



Dorset Fire Authority

MEETING	Dorset Fire Authority
DATE OF MEETING	23 September 2015
OFFICER	Chief Fire Officer
SUBJECT OF THE REPORT	Corporate Statement of Assurance
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	<p>The National Framework requires the Authority to publish an annual Statement of Assurance. The guidance published in May 2013 allows considerable flexibility over their format and it is expected that existing documents be referenced to avoid duplication. One of the principal aims of the Statement is to provide an 'accessible way in which communities, Government, local authorities and other partners may make a valid assessment of their local authority's performance'. This year has seen significant resources used to support the combination with Wiltshire and we intend, as a consequence, that no formal Annual Report be made this year, as the information usually contained within it is already available through the website. Nevertheless, providing our communities with assurance that we have maintained the previously high standards of governance is essential. Given the breadth of audience, a Plain English assurance statement has been created and will be made available on the DFRS website. This Statement will make reference to a number of key documents and assurance assessments undertaken by the Authority that will be hyperlinked and made available in paper copy upon request.</p>
RISK ASSESSMENT	<p>Failure to agree a Statement of Assurance may render the Authority in breach of its requirements under Section 21 of the National Framework 2012. This Statement may be used as a source of information for the Secretary of State's biennial report under Section 25 of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 and as such failure to publish a suitable Statement may cause reputational risks.</p> <p>Failure to publish an Annual Governance Statement will put it in breach of its duty under the Accounts and Audit (England) Regulations 2011. This may cause the Authority's sound track record of good governance to be placed in doubt and may attract additional scrutiny.</p>

COMMUNITY IMPACT	The Statement of Assurance has been developed with the community as the primary audience. This will help improve transparency and accountability of the Service and Authority.
BUDGET IMPLICATIONS	None for the purposes of this report
RECOMMENDATIONS	It is recommended that Members approve the Statement of assurance following its consideration at the Audit and Scrutiny Committee meeting on 18 September 2015.
BACKGROUND PAPERS	<p>Publication of Assurance Statement Guidance and Revision of the Intervention Protocol, DCLG, 14 May 2013</p> <p>Fire and Rescue Service National Framework 2012</p> <p>CIPFA/SOLACE Framework <i>Delivering Good Governance in Local Government 2007</i></p> <p>Community Safety Plan 2014-19, Dorset Fire Authority</p> <p>The following documents are supported appendices to the draft Statement of Assurance Report which will be considered by the Audit and Scrutiny Committee at their meeting on 18 September 2015. These will be available on the website should Members approve the Statement of Assurance.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Draft Annual Governance Statement 2014/15 • Annual Health and Safety Assurance Statement 2014/15 • Annual Operational Capability Assurance Statement 2014/15 • Annual Diversity and Inclusion Assurance Statement 2014/15 • Progress Review Against Fire and Rescue Service National Framework • Annual Information Management Assurance Statement 2014/15
APPENDICES	A. Draft Statement of Assurance 2014/15
REPORT ORIGINATOR AND CONTACT	Robert Ford, Head of Corporate Planning Tel:(01305) 252615

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The National Framework requires the Authority to publish a Statement of Assurance. It states:

'Fire and rescue authorities must provide annual assurance on their 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.' {para. 3.2}

- 1.2 Following consideration at its meeting in December 2012, the Authority provided a full response to the draft 'Protocol on Government Intervention Action on Fire and Rescue Authorities in England', and 'Guidance on Statements of Assurance for Fire and Rescue Authorities'. Our response expressed concerns about the contradictions, duplication and burden with existing assurance and reporting requirements.
- 1.3 In May 2013, DCLG published guidance for producing the Statement of Assurance and the revised Intervention Protocol. It would appear that many of the concerns expressed by the Authority and others had not been taken into account. There remains considerable duplication of effort and reporting, although the guidance allows for flexibility over the format and referencing to existing documentation.

