



**DORSET & WILTSHIRE
FIRE AND RESCUE
AUTHORITY**

Statement of Assurance 2019-2020

**PASSIONATE ABOUT
CHANGING & SAVING LIVES**

Background

- 1.1 Dorset & Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Authority (the Authority) produces a strategic plan to set out our high-level vision and the priorities we are pursuing against the strategic and operational risks we are mitigating. This is known as our Community Safety Plan (CSP), which is supported internally by a wide variety of documents to transform this intent into on-the-ground action. We also publish an Annual Report, in September each year, which sets out how we are doing and the key achievements that we have made. This report harmonises the performance 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 to cover financial, governance and operational matters.
- 1.3 In the interests of greater transparency, we link this statement to our annual policy assurances, many of which have supplementary documents to help further authenticate our position in these key areas. These are:
 - [Corporate Governance \(incorporating information management\)](#)
 - [Health and Safety](#)
 - [Community Safety](#)
 - [People](#)
 - [Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion](#)
 - [Financial Management](#)
 - [Asset Management](#)
 - [Safeguarding](#)
- 1.4 This Statement of Assurance is divided into declarations surrounding our overall governance, financial and operational arrangements and provides details of our current and future challenges and how these will be managed moving forward.

Governance Assurance

- 1.5 Corporate Governance enables us to monitor the achievement of our 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.
- 1.6 Our Corporate Governance comprises:
 - the systems, processes, culture, and values by which we are directed and controlled

- those activities through which we account to, engage with, and lead the community.
- 1.7 To help us maintain good governance we adopt 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.
- 1.8 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.
- 1.9 Since June 2018, our Authority has been governed by 18 Members. This is a reduction from the original 30 Members who were in place following the combination of Dorset Fire and Rescue Authority and Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Authority in April 2016.
- 1.10 The importance of this reform was to focus on having a governance model that secured efficiencies without losing local democratic accountability and is aligned to emerging national standards.
- 1.11 In June 2019, following a period of 12 months in operation, we commissioned the Local Government Association (LGA) to undertake a bespoke governance peer review to provide independent assurance of our revised arrangements.
- 1.12 This review took place in July 2019 and covered the following key areas:
- Overall organisational governance
 - The current assurance framework and supporting procedures that underpin the annual Statement of Assurance
 - The quality of Member and Officer relations
 - The scope of opportunity for Member Development arrangements
 - Make recommendations for strengthening the current governance arrangements.
- 1.13 The LGA findings [report](#) provided us with positive assurance of our governance arrangements, citing that, '*the overall impressions are that the Authority is a good, well organised Fire and Rescue Authority*'.
- 1.14 In addition, assurance was also provided in relation to the development process for the annual Statement of Assurance.

- 1.15 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.
- 1.16 This review of our effectiveness is informed by the work of our senior managers; reports from our internal and external auditors and through inspections undertaken by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabularies and Fire & Rescue Service (HMICFRS) and the British Standards Institute.
- 1.17 Within its first [inspection report](#) of our Service, HMICFRS commended our high standard of performance in all areas and in meeting the needs of our communities. The Inspectorate therefore awarded our Service with the grading of 'Good' against all three pillars of the inspection: effectiveness, efficiency, and people.
- 1.18 As part of our assurance process we undertake an annual comprehensive corporate governance baseline assessment against the CIPFA framework. This supports our additional requirement to publish an Annual Governance Statement, which is included within our statutory Financial Statement of Accounts.

Financial Assurance

- 1.19 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 our Service and the format is determined by the CIPFA Code of Practice, which aims to give a "true and fair" view of our financial position and transactions.
- 1.20 To support this, we have an overarching Financial Management Policy, which 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.
- 1.21 The Head of Financial Services and Treasurer is responsible for producing the Statement of Accounts ready for 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, although due to the coronavirus pandemic this has been extended this year to the end of November 2020.

