



**DORSET & WILTSHIRE  
FIRE AND RESCUE  
AUTHORITY**

# Statement of Assurance 2018-19

**FIRE  
OPERATIONS  
COMMANDER**

**PASSIONATE ABOUT  
CHANGING & SAVING LIVES**

## Background

- 1.1 Dorset & Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Authority produces a strategic plan known as the [Community Safety Plan](#) (CSP) to set out our four-year high-level vision and the priorities we are pursuing. This high-level plan is supported by a wide variety of documents to translate this intent into on-the-ground action. In September, we also publish an Annual Report which sets out how we are doing and the key achievements that we have made. This report supplements a range of quarterly progress reports provided to the Authority at their public meetings.
- 1.2 The Fire and Rescue National Framework for England, published in May 2018, sets out the requirement for all fire and rescue authorities in England to publish an annual statement of assurance on financial, governance and operational matters.
- 1.3 In the interests of greater transparency, we have linked this statement to our annual policy assurances, many of which have additional documents to help further substantiate our position in key areas. These are:
  - **Corporate Governance (incorporating information management)**
  - **Health and Safety**
  - **Community Safety**
  - **People**
  - **Equality, Diversity and Inclusion**
  - **Finance**
  - **Asset Management**
  - **Safeguarding**
- 1.4 Our annual Statement of Assurance is divided into declarations surrounding our overall governance, financial and operational arrangements. It also sets out what our current and future challenges are and how we are managing these going forward.

## Governance Assurance

- 1.5 In September 2017 the Authority made a formal request to the Home Secretary for a variation to the Dorset & Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Authority (Combination Scheme) Order 2015 to reduce the membership from 30 to 18. As a response to this, a single Combination Order was progressed by the Home Office and laid before Parliament on the 4 December 2017 and took effect from 6 June 2018.
- 1.6 Whilst the reduction in the number of Authority Members resulted in direct savings, against member's allowances, these were not material in terms of the Authority's overall budget and the greater significance of this reform was the focus on having a sound modern governance model.

- 1.7 The revised governance arrangements secure efficiencies without losing local democratic accountability and are aligned to emerging national standards.
- 1.8 To achieve full assurance of the revised arrangements, and following 12-months of operation, the Local Government Association (LGA) undertook an independent peer review in June 2019. The positive position indicated by the LGA is to be considered by the Authority at its September meeting.
- 1.9 Our Corporate Governance comprises:
- the systems, processes, culture and values by which the Authority is directed and controlled
  - those activities through which it accounts to, engages with and leads the community.
- 1.10 Corporate Governance enables the Authority to monitor the achievement of its strategic priorities and to help guarantee the delivery of appropriate and cost-effective services. The system of internal control is an integral part of the governance arrangements designed to direct risk to a managed level.
- 1.11 To help us maintain good governance we have adopted a corporate governance policy that is underpinned by the principles developed by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) and the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE) in their revised model issued in April 2016. This framework has seven core principles, a number of supporting principles and suggestions for source documents/good practice that may be used to demonstrate compliance. Within the governance code we have incorporated our information management arrangements and practices.
- 1.12 The Authority has a responsibility for conducting, at least annually, a review of the effectiveness of its governance arrangements including the system of internal control.
- 1.13 This review of the effectiveness is informed by the work of senior managers within the Service; the internal and external auditors' annual reports; and also, by comments made by the external auditors and other review agencies and inspectorates including the Investigatory Powers Commissioner's Office, who undertook an audit of the Service's arrangements for complying with the Regulation of Investigative Powers Act 2000 (RIPA). After reviewing the procedures, training and support mechanisms that are in place, and speaking with a range of officers, the Rt. Hon. Lord Justice Sir Adrian Fulford concluded that: "Dorset & Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service has taken a very professional approach to RIPA and associated obligations".

- 1.14 As part of our assurance process we undertake an annual comprehensive corporate governance baseline assessment against the CIPFA framework, this also supports our additional requirement to publish an [Annual Governance Statement](#), which accompanies our statutory financial statements.

