

Performance report - Quarter 3

Finance & Audit Committee

1 October - 31 December 2022



DORSET & WILTSHIRE
FIRE AND RESCUE

Priority: Making every penny count

KLOE (Key Lines Of Enquiry) 6: How well do we use resources to manage risk?

KLOE 6 Summary

The Service continues to have robust and appropriate corporate risk and business continuity arrangements, with both being assured by the South West Audit Partnership, achieving 'substantial' assurance within their most recent audits. This is further assured through the resilience of the Service during the Coronavirus pandemic, and ongoing volatility both globally and nationally, due to the cost-of-living crisis, the continued disruption and challenge with supply chains and environmental factors triggering significant severe weather events. Furthermore, planning and preparations are ongoing for periods of industrial action across a variety of sectors, and now more closely with the Fire Brigades Union and the increased likelihood of strike action.

Information and Communication Technology capital and revenue programmes remain on track, albeit some amendments have been made to the programming of activity to accommodate and plan for the worldwide supply issues resulting from the coronavirus pandemic and the Ukraine/ Russia situation, as well as ongoing supplier price increases.

Procurement procedural and managerial arrangements continue to be in a good position. New collaborative procurements are progressing with the latest command & control system as well as the new e-tendering system. Officers continue to work with both internal and external stakeholders, including suppliers, to strengthen relationships and plan to mitigate the national and global supply chain disruption. The Service continues to strengthen its pre-engagement activities in the face of the current challenges, with a successful stakeholder event taking place in November, with our procurement and estates team. Furthermore, the Service continues to work with legal teams and national leads to further assure and strengthen our procurement approach during this volatile period.

The Service continues to explore opportunities to reduce environmental impacts through our supply chains for goods and services procured. Environmental impact assessments are now part of our procurement practices and, where appropriate, suppliers are asked to provide their environmental charters and their net zero carbon targets. Furthermore, social value forms part of the scoring criteria for procurements.

In line with the Authority's policy, the Service works to the principles of the ISO 55001 Asset Management standard. The Service is currently committed to achieving the full accreditation, with support from the British Standards Institute during 2023, with the Stage 1 assessment taking place in January. To progress this the Service has delivered a full gap analysis and action plan against the standard.

The fleet replacement programme is progressing well with the first set of the new flexi-duty cars now delivered. These are the Service's first hybrid vehicles, which supports the Service's environmental strategy and journey. To further support this the Service has ordered a new plug-in hybrid car to undertake a trial with officers on the flexi-duty system. In addition, the Service will shortly be ordering a small electric van for a further trial, for non-operational use. This supports the Service to begin its transition to a greener fleet and reduces its carbon footprint.

KLOE 6 sub-diagnostic

To what extent are business continuity arrangements in place and how often are they tested?

The Service is required to have well embedded and assured business continuity and significant event arrangements in place to meet the requirements within the Civil Contingencies Act (2004). This includes assessing the risk of emergencies occurring to inform contingency planning and to have in place emergency plans and business continuity arrangements.

The Service's corporate risk management arrangements were assured by internal audit in quarter 2 2022-23, with 'substantial' assurance awarded. Through these robust risk management arrangements, the Service has a healthy understanding of the current and future risks and threats to the Service. This approach to risk aids in the areas of focus and priority within our business continuity arrangements. Our business continuity provisions are well-established and embedded and along with our risk management approach ensures the continued maintenance of our critical activities and service delivery through challenging times. Furthermore, these business continuity procedures, plans, exercises, and testing regimes received 'substantial' assurance through our internal auditors. To ensure the continued provision of robust business continuity management the Service has aligned its approach to industry best practice, through the Business Continuity Institute's Good Practice Guidance (2018).

Over the past couple of years, since the pandemic, there has been a significant amount of volatility globally and nationally, which has tested the resilience of our business continuity planning. This has included the challenges and disruption of supply chains as well as the current impacts of industrial action, affecting a variety of sectors. In addition to this the Service has continued to be impacted by severe weather events, from dry summers to cold and wet winters, all resulting in an increase of incidents. This is set to continue as the cost-of-living crisis continues, environmental impacts are felt, and more sectors are affected by strike ballots and industrial action. In support of this and to ensure the preparedness of the Service we undertake a horizon scan on an annual basis, reviewing emerging threats and risks posed to the Service and its communities. This scan is also cognisant of local and national risk registers and the National Security Risk Assessment. Information from this work helps to shape and inform the annual business continuity programme, focusing the work set for our resilience team. The programme is currently focusing on national power outages and industrial action.

As another requirement of the Civil Contingencies Act (2004) the Service continues to be an active category 1 partner across both the Dorset and the Wiltshire & Swindon Local Resilience Forums (LRFs). Through this the Service leads the training and exercising groups, supporting, undertaking, and delivering the exercise and training programmes across the two counties. This year this has included internal industrial action exercises, a multi-agency national power outage exercise, an exercise at the Ministry of Defence in Corsham and a Chemical, Biological, Radiation, Nuclear and Explosives tabletop in Exeter. Furthermore, the Service is considerably involved with both LRFs on a significant national exercise.

KLOE 6 sub-diagnostic

To what extent do we show sound financial management of non-pay costs, including estates, fleet and equipment through benchmarking, contract renegotiation and procurement?

The Service must follow the national and local level regulations, including the Public Procurement Regulations, when procuring goods, services and works, and we must ensure that the principles of transparency and fairness are applied throughout all stages of the procurement processes. Our approach is published on the Service's website.

