



Dorset Fire Authority

MEETING	Dorset Fire Authority
DATE OF MEETING	24 September 2014
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'. With such a breadth of audience, it is proposed that a very simple, Plain English assurance statement be included in the Annual Report and made separately 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>

<p>COMMUNITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT</p> <p><i>Note: If the matrix indicates negative impacts on the community or staff, an equality impact assessment (EIA) will need to be completed.</i></p>	<p>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.</p>
<p>BUDGET IMPLICATIONS</p>	<p>None for the purposes of this report</p>
<p>RECOMMENDATIONS</p>	<p>It is recommended that Members approve the Statement of Assurance following its consideration at the Audit and Scrutiny Committee meeting on 19 September 2014.</p>
<p>BACKGROUND PAPERS</p>	<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 supporting appendices to the Corporate Statement of Assurance Report which will be considered by the Audit and Scrutiny on 19 September 2014. These will be available on DFRS website should Members approve the Statement of Assurance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Draft Annual Governance Statement 2013/14 ◆ Annual Health and Safety Assurance Statement 2013/14 ◆ Annual Operational Capability Assurance Statement 2013/14 ◆ Progress review against Operational Assessment Peer review Improvement Plan 2013 ◆ Annual Diversity and Inclusion Assurance Statement 2013/14 ◆ Progress review against Fire and Rescue Service National Framework ◆ Annual Information Management Assurance Statement 2013/14
<p>APPENDICES</p>	<p>A. Draft Statement of Assurance 2013/14</p>
<p>REPORT ORIGINATOR AND CONTACT</p>	<p>Robert Ford, Head of Corporate Planning Tel: (01305) 252615</p>

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 Requirement 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'*. With such a breadth of audience it is proposed that a very simple, Plain English assurance statement be included in the Authority's Annual Report and made separately 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.
- 2.1 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 its meeting on 19 September 2014 will consider in some depth the supporting assurance frameworks and associated evidence that are listed as background papers in this report. It will ensure 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. Members have previously accepted the view of 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, Annual Governance Statement and Annual Report. 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 included with our Annual Report and made separately available on the website.

DARRAN GUNTER

Chief Fire Officer

17 September 2014