

WEST MIDLANDS FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

20 FEBRUARY 2017

1. STATEMENT OF ASSURANCE 2015-2016

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

RECOMMENDED

THAT the Authority approves the Statement of Assurance 2015-16.

2. PURPOSE OF REPORT

This report is submitted to seek approval for the Statement of Assurance 2015-16, which we 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 July 2012 sets out a requirement for Fire and Rescue Authorities to publish 'Statements of Assurance' and review them annually. The requirement is contained within Chapter 3 of the Framework which focuses entirely on 'assurance'.

3.2 In line with this expectation, the Authority's Statement of Assurance (attached as Appendix 1) has been reviewed for the year 2015-16 and is submitted for approval.

3.3 The 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

- 3.4 With regard to our arrangements the following are all part of West Midlands Fire and Rescue Service's (WMFS) assurance process.

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

3.4.2 **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.

3.4.3 **Operational**

The Fire Authority publishes and consults on its Community Safety Strategy (Integrated 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.

3.4.4 **Future Improvements**

Future improvements reflect on our work to continuously improve our Service Delivery model through the Prevention, Protection and Response integration project in order to deliver our vision of 'Making West Midlands safer'.

- 3.5 The Home Office published the 'Report by Home Secretary on Fire and Rescue Authorities' progress with the Fire and Rescue National Framework' in July 2016. The report confirmed that all Fire and Rescue Authorities had published a Statement of Assurance, confirming they complied with the requirements of the Framework. In addition, the Home Office had undertaken rigorous examination of a random sample of Statements of Assurance.
- 3.6 The report confirmed that the Home Secretary was satisfied that all Fire and Rescue Authorities were compliant, however it was noted that there were some areas where practice could be strengthened.
- 3.7 The report provided no mandatory requirement for Fire Authorities to report against these areas, but these have been reviewed and considered as part of the review of the Statement of Assurance. It was found that the Statement of Assurance provided sufficient evidence for each area with the exception of the following which were expanded upon:
- a formal declaration of assurance and sign off by the Chair of the Fire Authority and Chief Fire Officer
 - a table of the requirements of the National Framework with references to evidence (for ease of reference purposes)
 - reference made to the fitness principles that were an addendum to the National Framework in December 2014
- 3.8 It is reassuring to note that the overwhelming 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. However, we do acknowledge the benefits of bringing these together within a single document in terms of providing transparency. The Statement of Assurance also ensures compliance with our specific data transparency requirements.

- 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 Authority is required to review this document annually to reflect the previous year's activity and must publish this document prior to 1 April 2017.

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 a legal requirement as part of the Fire and Rescue Services National Framework for England. It must be published before 1 April 2017.

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 direct financial implications.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Fire and Rescue National Framework for England, DCLG, 2012

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' progress with the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England (July 2016)

Firefighter fitness: addendum to the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England

The contact name for this report is DCFO Phil Hales, telephone number 0121 380 6004

PHIL LOACH
CHIEF FIRE OFFICER

KAREN GOWREESUNKER
CLERK TO THE AUTHORITY

SATINDER SAHOTA
MONITORING OFFICER