2. Complying with Requirements to Produce a Statement of Assurance

- 2.1 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 authority's performance*'. This year has seen significant resources used to support the combination with Wiltshire and we intend that no formal Annual Report be made this year, as the information usually contained within it is already available through the website. Nevertheless, providing our communities with assurance that we have maintained the previously high standards of governance is essential. Given the breadth of audience, a Plain English assurance statement has been created and will be made available on the DFRS website. The statement will make reference to a number of key documents and technical assessments undertaken by the Authority that may either be hyperlinked or made available in paper copy. Upon request, officers could then assist members of the public, partners or indeed the Government in understanding the complexities behind the Statement of Assurance.
- 2.2 The published assurance statement guidance sets out the content requirement under four broad headings - Financial, Governance, Operational and National Framework Requirements. The Audit and Scrutiny Committee at their meeting on 18 September 2015 will consider in some depth the supporting assurance frameworks and associated evidence that are listed as background papers in this report. It will ensure that it is satisfied with the quality of this assurance and make a recommendation to the DFA to amend or endorse the statement.

3. Conclusion

- 3.1 The Authority has considerable discretion with regard to its Statement of Assurance. However, it must approve a statement to comply with the Fire and Rescue Services Act, along with an associated Annual Governance Statement in compliance with financial regulations. As in previous years, officers believe that a simple, more community focused approach is the best way forward. The approach taken seeks to minimise duplication with existing documents such as the Community Safety Plan and Annual Governance Statement. To this end, we have sought to employ the Statement of Assurance as an 'umbrella' for a range of assurances many of which have been deemed as notable practice. The three page statement will be made available on the website.

DARRAN GUNTER

Chief Fire Officer

14 September 2015

Appendix A



DORSET FIRE AUTHORITY PUBLIC STATEMENT OF ASSURANCE 2014/15

Rebecca Knox
Chairman
Dorset Fire Authority

Darran Gunter
Chief Fire Officer
Dorset Fire and Rescue Service

Why are we producing a statement of assurance?

Each year we look very carefully at the risks facing our communities and plan accordingly to ensure that we have the right people, with the right skills and resources to keep you, our staff and partners safe. Our aim is prevent fires and other emergencies before they happen, but if they do occur, to respond quickly and professionally. We set out our approach to how we do this in our **Community Safety Plan**ⁱ. As we move through the year we closely monitor our performance in key areas through our **quarterly performance reports**ⁱⁱ. Because of the work involved in combining with Wiltshire Fire & Rescue Service which will take place on 1 April 2016, it has been decided that no further Community Safety Plans or Annual Reports should be produced solely by Dorset Fire Authority. However, all the information normally contained within the Annual Report is available through the website at www.dorsetfire.gov.uk.

We are required under the Government's **Fire and Rescue Service National Framework**ⁱⁱⁱ to provide an annual assurance on financial, governance and operational matters and how we have had regard to this Framework. This Statement is a broad summary of our arrangements. It is supported by a number of other, more detailed documents that we would be happy to provide or explain to you.

Where can you get further information?

Further detailed documents referenced to this Statement are available on our website. Should you wish to receive paper copies they may be obtained from us by writing to the Head of Information Management, Dorset Fire and Rescue Service Headquarters, Peverell Avenue West, Poundbury, Dorchester, DT1 3SU or telephoning (01305) 252641 or emailing us vikki.shearing@dorsetfire.gov.uk. We would be happy to talk you through these documents if you need our help understanding them.

What are we are assuring?

Financial assurance

We are responsible for ensuring that public money is properly accounted for and used economically, efficiently and effectively. Each year we carefully assess the money we need against the money that we secure from Government, fire precept payers and other sources. We have very robust budget monitoring processes that are subject to close scrutiny. We also plan for the **medium term**^{iv} looking carefully at what resources we will need and how we might fund this. Our appointed Treasurer is responsible for ensuring that we have proper controls in place to manage our financial assets and to safeguard against fraud and other irregularities. He is also responsible for ensuring accurate reports are kept and that an **annual statement of accounts** is produced. In addition we have a range of auditors appointed by our treasurer and government. These auditors produce an independent **annual management report**^v which we consider and if necessary action any points arising from it. Similar to the majority of public bodies we have a number of concerns about our financial outlook; however our auditors, treasurer and ourselves have no significant financial concerns about how we account for and use public money.