Procurement procedural and managerial arrangements continue to be in a positive position, with a continued focus and approach to collaborative procurements to support our approach to value for money. The Service makes extensive use of national procurement contracts and actively promotes and partakes in collaborative/ joint procurements, particularly within the Networked Fire Services Partnership (NFSP). The Service is currently participating in collaborative procurements for:

- A command-and-control system with the NFSP partners led by Hampshire County Council procurement team. The Service is looking to commence this procurement in early 2023. This procurement also includes Kent Fire and Rescue Service, due to them joining the partnership.
- An e-tendering system, including contract management. The Service is part of the National Fire Chiefs Council and Bluelight commercial-led procurement for a new system.

The Service is using national frameworks for several upcoming procurements including training, information and communication technology, property, estates, and fleet.

Officers continue to work with both internal and external stakeholders, including suppliers, to strengthen relationships and planning to meet the ongoing challenges resulting from the pandemic, European Union exit and the general uncertain economic position. The Service has strengthened its pre-engagement activities in support of the current challenges and to hopefully enable a wider level of interest in tender applications. During November, the Service hosted a successful procurement and supplier

event, welcoming several potential new contractors for our estates work. Furthermore, the Service continues to work with legal teams and national leads to further assure and strengthen our procurement approach during this volatile period, as well as procurers, suppliers, buyers, and contracting authorities.

KLOE 6 sub-diagnostic

To what extent do we understand what assets we are responsible for across the Service and how do we demonstrate effective management of these assets?

In line with the Fire Authority's policy, the Service works to the principles of the ISO 55001 Asset Management Standard. The Service is currently committed to achieving the full accreditation, with support from the British Standards Institute. To progress this the Service has delivered a full gap analysis against the standard and identified an action plan, where areas of strengthening have been identified. The formal stage 1 of the accreditation takes place on 30 January 2023. Subject to the success of this assessment the Service will progress to the second stage of this process in quarter 1 of 2023-24.

The implementation of the new Asset Management System continues to progress well. The Service is working closely with the suppliers to iron out final issues and strengthen the system and experience at station level. Due to the system being used across a number of fire and rescue services now, the Service is working with these services to set up a user group, for support and to identify potential enhancements to review with the supplier.

The Service has strengthened its approach to the approval and development of the cyclical refurbishment programme. This has meant that the planning and procurement for the 2023-24 programme has been able to be undertaken earlier this year, meaning that the contractors can begin on site earlier than in previous years. On site work from the 2022-23 programme commenced in quarter 3, with good progress made. It is envisaged that some of the projects will slightly overrun into 2023-24.

The fleet programme continues to progress well, with the team keeping a firm awareness of the challenges with the supply chains and delays. This awareness supports planning, forecasting and order dates. The first set of the new flexi-duty cars have been delivered. These are hybrid vehicles, which supports the Service's environmental strategy. The Service has ordered a new plug-in hybrid car to undertake a trial with officers on the flexi-duty system. This is expected to be in service in quarter 2 of 2023-24. In addition, the Service will shortly be ordering an electric van for an additional trial, for non-operational use. The intention of these trials is to support the Service to begin its transition to a greener fleet.

The Assets teams, along with procurement and finance, continue to keep abreast of the economic situation with regards to parts, materials and labour costs increasing significantly, along with global supply chain disruptions and challenges. This focus is enabling appropriate decisions to be made regarding ordering timeframes and stock levels.

KLOE 6 sub-diagnostic

To what extent do we understand and manage our impact upon the environment?

The Service has an Environmental Sustainability Strategy. This includes areas such as waste, fleet and transport, water, purchasing and procurement, energy, carbon emissions, maintenance and improvement projects, and communication of environmental issues. This strategy highlights the focus and priorities for the Service over the next three to five years. Within the strategy the Service has committed to reviewing opportunities to reduce carbon emissions and becoming more sustainable. As part of this the Service is investing in photovoltaics (solar panels) at five keys stations. It is expected that the installation of these will not only be positive for our carbon footprint but also reduce energy costs and provide sites with resilience from national power outages, which is a high risk on the national security risk assessment. The procurement for this work is now live with the contract award due in March 2023. It is expected that the completion of work should be in place in Spring/ Summer 2023.

Unfortunately, the Service was unsuccessful in its bid to secure grant funding for an energy audit and heat decarbonisation plan and has therefore reviewed the alternative opportunities to progress this work. An internal business case will be reviewed in January 2023 by the Service to support the provision for an external consultant to undertake the work. The delivery of an energy audit and heat decarbonisation plan is critical to the progress of the environmental sustainability of the Service. It will also hopefully open further grant opportunities for the Service.

Following the waste audits, undertaken across a sample of the stations to drive our commitment to reducing waste, the Service is working with officers, crews, and sustainability champions to improve waste management. All sites have mixed dry recycling facilities to support this. More support is being developed to support wider understanding through Service wide communications and the champions' network.

Furthermore, the Service continues to explore opportunities to reduce environmental impacts through our supply chains for goods and services procured. Environmental impact assessments are now part of our procurement practices, social value is considered through scoring and where appropriate suppliers are asked to provide their environmental charters and their net zero carbon targets.

The Service continues to engage across the sector and wider within environmental groups and forums. This includes being part of the National Fire Chiefs Council's environmental group and the Emergency Services Environment and Sustainability Group (ESESG), with other fire and rescue services and police forces. The Service has committed to the ESESG charter, which further supports the focus of the Service's approach.

