



Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Fire Authority

MEETING	Overview and Audit Committee
DATE OF MEETING	11 March 2020
OFFICER	Graham Britten, Director of Legal and Governance
LEAD MEMBER	Councillor David Watson (Chairman, Overview and Audit Committee)
SUBJECT OF THE REPORT	2018/19 Statement of Assurance
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	<p>The Fire and Rescue National Framework, published by the Department of Communities and Local Government in July 2012, introduced the requirement for fire and rescue authorities in England to produce a 'Statement of Assurance' on an annual basis. An updated National Framework was published in May 2018. This maintained the requirement that every authority must publish an annual statement of assurance of compliance with the Framework. The statements are intended to provide assurance to the public on financial, governance and operational matters and demonstrate that National Framework requirements, including those relating to integrated risk management planning, are being met.</p> <p>The precise form, content and methodology used to prepare the statements are left to local discretion. Where authorities "<i>have already set out relevant information that is clear, accessible, and user-friendly within existing documents</i>" they may draw on these in preparing their statements of assurance.</p> <p>Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire Authority already produces and publishes a variety of separate statements relating to financial, governance and operational performance such as the Annual Governance Statement and Annual Financial Statements. The draft 2018/19 Statement of Assurance, shown at Annex A, draws on, summarises and includes relevant extracts from these more detailed assessments. Changes from the 2017/18 Statement of Assurance are shown as shaded text. Officers are of the view that collectively the assurance processes underpinning the range of existing statements covers the scope and nature of what is required for the statement of assurance.</p> <p>The statement of assurance should be signed off by an elected member of the Authority who is able to take responsibility for its contents. It is for authorities to</p>

	<p>decide who the most appropriate person is.</p> <p>In respect of Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire Authority, officers are of the view that the most appropriate person is the Chairman of the Overview and Audit Committee.</p>
ACTION	Decision.
RECOMMENDATIONS	That the 2018/19 Statement of Assurance be approved for signature by the Chairman of the Overview and Audit Committee and the Chief Fire Officer.
RISK MANAGEMENT	Financial, governance and operational assurance processes form part of the Authority's risk management framework. The effectiveness of these contributes to the identification, reduction and mitigation of corporate and operational risks. Following consultation with the Data Protection Officer, no privacy issues have been identified or associated with the Statement of Assurance.
FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS	There are no direct financial implications arising from the production of the annual Statement of Assurance.
LEGAL IMPLICATIONS	<p>Section 21 of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 (FRSA 2004) provides the statutory authority for the National Framework and requires Fire and Rescue Authorities to 'have regard' to it in carrying out their functions. However, Section 22 of the Act gives the Secretary of State the power to intervene if he considers that "...a fire and rescue authority is failing, or is likely to fail, to act in accordance with the Framework prepared under section 21".</p> <p>Also "The Secretary of State must report to Parliament on —</p> <p>(a) the extent to which fire and rescue authorities are acting in accordance with the Framework prepared under section 21;</p> <p>(b) any steps taken by him for the purpose of securing that fire and rescue authorities act in accordance with the Framework".</p> <p>The Statement of Assurance will be used as a source of information by the Secretary of State when preparing biennial reports required by section 25 of the Fire & Rescue Services Act 2004.</p>
CONSISTENCY WITH THE PRINCIPLES OF THE DUTY TO COLLABORATE	The statement is designed to provide assurance in relation to the operations of the Authority and details any relevant collaborative work with the other Thames Valley Fire Authorities and other agencies.
HEALTH AND SAFETY	There are no direct health and safety implications

