

Approval date: 14 November 2018



Statement of Assurance
2017/2018

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1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Although fire and rescue services in England are run by local government bodies, the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 requires that local fire and rescue authorities must have regard to direction from central government. This direction, issued in the form of a 'National Framework', sets out the Government's strategic aims and requirements for Fire and Rescue Services in England. An updated National Framework was published in May 2018. This maintained the requirement, introduced by Government in 2012, that every authority must publish an annual statement of assurance of compliance with the Framework that:

"should outline the way in which the authority and its fire and rescue service has had regard – in the period covered by the document – to this National Framework, the Integrated Risk Management Plan and to any strategic plan... prepared by the authority for that period. The authority must also provide assurance to their community and to government on financial, governance and operational matters".

- 1.2 The purpose of this document is to provide the public and Government with assurance that Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire Authority ('The Authority') met the requirements set out in the National Framework and accompanying Government guidance¹ during the 2017/18 financial year.
- 1.3 Where relevant the document draws on, consolidates and summarises the findings of existing assurance processes relating to financial, governance and operational matters that were set up to meet other statutory and regulatory requirements of fire and rescue authorities.

2. FINANCIAL ASSURANCE

- 2.1 It is a statutory requirement under the Accounts and Audit 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.
- 2.2 The audited annual financial statements for the Year Ending 31 March 2018 can be accessed via this hyperlink:
https://bucksfire.gov.uk/files/1315/3192/5032/Statement_of_Accounts_2017_18_Audited_SIGNED.pdf

¹ 'Guidance on Statements of assurance for fire and rescue authorities in England, Department for Communities and Local Government, May 2013.

- 2.3 The financial statements are required to be audited under the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014. The auditors are responsible for:
- forming an opinion on the financial statements;
 - reviewing the Annual Governance Statement;
 - forming a conclusion on the arrangements that the Authority has in place to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources.
- 2.4 In the auditor's opinion the financial statements:
- Gave a true and fair view of the financial position of Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire Authority as at 31 March 2018 and of its expenditure and income for the year then ended; and,
 - had been prepared properly in accordance with the CIPFA/LASAAC Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in the United Kingdom 2017/18.
- 2.5 Regarding the requirement to consider whether the Authority has put in place 'proper arrangements' to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources – known as the 'value for money conclusion' the auditors found that:
- "In all significant respects, the audited body had proper arrangements to ensure it took properly informed decisions and deployed resources to achieve planned and sustainable outcomes for taxpayers and local people".*
- 2.6 The detailed results and conclusions from the appointed external auditors audit process can be found in the Annual Audit Letter for the year ended 31 March 2018:
[https://bucksfire.gov.uk/files/2115/3598/2688/18_BMKFA_Audit_results_report - 25.06.18 - final.pdf](https://bucksfire.gov.uk/files/2115/3598/2688/18_BMKFA_Audit_results_report_-_25.06.18_-_final.pdf)
- 2.7 The Authority is also required to report annually on progress against the Efficiency Plan. The Plan required the Authority to make savings of £4.5million between 2015/16 and 2019/20. The Authority is currently forecasting that it will have made savings totalling £5million by the end of 2019/20.
- 2.8 The Authority's internal auditors also produce an annual report on the internal control environment. In this report, the Chief Internal Auditor noted:
- "In my opinion the system of internal control provides reasonable assurance regarding the effective, efficient and economic exercise of the Authority's functions. During 2017/18 there has been continued improvement to Bucks & Milton Keynes Fire Authority's system of*

internal control through the on-going development of policies and procedures covering the key control processes. This demonstrates a positive direction of travel towards robust and effective internal control and risk management that will facilitate the effective exercise of the Authority's functions".

