is evident that further work is still required.
- 2.3 The Service have broken down the figures for hoax calls between 1 April 2001 and 31 March 2002 into three areas – calls received from mobile phones, calls received from kiosks and other calls. They are attached as Appendix 1.
- 2.4 Overall the Service are looking to reduce the number of hoax calls received. Policies currently being developed and the detailed in the report should seek to assist in achieving that reduction.

**3. Conclusion**

The Scrutiny Committee is asked to note the strategies being produced to reduce the number of hoax calls within the Fire and Rescue Service. Members are invited to consider whether or not they wish to undertake further scrutiny of this issue, once these strategies have been introduced. Any suggested policy changes would be referred to the Cabinet Fire Service Panel for consideration.

## **1. Background**

- 1.1. A report was presented to the Community Information and Protection Scrutiny Committee on Tuesday 12 March 2002, which followed on from Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Fire Services Inspection in 2001 and a request for an update on unwanted fire calls.
- 1.2. Within that report reference was made to the need for the Service to tackle all areas of unwanted calls, not just those from automatic fire detection systems.
- 1.3. Members asked for a report to be submitted containing further information about strategies in place or proposed for tackling hoax calls.

## **2. Work Undertaken**

### 2.1 Hoax Calls from Kiosks

The Service has been working in conjunction with BT on a project known as The BT Challenge. This was where the worst offending kiosks were identified by BT and actions were taken to reduce the calls. We continue to support this project with the assistance of BT.

### 2.2 Hoax Callers General

Guidance is currently being drawn up of the actions to be implemented within the Command and Control Centre when they are dealing with a suspected hoax caller. This will be written with specific and detailed guidance on how to deal with young offenders. Officers within Command and Control are currently working with colleagues from Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service to develop that policy with a view to implementation at the earliest opportunity.

### 2.3 Hoax Calls from Mobile Phones

We recently introduced the text back message to hoax mobile phone callers following its successful introduction by West Midlands Fire Service. If a malicious call is received from a mobile phone a standard message is text back to the caller stating that if such a call is received again the matter will be passed to the mobile phone provider via the Police and their line would be disconnected.

### 2.4 Procedure for Dealing with Confirmed Hoax Callers

Currently it is a criminal offence to make malicious calls to any of the emergency services. A policy is currently being prepared on advice to operational personnel, with specific and detailed guidance on how to deal with confirmed hoax callers, in particular, children. There are a number of avenues open to the Service, from our own "Fire Setters" programme to criminal action which would be undertaken by our colleagues in the Police.

- 2.5 The issue of schools education continues to be included in our programme for Crucial Crew and Safe Havens in particular. It is of course covered in detail in our "Fire Setters programme" where appropriate.

### 2.6 Raising the Profile of Hoax Calls

Although there is a need to educate the public on the problems associated with hoax calls, the Service must continue to remain cautious in how they undertake that role. Previous facts suggest that when such a campaign is

initially launched in a local area to raise the profile of hoax calls, it unfortunately results in an increase in calls.

- 2.7 The Service continues to monitor best practice as demonstrated by other brigades and, as appropriate, will amend or add new procedures to deal with these issues.

### **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 Scrutiny Committee – 12 March 2002

Report to Service Management Board – 30 January 2002

Best Value Review of Unwanted Calls Report to Chief Officers Advisory Group – 30 September 2001

**Community Information and Protection Scrutiny Committee  
Report on Unwanted Calls - June 2002**

**DELIBERATE FALSE ALARM (HOAX)  
CALLS  
1ST APRIL 2001 - 31ST MARCH 2002**

Mobile Phones	285
Kiosks	377
Other	688
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1350</b>