KLOE 6 sub-diagnostic

To what extent do our plans address the risks identified in the integrated risk management plan?

The Service's community risk management planning is well supported by the delivery of the Strategic Assessment of Risk. This document helps ensure that the Service is fully aware of its internal and external landscape, as well as understanding the current level and future estimates on operational demand. This document is used to steer Service planning and supports the delivery of the Community Safety Plan and its subsequent strategies. During 2022 the Service has been developing an updated Strategic Assessment of Risk. This updated document has been enhanced by the development and delivery of a comprehensive risk analysis within each of our four community groups. This document is on track to go out for stakeholder engagement in quarter 1 2023-24. It is then expected to be finalised and published during quarter 2 2023-24. This document will aid decision making and planning across the Service and support the development of the next iteration of the Community Safety Plan, which will be developed during 2023-24 for publication in 2024-25.

The Fire Standards Board have developed and published their Community Risk Management Planning standard, to bring consistency to the development of the strategic plans across the sector. The Service has undertaken a gap analysis against this standard. Through this the Service is assured that the approach undertaken to deliver the Community Safety Plan is appropriate. Furthermore, as part of the internal audit programme, the internal auditors South West Audit Partnership have reviewed the Service's approach to Strategic Planning and provided substantial assurance.

KLOE 6 sub-diagnostic

To what extent do we demonstrate effective management of Information and Communication technology?

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) capital and revenue programmes are on track, following a review of organisational priorities. Some amendments to the programming of activity have been required to continue to accommodate worldwide supply issues impacted by the coronavirus pandemic and the Ukraine situation, as well as ongoing supplier price increases for hardware and services.

Recruitment to some specialist vacancies has been unsuccessful, leaving resourcing gaps – this is being reviewed and different approaches are being taken.

The Service has achieved improvements such as:

- Server upgrades and network reviews, including upgrades of historical systems to assure compliance with security and increase access to information.

- Cyber Essentials Certification has been achieved for another 12 months.
- Telephony procurement has been completed to commence the call manager upgrade.
- Continued communications audits have been conducted across all Service sites to rationalise and align hardware, increase security and assure consistency.
- Third Party support contracts are being aligned to assure value for money and confidence in our ability to manage unplanned events, increasing our effectiveness.

During the next period, work expected includes ongoing projects and business as usual with the commencement of the next planned phase of work for Telephony Project delivery and the replacement of station uninterruptable power supplies to modernise and align stations' power fallback for ICT.

KLOE 7: How well are we securing an affordable way of managing the risk of fire and other risks now and in the future?

KLOE 7 Summary

The Authority was able to set a balanced budget for 2022-23, with the help of a slightly improved funding picture and continued hard work to deliver savings identified through the Resourcing and Savings Programme. The Medium-Term Finance Plan (MTFP) approved by Members showed reduced, but still large, deficits in future years, with the continued absence of local council tax flexibility for all fire and rescue authorities.

The medium-term outlook significantly worsened through 2022. The budget and MTFP included provision for 2% pay awards each year for all staff groups and assumptions about price inflation, based on economic conditions predicted towards the end of 2021. Inflation has increased significantly, is now well ahead of previous budget assumptions and is likely to continue at higher levels for longer. General economic uncertainty has significantly increased. Clearly this impacts on both the revenue and capital budgets, where we are seeing some significant cost pressures across many budget lines. Wage growth will far exceed the 2% allowance made in the budget. The 2022 pay award for corporate staff averages about 6% and for operational staff the current offer is 5%. The overall impact of these awards is an estimated £1.65m increase in costs compared to the MTFP provision. The quarter 3 financial report shows the impact on this year, but the major concern is the medium-term impact, as we also expect higher pay awards than previously allowed for in 2023-24 as well.

Through the Resourcing and Savings Programme, Officers identified options for further savings of up to £3m to deal with these financial pressures, assuming no improvement in funding. These options have now been consulted on with staff and representative bodies.

The Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement for 2023-24 was released on 19 December 2022 and shows an improvement in funding, with the core referendum principle increased from 2% to 3% and a £5 flexibility for all standalone Fire and Rescue Authorities. The local funding position also shows some improvement. Members were fully updated on the current financial position at a seminar on 14 December 2022 and a further seminar on 20 January 2023. We are now finalising the budget requirement for 2023-24.

KLOE 7 sub-diagnostic

To what extent do we understand and take action to mitigate our main or significant financial risks?

For some time now, the Service have been engaging with local Members of Parliament (MPs), the Home Office and National Fire Chiefs Council to influence the debate on financial sustainability for fire and rescue services and, in particular, lobby for council tax flexibility. This has included briefing sessions for local MPs and letters from the Chair and Chief Fire Officer to the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and the Chief Secretary to the Treasury putting our case of local council tax flexibility. All of our local MPs were also encouraged to contact the Secretary of State. It is pleasing to report that the Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement for 2023-24 included an increased general referendum principle at 3% for Fire and Rescue Authorities (FRAs) but, more importantly, flexibility for a £5 increase in precept for all standalone FRAs. Unfortunately, even with this £5 flexibility cost pressures, particularly those arising from pay awards, require the Service to make more budget reductions. Officers set an initial target of £3m in reductions.

