

WEST MIDLANDS FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

13 FEBRUARY 2023

1. STATEMENT OF ASSURANCE 2021-2022

Joint report of the Chief Fire Officer, the Clerk to the Authority, and the Monitoring Officer.

RECOMMENDED

- 1.1 THAT the Authority approves the current version of the Statement of Assurance 2021-22.
- 1.2 THAT the Statement of Assurance will be submitted to the Home Office once the findings of the external auditor have been finalised, and upon the final approval of the Chief Fire Officer.

2. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 2.1 This report is submitted to seek approval for the Statement of Assurance 2021-22 which the Authority are legally obliged to produce and review on an annual basis under the Fire and Rescue National Framework.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The Fire and Rescue National Framework for England published in May 2018 sets out a requirement for Fire and Rescue Authorities to review and publish a 'Statement of Assurance' on an annual basis. The requirement is contained within Chapter 4 of the Framework which focuses on governance.
- 3.2 In line with this expectation, the Authority's Statement of Assurance (attached as Appendix 1) has been reviewed for the year 2021-22 and is submitted for approval.

- 3.3 The 'Guidance on Statements of Assurance for Fire and Rescue Authorities in England' issued by the Government in May 2013 remains current. The guidance stipulates the content of a Statement of Assurance.

The following three key areas must form part of any Statement of Assurance:

- Financial
- Governance
- Operational

- 3.4 Additionally, the guidance states that Fire and Rescue Authorities may wish to include a section on any potential improvements they have identified across their accounting, governance, or operational responsibilities to communities. These have been included in the three main areas above to assist the contextual flow of the statement reflecting work to continuously improve our Service Delivery Model through the integration of Prevention, Protection and Response activity to deliver our vision of 'Making the West Midlands safer, stronger and healthier'.

- 3.5 With regard to our arrangements, the following are all part of West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority's (WMFRA) assurance process:

3.5.1 **Financial**

The Authority publishes its Statement of Accounts, pay policy, transparency data, internal and external audit information. Each year the auditors discharge pre-agreed audit plans and are invited to the Fire Authority and Audit and Risk Committee to give their findings. Additionally, the outcomes are published via Fire Authority meetings, and are available online through the Service's website and committee management system.

It should be noted that at the time of writing, the Value for Money Conclusion, and the Auditor's Annual Report on West Midlands Fire Authority 2021-22 (previously known as the Annual Audit Letter) remain outstanding. The Service expects to receive both in March and does not anticipate either to have an impact upon the content of the Statement of

Assurance or affect approval by the Fire Authority in preparation for submission to the Home Office (which will be done once all elements including these two items have been received and then, upon final approval of the Chief Fire Officer).

3.5.2 **Governance**

Each year the Authority produces its Annual Governance Statement in support of its accounts. This statement expresses the measures undertaken to ensure propriety. In addition, the Fire Authority maintains a level of scrutiny of the Service through its governance framework, the reports of which are all publicly available.

3.5.3 **Operational**

The Fire Authority publishes and consults on its Community Safety Strategy (Community Risk Management Plan) on at least a three-yearly basis. This process of consultation is robust and is in line with the Fire Authority's own consultation strategy which is based on government guidance.

- 3.6 It is reassuring to note the majority of the information required as part of the Statement of Assurance is established within the organisation and the vast majority of the documents are already within the public domain. We do acknowledge the benefits of bringing our key financial, governance and operational assurances together within a single document in terms of providing transparency and assurance to our staff, communities, partners and the Government. The Statement of Assurance also ensures compliance with our specific data transparency requirements, for example the Local Government Transparency Code.
- 3.7 The Authority is required to review this document annually to reflect the previous year's activity.

4. **EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

- 4.1 In preparing this report an initial Equality Impact Assessment is not required and has not been carried out. The matters contained in this report do not relate to a policy change.

5. **LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 The preparation of the Statement of Assurance document is a legal requirement as part of the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England.
- 5.2 There are no matters arising out of this report that are required to be brought to the attention of the Monitoring Officer.

6. **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 The Statement of Assurance will be a web-based publication. No hard copies will be produced and as such there are no direct financial implications.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

- [Fire and Rescue National Framework for England, Home Office, 2018.](#)
- [Guidance on statements of assurance for Fire and Rescue Authorities in England, DCLG, May 2013.](#)
- [Report by the Home Secretary on Fire and Rescue Authorities' compliance with the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England \(July 2020\).](#)
- [Firefighter fitness: addendum to the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England.](#)

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