

WEST MIDLANDS FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

25 NOVEMBER 2013

1. **STATEMENT OF ASSURANCE**

Joint report of the Chief Fire Officer and Clerk and Monitoring Officer.

RECOMMENDED

THAT The Authority approves the Statement of Assurance document (enclosed separately with the agenda papers).

2. **PURPOSE OF REPORT**

This report is submitted to seek approval for the Statement of Assurance document, which we are legally obliged to produce under the Fire and Rescue National Framework.

3. **BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 The Fire and Rescue National Framework for England published in July 2012 sets out a requirement for Fire and Rescue Authorities to publish 'Statements of Assurance'. The requirement is contained within Chapter 3 of the Framework which focuses entirely on 'assurance'.
- 3.2 Specifically, Section 3.2 states that 'Fire and Rescue Authorities must provide assurance on financial, governance and operational matters and show how they have had due regard to the expectations set out in their integrated risk management plan and the requirements included in this Framework. To provide assurance, Fire and Rescue Authorities must publish an annual Statement of Assurance'.
- 3.3 As this was a new requirement on Fire and Rescue Authorities, the Framework advised that Government would be providing guidance on the nature of the assurance statements. As this was a new requirement consultation was undertaken on the format and content of the Statement of Assurance.

- 3.4 The consultation commenced in September 2012 and concluded on 15 November 2012. The consultation document acknowledged existing arrangements, but sought to bring the various elements together under one 'statement' which should be published annually.
- 3.5 At its meeting on 5 November 2012, the Executive Committee approved a consultation response prepared on behalf of the Fire Authority which was duly submitted (reported to full Fire Authority on 26 November 2012). In line with the response of CFOA & individual FRSs our response raised concerns about the benefit of Statements of Assurance as many of the assurances required to be evidenced were already in place and available in the public domain and as such the Statements of Assurance would only serve to duplicate what was already in place.
- 3.6 Government has indicated that there are four key areas that should form part of any Statement of Assurance. These are:
- Financial
 - Governance
 - Operational
 - Future improvements
- 3.7 With regard to our arrangements the following are all part of West Midlands Fire and Rescue Service's assurance process.

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 Committee to give their findings. Additionally the outcomes are published via Fire Authority meetings, the Internet and contained within the annual report.

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.

Operational

The Fire Authority publishes and consults on its Integrated Risk Management Plan (the Community Safety Strategy) 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.

Reports on various actions and proposals are all reported through Fire Authority Committees and all recommendations and decisions are publicly available.

In support of its long standing commitment to continuous improvement across the range of its activities, the Authority has recently taken part in the fire sector specific Operational Assessment (OPA) process.

Future Improvements

Future proposals are contained within the Integrated Risk Management Plan/Community Safety Strategy and are consulted upon – any proposals which may affect the public are also subject to consultation and Member scrutiny through the governance process.

- 3.8 As part of preparing the Assurance document we have consulted widely and have received significant positive feedback. It is reassuring to note that the overwhelming majority of the information required as part of the Statement of Assurance was already in existence and established within the organisation and the vast majority of the documents are already within the public domain. However we do acknowledge the benefits of bringing these together within a single document in terms of providing transparency.

- 3.9 The Statement of Assurance brings together our key financial, governance and operational assurances together within one publication.

It is the intention that the document will be live and to this end there will be electronic links from it to other corporate documents referenced therein.

This will enable the reader to evaluate and make a valid assessment of our performance.

- 3.10 The guidance states that we are required to review this document annually to reflect the previous year's activity. Clearly it is appropriate to produce it at such a time that it ties in with the financial and governance frameworks and assurances.

4. **EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

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**

The preparation of the Statement of Assurance document is now a legal requirement as part of the Fire and Rescue Services National Framework for England.

6. **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

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

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Guidance on statements of assurance for Fire and Rescue Authorities in England, DCLG, May 2013

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