The audited financial statements for 2021-22 were signed off by the Finance and Audit Committee in December 2022. Our auditors, Deloitte LLP, have provided an 'Unmodified' opinion and we expect to receive their annual audit report soon.

South West Audit Partnership have completed their scheduled internal audits for 2022-23, reviewing creditors and debtors in quarter 1 and budget management in quarter 3. Both reviews gained a 'Substantial' assurance opinion.

KLOE 7 sub-diagnostic

To what extent do we have a track record for achieving savings and avoiding any residual future budget gaps?

Members approved the 2022-23 budget and current Medium-Term Finance Plan (MTFP) in February 2022. Although the MTFP continued to show a forecast future deficit, there was an improved position over the previous MTFP. The deficit forecast was £1.1m for 2023-24, rising to £1.8m for 2025-26. The improved position resulted from the work of Officers, which delivered budget reductions of just over £1m and some improvement in the funding position.

Since the budget and MTFP were approved the economic situation has become markedly worse, particularly since the conflict between Russia and Ukraine commenced, and the significant inflationary pressures in the economy. Our revenue and capital budgets have been coming under increasing pressure as a result of cost increases and wage demands. Officers identified that without an improvement in funding significant additional savings would be needed in order to balance future budgets and move the Service on to a more sustainable financial footing. An initial target of £3m in further budget reductions was set and reported to Members at the December 2022 finance seminar.

The Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement announced on 19 December 2022 includes better than expected funding for 2023-24, including a £5 precept flexibility for all standalone fire and rescue services and government funding increase in line with the September 2022 Consumer Prices Index increase of 10.1%. A Core Referendum threshold of 3% will apply for 2023-24 and 2024-25.

Overall, this means that the level of savings required can be scaled back for the time being, but there remains a significant risk particularly around pay awards for operational staff.

KLOE 7 sub-diagnostic

To what extent is our use of reserves sustainable and promoting new ways of working?

The reserves plan and general balances risk assessment have been reviewed and updated for the 2023-26 Medium-Term Finance Plan. The strategy includes the movement of some surplus funding to support future investment in the capital programme, including updated training facilities. The plan will be reviewed by the Authority in February 2023.

Reserves and general balances will be reviewed further in compiling the 2022-23 Statements of Account.

KLOE 12: How effective is the Occupational Health and Safety management system in the Service?

KLOE 12 Summary

The Service continues to exhibit a strong health and safety performance. There are no strategic issues to raise with Members. The total number of Accident/Adverse Occurrence Reports reported in quarter 3 has decreased from 184 to 75, when compared to the same quarter last year. This can be attributed to cases of coronavirus no longer being required to be reported. The quarterly trend for work-related absence due to 'physical' injuries or ill-health is down from 297 down to 118 days. In this quarter, seven people (incidents) are contributing to these figures. The number of reportable incidents to the Health and Safety Executive under the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 2013 has fallen from four to one.

KLOE 12 sub-diagnostic

How well structured and embedded is the Health & Safety policy, practices, and culture to ensure a safe and legally compliant Service?

The Health and Safety Committee, and the associated department, continues to monitor the robust arrangements in place. Health and Safety arrangements across the Service continue to operate well, with no causes for concern to raise, and in accordance with externally accredited standards. The next audit by British Standards Institute auditors is due in April 2023.

The quarterly trend for work-related absence due to 'physical' injuries or ill-health is down from 297 down to 118 days. In this quarter, seven people (incidents) are contributing to these figures. Of the seven people, two are designated long term sick or in long term recovery and their days lost make up 88% of the quarter 3 total days lost.

The total number of Adverse Occurrence Reports (AORs) reported in quarter 3 has decreased from 184 to 75 when compared to the same quarter last year. This can be attributed to cases of coronavirus no longer being reported on the AOR database. During this quarter, the Service had 19 injuries compared to 122 (including coronavirus reports), when compared to the same quarter last year. The coronavirus pandemic has influenced the Service's reports for over 24 months; therefore, it will take up to 12 months to level up when comparing against the same quarter of the previous year.

Our 'near miss' event reporting is around 22% of the AORs reported. It is good to see a continual increase in the near miss reporting process as the Service can gain the greatest amount of learning from good investigations following any occurrence of a 'near miss.' There appears to be no real pattern emerging from these events and control measures have been implemented where possible to reduce the likelihood of recurrence.

The number of reportable incidents to the Health and Safety Executive under the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 2013 (RIDDOR) has decreased over the same quarter last year (four down to one). These regulations require employers, the self-employed and those in control of premises to report specified workplace incidents. This RIDDOR report was caused by a contractor during building works at one of our fire stations.

KLOE 13: Are effective governance and decision-making arrangements in place?

KLOE 13 Summary

The Authority and Service has sound governance arrangements in place that are working well. Both have been audited through a peer review and internal audit mechanisms with good levels of assurance being awarded.

The Service has aligned its governance, from performance through to assurance to the Key Lines of Enquiry from His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary & Fire and Rescue Services. This was positively received by the inspectorate during their recent inspection, which took place between February and April 2022. The Service will receive the results of this inspection in January, and they will be reported to the Authority in February.

The Statement of Assurance for 2021-22 was prepared, along with its supporting information, for the Authority meeting in September 2022. During this meeting Members approved the document and this has subsequently been published on the Service's website.

Members can be assured that the Service is proactively managing its information compliance requirements. There are strategic and tactical processes that broadly align to the principles of British Standards Institute 27001 and are detailed in the supporting documentation associated with the Statement of Assurance.