- 1.22 The Authority approves a Medium Term Finance Plan (MTFP) each year, along with the revenue and capital budgets. The MTFP sets out an outline financial strategy to meet the requirements of Members' agreed vision and strategic priorities as set out in the Community Safety Plan. The MTFP includes our plans for achieving efficiency and value for money and sets out our reserves strategy.
- 1.23 Our Service was awarded the rating of 'Good' within the 'Efficiency' pillar from our first HMICFRS inspection, with the Inspectorate confirming that '*We found it to be good at providing an efficient service. And it is good at using resources and providing an affordable service*'.
- 1.24 **External Audit Arrangements.** On an annual basis, our Statement of Accounts is subject to external audit scrutiny. Since 2018, Deloitte LLP have been our appointed external auditors.
- 1.25 Deloitte LLP are responsible for the completion of the following assurance activities:
- Audit of the 2019-20 financial statements
 - Providing an opinion on the Authority's accounts
 - Providing a Value for Money conclusion.
- 1.26 Deloitte LLP are continuing their audit of the 2019-20 financial statements. This work has been delayed due to the coronavirus pandemic and the statutory timescales for completion have been extended to 30 November 2020, however, we expect that Deloitte LLP will provide an unmodified (or unqualified) opinion in respect of our accounts and value for money arrangements.
- 1.27 **Internal Audit Arrangements.** To support the external audit process, we have in place a robust system for internal auditing.
- 1.28 In January 2019 we appointed the South West Audit Partnership as our internal auditors and the four-year Internal Audit Strategy 2019-2023, was approved in March 2019.
- 1.29 The Internal Audit Strategy provides coverage of our key corporate outcomes, as well as coverage of the eight themes of a 'Healthy Organisation'.
- 1.30 Each year the annual Internal Audit Plan is reviewed and approved, and we have processes in place to monitor its delivery across our Service.
- 1.31 Performance against the Internal Audit Plan is reported to senior managers and Members on a quarterly basis along with the progress of any audit recommended improvements.
- 1.32 This year the Internal Audit Plan covered the list below and the following assurance levels were provided:

- Business Continuity Planning – Substantial Assurance
- Multi-agency response arrangements/ Resilience – Substantial Assurance
- Risk critical information – Adequate Assurance
- Procurement cards and fuel cards – Partial Assurance
- Planned and reactive maintenance - Adequate Assurance
- Recruitment and Workforce Planning - Substantial Assurance
- Payroll – Partial Assurance
- Medium Term Financial Plan and Capital Strategy – Substantial Assurance
- Financial management systems - Adequate Assurance
- ICT Strategy – Adequate Assurance.

1.33 The quarterly internal audit reports are published on our website for transparency and the reports include any agreed improvement activities. These improvement activities are reviewed by our Members at the quarterly Finance and Audit Committee meetings until they are complete.

1.34 **Procurement.** The procurement strategy encompasses both revenue and capital purchases of goods, services and works, and meets the requirements of the Public Contracts Regulations 2015. The procurement process spans the whole cycle, from the identification of need through to the end of contract or useful life of an asset. These arrangements are embedded within the organisation and, following a peer review by Devon & Somerset Fire and Rescue Service, were strengthened over 2019-20. Findings identified sound practice and opportunities for development including the introduction of Category Management. The Head of Financial Services and Treasurer oversees procurement processes to ensure compliance with standing orders and regulations. Recent Government analysis indicates that our Service procures at, or below, national average against a standard basket of goods.

1.35 **Data Transparency.** We comply with the Government's 'Local Government Transparency Code 2015' for releasing public data. In the last year we have complied with 95% of requests for information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 within the 20-working day legal timescale. Only six out of the 131 requests exceeded this timescale. All nine 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 our 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 the Gender Pay Gap report
- Publication of all committee reports (other than those where a statutory exemption for publication applies).

Operational Assurance

1.36 We are required to comply with a range of legislation 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.

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

1.37.1 **Prevention.** Our prevention teams, along with 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 an important role to play in the wider health agenda outlined in the Department of Health and Social Care 'Prevention is better than cure' 2018 report. As such we continue to be significantly involved in the health and well-being agendas across our Service area, which includes running a wide range of education and engagement programmes on key focus areas. These include the general wellbeing of vulnerable people, road safety and general risk education.

1.37.2 **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 conform with 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 carry out investigations in partnership 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.

- 1.37.3 **Response.** Our provision of immediate emergency response consists of 74 front-line fire engines operating from 50 fire stations across our Service with over 80% of our fire appliances being staffed using on-call firefighters.
- 1.37.4 We have the following specialist resources which can be deployed at incidents where required:
- Command and control
 - Hazardous materials
 - Environmental protection
 - Water rescue
 - Animal rescue
 - Rescue from confined spaces
 - Rescue from height
 - Marine firefighting
 - National resilience.
- 1.37.5 The availability of our appliances and our response times, predominantly in some of the rural parts of our Service, continue to be a key area of focus and improvement for us. This local challenge is reflective of the wider national position.
- 1.37.6 **Assurance Methods**
- 1.37.7 **HMICFRS**, following our first inspection, [reported](#) that they were pleased with the performance of our Service in terms of keeping our communities safe and secure, providing an overall score within their '**Effectiveness**' pillar as '**Good**'.
- 1.37.8 The Inspectorate made special mention of our positive arrangements within **Prevention** and in particular, the delivery of safety messages to children, the targeting of our Safe and Well visits towards those who are more vulnerable and how we work with our partners and other organisations to prevent fires.
- 1.37.9 It confirmed that we are good at **protecting** our public through fire regulation and have a robust approach to compliance within fire safety legislation.
- 1.37.10 We were rated as good at **responding** to fires and other emergencies and to national risks.
- 1.37.11 In addition, HMICFRS awarded the Service a rating of '**Good**' within their '**People**' pillar, confirming that our Service is good at; looking after our staff and their health and wellbeing, understanding the skills and capabilities of our workforce, appropriately monitoring and recording training delivered and ensuring sufficient resilience when crewing shortfalls arise.
- 1.37.12 For 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.