## Financial Assurance

- 1.15 It is a statutory requirement under the Accounts and Audit (England) Regulations 2015 for all fire and rescue authorities in England to publish the financial results of their activities for the year. Our '[Statement of Accounts](#)' show the annual costs of providing the Service and their format is determined by the CIPFA Code of Practice, which aims to give a "true and fair" view of the financial position and transactions of the Authority.
- 1.16 To support this, the Service has an overarching financial management policy. This policy sets out our approach to ensuring that we demonstrate sound financial management and control of our assets and finances. The policy is further supported by a number of local procedural documents.
- 1.17 The Treasurer is responsible for producing the Statement of Accounts ready for Authority approval and publication. To meet the requirements of the Accounts and Audit Regulations, the Statement of Accounts must be approved and published annually by the end of July.
- 1.18 To secure certainty of central government grant funding for the 2016-20 financial years, the Service was required to submit an efficiency plan. This document sets out the Authority's plans to improve the services it provides whilst managing with reduced real-terms funding levels. The efficiency plan was submitted to the Home Office and approved by the Fire Minister in December 2016. As a result, the Service secured a four-year funding settlement, enabling us to plan with greater certainty over this four-year period.
- 1.19 **External Audit Arrangements.** On an annual basis, the Statement of Accounts is subject to external audit scrutiny. During 2018 Deloitte LLP were appointed as our new external auditors, replacing KPMG LLP. Deloitte LLP are responsible for the completion of the following assurance activities:
- Audit of the 2018-19 financial statements
  - Providing an opinion on the Authority's accounts
  - Providing a Value for Money conclusion.
- 1.20 Deloitte LLP have completed their audit of the 2018-19 financial statements and provided the Authority with unmodified (or unqualified) opinions in respect of the Authority's accounts and Value for Money arrangements.

- 1.21 **Internal Audit Arrangements.** To support the external audit process, the Authority has in place a robust system for internal auditing. The three-year Internal Audit Strategy, approved by the Authority, has been delivered by our internal auditors, Gateway Assure.
- 1.22 An annual Internal Audit Plan is approved by the Authority and is delivered across the Service. Performance against the Audit Plan is reported to senior managers and Members on a quarterly basis.
- 1.23 The internal audit service reviewed a number of areas during the year:
- Energy Management
  - ICT Migrations
  - Information Governance
  - Resilience
  - Procurement
  - Health & Wellbeing
  - Performance Management
  - Leadership Development
  - On-Call Systems
  - Procedural Alignment.
- 1.24 The internal audit reports are published on the Service's website for transparency. The reports include any agreed improvement activities, and these are reviewed by Members on a quarterly basis until completion.
- 1.25 **Procurement.** The Service has a procurement procedure that addresses both revenue and capital procurement and how to procure goods, services and works. This includes meeting the requirements of the Public Contracts Regulations 2015. These arrangements are embedded within the organisation and work to strengthen these even more will be completed during 2019. The Treasurer is responsible for ensuring that the Service's processes conform to the Regulations and Treaty principles. The procurement process spans the whole cycle from identification of need through to the contract or end of the useful life of an asset. Recent Government analysis indicates that we are procuring at or below national average against a standard basket of goods.
- 1.26 **Data Transparency.** The Service complies with the Government's 'Local Government Transparency Code 2015' for releasing public data. In the last year the Service complied with 97% of requests for information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 within the 20-day legal timescale. Only four out of the 121 exceeded this. All 19 Subject Access Requests were responded to within the legal timescales required under the General Data Protection Regulations, demonstrating that good information management practices exist across the Service. The following arrangements are in place:

- A Freedom of Information Publication Scheme
- Publication of the annual Statement of Accounts
- Publication of all expenditure over £500
- Publication of all Government Procurement Card transactions
- Publication of procurement information
- Publication of land ownership
- Publication of Trade Union facility time
- Publication of a Pay Policy Statement including all senior employee salaries and the pay multiple
- Publication of fraud investigations
- Publication of Members' allowances and expenses
- Publication of External Audit reports
- Publication of all committee reports (other than those where a statutory exemption for publication applies).

## Operational Assurance

1.27 We are required to comply with a range of laws and regulations. The key areas for us are:

- Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004
- Civil Contingencies Act 2004
- Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005
- Fire and Rescue Services (Emergencies) (England) Order 2007
- Fire and Rescue Service National Framework for England (2018)
- Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 and associated regulations.