The full internal audit report containing the Internal Auditors opinion can be viewed at pages 61 – 66 of the hyperlinked document:

[https://bucksfire.gov.uk/files/2815/3112/5913/OVERVIEW AND AUDIT COMMITTEE 180718 AGENDA AND REPORTS.compressed.pdf](https://bucksfire.gov.uk/files/2815/3112/5913/OVERVIEW_AND_AUDIT_COMMITTEE_180718_AGENDA_AND_REPORTS.compressed.pdf)

- 2.9 In addition to the statutory requirement to publish annual financial results, the government is committed to increasing transparency across local authorities. One of the steps in this process is for the publication online of information relating to spend items in excess of £500. In accordance with that requirement, the Authority is publishing monthly schedules of payments, which can be found on our website:

<http://bucksfire.gov.uk/fire-authority/financial-information/spend-over-500/>

3. GOVERNANCE

- 3.1 The Authority is responsible for maintaining a sound system of internal control that supports the achievement of its policies, aims and objectives whilst safeguarding public money and organisational assets. There is also a requirement to ensure that the Authority is administered prudently and economically and that resources are used efficiently and effectively and that sound arrangements are in place for the identification and management of risks.
- 3.2 The Authority's approach to governance is based on the six core principles of good governance set out in the CIPFA / SOLACE governance framework ("*Delivering Good Governance in Local Government*"):
1. Focusing on the purpose of the Authority and on outcomes for the community and creating and implementing a vision for the local area;
 2. Members and officers working together to achieve a common purpose with clearly defined functions and roles;
 3. Promoting values for the Authority and demonstrating the values of good governance through upholding high standards of conduct and behaviour.

4. Taking informed and transparent decisions which are subject to effective scrutiny and managing risk;
5. Developing the capacity and capability of members and officers to be effective;
6. Engaging with local people and other stakeholders to ensure robust public accountability.

3.3 There is already a statutory requirement for the Authority to produce an annual governance statement to demonstrate and evidence that it operates an effective system of internal control. The internal control systems underlying the annual governance statement are assessed by Internal Audit to ensure that they are adequate and effective so that:

- The Authority can establish the extent to which they can rely on the whole system; and,
- Individual managers can establish the reliability of the systems and controls for which they are responsible.

3.4 The Chief Internal Auditor's most recent opinion on the Authority's internal control environment was published in the Annual Governance Statement for the 2017/18 financial year. This stated that:

The audit activity in 2017/18 has demonstrated that the Authority continues to improve and develop corporate governance, and remains focused on creating a strong system of internal control. This can be evidenced by the continued strengthening of key control processes through the on-going development of policies and procedures and has resulted in core financial controls continuing to be rated as substantial.

3.5 Further details of the Authority's governance arrangements and the internal auditor's findings in relation to these can be found in the Annual Governance Statement 2017/18:

https://bucksfire.gov.uk/files/9415/3192/4816/AGS_Signed.pdf

3.6 The Annual Governance Statement also confirms that the Authority met its statutory obligation to review its Pay Policy Statement annually. This sets out its policies on the remuneration of its chief officers, the remuneration of its lowest paid employees and the relationship between the remuneration of its chief officers and the remuneration of its employees who are not chief officers. This was approved and adopted by

the Authority at its February 2018 meeting, and can be viewed via the following link to the Authority's website (at pages 163 - 182):

https://bucksfire.gov.uk/files/9615/1782/8239/FIRE_AUTHORITY_AGEN_DA_AND_REPORTS_140218-min.pdf

4. OPERATIONAL ASSURANCE

4.1 The Government requires Fire Authorities to provide assurance that they meet the requirements arising out of the legislative and policy framework for fire and rescue services. In particular:

- Details of specific events that raise issues of operational competence or delivery such as advice received under health and safety or other legislation together with assurance that these matters have been considered and, where appropriate, acted on;
- That integrated risk management plans are consulted on and that during the consultations appropriate information was provided to enable active and informed participation;
- Details of any agreements and / or mutual aid arrangements with other relevant bodies such as neighbouring fire and rescue services.

Statutory Duties and Operational Effectiveness

Fire and rescue authorities operate within in a clearly defined legislative and policy framework comprising of:

- The Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004;
- The Civil Contingencies Act 2004;
- The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005;
- The Fire and Rescue Services (Emergencies) (England) Order 2007;
- The Localism Act 2011;
- The Fire and Rescue National Framework for England;
- Policing and Crime Act 2017.