- 1.37.13 This work helps us guarantee that we maximise our impact and allows us to target areas outside of our response standards, a key part of our approach to integrated risk management planning.
- 1.37.14 **Safe and Well visits** are quality assured by the auditing of visits and follow up customer satisfaction and behaviour change surveys. **Road Safety, Fire Education and Youth Intervention** are measured and evaluated through attendee behavioural change surveys and feedback questionnaires. Results are recorded in our end of year reports and the teams take any necessary action to improve delivery. This helps us to assure the value of our efforts and gauge our potential impacts.
- 1.37.15 **Protection visits** are also targeted against risk and are both quality assured and any customer feedback is audited. There is an internal assurance framework in place for assessing our operational capability which is currently under review to improve the targeting of quality assurance for enforcement and prohibition activity as well as sampling the work of inspectors to inform future practice. Customers are invited to provide feedback on audits via a survey portal. This feedback is scrutinised to improve future performance.
- 1.37.16 Our **operational competencies** are aligned to the fire professional framework and 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 our Service's requirements. A structured approach is in place for the design, delivery, and assessment for each element of our operational licence.
- 1.37.17 We fully recognise and accept our responsibility for the **health, safety, and welfare of our members of staff** and others who may be affected by our activities. In recognition of this, we look to meet all relevant requirements of the Health & Safety at Work Act 1974 (together with all other statutory provisions associated with it) and we support our staff to meet their obligations under the Act. We hold detailed procedures in health, safety, and welfare, that are developed to take account of relevant legislation and guidance. These procedures provide our members of staff with relevant and comprehensive information on the risks they face, and the preventative and protective measures required to control them. We maintain **the BSI 18001 Health & Safety standard** Service wide, verifying that we have robust systems in place for actively monitoring the effectiveness of our Health & Safety Management procedures.
- 1.37.18 We closely work with both the **Wiltshire & Swindon and Dorset Local Resilience Forums** to help us meet our obligations under the Civil Contingencies Act. We are also the employing body for the Dorset Civil Contingencies Unit. Our risk management arrangements are aligned to the local community and national risk registers to make sure we have the appropriate response and recovery plans and resources to meet these threats, risks, and our

duties. Additionally, we work with multi-agency partners to ensure that appropriate exercising takes place to test these arrangements.

- 1.37.19 We are 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 (JESIP), the Critical National Infrastructure and Safety Advisory Groups.
- 1.37.20 We ensure that our initial multi-agency response to all incidents is organised, structured, and practiced using the **Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Principles**. The interoperability framework provides us with a standard approach to multi-agency working, which is supported by training and awareness arrangements for our staff. The embedding of JESIP ensures that we are constantly up to date with working practices and able to learn from events together with the other emergency services.
- 1.37.21 The Service's **performance** is monitored internally on a monthly basis through our performance management systems and is scrutinised quarterly by our senior management teams. This reporting process is designed to feed directly into the Service wide performance reporting, by our officers, to the Authority where it is fully scrutinised by Members.
- 1.37.22 Whilst our Service wide performance is reported by officers and scrutinised by Members at Authority level, to make sure local accountability across our large Service area is maintained, four **Local Performance and Scrutiny Committees** have been established for the four constituent authorities: Bournemouth, Christchurch & 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.
- 1.37.23 As part of the development of the current Community Safety Plan we undertook a **consultation exercise**, involving focus groups and online forums, among others. The process undertaken was judged by an external organisation as best practice. We are currently developing the 2021-2025 Community Safety Plan due for publication in June 2021.

