

# Performance report - Quarter 4

Finance & Audit Committee

1 January - 31 March



**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

Corporate risk management practices have been recently assured by Internal Audit, where the Service achieved a 'substantial' assurance rating. A revised Strategic Assessment of Risk is currently being formulated during 2022-23, which ensures the Service is well informed regarding the current and future risks with the potential to impact the organisation. This analysis will be used to inform the next iteration of the Community Safety Plan.

Business continuity is a key focus area for the Service and this is well embedded. These arrangements are aligned to industry best practice and regular reviews and exercises are undertaken aligned to risk. The Service has most recently been using these plans as we prepared for industrial action. However, due to the pay agreement this risk has now been significantly mitigated. A key focus area for the Service, working with our Local Resilience Forum and nationally, is the potential for a national power outage. The Service was involved in the national three-day exercise during March, which will aid the strengthening of arrangements.

Procurement procedural and managerial arrangements continue to be in a good position, with this being confirmed by Internal Audit in January 2023, with the Service being awarded 'substantial' assurance. The Authority is committed to eliminating discrimination and exploitation in all business dealings and through our supply chains. As such, and as a requirement of the Modern Slavery Act 2015, the Authority has now adopted a Modern Slavery statement, which is published on the Service's website. With the ongoing challenges with national and global supply chain disruption, officers continue to work with both internal and external stakeholders, including suppliers, to help mitigate and minimise any impacts. Furthermore, the Service continues to work with legal teams and national leads to further assure and strengthen our procurement approach during this volatile period and also in preparation for the Government's procurement regime which will come into effect in 2023.

We continue to explore opportunities to reduce environmental impacts through 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 Asset Management policy, the Service works to the principles of the ISO 55001 Asset Management standard. The Service is currently committed to achieving full accreditation and in January 2023 positively undertook the stage 1 assessment process. Following the success of this stage, the next assessment will take place in May 2023, where it is hoped the Service will secure the accreditation.

The fleet capital programme has progressed well this year with three new fire appliances being delivered and assigned to stations and a further two enhanced rescue appliances also now in place. In addition, to support the Service to begin its transition to a greener fleet and reduce its carbon footprint, the Service has ordered a new plug-in hybrid car to undertake a trial with officers on the flexi-duty system and a small electric van for a further trial, for non-operational use. These are expected to be delivered in July 2023, with the trials expected later in the year.

The Service's estates programme for cyclical refurbishment has been strengthened to improve the delivery of these projects within the appropriate financial year. The new approach is being trialled for the 2023-24 programme. The procurement for this will be underway in quarter 1, with the hope for contractors to be on site in quarter 2.

The solar panel installations at the five key sites are due in Spring/Summer 2023 and as Swindon fire station requires a replacement roof, solar panels will also be installed at this location. Further work to support carbon reduction will be progressed during 2023-24 as the Service advances with the delivery of a heat decarbonisation plan.

Information and Communications Technology capital and revenue programmes remain on track, albeit with some amendments to the programming of activity to accommodate and plan for the worldwide supply issues resulting from the coronavirus pandemic and the conflict in Ukraine, as well as ongoing supplier price increases.

#### **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. This is currently out to tender. This procurement also includes Kent Fire and Rescue Service, due to them joining the partnership.
- Adobe Licensing Aggregation Procurement led by the Crown Commercial Services with several public sector bodies participating. We have now awarded a contract as a result of this.
- Microsoft Aggregation Procurement led by the Crown Commercial Services with several public sector bodies participating. This is currently out to tender.

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.

## 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?**

Officers continue to keep abreast of the economic situation and challenges with regards to parts, materials and labour costs increasing significantly, along with global supply chain disruptions and challenges. This focus continues to enable appropriate decisions to be made regarding planning, ordering timeframes and stock levels.

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. 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 positively took place on 30 January 2023. Following the success of this assessment the Service has booked the second stage to hopefully achieve the accreditation in May 2023.

The new Asset Management System, now used by the Service, is also used by a number of other fire and rescue services. The Service has set up a sector working group, with these services and the system supplier, to share learning, support each other and to identify potential enhancements for the system. The first meeting for this group is now planned for May 2023, with positive engagement already achieved. The Service continues to embed the new Asset Management System across the Service, with positive progress and engagement. The Service is finalising the remaining few issues with the supplier which are expected to be resolved in quarter 1 2023-24.

