



**DORSET & WILTSHIRE
FIRE AND RESCUE
AUTHORITY**

Item 19/37

MEETING	Dorset & Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Authority
DATE OF MEETING	30 September 2019
SUBJECT OF THE REPORT	Local Government Association Peer Review of the Authority's governance arrangements
STATUS OF REPORT	Open publication
PURPOSE OF REPORT	For approval
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	<p>As Members are aware, from the 6 June 2018 the membership of the Authority was reduced from 30 to 18.</p> <p>At their June 2018 meeting, Members agreed for a review of the revised governance arrangements to take place after 12 months of operation.</p> <p>In June 2019, the Authority commissioned the Local Government Association (LGA) to undertake a two-day peer review, that was to be undertaken at no cost to the Authority.</p> <p>Following this review, the LGA provided the Authority with a report detailing their findings (Appendix A). This report provides positive assurance over the Authority's governance arrangements and suggests six improvement areas for further consideration.</p> <p>A Member working group, led by the Chair of the Authority, recently reviewed the LGA report and its suggested improvements.</p> <p>This report provides Members with the working group's recommendations against each of the suggested improvements.</p> <p>Subject to Authority approval, further work to deliver the recommendations will be undertaken and progress will be reported to the Authority in December 2019.</p>

RISK ASSESSMENT	Failure to have appropriate and robust governance arrangements may adversely affect the efficiency, effectiveness and reputation of the Authority.
COMMUNITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT	None for the purposes of this report.
BUDGET IMPLICATIONS	There was no cost to the Authority in relation to the completion of the LGA peer review. It is not anticipated that there will be any budget implications resulting from any of the recommended actions within this report.
RECOMMENDATIONS	Members are asked to: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Note the content of the LGA peer review report within Appendix A 2. Consider and approve the recommendations from the Member working group, as set out in in table 1 of this report.
BACKGROUND PAPERS	The Local Government Association Annual Report 2017-2018 'Peer Challenge Programme'
APPENDICES	Appendix A: Report of the LGA on the Authority's governance arrangements July 2019
REPORT ORIGINATOR AND CONTACT	Name: Cllr Rebecca Knox, Authority Chair Email: cllrrebecca.knox@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk

1. Introduction

- 1.1 In September 2017, Members agreed to reduce their membership from 30 to 18, and a revised Combination Order was subsequently laid before Parliament on 4 December 2017.
- 1.2 At their meeting on the 6 June 2018 Members approved the revised governance arrangements and requested a review after 12 months of operation.
- 1.3 Noting the Local Government Association's (LGA) success and experience within their peer review programme, the Authority approved the undertaking of an independent peer review on the 6 June 2019. This review was undertaken at no cost to the Authority.
- 1.4 Members approved the key areas for this peer review as:
 - i. Review the effectiveness and efficiency of the current governance arrangements and structures associated with the Dorset & Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Authority
 - ii. Review the current assurance framework and supporting procedure that underpins the annual Statement of Assurance required under the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England, 2018
 - iii. Review the quality of Member and Officer relations and clarity of respective roles
 - iv. Review the scope of opportunity of Member development arrangements
 - v. Make recommendations for strengthening the current governance arrangements.

2. Local Government Association Peer Review

- 2.1 The LGA peer review took place over two days on 24 and 25 June 2019.
- 2.2 The team was led by Cllr Nick Chard, Chairman of Kent and Medway Fire & Rescue Authority, who was supported by:
 - Simon Furlong – Interim Strategic Director of Communities and Chief Fire Officer, Oxfordshire County Council
 - Rob Davis – Assistant Chief Fire Officer, Avon Fire and Rescue Service
 - Emily McGuinness, LGA Challenge Manager.

- 2.3 The peer review programme included engagement with over 25 Authority Members, Officers and staff, including:
- Interviews with the Authority Chair, Finance & Governance Chair, Authority Members and Clerk & Monitoring Officer
 - A focus group session made up of members of the Strategic Leadership Team, Area Managers and Heads of Department
 - A focus group session with the Democratic Services Team.
- 2.4 To provide an opportunity for full Member engagement an electronic survey was circulated to all Members who had been part of the Authority during the year 2018-2019 and included those new to the Authority from June 2019.

3. Local Government Association Peer Review Report

- 3.1 Following the peer review, the LGA provided a report of their findings and recommendations. This report (see Appendix A) was circulated to Members on 19 July 2019. For transparency, the full report has been made publicly available on the Service's website.
- 3.2 The report provides the Authority with positive assurance of its governance arrangements, citing that, *'the overall impressions are that the Authority is a good, well organised Fire and Rescue Authority'*.
- 3.3 Members will be further assured by the number of encouraging comments throughout the report, a selection of these are highlighted below:
- 3.3.1 *'We found an Authority that has, understandably, adopted a strong assurance focus in the months following the creation of the new authority, thus enabling them to demonstrate to a number of different parties that the merger has been a success and that services have not only been maintained, but are improving'*
- 3.3.2 *'The Authority has successfully done the 'nuts and bolts' of creating the new fire authority, and in doing so have established a strong performance-based organisation'*
- 3.3.3 *'The Authority has successfully navigated the changes in governance structure...'*
- 3.3.4 *'The democratic structures that have been put in place allow for an effective and productive relationship between the Service and the communities it serves'*

- 3.3.5 *'The Local Performance & Scrutiny Committees (LPS) are regarded favourably as a formal forum which allow for local tailoring of services and are a valued demonstration of the importance the Authority places on maintaining service visibility across the Service area'*
- 3.3.6 *'The Authority should reflect with pride on the level of assurance they have garnered amongst their elected Members, Officers and constituent authorities since the creation of the new Authority'*
- 3.3.7 *'Overall, we found that good working relationships between Officers and Members positively impact on the Service. We heard some great examples of a one-team approach'*
- 3.3.8 *'There are examples of good practice, for example, the regular Podcast, which is shown at Authority meetings, and made available to the public via the website'*
- 3.4 The LGA have highlighted six suggested improvements that are noted below in Table 1 of this report.