Information management and security arrangements are operating well, and the Service has been re-accredited to the national Cyber Essentials security standard, giving additional assurance of the robust arrangements in place.

The Digital Transformation Programme is progressing well and is on track to deliver migration of files and systems to Office 365 against the agreed timescale. This is enabling the Service to review and streamline its processes and systems to maximise efficiency and productivity in terms of workloads and licence costs, as well as strengthening data management.

KLOE 13 sub-diagnostic

How well does the Fire and Rescue Authority have oversight and scrutiny to ensure that the Service is appropriately effective and efficient in ensuring the safety of communities from fire and other risks?

The Authority has five key priorities and performance against these are overseen and scrutinised by Members on a quarterly basis. Priorities one, two and three are reviewed at the four Local Performance & Scrutiny Committee meetings which took place in November and December 2022 for quarter 2 performance and are due to take place in February and March 2023 for quarter 3 performance. Priorities four and five are reviewed at the Finance & Audit Committee at their meeting in December for quarter 2 performance and March 2023 for quarter 3.

The performance reports and presentations at these meetings provide details on the effectiveness and efficiency of the Service, as well as looking at how the Service is supporting, developing and ensuring the health and wellbeing of its people. The annual report is approved by Members and published each year in September, along with a Statement of Assurance providing assurance of the previous year's governance, finance, and operational matters. The process of developing the Statement of Assurance received a 'substantial' assurance rating from internal audit and was commended by the Local Government Association (LGA) peer review team led by the Chair of the Authority.

The internal audit annual report from South West Audit Partnership awarded the Service an overall grade of 'substantial assurance' following delivery of the 2021-22 audit programme.

The Authority oversees and scrutinises the development and delivery of the Community Safety Plan (CSP), which includes the Service undertaking consultation and community engagement. A presentation of overall performance against each priority is provided to the Authority at six and 12-month intervals.

The Authority's governance arrangements have been assured through an independent peer review by the LGA, who confirm that the Authority has appropriate arrangements. The Authority's arrangements have been aligned to the LGA's revised code of conduct.

The Fire Authority has adopted a set of financial planning principles and assumptions on which to base its revenue budget and Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP). This supports the budget planning process, with the principles kept under review and was last updated in February 2022 following the final settlement and local council tax financial collection rates and details. The MTFP is developed and aligned to the learning and outcomes within the Strategic Assessment of Risk, is used to support the development of the CSP and is scrutinised by the Fire Authority. Members' seminars are held to examine and discuss core issues before being presented to the Fire Authority.

The 2022-23 programme of Member development seminars approved by Members has been delivered, with the focus in quarter 3 on financial challenges. The future programme will be taken to the full Fire Authority meeting in June for Member approval, alongside a review of the Members' handbook.

KLOE 13 sub-diagnostic

How effective and efficient are our governance arrangements?

The Authority and Service have robust and well aligned governance arrangements with performance management, reporting and scrutiny arrangements well established. This has been assured through the Local Government Association's Peer Review in 2019. Performance reporting is linked through from the Community Safety Plan and the Authority's five priorities, through to team and watch level. This is developed through our performance management system and through our comprehensive station level performance dashboards.

The Authority and Service have ensured that from policy through to operational level, the Service is well aligned to His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services methodology. This is highlighted through our Key Lines of Enquiry, which are aligned to the inspectorate's judgement criteria and their 'good' rating. Performance reporting then ensures the continuation of appropriate evidence to support the Service in achieving 'good.' This approach was audited by our internal auditors, South West Audit Partnership (SWAP), who awarded it 'substantial' assurance.

The assurance arrangements for the Service are robust, with a significant approach undertaken through inspection, internal audit, British Standards Institute audits, external audit, and peer reviews. This, plus other internal assurance mechanisms, are undertaken on an annual basis to support the development of the Statement of Assurance. In September 2022, the Authority approved the 2021-22 Statement of Assurance, which for the first time provides assurance against the inspectorate's methodology. The 2022-23 Statement of Assurance and supporting information will be reviewed for approval in September 2023.

The internal audit annual report, from SWAP, awarded the Service with an overall grade of 'substantial assurance' following delivery of the 2021-22 audit programme. Furthermore 'substantial' assurance has been awarded individually against several areas included within the governance arrangements, such as project management and business case approaches as well as performance management frameworks. The draft internal audit programme for 2023-24 has been developed between SWAP, the Service and the Chair of the Finance & Audit Committee and programmed for Members' review in March 2023.

KLOE 13 sub-diagnostic

How effective and efficient are we at managing data?

Members can be assured that the Service is proactively managing its information compliance requirements. There are strategic and tactical processes that broadly align to the principles of British Standards Institute 27001 and are detailed in the supporting documentation associated with the Statement of Assurance, which was approved by Members in September 2022.

A mitigation plan from the annual information communication technology health check is being monitored to ensure all high and medium risks are prioritised.

There were 30 Freedom of Information (FOI) requests due for response in quarter 3, 29 of which were responded to within 20 working days. The average response time was 10 working days. Two total exemptions were applied, and partial exemptions were applied on three occasions. There were no notable requests or particular FOI themes identified in this quarter.

Nine Subject Access Requests were responded to in quarter 3, all of which were received from current or previous members of staff. It was the busiest ever recorded quarter. All disclosures were either made in full or with redactions made for third party personal data.