On site work from the 2022-23 cyclical refurbishment programme commenced in quarter 3 and continued over this quarter. Positive progress made has been made. However, as anticipated, some projects will overrun into 2023-24. During this year, the Service further strengthened its approach to the approval and development of the cyclical refurbishment programme. This has meant that the planning and preparation for procurement for the 2023-24 work was able to happen earlier, with the view to ensuring that contractors can begin on site earlier than in previous years to reduce any roll over of work into the next financial year. Procurement for this work will commence in quarter 1 with a view to having contractors on site from quarter 2.

The fleet programme has progressed well, with the first set of the new flexi-duty cars being delivered and assigned; these are hybrid vehicles which support the Service's environmental strategy. The remaining are awaiting delivery, which is expected in quarter 1 2023-24. The Service has ordered a new plug-in hybrid car to undertake a trial with officers on the flexi-duty system along with an electric van, for a non-operational use trial. Both trials are planned to start from September 2023. The intention of these trials is to support the Service to begin its transition to a greener fleet. This year we have also successfully delivered three new fire appliances and two enhanced rescue appliances. A final appliance is awaiting delivery due later in 2023. The capital programme for 2023-24 is agreed, with advanced preparation for delivering these projects.

#### **KLOE 6 sub-diagnostic**

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

Through internal audit the Service has been assured of its current arrangements, strategy, focus and plans for environmental sustainability. Since January 2023 a small, dedicated team is now in place to lead this important agenda.

The Environmental Sustainability Strategy covers waste, fleet and transport, water, purchasing and procurement, energy, carbon emissions, maintenance and improvement projects, and communication of environmental issues. This strategy focuses the Service in the key areas for delivery in the next three to five years. 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 (EESG), with other fire and rescue services and police forces. The Service has committed to the EESG charter, which further supports the focus of the Service's approach. Furthermore, the Service works with partners across our local authorities and with other fire and rescue services to share learning and experiences to support our journey.

Officers have now commissioned an energy audit to develop a heat decarbonisation plan. The delivery of this work is critical to the progress of the environmental sustainability of the Service. Officers are awaiting confirmation from the NFCC with regard to appointing an appropriate consultant through a framework. Having a heat decarbonisation plan it is hoped, following specialist advice, will open further grant opportunities for the Service.

The Service has invested in photovoltaics (solar panels) at five keys stations. The procurement for these has recently finished and contracts will be awarded after the standstill period. The installation at these five sites will be undertaken in Spring/Summer 2023. In addition, due to the roof requiring replacement at Swindon Fire Station this summer, solar panels will also be installed at

this station, along with a battery for site resilience. 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. An evaluation will be undertaken following installation and use of the solar panels. This will include confirming that the expected pay-back periods are likely to be met and to review wider opportunities across the estate, in line with the heat decarbonisation plan, once in place.

Environmental awareness and impact are being embedded across the Service, with sustainability champions identified across the organisation and specific communications being shared on a regular basis to improve knowledge. Environmental impact assessments are considered now as part of project management and through procurements and supply chain management. Furthermore, the route to disposal of old or unneeded items is now considered, to reduce environmental impacts.

#### **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. The document is used to steer service planning and supports the delivery of the Community Safety Plan (CSP) and its subsequent strategies. During 2022-23 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. The 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. It will aid decision making and planning across the Service and support the development of the next iteration of the CSP, which will be developed during 2023-24 for Member approval and 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 CSP 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 a 'substantial' assurance rating.

## **KLOE 6 sub-diagnostic**

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

Information and Communication Technology 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 conflict in Ukraine, as well as ongoing supplier price increases for hardware and services. 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. The project has now moved into live development.
- 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. Microsoft licence review for business requirements over next three years is complete and will move to procurement of a new contract to commence September 2023.

### **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 Local Government Finance Settlement for 2023-24 has provided some improvement in funding for the Authority, with the council tax core referendum principle increasing from 2% to 3% and a £5 flexibility for all standalone Fire and Rescue Authorities. Government grant funding has been increased in line with the September 2022 Consumer Prices Index increase of 10.1% and business rates funding has increased by more than expected. These funding increases have gone some way to mitigating the cost increases that we have seen, but we have still needed to find significant additional budget savings to set the budget for 2023-24.

