



Hereford & Worcester
Fire Authority

Fire Authority Statement of Assurance

2015-16

What is a statement of assurance?

A statement of assurance is a short report designed to give our staff, partners and local communities an assurance we are doing everything we can to keep them safe and that we are providing value for money.

The statement covers three main areas: our finances, our governance and our frontline response services. This provides an overview of how we manage the money we receive, how we conduct our business and how we make sure everything we do is done properly, efficiently and effectively.

The statement includes a short directory with links to a wealth of information, which will also help you assess our performance and value for money. Our website is also full of facts and figures about everything we do, which will also help you judge how well we are doing.

We trust that the statement of assurance gives you confidence that the Authority maintains the highest standards in all aspects of its work and that the Service is delivering its frontline and support services to the best of its abilities for the communities of Herefordshire and Worcestershire.



Cllr. Derek W. Prodger MBE,
Chairman of the Fire Authority

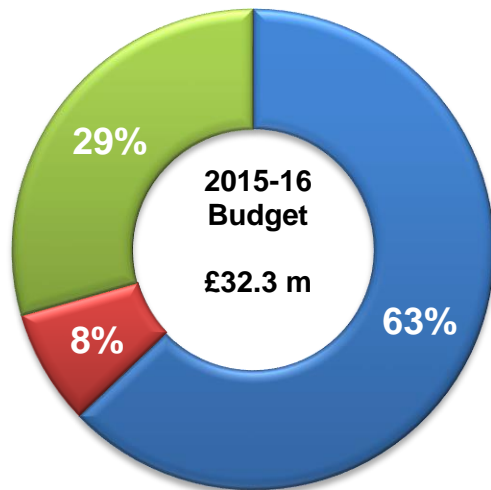


Mark J. Yates QFSM, Chief
Fire Officer/Chief Executive

Finance

Our funding comes from three main sources as shown in the following chart:

How the Service is paid for: 2015-16

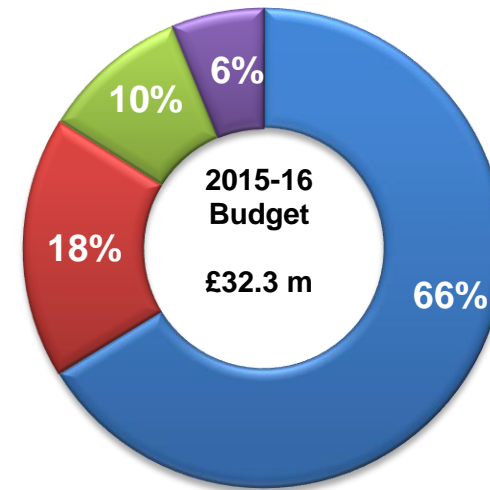


- H&W Council Tax: £20.3 m
- H&W share of Business Rates: £2.5 m
- Government Grants: £9.5 m

To make sure we spend this properly, we have robust financial monitoring processes in place. The Fire Authority requires the Treasurer to prepare an annual statement of accounts, which is designed to provide a true and fair view of the financial position, including a statement on income and expenditure. In preparing the

statement, the Treasurer follows the CIPFA Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in the United Kingdom

How the budget is spent : 2015-16



- Employees
- Fleet, equipment, ICT, property
- Capital financing
- Other running costs

The Authority also approves a Medium Term Financial Plan, which sets out the resources needed to deliver our services, and sets an annual budget as shown in the chart above.

To provide further assurance, every year a structured programme of internal audit reports is carried out, supported by an independent annual external audit. The internal audits are currently carried out by the Worcestershire Internal Audit Shared Service in line with the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards 2013. These audits examine key aspects of how the Service conducts its business including:

- the adequacy and effectiveness of internal controls and risk management,
- compliance with legislation and the Service's own objectives, policies and procedures,
- how well the assets and interests are protected and managed,
- investigation of any allegations of fraud and irregularity,
- advice on the control and risk implications of new systems or other organisational change.

In the last year, four accountancy and finance systems were examined – payroll, creditors, debtors and budgetary control/main ledger – and all four were reported as providing a high level of assurance.

The external audit is currently undertaken by Grant Thornton UK LLP and provides an independent assessment of the Fire Authority's arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources. It focuses on arrangements for securing financial resilience and prioritising resources within tighter budgets.

In the latest annual audit review letter 2013-14, the auditor considered the Authority's financial statements gave a true and fair view of the financial position and was satisfied that the financial statements were sound. The auditor also found that the Authority has put in place proper arrangements to secure value for money in its use of resources for the year ending 31 March 2014.

Governance

The Fire Authority has a responsibility to ensure that its business is conducted in accordance with the law and proper standards, and that public money is safeguarded and properly accounted for. To do this the Authority must ensure it has proper arrangements for the governance of its affairs. This includes maintaining a sound system of internal control and ensuring robust arrangements for managing risk are in place.

Governance is about how the Authority ensures it is doing the right things in the right ways for the right people in a timely, inclusive, open, honest and accountable manner. It comprises the systems and processes, culture and values by which the Authority is directed and controlled and through which it accounts to and engages with its communities.