Current and future challenges

1.38 The following strategic risks are currently being addressed by the Authority:

- 1.38.1 **Secure financial sustainability that ensures and maintains effective Service provision.** Financial sustainability continues to be a key risk and focus area for us. All public services are having to operate with less money and this Authority is no exception. Our Medium Term Finance Plan (MTFP) predicts a forecast deficit of £1.5m for 2020-21, rising to £3m for 2023-24. Since February 2020, like all organisations, we have been significantly impacted by the coronavirus pandemic. In the short-term, we have received additional funding of £1.3m to support our response and resilience to the impact. The longer-term financial impact cannot yet be determined but does represent a significant financial risk. Our future funding position was already uncertain, and the potential impact of the coronavirus pandemic now adds an additional layer of complexity. We will be much clearer about what this looks like as we progress through the 2020-21 financial year, and when more information becomes available. The economic shock of the pandemic will undoubtedly impact on the amount of funding that we receive, particularly through council tax receipts and business rates. We can also expect to see costs increasing in certain areas, such as property repairs and maintenance contracts. There had been some uncertainty over the timing of the next Comprehensive Spending Review, although it is now confirmed as taking place this year with an expectation that this will be a three year settlement. We have been engaging with local MPs, the Home Office and the National Fire Chiefs Council to influence the debate on financial sustainability for fire and rescue services. We are already reviewing the MTFP and financial plans for 2021-22 onwards, including the options to address the forecast budget deficits, and how these could be impacted by the coronavirus pandemic as well as from a potential no-deal Brexit.
- 1.38.2 **A robust and financially sustainable on-call duty system to meet the needs of our Service.** Over 80% of our fire engines are crewed by on-call firefighters, who balance their time between their primary employer and our Service. As with the fire service nationally, the on-call model remains challenging. To improve on-call fire engine availability, our selection and recruitment processes have been reviewed and strengthened. Furthermore, better engagement with primary employers to promote the role of an on-call firefighter in the community has resulted in an increase in applicants. The Service provides a good level of support to on-call firefighters. The amount of management and administration has been reduced to help achieve a better work-life balance and on-call support officer roles implemented. To improve future financial and operational sustainability, a new pay model has been developed and agreement reached with staff to implement in 2020.

- 1.38.3 **Protection against cyber risks. The threat of cyber incidents, both nationally and locally, continue to increase.** Robust information security risk management processes are in place to monitor and manage this risk. As required under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004, we have robust and resilient business continuity arrangements in place to enable us to respond in the event of an incident and these plans have been tested. We continue to strengthen our technical security arrangements, which are central to the resilience and safeguarding of our critical functions and these arrangements will be validated through achievement against the minimum cyber standard and cyber essentials in 2020. With the increase of home working arrangements, this presents additional risks associated with managing our information. We have ensured appropriate technical measures are in place to protect our data and that our staff understand the threats and the action they need to take to avoid security incidents in a remote environment.
- 1.38.4 **Failure to sufficiently resource potential changes to the fire safety and building safety regimes.** The building safety programme and proposed changes to legislation within the Building Safety Bill and the Fire Safety Bill will have a significant effect on our Service. This includes the requirement for all high-rise residential buildings of 18 metres or above to be triaged and where required, audited prior to the end of 2021. In addition, the publication of the Grenfell Tower Inquiry Phase 1 report has also identified a number of areas for how we deliver prevention, protection, and response functions. Internally we have assessed the necessary resources to meet these increased demands. The HM Government has provided one off grant funding for both of these elements to support the development of capacity and capability within fire safety, and plans are being developed to ensure the funding is used efficiently and effectively. Our Protection team are working hard to ensure that future legislative changes and their impacts are understood, with plans for implementation in place. These changes emanate from the Hackitt Report and the subsequent Grenfell Tower Inquiry which are logged, assessed, and prioritised for completion.
- 1.38.5 **Failure to appropriately work within the requirements and restrictions of the Covid-19 national pandemic.** The global outbreak of coronavirus has impacted the UK since early 2020 and is likely to continue for the next 12 months. The impacts are being felt at both national and local level. We are working with partners through the Multi-Agency Strategic Coordinating Groups and the fire sector to ensure the resilience of our Service and the continuation of our critical activities. In response to this we have revised our internal governance arrangements to support the management of this situation and adapt to our 'new normal' working arrangements. This is an unprecedented situation and a long-term risk for us to manage to ensure the safety of our staff and the communities we serve. To meet the challenges of these risks and threats we have initiatives and actions included within our internal Service Delivery Plan 2020-21, which is our internal mechanism for delivering the Community Safety Plan.

- 1.39 Progress against these risks and our performance is reviewed internally on a monthly basis and scrutinised quarterly by the Authority and its associated committees. The process adopted is well embedded and has been assured by internal audit who provided a 'substantial' level of assurance. These quarterly reports are published on our website for transparency.

Conclusion

- 1.40 Our Statement of Assurance provides you with a comprehensive overview of how we maintain high standards of good governance and services to the communities we serve.

- 1.41 Her Majesty's Inspector, Wendy Williams, in her press release following the publication of our first HMICFRS inspection stated:

'Our first inspection of Dorset & Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service has found that it is performing to a high standard in all areas'

'We found that the combination was well managed, and the new Service is realising operational and financial benefits as a result'

'The residents of Dorset and Wiltshire can be confident that they are receiving a quality service'.

- 1.42 Whilst we recognised there are key future challenges, we are also firmly committed to the need to continuously improve. 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).

- 1.43 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 Rebecca Knox



**Chair
Dorset & Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Authority**

Ben Ansell



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