1.28 In broad terms, our service delivery has three key components:

1.28.1 **Prevention.** Our prevention teams, station based staff and volunteers work with partners to prevent fires from starting and to reduce the numbers of fire related injuries and deaths. Whilst our statutory duty is to prevent fires, we have a key role to play in broader prevention areas such as road safety and health and well-being. As such we are significantly involved in the health and well-being agendas across the Service area running a wide range of education and engagement programmes.

1.28.2 **Protection.** We are the enforcing Authority for the fire safety requirements of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 and the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005, along with other related legislation. To confirm legal compliance, all of our fire safety members of staff are issued with warrant cards and we have procedures in place to ensure we can operate effectively. Our fire safety inspectors are engaging with work and business, in preference to enforcing fire safety standards, and will continue to enhance the economic growth of our communities. Fire investigation officers are carrying out investigations in conjunction with the police where appropriate, and information is collated for

serious case conferences and for the use of HM Coroner, as well as, reducing the incidence of fire. Through broader analysis, we identify those high-risk premises that fall under the Regulatory Reform Fire Safety Order (2005) and use this information to target our risk-based inspection programme.

- 1.28.3 **Response.** Our provision of immediate emergency response consists of 74 front-line fire engines operating from 50 fire stations across the Service and over 80% of our fire appliances are staffed using on-call firefighters.
- 1.28.4 We have the following specialist resources which can be deployed at incidents if need be:
- Command and control
  - Hazardous materials
  - Environmental protection
  - Water rescue
  - Animal rescue
  - Rescue from confined spaces
  - Rescue from height
  - Marine firefighting
  - National resilience.
- 1.28.5 Availability of appliances and response times, particularly in some of the rural parts of our Service range, continue to be a key area of focus and improvement for the Authority and the Service. This local challenge reflects the wider national position.
- 1.28.6 **Assurance.** In terms of our prevention and protection activities, we use sophisticated modelling and profiling techniques, coupled with partnership data, referrals, and local knowledge to identify those who are most at risk from fire and ensure appropriate interventions are made to educate and reduce risk. This helps us guarantee we maximise our impact and allows us to target areas outside of response standards; a key part of our approach to integrated risk management planning. Safe and Well checks are quality assured and there are follow up surveys, with our wider prevention activities, to help us assure the value of our efforts and to gauge our potential impacts. Protection visits are also targeted against risk and are both quality assured and audited. There is a significant assurance framework in place for assessing our operational capability. Operational competencies aligned to the fire professional framework form part of our Operational Licence which must be in date for all operational firefighters. Local variation in essential skill levels which are required to be at a higher level than the Operational Licence is managed on a risk basis and according to local risk and Service requirements. A structured approach is in place for the design, delivery and assessment for each element of the Operational Licence.

- 1.28.7 The organisation fully recognises and accepts its responsibility for the health, safety and welfare of its members of staff and others who may be affected by our activities. To achieve this, the organisation looks to meet all relevant requirements of the Health & Safety at Work Act 1974 (together with all other statutory provisions associated with it) and support members of staff in meeting their obligations under the Act. Detailed health, safety and welfare specific arrangements are set out in procedures that are developed to take account of relevant legislation and guidance. The procedures provide members of staff with relevant and comprehensive information on the risks they face, and the preventative and protective measures required to control them. During 2018-19 the Service achieved the BSI 18001 Health & Safety standard Service wide, confirming we have a robust system in place for actively monitoring the effectiveness of the Service's Health & Safety Management procedures.
- 1.28.8 We work closely with our Local Resilience Forums, in both Wiltshire & Swindon and Dorset, to help us meet our obligations under the Civil Contingencies Act and are the employing body for the Dorset Civil Contingencies Unit. We align our risk management arrangements to the community and national risk registers to make sure we have the appropriate response and recovery plans and resources to meet our duties. Multi-agency and Service based exercising takes place to test these arrangements. The Service is also heavily involved in effective multi-agency liaison arrangements, and the sharing of resources which contribute to an enhanced incident response such as the National Inter-Agency Liaison Officers network, the Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Programme, the Critical National Infrastructure and Safety Advisory Groups.
- 1.28.9 Whilst Service wide performance is reported by officers and scrutinised by Members at Authority level, to make sure local accountability across a large Service is maintained, four Local Performance and Scrutiny Committees have been established for Bournemouth & Poole; Dorset; Swindon and Wiltshire. The principle is to provide a mechanism for ensuring local accountability, focus and on-going support for matters relating to the geographical areas of the constituent local authorities. These public meetings are held locally on a quarterly basis with performance information and reports available from our website.
- 1.28.10 The Service undertook a consultation exercise, that led to our first combined Community Safety Plan, involving focus groups and online forums, among others. This process was judged by an external organisation as best practice and appropriate consultation arrangements will be undertaken as part of the development of the new Community Safety Plan due in 2020.