In quarter 3, 11 complaints were due to be responded to. Of these 82% were resolved within 14 days (or within the date agreed with the complainant). Of these complaints, 36% were not upheld and none needed referring to senior management.

There were 35 compliments this quarter.

There were eight security incidents reported this quarter, all of which had a low rating. Five incidents related to data handling and three were as a result of phishing emails. We continue to monitor progress against our cyber action plan, and this is on track with our re-accreditation of cyber essentials being achieved at the end of December 2022.

The Service participates in a national working group to help author the data management framework to support the National Fire Chiefs Council standard. It is anticipated that the documents will be available for peer review in March 2023.

South West Audit Partnership conducted an internal audit of records management in October which received 'substantial' assurance.

All staff are expected to complete Information Security/ Data Protection e-learning to ensure they are aware of their responsibilities regarding data. The Service monitors the completion rate of this e-learning and escalates to Officers if required.

As of 31 December 2022, 90% of all employees had completed their mandatory data protection and cyber security training. This is up from 86% in the previous quarter.

Progress against the General Data Protection Regulations action plan is progressing well and the concept of privacy by design is being embedded into Service processes, through data protection and information risk impact assessments. Work is continuing to manage retention periods for information held in archive and legacy systems and ensure these are applied to new systems and processes going forwards.

The Digital Transformation Programme is progressing well and is on track to deliver migration of files and systems to Office 365 against the agreed timescale. The programme is enabling the Service to review and streamline its processes and systems to maximise efficiency and productivity in terms of workloads and licence costs, as well as strengthening data management.

Priority: Supporting and developing our people

KLOE 8: How well do we understand the wellbeing needs of our workforce and act to improve workforce wellbeing?

KLOE 8 Summary

Long term absence was the largest contributing factor to the absence figures in quarter 3 across wholetime, on-call and fire control staff groups whereas short term absence was the largest contributing factor for corporate staff.

Mental health was the highest cause of absence for the wholetime, and corporate staff groups this quarter. The main cause for fire control was respiratory and for on-call staff (whose sickness is recorded by calendar days) it was musculoskeletal. A range of support mechanisms are in place to support staff including a confidential counselling service and physiotherapy. Funding for private investigations is considered, through a cost benefit analysis, if National Health Service (NHS) waiting times are delaying treatment and/or recovery.

The Service has a corporate target to achieve average sickness levels lower than the previous five-year average. The cumulative actual shifts/ days lost for quarter 3 is 8.5 shifts per person (wholetime/corporate/fire control) against the cumulative quarter 3 target of 6.6 shifts lost per person. The long-term absence trend is showing an increase.

Sickness absence is well managed through our dedicated health and wellbeing team who work closely with line managers and Human Resources Business Partners. Sickness procedures are robust and are augmented by support mechanisms such as counselling and physiotherapy treatment. Funding for private investigations is considered on a cost benefit basis if NHS waiting times are delaying treatment and/ or recovery, particularly when continued absence could have a significant impact on broader service delivery issues.

In quarter 3, 97% of staff passed their fitness test and eight members of staff were on fitness improvement plans, which include advice and guidance on fitness improvement, including weight management and nutritional information.

KLOE 8 sub-diagnostic

How well do we understand the wellbeing needs of our workforce and act to improve workforce wellbeing?

The Service has a robust and audited health and wellbeing programme to support staff which is overseen by officers. Health and wellbeing procedures are available to all staff which outline all the support mechanisms available to staff including mental health support, peer support and other external self-service provisions.

Absence management continues to be a key focus for the Service with robust monitoring arrangements in place. Long-term absence was the largest contributing factor to the absence figures in quarter 3 across wholtime, on-call and fire control staff groups whereas short term absence was the largest contributing factor for corporate staff.

Mental health was the highest cause of absence for the wholtime, and corporate staff groups this quarter. The main cause for fire control was respiratory and for on-call staff (whose sickness is recorded by calendar days) it was musculoskeletal. A range of support mechanisms remain in place to support staff including counselling and physiotherapy. Funding for private investigations is considered on a cost benefit basis if National Health Service waiting times are delaying treatment and/ or recovery, particularly when continued absence could have a significant impact on broader service delivery issues.

The Service has a corporate target to achieve average sickness levels lower than the previous five-year average. The cumulative actual shifts/days lost at quarter 3 is 8.5 shifts per person (wholtime/corporate/fire control) compared to the cumulative target of 6.6 shifts lost per person.

As the Service did not achieve the corporate target last year (predominantly due to coronavirus related sickness), coupled with the fact that we enjoyed exceptionally low sickness in the year 2020-21, the long-term absence trend is showing an increase.

Sickness absence is managed through the Health and Wellbeing team who work closely with line managers and Human Resources Business Partners. Robust sickness procedures and support mechanisms are in place to provide advice, guidance and support to staff and managers. Management of long-term absence is more complex than short term absence as the illnesses/ conditions may be serious and involve surgery and recovery time. With any long-term absence, staff are referred to occupational health from day 28 of the absence for advice and recommendations.

The Service has a Key Performance Indicator to reduce the number of working days lost to non-physical work-related ill health by 5% each year. In the year to date 294 days have been lost (cumulatively) compared to a cumulative target of 269 days.

In quarter 3, 97% of staff passed their fitness test and eight members of staff were on fitness improvement plans and were provided with advice and guidance on fitness improvement, including weight management and nutritional information.