4. Members Working Group

- 4.1 All Members were invited, by the Authority Chair, to a working group on the 23 July 2019. The purpose of this group was to review and discuss the report; its suggested improvements and deliver recommendations for full Authority consideration.
- 4.2 As part of the working group, Members self-evaluated the current governance arrangements; taking account of LGA recommendations one and six.
- 4.3 Prior to the combination of Dorset and Wiltshire governance was delegated by the Shadow Authority, due to the large membership of 30 Members, to the Policy & Resources Committee; where a smaller number of Members (12) reviewed governance matters.
- 4.4 During the Authority governance review in 2017-18, preparing for a reduction in Authority Members from 30 to 18, the Authority agreed that the responsibilities of the Policy & Resources Committee would be subsumed within those of the Authority.
- 4.5 To ensure clarity of this Members discussed strengthening the Authority's terms of reference to include:
- 4.6 The Authority will:
- Set budget and agree any significant change within the revenue and capital programme

- Formulate and agree policies and strategies
- Have responsibility and oversight of all governance ensuring that good governance operates in line with the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA)/Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Managers (SOLACE) code of good governance and approve the Annual Governance Statement and Statement of Assurance
- Have responsibility and oversight of the emergency cover review and associated plans

4.7 This would allow the Finance & Governance Committee to focus on its terms of reference which covers financial and audit matters.

4.8 Table 1, below, provides the LGA peer review suggested improvements and the recommendations from the Member working group.

No.	Suggested Improvement	Working Group Recommendation
1	Revisit the critical success factors for the Governance Review which was conducted in 2017 and resulted in the reduction in the number of Authority Members from 30 to 18. These factors should then form the basis of a self-evaluation exercise, providing the Authority with an opportunity to recognise and celebrate success, identify opportunities for future learning and move forward from a position of strength	The peer review was the exercise to ensure that the critical success factors were achieved. Assurance has been achieved through the LGA peer review process. Democratic Services Team to: Strengthen and clarify the Authority terms of reference to include updates within section 4.6 of this report.
2	Collectively define what scrutiny means to the Authority and consider how this can be most effectively delivered, without over complicating or adding to the existing committee structures	Democratic Services Team to: Update the Members handbook to include: <i>Scrutiny is the responsibility of all Authority Members. The overall objective of scrutiny is to aid improvement. Member seminars and working groups are the principal mechanisms for Members of this Authority to oversee and scrutinise; through monitoring, examination and questioning of decisions, actions and performance.</i>

3	Widen the Member Working group, currently established to review performance reporting practices and processes, to review the name of the Local Performance and Scrutiny Committees to align more appropriately to its role and function	<p>Retain the current branding for the Local Performance & Scrutiny Committees.</p> <p>Democratic Services Team to:</p> <p>Set up a Member Working group for Local Performance & Scrutiny Chairs to meet, reporting to the Authority; with oversight (if required) by the Authority Chair or Vice Chair.</p>
4	Ensure that there is an effective feedback loop in place which sets out how local performance issues, that are raised via the LPS Committee, are escalated to other bodies such as the Authority, Finance & Governance Committee, or directly with Senior Officers, and then fed back to the Local Committees and the Members raising the matter.	<p>Strengthen the six-monthly Local Performance & Scrutiny Chair updates at the Authority meetings by the use of a standardised proforma report.</p> <p>Where items are identified by the Authority for action the Authority will determine the route for its progression.</p> <p>Democratic Services Team to:</p> <p>Create a draft proforma report to be circulated to Local Performance & Scrutiny Chairs for recommendation and approval of the Authority Chair.</p> <p>Proformas to be used from December 2019.</p>
5	Identify other Authorities where Member development is strong and look to review and understand notable practice in this area and further support Members in taking ownership of their personal and collective development	<p>Democratic Services Team to:</p> <p>Complete a Members' skills audit to understand Member Development requirements for 2020 onwards.</p> <p>Offer Member development sessions after Authority meetings, similar to the arrangements currently in place for Finance & Governance Members. A programme of sessions to be in place from April 2020.</p> <p>Review the use of technology for Member Development. For example, recording sessions so that Members can access the training they are unable to attend.</p>
6	Review the structure, style and governance process for the Statement of Assurance.	<p>Democratic Services to:</p> <p>Update the Authority terms of reference to include approval of the Statement of Assurance and Annual Governance Statement from September 2020.</p>

		<p>Rename the Finance & Governance Committee to Finance & Audit (from December 2019) aligned to reflect their references.</p> <p>Head of Strategic Planning & Corporate Assurance to update the style of the Statement of Assurance in consideration of the potential public audience.</p>
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Table 1. LGA recommendations & suggested course of action arising from the Member-led working group

4.9 Should Members endorse the way forward as recommended by the Member working group then it is proposed that a progress report be presented to Members at their December Authority meeting.

5. Summary and Key Points

5.1 Members have considered the suggested improvements arising from the independent LGA report and have made recommendations through a working group for approval by the Authority. If endorsed it is recommended that a progress report be tabled in December 2019.

September 2019