

Fire and Rescue Strategic Governance Board

Statement of Assurance 2021-22

Purpose:

The purpose of this paper is to provide members of the Strategic Governance Board (the Board) with an overview of the draft Statement of Assurance 2021-22 prior to its publication.

Summary:

Members of the Board are requested to consider the contents of the draft Statement of Assurance accompanying this report as set against national guidance.

As detailed within the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England 2012 (updated May 2018) (the Framework), the Staffordshire Commissioner Fire and Rescue Authority (the Authority) must satisfy the following requirement:

“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 the Framework. To provide assurance, fire and rescue authorities must publish an annual statement of assurance.”

It should be noted that this Statement of Assurance covers the period 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022.

Please note that the draft Statement of Assurance was received and considered at Service Management Board on 11th October 2022. A small number of amendments to the document were requested and the Communications team are making the necessary changes. Should the updated draft not be available in time for this Board due to the tight turn-around to allow the design elements to be changed we would ask the Board to take into account the following:

- On Welcome – we will acknowledge the name change of Her Majesty’s Inspectorate to His Majesty’s Inspectorate following the Queen’s demise and ensure that the references throughout the doc. reflect this.
- The photos in the draft will be reviewed with a view to including some more diverse images, which better reflect our Service/Communities.
- The Financial Challenge infographic on page 37 will be removed in its entirety as it refers to 2022/23 and just serves to confuse.
- On page 36 under Financial Overview amend both the references in the Comprehensive Income and Expenditure bullet from 2020/21 to 2021/22 and similarly Balance Sheet setting out financial position as at 31 March 2022 rather than 2021.

- On page 39 – infographic – Finance - 'actual spend £40.9m and £1.1m saved' to be deleted. Text to read 'Budget set at £42m Capital spend £0.4m.
- Page 39 - Human Resources – HR to provide bullets regarding sickness and absence for the period.

The figures reported are calculated using the most up to date information available. As a result, these performance figures may differ slightly from those reported in previous statements due to the subsequent outcomes from fire investigations, Coroner's reports and other external factors, and may be subject to change.

Recommendations:

That the Board:

- accept the content and context of the draft Statement of Assurance; and
- sign off the draft Statement of Assurance as suitable for publication. Publication will coincide with the sign-off and publication of the Service's Annual Statement of Accounts for the period 1st April 2021 to 31st March 2022 as referred to in the Statement of Assurance.

Introduction and background:

The Framework states that:

'Fire and rescue authorities must provide annual 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 the Framework. To provide assurance, fire and rescue authorities must publish an Annual Statement of Assurance'

Fire and rescue authorities are accountable for their performance and should be open to evaluation by the communities they serve. Information on their performance should be accessible, robust, fit-for-purpose and accurately report on effectiveness and value for money.

One of the principal aims of a statement of assurance is to provide an accessible way in which communities, Government, Local Authorities and other partners may make a valid assessment of their local fire and rescue authority's performance.

The Statement of Assurance will be used as a source of information on which to base the Secretary of State's biennial report under section 25 of the *Fire and Rescue Act 2004*.

Fire and rescue authorities should assess their performance across a number of key areas. The areas to be included for assessment, and the methodology used, are a matter for local determination, although authorities will need to satisfy themselves that the measures and methods used are appropriate and fit for purpose.

An elected member of the relevant authority who is able to take responsibility for its contents should sign off the Statement of Assurance. It is up to the individual authority to ensure that this is done by an appropriate person (or persons) on behalf of the Authority.

Statements of Assurance should be published annually by fire and rescue authorities. It is for fire and rescue authorities to decide when they should publish depending on individual reporting arrangements.

Fire and rescue authorities are responsible for ensuring that their business is conducted in accordance with the law and proper standards, and that public money is properly accounted for and used economically, efficiently and effectively.

It is a statutory requirement under the *Accounts and Audit (England) Regulations 2015* for authorities to publish the financial results of their activities for the year. This 'Statement of Accounts', shows the annual costs of providing the service and is determined by a Code of Practice which aims to give a "true and fair" view of the financial position and transactions of the authority. The Statement of Assurance may briefly set out what assessment procedures are in place with regard to the authorities' statements of account.

The *Accounts and Audit (England) Regulations 2015* also require authorities to prepare an annual governance statement in support of this statement of accounts. This governance statement is an expression of the measures taken by the authority to ensure appropriate business practice, high standards of conduct and sound governance. The Statement of Assurance may set out what work authorities have undertaken to review the effectiveness of their governance framework, including the system of internal control.

Greater transparency is a key element of the Framework and is at the heart of the Government's commitment to enable the public to hold their authorities to account for the way they spend public money. In preparing the Statement of Assurance, Fire and Rescue Authorities may consider the principles of transparency set out in the *Code of Recommended Practice for Local Authorities on Data Transparency*.

Fire and Rescue Authorities already consult on, and publish, their Community Risk Management Plans (CRMP) / Safety Plan, which set out local strategies including cross-border, multi-authority and national arrangements where appropriate. The Statement of Assurance should include details of consultation on these plans, and confirm that appropriate information was provided to enable active and informed participation.

The Statement of Assurance may also indicate where Fire and Rescue Authorities have entered into agreements and/or mutual aid arrangements with other relevant bodies. The level of detail included will be a matter for each individual fire and rescue authority and may be linked to their CRMP.

It is not the aim of Statements of Assurance to set out the operational procedures for Fire and Rescue Authorities. However, Statements of Assurance are the appropriate vehicle with regard to specific events that raise issues of operational competence or delivery. For example, when advice is received under health and safety or other legislation, it is appropriate for the fire and rescue authority to use the Statement of Assurance as a means to inform their communities that these matters have been considered and, where appropriate, acted on.

Issues for consideration:

Financial Implications

Design costs are within existing budgets. **Limited printed documents may be produced internally** with the document available (published) on the Service website. Copies required for specific reasons can be requested.

Legal Implications

Evidence is required of performing against expectations set within the Framework (meeting provisions of the Localism Act 2011). The Framework sets out a requirement to publish Statements of Assurance (annually).

Protective Security

Data accompanying this Statement of Assurance meets data security policy requirements.

Procurement and Social Value

The Statement of Assurance has no direct procurement implications. The design and publication of the Statement of Assurance is in line with existing internal policy and procedure.

The content of the Statement of Assurance provides evidence of financial accomplishments in relation to accounting regulations, which is underpinned by efficiency, effectiveness and public value.

Risk Implications

Failure to publish this Statement of Assurance may compromise the organisation in relation to its duties under the Framework.

Environmental Implications

The document will be published on the Service website with limited numbers printed to reduce the impact on the environment. Copies required for specific reasons can be requested.

Consultation and Engagement undertaken:

The Statement of Assurance is a report drawn from a number of already published sources across the Service, e.g. Public Performance reports, HMICFRS outcomes and relevant stakeholders have been consulted where applicable to check content.

Report Implications**Monitoring Officer comments:**

N/A

Signature

Date

Section 151 Officer comments:

N/A

Signature

Date

5. Equality comments:

This Statement of Assurance is a retrospective report on achievements against the Framework requirements and the priorities set within the Safety Plan 2020-24 which is supported by an associated People Impact Assessment. This document will be available on request in any language. This detail will be included in the final document.

6. Background/supporting papers:

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government's (formerly DCLG) - Guidance on statements of assurance for fire and rescue authorities in England available if required.

7. Public access to information:

The Statement of Assurance will be published on the Service's website and available in print version on request.

8. Is the publication of this report to be deferred?

N/A

REPORT AUTHOR:

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Date	17th October 2022