We have 26 staff who provide peer support and promote national campaigns such as World Mental Health Day, International Stress Week, and the Time to Talk campaign. Mental wellbeing sessions are integrated into the supervisory managing performance and wellbeing training.

The Service is a member of the National Fire Chiefs Council National Occupational Health Practitioners Group, who deliver evidence-based approaches that promote, prevent, and detect workplace health issues known to impact on employee wellbeing, including physical, psychological, and societal elements.

KLOE 9: How well trained and skilled are staff?

KLOE 9 Summary

We continue to conduct training delivery in accordance with the Annual Training Action Plan and on-call quarterly training programme. Our training delivery is supported by additional e-learning modules and virtual delivery.

Our competence recording system, which covers all staff, developed with a private sector partner, has been successfully embedded with competence levels monitored by Officers.

KLOE 9 sub-diagnostic

How well do we understand the skills and capabilities of our workforce?

All operational members of staff are required to maintain competence for their respective roles. Operational competence is demonstrated by satisfactory performance at real incidents, during simulations, exercises, drills or centrally run training courses. The operational training programme has continued in standard delivery format in quarter 3. Training delivery continues to be supplemented by additional e-learning and virtual course delivery.

Our competence recording system, which covers all staff, developed with a private sector partner, has been successfully embedded. Officers monitor competence levels to ensure that staff are allocated to appropriate operational license courses. Maintenance of skills training is delivered through localised training in line with the training planners and the needs of the station.

KLOE 10: How well do we ensure fairness and diversity?

KLOE 10 Summary

The opportunities for feedback from our staff are aligned to the internal communications and engagement plan and have included a range of channels and methods to ensure the involvement of all parts of our workforce. Communications plans are a standard element of the project management process to ensure that stakeholders engage in Service projects.

Robust workforce and succession planning arrangements are in place that support each stage of the employment cycle. Heads of Department complete any annual department succession plan and a five-year retirement profile is monitored regularly to aid wholetime recruitment decision making.

We continue to use social media as a key part of our positive action work. Community profile information is available to crews, so that we can target our 'Have a Go' recruitment and social media campaigns. This information also enables us to better support and strengthen our community engagement activities.

The Service's promotions processes have been designed to promote fair promotion opportunities for all. The new process is embedded and the number of people entering the promotion process continues to increase.

The diversity of our workforce is monitored on a quarterly basis and our corporate target to improve the diversity of our workforce as a whole compared to the last five years continues to make positive progress, with our actual workforce diversity in quarter 3 being 23.2% against a target of 21.8%.

There are no significant trends in terms of sexual orientation, disability, ethnic origin or religion and belief identified in relation to those leaving the Service during quarter 3.

There have been significant delays in the development of the new online leavers process. In the intervening time a key objective of the Service's Digital Transformation Programme is to maximise use of Office 365. Accordingly, the leavers process is to be progressed as part of that programme. Leavers' discussions continue to take place in their existing format and the procedure will be updated to ensure that completion of exit discussions is mandatory.

KLOE 10 sub-diagnostic

How well do leaders seek feedback and challenge from all parts of the workforce?

The Service has a structured approach to staff communications and engagement. An internal communications engagement plan is in place to ensure there is opportunity for all parts of the workforce to provide feedback and challenge to leaders which was a focus for the latest His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services inspection.

In quarter 3, our communications and engagement has focused on organisational change. This involved a series of staff briefings and support mechanisms in place for those impacted by the change, as well as a formal consultation process. Feedback was also reported back to operational managers following supervisory engagement days with actions to address areas for improvement.

Immediately following the publication of the London Fire Brigade report we also commenced work on our own Culture Review in quarter 3 and this has led to the launch of a staff survey and targeted focus groups for staff to tell us how they feel about working for the Service and their experiences so that we can learn from these. Once this work is complete, the outcomes will be reported to the Authority.

We continue with structured and regular 1:1s and team meetings over the phone, in person and using video calls in line with our smarter working approach.

Communication plans for Service projects are developed and monitored as part of the project management process – the work in quarter 3 has been on the training centre proposals which has involved impacted staff as well as external stakeholders.

The Service continues to engage with representative bodies on a regular and structured basis through liaison meetings attended by the Director of People and Director of Community Safety. This enables effective and timely two-way dialogue between the Service and staff representatives. The focus of this has been around key projects such as the training centre, our financial challenges and organisational change, and the potential for industrial action. Good local relationships are being maintained.

KLOE 10 sub-diagnostic

How well do we identify and address potential disproportionality in recruitment, retention, and progression?

The Service's recruitment processes are transparent and reviewed to ensure there are no unintentional barriers to recruitment. Initiatives to support a diverse workforce include:

- Interviewers receiving unconscious bias training via Leaders' Forums and e-learning packages.
- Developing station-level demographic profiling to enable better targeting of on-call recruitment.
- Attending a range of community and partnership events to demonstrate the diverse roles undertaken by the Service.
- Stations taking part in school visits and careers fairs to help change the messaging around female firefighters.
- Providing reasonable adjustment during the recruitment process and employment for those living with a disability to ensure equal access.
- Positive action tools such as 'Have a Go' days, Facebook live sessions, #BeOneOfUs and #NeedMore campaigns on social media.
- Representatives from our staff networks providing 'buddy' support to potential applicants.
- Staff testimonials on the Service's website to promote the benefits of working for the Service.
- A new e-recruitment system with an improved user experience.