The operational pay award for 2022-23 (a 7% increase) was agreed after the budget was set and at the same time the 2023-24 pay award (a further 5% increase) was agreed. These are both in excess of the 5% and 4% respectively allowed for in the 2023-24 budget plans, adding further financial pressure. The current 2023-24 local government pay offer, which applies to our corporate staff, would also average more than allowed for in the budget, around 6% compared to the 4% allowed for. Combined, these pay awards are likely to add c.£1.3m of additional cost.

With inflation still high and general economic pressures not showing signs of abating, we remain concerned about the medium to longer-term impact on the Authority's financial position. As well as additional cost increases, it is possible to foresee that there will be further funding pressures on us as we move towards a General Election and new Parliament, with the Government needing to reduce the national debt and balance overall public spending. Officers continue to closely monitor the situation and review opportunities for further savings.

#### **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, 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. It was therefore pleasing to see the inclusion of flexibility for all standalone Fire and Rescue Authorities to increase their Band D council tax precept by up to £5 for 2023-24. The general referendum principle was increased from 2% to 3% at the same time and covering 2023-24 and 2024-25. Unfortunately, even with this £5 flexibility cost pressures, particularly those arising from pay awards, have required the Service to make more budget reductions as outlined in the budget report to the Authority in February. As the operational pay awards now agreed for 2022-23 and 2023-24 are in excess of what has been allowed for, and the corporate pay award for 2023-24 is expected to be higher than budgeted for as well, further savings are likely to be required to be identified in setting budgets for 2024-25 onwards.

The audited financial statements for 2021-22 were signed off by the Finance and Audit Committee in December 2022. Our auditors, Deloitte LLP, provided an 'Unmodified' opinion on the Statements and updated the Committee in March 2023 with the outcome of the Value for Money work. This also showed an 'Unmodified' opinion.

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 2023-24 budget and new Medium-Term Finance Plan (MTFP) in February 2023. Although the MTFP continues to show a forecast future deficit, this has improved over the position shown in the previous MTFP. The deficit forecast is now £1.1m for 2023-24, rising to £1.8m for 2025-26. This is an improved position over that previously forecast following work which delivered budget reductions of just over £1m and some improvement in the funding position.

Unfortunately, although the Local Government Finance Settlement outcome was better than expected, it still only provided a one-year settlement, so there is real clarity over the longer-term funding picture beyond 2023-24. The Resourcing and Savings Programme work continued in 2022-23 and officers are reviewing future plans for 2023-24 onwards. The Committee and Authority are kept up to date with financial issues during the year. A Finance seminar was most recently held in January 2023 prior to budget setting.

#### **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 was approved 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 work-related absence due to physical injuries or ill health quarterly is up by 176 days to 321 days. In this quarter, 12 people are contributing to these figures. Of the 12 people, five are designated long term sick or in long term recovery and their days lost are 89% of quarter 4 total days lost. The total number of Adverse Occurrence Reports reported in quarter 4 has decreased from 235 to 87. This can be attributed to cases of coronavirus no longer being required to be reported. The number of reportable incidents to the Health and Safety Executive under the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 2013 has increased over the same quarter last year by one to a total of 11.

### **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 work-related absence due to physical injuries or ill health quarterly is up by 176 days to 321 days. In this quarter, 12 people are contributing to these figures. Of the 12 people, five are designated long term sick or in long term recovery and their days lost are 89% of quarter 4 total days lost.
- The total number of Adverse Occurrence Reports (AORs) reported in quarter 4 has seen a large reduction of 62% (235 down to 87), when compared to the same quarter last year. This can be attributed to cases of Covid 19 no longer being reported on

the AOR database. When looking at just the injury or harm category, a large reduction can also be seen. During this quarter, the Service had 28 injuries compared to 171 (including Covid reports), when compared to the same quarter last year.

- Our 'near miss' event reporting is around 11% of the AORs reported. This is slightly lower than the last quarter. The Service can gain the greatest amount of learning from good investigations following any occurrence of a 'near miss.' Our training in the use of the AOR database has given most staff a good understanding of the requirement to complete reports as required by our Service procedures. This has reduced under-reporting and supports the AOR submission process. There appears to be no real pattern emerging from these events and control measures have been implemented where possible to reduce the likelihood of reoccurrence.
- The number of reportable incidents to the Health and Safety Executive under the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 2013 has increased over the same quarter last year by one to a total of 11. These regulations require employers, the self-employed and those in control of premises to report specified workplace incidents. All incidents receive an investigation appropriate to the type of event and/or the injury severity. No pattern or common thread came to light within the investigations.