4.2 In 2016 the Authority reviewed its approach to assuring operational effectiveness and developed a new operational assurance model to help identify and meet known 'best practice' requirements. It subsequently commissioned an independent appraisal and application of the new model in order to assure its fitness for purpose and assess the Authority's performance in relation to it. The appraisal and application of the new operational assurance model, carried out by Operational Assurance Limited (OAL), identified a total of 30 improvement recommendations.

4.3 In November 2017, OAL were commissioned to undertake a further independent review of progress made against the previously identified improvement recommendations, over the preceding 12 months. The subsequent 'checkpoint' report was extremely positive highlighting the considerable progress made against all the previously accepted recommendations. Particular emphasis was placed upon the work undertaken to address Priority Recommendation 1, notably the training package based on the 'Balmoral Bar' incident and development of the operationally focused Operational Assurance monthly report, both of which were considered as exemplars.

4.4 The OAL's 'Progress Checkpoint Report', together with the Service's updated Operational Assurance Improvement Plan, was presented to the Authority's Overview and Audit Committee in March 2018 and can be viewed by following the hyperlink below (see pages 15 – 40):

https://bucksfire.gov.uk/files/9415/1939/6037/OVERVIEW_AND_AUDIT_COMMITTEE_070318-min.pdf

5. INTEGRATED RISK MANAGEMENT PLANNING

5.1 The National Framework requires that Fire Authorities must produce an Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) that identifies and assesses all foreseeable fire and rescue related risks that could affect its community, including those of a cross-border, multi-authority and / or national nature. The plan must have regard to the community risk registers produced by Local Resilience Forums and any other local risk analyses as appropriate. Each fire and rescue authority integrated IRMP must:

- be easily accessible and publicly available; and,
- reflect effective consultation throughout its development and at all review stages with the community, its workforce and representative bodies, and partners.

5.2 The Government guidance relating to statements of assurance requires that they should include details of IRMP consultations and, in particular, that appropriate information was provided to enable active and informed participation.

5.3 Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire Authority regularly reviews the fire and rescue related risks to the community it serves and updates its IRMP in response to any material changes to the nature and level of the risks identified and assessed.

- 5.4 The Authority's current IRMP, known as the '2015-20 Public Safety Plan', is published on its website. This sets out the Authority's strategy for achieving its vision of making *'Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes the safest areas in England in which to live, work and travel'*:
[http://bucksfire.gov.uk/files/8114/2116/4524/2015 -
20 PSP Updated after 17 Dec CFA.pdf](http://bucksfire.gov.uk/files/8114/2116/4524/2015-_20_PSP_Updated_after_17_Dec_CFA.pdf)
- 5.5 The draft Public Safety Plan (PSP) was subject to extensive consultations prior to the Authority reaching any decisions. The consultation process embraced key stakeholder groups including the general public, Authority staff, neighbouring fire and rescue services and a range of other organisations with a potential interest in the development of the plan. It also included the use of qualitative consultation methods such as 'community engagement forums' and focus groups which encourage participants to reflect in depth about their priorities for the Authority while both receiving and questioning background information and discussing service delivery issues in detail. Full details of the consultation process and its outcomes are available on the Authority's website:
[http://bucksfire.gov.uk/files/5514/5527/7938/ITEM_16_2015-
20 PSP Consultation -
_17 December 14 CFA Paper Annexes.compressed.pdf](http://bucksfire.gov.uk/files/5514/5527/7938/ITEM_16_2015-20_PSP_Consultation_-_17_December_14_CFA_Paper_Annexes.compressed.pdf)
- 5.6 A follow up public consultation was undertaken in 2015 to assist the Authority with its determinations in relation to a proposal to consolidate two of its existing fire stations in Milton Keynes onto a new tri-service 'blue light hub' facility with police and ambulance services (see Agenda Item 9, Pages 87 – 189):
[http://bucksfire.gov.uk/files/4614/5459/6672/Fire_Authority_Summons
and Agenda 100216 72dpi.pdf](http://bucksfire.gov.uk/files/4614/5459/6672/Fire_Authority_Summons_and_Agenda_100216_72dpi.pdf)
- 5.7 In January 2018, preparatory work began on the development of the next PSP that will cover the period April 2020 – March 2025. This will include a comprehensive programme of public and other stakeholder consultation work to help inform the setting of the Authority's future strategic priorities.
- 5.8 The Authority has also established a framework of key performance indicators and measures to help it assess progress towards the achievement of its vision. Performance in relation to these is reported to the Authority's Overview and Audit Committee on a regular basis whose role is to scrutinise any areas of under-performance together with proposals for corrective action. A report on performance outcomes against the framework of indicators and measures can be viewed on the Authority's website (Agenda Item 17 – 14 November 2018):