## Current and future challenges

1.29 The following strategic risks are being addressed by the Authority:

1.29.1 **A diverse workforce to meet our needs.** We remain fully committed to having a competent, diverse and resilient workforce. To help us achieve this, we have continued to strengthen our Strategic Workforce Plan to make sure we are able to better forecast our needs and appropriately recruit firefighters, corporate members of staff and volunteers. In support of this we have a comprehensive approach to equality, diversity and inclusion that is overseen by a separate committee. In addition, we are further strengthening all aspects of our Service with a particular focus on our approach to positive action, leadership, talent management and progression.

1.29.2 **Securing financial sustainability.** Financial sustainability is a key risk and focus area for us. All public services are having to operate with less money and this Authority is no exception. Since our successful combination the Service has continued to make changes to the way frontline and corporate office activities are carried out in order to deliver further financial savings and efficiencies. Since 2016-17 our funding has reduced by over 20% compared to an average reduction in funding across all fire authorities (excluding London) of 15%. Against this backdrop we have been able to achieve savings to balance our budget, but our medium-term projections forecast a deficit of £2.2m by 2022-23. These projections are based on our current assumptions about future funding; however, there remains a significant degree of uncertainty about this due to the Fair Funding Formula review; Spending Review 2019 and changes to the financial arrangements for the Firefighters Pension Scheme. In addition, the outcome of Brexit discussions could impact on the timing of the Government's plans, potentially delaying the Spending Review process, adding further uncertainty over future funding levels.

1.29.3 **Sustainable on-call duty system.** Over 80% of our appliances are crewed by on-call members of staff who balance their time between their primary employer and our Service. To help us make sure we have a sufficient number of firefighters available when we need them, we have reviewed our selection and recruitment processes. We have enhanced our engagement with primary employers, to promote the role of an on-call firefighter in the community, resulting in an increasing number of applicants to the Service. We have also improved the support provided to on-call members of staff, reducing the amount of management and administration required to help achieve a better work-life balance. In addition, we are developing a pay proposal with representative bodies and staff groups which will reward our members of staff in a better way and contribute to a sustainable on-call duty system.

1.29.4 **Cyber Resilience.** The risk of cyber threats and attacks, both nationally and locally, has increased. Under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004, the Service is required to have robust and resilient business continuity arrangements in place. Information and Communication Technology (ICT) security arrangements are central to the Service delivering resilience and safeguarding the continuation of its critical functions. With an increased reliance on ICT for storing information, accessing partner data and sharing Service data and with continuous advancements in technology, it is essential the Service continues to respond to threats and has robust information security risk management processes in place.

1.30 To meet these challenges, we have initiatives and actions that are included within our Service Delivery Plan, which is the internal mechanism for delivering the Community Safety Plan. Progress is reviewed by the Finance & Governance Committee on a quarterly basis via the performance reports and Strategic Risk Register. This process has been assured by internal audit who have given a 'substantial' level assurance. Reports are available via the Service's website.

## **Conclusion**

1.31 We believe our Statement of Assurance provides a good overview of how we maintain high standards of good governance and services to the communities we serve. Whilst we recognised there are key future challenges, we are also firmly committed to the need to continuously improve. Overall, we are satisfied that the systems and processes that are in place across the organisation fulfil the requirements under the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England (2018). Should you have any queries or require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact us and we will be more than happy to help.

**Cllr Bob Jones**

**Ben Ansell**

**Chairman  
Finance & Governance Committee**

**Chief Fire Officer  
Dorset & Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service**