Our promotions processes have been designed to promote fair promotion opportunities for all. The diversity of our workforce is monitored on a quarterly basis and our corporate target to improve the diversity of our workforce as a whole compared to the last five years continues to make positive progress with our actual workforce diversity in quarter 3 being 23.2% against a target of 21.8%.

Of the 51 new starters in quarter 3, 30 were commencing employment as on-call firefighters. This demonstrates the positive impact of our 'Have a Go' events and is also helping us to have a more diverse workforce.

The development and testing of the new online leavers process was significantly delayed due to capacity within the developer team. As such a decision has been made to not further develop this and to include a new electronic process in the new Human Resources system. In the meantime, exit interview data continues to be collected manually and analysis of the responses has not identified any trends.

Of the 46 leavers this quarter there were no significant trends in terms of sexual orientation, disability, ethnic origin or religion and belief. The primary reason for leaving was due to retirement.

KLOE 11: How well do we develop leadership and capability?

KLOE 11 Summary

All joiners are invited to a corporate induction with one corporate induction taking place in quarter 3.

The 1:1 personal review process is embedded with completion monitored to ensure that all staff have at least one personal review during a 12-month period.

Following promotion, staff meet with the Learning & Development team to identify the development programme appropriate to their role. The Service's Leadership Development Programme ensures leaders at each level in the organisation are equipped with the skills to successfully conduct their role. Middle and strategic managers attend our Leaders' Forum which consists of two hour 'bitesize' workshops on a bi-monthly basis and cover a range of cultural and leadership topics aligned to our Strategic Assessment of Risk. Corporate staff are also encouraged to complete development pathway activities relevant to their role.

Supervisory managers undertake their initial incident command training using the facilities at the Fire Service College, which enables them to be assessed at a range of incidents. A comprehensive and structured rota group training programme is in place for Flexible Duty Officers. This ensures skills are refreshed and provides a good practice forum to share and learn from incidents recently attended.

The Leaders' Forum, which includes all middle and strategic managers, now consists of two hour 'bitesize' workshops on a bi-monthly basis. The programme includes cultural and leadership topics identified in our Strategic Assessment of Risk as well as topics highlighted through an attendee survey.

The Service's apprenticeships cover a wide range of areas including Operational Firefighter, Emergency Contact Handler (Control Firefighters), Leadership Development, Finance, Human Resources and Facilities Management. Figures for quarter 3 show that 36 Service personnel are undertaking apprenticeships which represents 2.3% of staff. The public sector apprenticeships target was set at 2.3% but the target ended on 31 March 2022. However, the Service will continue to monitor and report on this performance.

Our coaching procedure also supports staff in their development. The Service have several coaches qualified at the Institute of Leadership & Management level 3 and level 5. Our Learning Hub provides a one-stop blended learning resource and is widely used by staff.

KLOE 11 sub-diagnostic

How well do we manage and develop the individual performance of our staff?

One corporate induction session was held in quarter 3. Another way that we evaluate how successful the induction period has been for a new starter is data from probation reviews. In quarter 3, no probations were extended, and no staff contracts were terminated during their probation period.

A new starters network is in place and after individuals have been employed for six months we ask for feedback on their experiences within the Service and seek their views as to what we could do differently to improve our 'employment offer.'

The personal review process ensures that a discussion and appraisal take place at least once a year and focusses on wellbeing, performance, and development. The target completion rate for all staff groups is 100% and monthly reminders are sent to line managers to book in reviews with staff members.

KLOE 11 sub-diagnostic

To what extent are the career pathways of all staff effectively managed?

Following promotion, staff meet with the Learning & Development team to identify the development programme appropriate to their role. Relevant courses, mentoring, coaching, and e-learning programmes are highlighted and progress against their development pathway is monitored. For those at Station Manager level these have included a role induction and a period of being shadowed for operational deployments. The role induction programme for supervisory managers has been developed but delivery has been delayed. Corporate staff are also encouraged to complete development pathway activities relevant to their role.

The Service's Leadership Development Programme ensures leaders at each level in the organisation are equipped with the skills to successfully carry out their role and was recently awarded a 'substantial' assurance rating by internal audit. The Leaders' Forum, which includes all middle and strategic managers, now consists of two hour 'bitesize' workshops on a bi-monthly basis.

The programme includes cultural and leadership topics identified in our Strategic Assessment of Risk as well as topics highlighted through an attendee survey.

Incident command training also continues using the facilities at the Fire Service College, enabling our supervisory managers to be assessed at a range of incidents. Structured rota group training for Flexible Duty Officers ensures the opportunity to refresh skills and knowledge as well as providing a forum to share and learn from incidents recently attended. This occurs every Friday morning to coincide with the on-coming duty group.

The Service apprenticeships cover a wide range of areas including Emergency Contact Handler (Control Firefighters); Finance; Human Resources; Facilities Management; Leadership Development; and Operational Firefighter. Figures for quarter 3 show that 36 Service personnel are undertaking apprenticeships which represents 2.3% of staff. The public sector apprenticeships target was set at 2.3% but the target ended on 31 March 2022. However, the Service will continue to monitor and report on this performance.

Our coaching procedure also supports staff in their development. The Service have several coaches qualified at the Institute of Leadership & Management level 3 and level 5. Our Learning Hub provides a one-stop blended learning resource including all e-learning and course materials and is widely used by staff, having achieved over 60,000 views since its launch.