Governance - *the way we direct and control our money, people and resources*

We are required to ensure that our business is conducted in accordance with the law and proper standards, and that public money is safeguarded, properly accounted for, and used economically, efficiently and effectively. We appoint a Clerk, Treasurer and Chief Fire Officer to ensure this happens. We have robust frameworks and processes in place that are scrutinised by us and our auditors. We have very high levels of performance, very praiseworthy peer assessments and no significant failings. We are required in law to produce an **Annual Governance Statement**^{vi} that sets this out along with the key risks facing us. This Statement and supporting documents are all publically available.

Operational assurance

We are required to comply with a range of laws and regulations. They key documents for us are:

- **Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004**^{vii}
- **Civil Contingencies Act 2004**^{viii}
- **Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005**^{ix}

- **Fire and Rescue Services (Emergencies) (England) Order 2007^x**
- **Localism Act 2011^{xi}**
- **Fire and Rescue National Framework for England 2012^{xii}**

To help us establish a clear understanding of how we are doing against these requirements, we undertake a number of detailed assessments. In particular we look carefully at our:

- health and safety policy and produce a **Health and safety assurance statement^{xiii}**
- **operational capability^{xiv}** against the risks we face and the incidents we attend to ensure that we have the right procedures, resources and skills to professionally respond
- compliance against the **National Framework^{xv}** including the Fire and Rescue Services Act

In addition, we have provided:

- a **Diversity and inclusion assurance statement^{xvi}** to help us make sure that we are working in the best possible way to meet the differing needs our communities and staff
- an **Information Management assurance statement^{xvii}** to explain how we manage the sensitive information we hold

We have very comprehensive systems for ensuring that we consider all external advice and instructions to comply with health and safety legislation. We have learnt a lot from other incidents where firefighters have been killed and seriously injured and have changed our procedures and equipment where we feel that it is appropriate to do so.

Whilst we have a number of challenges and issues, we have concluded that there are no significant failures or weaknesses in our operational capability.

Future plans

Like most publically funded organisations money is getting very tight and we are facing some very tough choices. We remain absolutely committed to ensuring that we do all we can to protect our frontline services that we provide to you. In December 2014, the Dorset Fire Authority agreed to combine with Wiltshire & Swindon Fire Authority. The new combined Authority, Dorset and Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Authority will formally take over the running of all fire and rescue responsibilities for Dorset and Wiltshire on 1 April 2016 and this new Authority will be publishing a Community Safety Plan by 31 March 2016. Whenever we plan any change we always consult thoroughly as we did when we set this year's budget. Please be assured that this will continue to be the way we operate. It is fundamental to us that we seek the views of the people that we serve before making any fundamental change.

And finally...

We hope that this Statement of Assurance provided you with a general overview of how we maintain the highest standards in using our resources and safeguard public money. Should you have any queries or requests for further information, please do not hesitate to contact us and we would be more than happy to help you.

Hyperlinked documents

- i Community Safety Plan 2014/2019
- ii Quarterly performance reports to DFA 2014/15
- iii National Framework 2012
- iv Medium Term Finance Plan
- v Management letter KPMG 18 September 2015 Audit and Scrutiny Committee
- vi Annual Governance Statement 18 September 2015 Audit and Scrutiny Committee
- vii Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004
- viii Civil Contingencies Act 2004
- ix Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005
- x Fire and Rescue Services (Emergencies) (England) Order 2007
- xi Localism Act 2011
- xii Fire and Rescue National Framework for England 2012
- xiii Annual Health and Safety Assurance Statement 18 September 2015 Audit and Scrutiny Committee
- xiv Operational Capability Assurance Statement 18 September 2015 Audit and Scrutiny Committee
- xv Assessment against National Framework 18 September 2015 Audit and Scrutiny Committee
- xvi Annual Diversity and Inclusion Assurance Statement 18 September 2015 Audit and Scrutiny Committee
- xvii Annual Information Management Assurance Statement 18 September 2015 Audit and Scrutiny Committee