### **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.

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.

Information management and security arrangements are operating well and pleasingly 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 February and March 2023 for quarter 3 performance and are due to take place in May 2023 for quarter 4 performance. Priorities four and five are reviewed at the Finance & Audit Committee at their meeting in March for quarter 3 performance and July for quarter 4.

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 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 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.

### **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 provided 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 was approved by Members 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 41 Freedom of Information (FOI) requests due for response in quarter 4, 34 of which were responded to within 20 working days. The average response time was 12 working days. Two total exemptions were applied and partial exemptions were applied on eight occasions. Overall, there were 11 FOIs received in this quarter that related to questions around the organisation's culture. All but one of these requests were received from media outlets.

Eight Subject Access Requests (SARs) were received in quarter 4. Four SARs were responded to in the same quarter, all of which were received from current or previous members of staff. It is likely that a number of these SARs have been prompted by culture related coverage in the media.

In quarter 4, six complaints were due to be responded to. Of these 67% were resolved within 14 days (or within the date agreed with the complainant). Of these complaints, 83% were not upheld and none needed referring to senior management.

Pleasingly there were 24 compliments this quarter.

There were six security incidents reported this quarter, all of which had a low rating and related to phishing, data handling and access control. We continue to monitor progress against our cyber action plan and our re-accreditation of cyber essentials was 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.

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 March 2023, 30% of all employees had completed their mandatory data protection and cyber security training. This lower figure coincides with the new eLearning course launch. This will be much improved by next quarter. The actual percentage of staff who have completed a data protection and cyber eLearning course within two years is higher than this. However, it was agreed that competencies would be reverted to suit the new approach of having a revalidation window.

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.

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 sickness absence was the largest contributing factor to the absence figures in quarter 4 across wholetime, on-call and fire control staff groups whereas short term sickness absence was the largest contributing factor for corporate staff.

Musculoskeletal was the biggest cause of absence for the wholetime and on-call staff groups this quarter. The main cause for fire control and corporate staff groups was mental health. Musculoskeletal absences significantly increased this quarter when compared to previous quarters and this has resulted in an annual increase of 5%. Many of the musculoskeletal absences relate

to fractures that have required a hospital intervention and our figures will have been negatively impacted by National Health Service (NHS) waiting times.

In quarter 4 96% of staff passed their fitness test and 13 members of staff were on fitness improvement plans, which include advice and guidance on fitness improvement, including weight management and nutritional information.

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.

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 4 is 11 shifts per person (wholetime/corporate/fire control) for 2022-23 compared to the cumulative target of 9.1 shifts lost per person. As a result, the corporate target was not achieved for this year and there is now a long-term trend that sickness absence is increasing.

Year-end analysis demonstrates that absences in the Mental Health category, both work and non-work related, was a significant factor in the increase in sickness this year and is 27% higher this year for the staff groups included in corporate target (wholetime, corporate and fire control). A number of these absences are due to sickness absences arising out of individuals being subject to management processes, such as discipline or in relation to dissatisfaction with their terms and conditions. In these situations, the individual's GP will often certify the absence as 'work related stress', this results in the service undertaking an investigation to determine whether the Service deem that the absence is work related with its associated linkage to pay. There is a long-term case of post-traumatic stress and in these situations tailored wellbeing support is provided. Other mental health absences are as a result of non-work related personal life stressors. In this regard, mental health absences are well managed by the Service in both a robust and supportive manner. In recognising the increase in mental health absences, the Service is in the process of reviewing and exploring options to further enhance our mental health provision. In the meantime, the Service has provided additional funding for counselling support, which is available to all staff and includes counselling supervision for safeguarding teams, and safe and well advisors. The Service also promotes and participates in free preventative Wellness Workshops provided by the Firefighters Charity. The Workshops have been developed with the aim of empowering fire service staff to live healthier and happier lives; the Workshops cover topics such as physical, mental health and social health.

Year-end data also shows that there has been a slight increase in most of the other individual sickness causations throughout the year which has contributed to the increase in shifts lost this year. The most notable increases are within the heart and cardiac category, which again have necessitated hospital intervention and therefore are impacted by NHS waiting times. Pleasingly, overall there has been a 20% reduction in respiratory absence which reflects that Covid is having a decreasing impact on our sickness absence.

#### **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. A range of health and wellbeing procedures are in place which outline all the support mechanisms available to all 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 4 across wholetime, on-call and fire control staff groups whereas short term absence was the largest contributing factor for corporate staff.

