



STATEMENT OF ASSURANCE

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1. The National Framework sets out a requirement for Fire and Rescue Authorities to provide annual assurance on financial, governance and operational matters and show they have had due regard to the expectations set out in their Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) and the requirements included in the Framework.
2. The Statement of Assurance (SoA) for this Authority is based on the principles set out in the department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) guidance.
3. This SOA complements the following documents:
 - Annual Statement of Accounts 2014/15
 - Annual Governance Statement 2014/15

FINANCIAL ASSURANCE

4. The Authority places significant importance in ensuring that its financial management arrangements are in line with the expectations of a public body.
5. The Authority produces accounts on an annual basis that set out details of its financial affairs. The Annual Statement of Accounts is produced taking account of Codes of Practice issued by professional accounting bodies.
6. The Annual Statement of Accounts is considered and approved by the Authority's Audit and Risk Committee prior to being published.
7. The Accounts are audited by independent external auditors who provide a view on the information contained in the accounts being "true and fair". The Auditor considers whether the Authority has demonstrated it has delivered value for money prior to signing the audit statement.

GOVERNANCE ASSURANCE

8. The Authority, as a public body, places significant emphasis on ensuring that effective governance arrangements are in place.
9. Governance is concerned with how the Authority manages its affairs on a day to day basis including its business practices, standards of conduct and overall management procedures.
10. The Authority publishes a separate Annual Governance Statement (AGS) that sets out its arrangements for ensuring that effective governance arrangements are in place.
11. Prior to approving the AGS, a review of the internal control framework is considered by the Audit and Risk Committee. The Committee also considers key governance risks, the assurances gained from internal audit work undertaken during the year and any instances of fraud and corruption that have been identified.
12. A Corporate Governance Action Plan (CGAP) is reviewed by the Audit and Risk Committee on a quarterly basis and key governance risks are monitored through this process. The CGAP review provides details of the key governance risks that are included in the CGAP for monitoring in the following financial year.

OPERATIONAL ASSURANCE

13. The Authority publishes an Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) that sets out details of its operational service provision and plans at a local, regional and national level.
14. Whilst the Authority is primarily a locally based service, mutual aid arrangements are in place with other services to provide resilience for large scale or complex incidents where additional resources need to be called on. The Authority contributes to national resilience and can make a number of its assets available to support a national emergency.
15. The Authority consults extensively on its IRMP proposals annually and reports the outcomes of consultation to the Combined Fire Authority prior to implementing any changes to service provision.

16. The consultation process involves:

- website consultation questionnaire
- consultation with local Area Action Partnership (AAP) meetings
- consultation with police and communities together (PACT) meetings
- media releases and press interviews
- consultation with all town and parish councils
- consultation with partners and stakeholders

17. Information to support the consultation process is provided in hard copy and electronic formats and is also available in alternative formats on request.

18. To help secure a greater understanding of our own performance and areas for improvement, the Authority actively participates in the Operational Assessment and Fire Peer Challenge process, developed in partnership with the Local Government Association and the Chief Fire Officers Association, every three years. We publish the outcome report from each peer challenge along with our action plan to address areas identified for improvement.

OVERALL ASSURANCE ARRANGEMENTS

19. The assurance arrangements that the Authority has in place are considered to meet the requirements set out in the National Framework.