	arising from this report.
EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY	There are no direct equality and diversity implications arising from this report.
USE OF RESOURCES	<p>Communication and consultation</p> <p>The officers with responsibility for the areas reported on in the Statement of Assurance have been responsible for supplying the information and responses necessary for its preparation.</p>
PROVENANCE SECTION & BACKGROUND PAPERS	<p>The requirement for Statements of Assurance arose from the revisions to the National Framework published by the Department for Communities and Local Government in July 2012. An evaluation of the implications of the new Framework was reported to the Fire Authority at its 27 September 2012 meeting:</p> <p>http://www.bucksfire.gov.uk/NR/rdonlyres/E6EE2A89-79F6-45B3-B02E-CE3675D252A3/0/270912Agendaandreports.pdf</p> <p>The 2017/18 Statement of Assurance was approved on 14 November 2018:</p> <p>https://bucksfire.gov.uk/files/6815/4108/8549/ITEM_9_Statement_of_Assurance_-_Cover_Paper_Appendices.pdf</p>
APPENDICES	<p>Annex A: Draft 2018/19 Statement of Assurance</p> <p>Annex B: CLG Guidance on Statements of Assurance</p>
TIME REQUIRED	15 Minutes.
REPORT ORIGINATOR AND CONTACT	<p>Stuart Gowanlock</p> <p>sgowanlock@bucksfire.gov.uk</p> <p>01296 744435</p>

Approval date: 11 March 2020



**Statement of Assurance
2018/2019**

Contents

1.	Introduction	3
2.	Financial Assurance	3
3.	Governance	5
4.	Operational Assurance	7
5.	Integrated Risk Management Planning	8
6.	Mutual Aid, Regional and National Resilience	10
7.	Declaration	14

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 2018/19 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.
- 1.4 During the year, Service Officers liaised with Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) to prepare the Service for the formal inspection visit by the HMICFRS fieldwork teams in June 2019. This included engagement with the HMICFRS Service Liaison Lead to familiarise them with the Service and responding to HMICFRS requests for data and documentation. The report of the inspection findings and any recommendations arising from these will be published in December 2019 and referenced in the 2019/20 Statement of Assurance.

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

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

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 2019 can be accessed via this hyperlink:
https://bucksfire.gov.uk/files/5015/7432/6887/Signed_Statement_of_Accounts_2018-19.pdf
- 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 2019 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 2018/19.
- 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:
- "...we are satisfied that, in all significant respects, Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire Authority put in place proper arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources for the year ended 31 March 2019."*
- The detailed results and conclusions from the appointed external auditors audit process can be found in the Audit Results Report for the year ended 31 March 2019:
https://bucksfire.gov.uk/files/1015/7564/1121/BMKFA_Final_-_446GPSR_-_Audit_Results_Report.pdf
- 2.6 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.

- 2.7 The Authority's internal auditors also produce an annual report on the internal control environment. In this report, the Chief Internal Auditor stated that:

"In my opinion the system of internal control provides reasonable assurance regarding the effective, efficient and economic exercise of the Authority's functions. Findings raised from the internal audit reviews undertaken in 2018/19 have not identified any material weaknesses to the internal control framework. Overall, the Fire Authority has continued to demonstrate a continued robust and effective internal control and risk management environment".

The full internal audit report containing the Internal Auditors opinion can be viewed via the following hyperlink:

[https://bucksfire.gov.uk/files/1115/6231/8991/ITEM_8b_BMKFA_Internal_Audit_Report - Annual Report 1819 Appendix.pdf](https://bucksfire.gov.uk/files/1115/6231/8991/ITEM_8b_BMKFA_Internal_Audit_Report_-_Annual_Report_1819_Appendix.pdf)

- 2.8 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 Details of the Authority's governance arrangements and the internal auditor's findings in relation to these (summarised at paragraph 2.7 above) can be found in the Annual Governance Statement **2018/19**:

https://bucksfire.gov.uk/files/5115/6231/9023/ITEM_9_Annual_Governance_Statement_2018-19_Cover_Paper_and_Annexes.pdf