Musculoskeletal was the highest causation of absence for the wholetime and on-call staff groups this quarter. The main causation for fire control and corporate staff groups was mental health.

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 4 is 11 shifts per person (wholetime/corporate/fire control) compared to the cumulative target of 9.1 shifts lost per person. As a result, the corporate target was not achieved for this year and there is now a long-term trend that sickness absence is increasing.

Sickness absence is managed through the Health and Wellbeing team who work closely with line managers and HR business partners. Robust sickness absence 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. A range of support mechanisms remain in place to support staff such as

counselling and physiotherapy. The Service will also consider funding, through a cost benefit analysis, of private investigations if it is considered that National Health Service waiting times are delaying treatment and/or recovery.

In quarter 4, 96% of staff passed their fitness test and 13 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. As part of the Dorset Public Health Workforce Campaign there is a collation of wellbeing initiatives across the public bodies. The Service is promoting the offer of free Wellbeing Workshops offered by the Firefighter Charity, who are rolling out a programme to operational staff. An Annual Trauma Risk Intervention management (TRiM) conference is not planned but continuous TRiM training is offered for TRiM practitioners and TRiM managers through an accredited body.

The Service is also a member of the National Fire Chiefs Council National Occupational Health Practitioners Group which delivers 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 4. 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 an annual department succession plan and a five-year retirement profile is monitored regularly to aid wholtime 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 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 4 being 23.2% against a target of 21.8%. As a result, we have exceeded our corporate target for this year.

Equality data of all starters and leavers is captured to monitor trends and of the 39 new starters in quarter 4, 25 were commencing employment as on-call firefighters, four of whom are female.

There were 47 leavers in quarter 4 and the top three primary reasons for leaving for all staff were retirement, redundancy and to pursue other employment. There were no trends in terms of sexual orientation, disability, ethnic origin or religion and belief. Analysis of the responses to exit interview questions has also identified no particular trends.

## **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 4, our communications and engagement has focused on the internal culture review which involved a staff survey based on the themes highlighted in the London Fire Brigade Culture report. The results of this survey were then the subject of over 15 focus groups which were conducted by staff group and included our staff networks, leadership consultancy group and representative bodies. All findings are currently being analysed and will feed into the Independent Review.

At the same time, six Manager Briefing sessions were conducted across the Service and the focus was on recent challenges and the impacts of this, culture and values and the work in progress, feedback and actions resulting from the supervisory engagement days held in quarter 3 and our budget position. These sessions were positively received with over 90% of respondents feeling well informed, listened to and positive about the Service after the events.

We continue with structured and regular one-to-ones and team meetings over the phone, in person and using video calls in line with our smarter working approach.

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 in quarter 4 has been around our financial challenges and organisational change, the potential for industrial action and culture and values. 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. A wide range of initiatives are in place to support our work to increase the diversity of our workforce. 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.

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Equality data of all starters and leavers is captured to monitor trends and of the 39 new starters in quarter 4, 25 were commencing employment as on-call firefighters, four of whom are female.

There were 47 leavers in quarter 4 and the top three primary reasons for leaving for all staff were retirement, redundancy and to pursue employment elsewhere. There were no trends in terms of sexual orientation, disability, ethnic origin or religion and belief. Of 47 leavers this quarter, 38 were offered leavers discussions (80%). Of those that were offered a leavers discussion, eight declined. Analysis of the responses to exit interview questions has identified no particular trends.

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

### KLOE 11 Summary

All joiners are invited to a corporate induction with two corporate inductions taking place in quarter 4.

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 carry out 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 4 show that 37 Service personnel are undertaking apprenticeships which represents 2.3% of staff.

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?**

Two corporate induction sessions were held in quarter 4. Following the corporate induction, a survey regarding the effectiveness of the process is sent out. All responses confirmed the induction either met or exceeded their expectations. Another way that we evaluate how successful the induction period has been for a new starter is data from probation reviews. Year to date, since 1 April 2022, 82 probations have been met, one has been extended and no staff contracts have been 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 1:1 personal review process ensures that a discussion and appraisal take place at least once a year and focuses on wellbeing, performance and development. One-to-one reviews are recorded over a rolling 12-month period and completion rates are monitored. Trend analysis suggests that reviews tended to be conducted quite evenly over the 12-month period.

### **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. 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.

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