6. MUTUAL AID, REGIONAL AND NATIONAL RESILIENCE

- 6.1 The National Framework requires fire authorities to consider risks of a cross-border, multi-authority and/or national nature and to make appropriate provision for dealing with these. The Authority does this via:
- Its active participation in the Thames Valley Local Resilience Forum which comprises other Category 1 and 2 responders. The forum maintains a community risk register which the Authority considers as part of its integrated risk management planning process;
 - Review of the National Risk Register, National Risk Assessment and National Resilience Planning Assumptions which are maintained by the UK Government Cabinet Office to inform planning in relation to major civil emergencies of a national or regional nature;
 - Mutual aid agreements with neighbouring fire and rescue authorities which enable authorities to provide each other with additional resources to deal with emergencies that cannot be dealt with by an authority acting alone. Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire Authority maintains formal mutual aid agreements with all six of its neighbours – Bedfordshire, Hertfordshire, London, Royal Berkshire, Oxfordshire and Northamptonshire.
 - Working with South Central Ambulance Service (SCAS) to provide co-responding services to medical emergencies and in allowing SCAS crews to use Authority premises.
- 6.2 The Authority maintains specialist assets to enable it to deal with major civil emergencies such as major transport incidents, natural disasters and terrorist incidents. The capabilities, which include Urban Search and Rescue (USAR), Detection, Identification & Monitoring Officers (DIM) and water rescue are available on a local, regional and national scale, and have been deployed in support of other Authorities during major emergencies. The Authority's USAR and water rescue assets are included on the National Asset Register. The National Asset DIM capability is overseen by Oxfordshire FRS, with support from specially trained officers from across the three Thames Valley FRS's.
- 6.3 The Authority also has an established cadre of National Inter-agency Liaison Officers (NILO) who are trained and qualified officers who can advise and support FRS Incident Commanders, police, medical, military and other government agencies on the FRS's operational capacity and

capability to reduce risk and safety resolve incidents at which a FRS attendance may be required.

- 6.4 The Authority collaborates with all the other South East Fire and Rescue Services to jointly fund the post of a NILO who is seconded to the Counter Terrorism Policing South East (CTPSE). This post acts as a focal point for advice to and from the unit.
- 6.5 As a Category 1 responder as defined in the Civil Contingencies Act 2004, business continuity is a high priority for Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire Authority. The Authority has secured a number of employees who work on flexible resilience contracts. These contracts ensure the Authority maintains availability of local, regional and national assets during the full range of foreseeable business continuity events.
- 6.6 At all times we also maintain sufficient numbers of trained USAR staff on duty to provide an initial response to incidents in line with the USAR Concept of Operations. Additionally we have staff who maintain cover through a recall to duty contract, who deliver our second set of staff as detailed under the USAR Concept of Operations and enable us to maintain operational cover locally if USAR is deployed for an extended period, this includes national exercising. Under their contractual arrangements these staff are required to maintain this cover during periods of industrial action, meaning Buckinghamshire FRS were one of only two USAR hosting Services that guaranteed this capability during the most recent industrial action.
- 6.7 In June 2017 the Service was visited by the 'Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Programme' (JESIP) Assurance Team. The purpose of the visit was to act as a 'critical friend' and provide an independent view of how far the Service has progressed with embedding the JESIP models and principles into its business as usual activity. The visit was one of a number undertaken by the team involving Police, Fire and Ambulance services across England, Wales and Northern Ireland.
- 6.8 The JESIP team's report contained 19 observations. Whilst many of the observations were very positive, there was nevertheless a particular aspect in relation to JESIP command refresher training, which the team highlighted as the biggest risk, being as none had taken place nor was there a plan in place for this. As a consequence the identified areas of improvement contained within this report, have now been incorporated in the Service's Operational Assurance Improvement Plan. The full JESIP Report can be viewed here at pages 41-58:

[https://bucksfire.gov.uk/files/9415/1939/6037/OVERVIEW AND AUDIT COMMITTEE_070318-min.pdf](https://bucksfire.gov.uk/files/9415/1939/6037/OVERVIEW_AND_AUDIT_COMMITTEE_070318-min.pdf)

- 6.9 Since 3 April 2017 section 2 of the Policing and Crime Act 2017 has placed a duty on the Authority to keep opportunities for collaboration with the police and ambulance services under review. Where two or more of the emergency services consider it would be in the interests of their efficiency or effectiveness to collaborate, there then arises a duty to enter into a collaboration agreement.
- 6.10 A Thames Valley Emergency Services Collaboration Executive Board has been established in 2017, comprised of the Chief Fire Officers from the Thames Valley Fire and Rescue Authorities, the Thames Valley Police Deputy Chief Constable and the Chief Executive from South Central Ambulance service, as the forum to determine collaboration opportunities and enter collaboration agreements.
- 6.11 Following the move to a jointly funded Thames Valley Fire Control Centre in 2015, the Authority has continued their commitment to collaboration through a Thames Valley Operational Alignment Programme. Amongst other things, the programme sets out to align:-
- 6.11.1 Operational equipment, procedures, training and practice across the region. The key benefits are improved interoperability, enhanced resilience, a reduction in cross border mobilisations and maximised Best Value through collaborative contract negotiation and joint procurement. A recent example is the jointly procured red fleet replacement, which has standardised the front line fire appliances and equipment across the Thames Valley, and has generated significant savings for the public purse;
- 6.11.2 Protection Policy. Work between Thames Valley fire services, chaired by Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service (OFRS), to develop a collaborative protection model has been ongoing. An options appraisal has been carried out to identify each services current position and governance structure, identifying the Critical Success Factors (CSF) necessary to develop and deliver a single Fire Protection (FP) function across the Thames Valley. Following a SWOT analysis of the identified options, a one size fits all approach has been ruled out as a viable option at this time, and a bottom up approach will be taken. We will seek to align policies and procedures and ways of working where we can, developing a framework for the aligned Policies and Procedures which will build a foundation that will facilitate a move to a single FP function in the future. Whilst this

bottom up approach is developed, any work streams, such as integrated system development or data purchasing will be shared with Thames Valley partners and collaboration considered.

6.11.3 Workforce recruitment. Two inter dependent projects are underway within one work stream; to develop a single recruitment process for Whole time and On Call fire fighters across the Thames Valley and to develop and deliver a joint Thames Valley programme based on the Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service Apprenticeship model.

The key benefits for these enabling projects are a more cost effective and efficient shared recruitment service achieved through pooling external and internal resources ; opportunity to increase the diversity of the workforce and consistency of approach across the Thames Valley. In addition, the joint approach to apprenticeships recruitment will also optimise opportunity to draw down the apprenticeship levy to fund apprenticeships training.

A joint recruitment process has been developed, workforce plans including expected recruitment requirements are being shared and the focus has been and continues to be on improving the diversity of applicants for operational roles, including apprenticeships and on design and delivery of an end to end recruitment through to training programme for On-Call fire fighters.

7. DECLARATION

Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire Authority are satisfied that the financial, governance and operational assurance arrangements in place across the organisation meet the requirements set out in the National Framework.

Jason Thelwell
Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive

Councillor David Watson
Chairman, Overview and Audit Committee