3.5 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 2019** meeting, and can be viewed via the following link to the Authority's website:

https://bucksfire.gov.uk/files/6215/4894/2646/ITEM_11_Cover_Report_-_Pay_Policy_Principles_Statement_2019-20_Fire_Authority_13_February_2019_Annex_A-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. A fundamental part of the assurance process is the Authority's three-year contractual agreement with Operational Assurance Limited (OAL), a specialist, external provider. This agreement ensures the Service's risk critical operations are subject to regular independent scrutiny, thereby strengthening the Authority's ability to deliver the best possible public service and improve the safety of Firefighters by: improving our performance at incidents; coping with future changes in the operational environment; and, driving development and innovation. The first of two planned OAL reviews took place during November 2018, focusing on the following key topic areas:

- management of site-specific risk information;
- operational discretion; and,
- the refined Operational Assurance model

4.3 In their report on the findings of the review, OAL identified 26 improvement recommendations. These were scheduled for follow up action in the Service's Operational Assurance Improvement Plan which, together with the full report of OAL's findings can be seen via the following hyperlink:

https://bucksfire.gov.uk/files/8615/6231/9337/ITEM_18_Operational_Assurance_Improvement_Plan_-_OA_-_17_July_2019_Appendices-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. As part of these preparations an initial 'listening and engagement' exercise, with a representative cross-section of the public, was carried out in November / December 2018 to help inform the development of the draft 2020-25 PSP. The findings from this can be viewed via this hyperlink:

[https://bucksfire.gov.uk/files/4915/4894/2682/ITEM_12_Outcomes_of_2
020-2025 PSP Focus Groups Report Appendix.pdf](https://bucksfire.gov.uk/files/4915/4894/2682/ITEM_12_Outcomes_of_2020-2025_PSP_Focus_Groups_Report_Appendix.pdf)

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:

https://bucksfire.gov.uk/files/9815/7312/5553/ITEM_9_Annual_Performance_Monitor_2018-19_cover_report_for_OA_Annexes-min.pdf

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 The Service remains committed to continued improvement in relation to joint-working between the emergency services and other responders thorough the adoption of the 'Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Principles (JESIP). This is supported and delivered by a local structure that includes nominated Strategic, Training and Joint Organisational Learning (JOL) leads.
- 6.8 Operational multi-agency exercises are routinely undertaken, utilising the fire-ground facilities at the Fire Service College with identified learning captured during a facilitated debrief. Any captured learning, along with notable practices originating from exercises or incidents have been inputted to JOL Online, so as to ensure that the lessons identified are available to other responder agencies. Furthermore, all operational commanders, along with colleagues from the other Thames Valley fire & rescue services, Thames Valley Police and South Central Ambulance, undergo a day's

training. This training has been designed to allow delegates the opportunity to demonstrate and apply knowledge of JESIP to any given situation, making decisions based on the joint emergency service interoperability principles in collaboration with our blue light partners.

6.9 All activities relating to JESIP are included within the embedding self-assessment questionnaire, submitted every quarter to the JESIP team, which is intended to provide assurance that JESIP is being embedded with the Service.

6.10 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.

6.11 A Thames Valley Emergency Services Collaboration Executive Board was 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.

6.12 Following the move to a jointly funded Thames Valley Fire Control Centre in 2015, the Authority has continued its commitment to collaboration through a Thames Valley Operational Alignment Programme. Amongst other things, the programme sets out to align:

6.12.1 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 Service's current position and governance structure, identifying the Critical Success Factors (CSF) necessary to develop and deliver a combined Fire Protection 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, procedures and ways of working where we can, developing a common framework, which will build a foundation that will facilitate a move to a single Fire Protection, 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 Reform - two interdependent projects are underway within one work stream: to develop a single attraction, engagement and recruitment process for Whole time and On Call fire fighters across the Thames Valley; and, to develop and deliver a joint Thames Valley apprenticeship programme based on the Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service's model.

The key benefits from these enabling projects are a more cost effective and efficient shared recruitment function achieved through pooling external and internal resources, and the 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 the 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.

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



Department for
Communities and
Local Government

Guidance on statements of assurance for fire and rescue authorities in England

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Contents

- Introduction..... 4
- Context 4
- Assessment and ownership..... 5
- Content of the annual statement of assurance
- Financial 5
- Governance 5
- Operational 6
- Framework requirements..... 6
- Future improvements..... 7

Introduction

1. The Government is committed to unburdening local government; eliminating top-down bureaucracy and increasing local flexibility. For fire and rescue authorities, this ethos is demonstrated by the revised Fire and Rescue National Framework for England (the Framework), and in the provisions of the Localism Act 2011, which helps to let them run their services as they see fit.
2. This freedom and flexibility is accompanied by the need for accountability and transparency. Providing an excellent service is only the starting point - communities expect to know how their services are being provided.
3. It is against this background that the Framework sets out a requirement for fire and rescue authorities to publish Statements of Assurance. It says:

‘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’.

4. This document provides guidance on the content of statements of assurance, and indicates how existing assessment processes might feed into the statements in order to avoid duplication.
5. Guidance should not be taken to constitute legal advice. We have indicated what should be included in the statements of assurance, while allowing the flexibility to tailor the format and presentation. It is for fire and rescue authorities to decide how to best present the information with their communities in mind.

Context

6. 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.
7. One of the principal aims of the 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.
8. Where fire and rescue authorities have already set out relevant information that is clear, accessible, and user-friendly within existing documents, they may wish to include extracts, or links to these documents within their statement of assurance.

9. 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*.¹

Assessment and ownership

10. 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.
11. The statement of assurance should be signed off by an elected member of the relevant authority who is able to take responsibility for its contents. It is up to the individual authority to ensure that this is done by an appropriate person (or persons) who can approve it on behalf of the authority.
12. 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. The first statements are due for publication in the financial year 2013-14, and annually thereafter.

Content of the annual statement of assurance

Financial

13. 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.²
14. It is a statutory requirement under the *Accounts and Audit (England) Regulations 2011*³ 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 Practice⁴ which aims to give a "true and fair" view of the financial position and transactions of the authority. The authority is responsible for approval of the statement of accounts prior to publication.
15. The statement of assurance may briefly set out what assessment procedures are in place with regard to the authorities' statements of account.

Governance

16. The *Accounts and Audit (England) Regulations 2011* also requires 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

¹ <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2004/21/section/25>

² Section 3 of the Local Government Act 1999

³ <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2011/817/contents/made>

⁴ *Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting* - Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy

have undertaken to review the effectiveness of their governance framework, including the system of internal control.

17. 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*.⁵

Operational

18. Fire and rescue authorities function within a clearly defined statutory and policy framework. The key documents setting this out are:
- the [Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004](#)⁶
 - the [Civil Contingencies Act 2004](#)⁷
 - the [Regulatory Reform \(Fire Safety\) Order 2005](#)⁸
 - the [Fire and Rescue Services \(Emergencies\) \(England\) Order 2007](#)⁹
 - the [Localism Act 2011](#)¹⁰
 - the [Fire and Rescue National Framework for England](#)¹¹
19. Fire and rescue authorities already consult on, and publish, their integrated risk management plans, 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.
20. 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 integrated risk management plan.
21. 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 which 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.

Framework requirements

⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/local-authority-data-transparency-code>

⁶ <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2004/21/contents>

⁷ <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2004/36/contents>

⁸ <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2005/1541/contents/made>

⁹ <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2007/735/contents/made>

¹⁰ <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2011/20/contents/enacted>

¹¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/fire-and-rescue-national-framework-for-england>

22. Where fire and rescue authorities are satisfied that the systems they have in place, and any specific measures they have undertaken, fulfil their Framework requirements, this should be clearly stated in the statement of assurance. Accordingly, where appropriate, authorities may consider making a simple declaration that the Framework requirements have been met.

Future improvements

23. Fire and rescue authorities may wish to include a section in their statements of assurance on any potential improvements they have identified across their accounting, governance or operational responsibilities to communities, particularly where plans are underway.