Each year the Authority prepares an Annual Governance Statement setting out how it meets these responsibilities. This is supported by a Code of Corporate Governance setting out how the Authority promotes good governance. The main elements of the governance framework are as follows:

- Constitution – defines the roles and responsibility of the Authority, Committees, Members and Officers.
- Audit and Standards Committee – reviews arrangements for identifying and managing the Authority's business risks

and the approval of policies in respect of the governance framework.

- Monitoring Officer – provides advice on the scope of powers and responsibilities of the Authority, and has a statutory duty to ensure lawfulness and fairness of decision making.
- Chief Financial Officer (Treasurer) – ensures the sound administration of the financial affairs of the Authority as required by the statutory duties under the Local Government Act 1972, the Local Government Finance Act 1988 and the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2011.
- Ethical Framework and Code of Conduct – in place for all staff and familiarisation is included in the local induction.

During 2014-15, three internal audits of corporate governance systems were carried out including risk management, which was assessed as providing significant assurance. The two other internal audits – documentation services and data security retention services and information technology – are part of wider audits and did not require assurance ratings.

Frontline response

Making sure our firefighters and communities are kept as safe as possible is at the heart of everything we do. We aim to provide the best training and equipment for our firefighters to do their jobs safely and ensure they have the best command and leadership available. We constantly assess the level of risk across the two counties and use this to help organise how we target our prevention and protection services.

During the year we published our strategic plan for the next few years to 2020. Called the Community Risk Management Plan 2014-2020, it sets out how the Service assesses and tackles risks and how it organises its fire and emergency cover arrangements in the light of changing risks and resources.

Each year the Authority publishes an Annual Report, which provides information on overall performance, highlights key achievements during the year and sets out plans for the year ahead. This year's report also provides a summary of our plans to tackle the ongoing funding issues facing the Authority, with a new 2020 Vision Programme setting out a wide range of projects designed to transform the way in which we'll be delivering our services in the future.

Our internal auditors, Worcestershire Internal Audit Shared Services, completed an audit of our operational assurance system in January 2015 and gave an overall rating of 'significant assurance'. The audit focused on six safety critical areas – training, intelligence, policies, active incident monitoring, thematic reviews and external health and safety factors.

During the year our firefighters also completed a wide range of safety-critical training designed to improve their operational capabilities including firefighting wearing breathing apparatus, understanding fire behaviour, tactical incident command training and practical exercises such as dealing with road traffic collisions.

Additional internal audits were completed on building maintenance and equality and diversity, both of which were assessed as providing a high level of assurance. Finally, in January 2015, a Chief Fire Officers Association (CFOA) West Midlands Regional Health and Safety Audit found that the Service is performing well in the two areas audited; Personal Protective Equipment (Firefighting PPE) and Water Rescue. A number of areas for improvement were also identified and these will be addressed during 2015-16.

Directory of assurance documents

The following directory provides links to documents available on the [Service website](#) and to others held on external websites.

A. Finance

Details of the Fire Authority's finances and budgeting arrangements can be found in the following documents:

- [Annual Statement of Accounts 2014-15](#)
- Link to previous [Statements of Accounts](#)
- [Budget and Precept 2015-16 and Medium Term Financial Plan](#)

Reports of internal audits and external audit review can be found at the following links:

- [Internal Audit Annual Report 2014-15](#)
- [Annual Audit Review Letter 2013-14](#)

The Service website has further information on spending and links include:

- [Council Tax](#)
- [Invoice payments over £500](#)

- [Pay policy statement](#)

Links to national legislation and other guidance:

- [Local Government Act 1999](#)
- [Accounts and Audit \(England\) Regulations 2011](#)
- [Local Government Finance Act 1988](#)
- [Local Government Act 1972](#)
- [Chartered Institute for Public Finance and Accountancy \(CIPFA\) Codes of Practice](#)
- [Public Sector Internal Audit Standards 2013](#)

Previous Statements of Assurance can be found at the following link:

- [Statements of Assurance](#)
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B. Governance

The Fire Authority is fully committed to supporting the Government's transparency initiative, promoting openness and accountability through reporting on local decision making, public spending and democratic processes. The Service website lists all the relevant information through its [Transparency Code of Practice](#), including:

- [Annual Governance Statement 2013-14](#)
- [Previous Annual Governance Statement](#)
- [Code of Corporate Governance](#)

- [Fire Authority Constitution](#)
- [Fire Authority and Committees](#)

Links to national legislation and other guidance:

- [Fire and Rescue National Framework for England 2012](#) – provides guidance on assurance and accountability
 - [Local Government Transparency Code 2015](#)
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C. Operations

The Fire Authority publishes reports on all its services, including the overall strategy, operational performance, policies and financial plans. Key documents include:

- [Fire Authority Annual Report 2015-16](#)
- [Community Risk Management Plan 2014-2020](#)
- [Annual Performance 2014-15](#)
- [CFOA West Midlands Regional Health and Safety Audit](#)
- 2020 Vision Programme

The Service website provides a wide range of information about the Fire Authority and the Fire and Rescue Service, with five main sections:

- [About Us](#)
- [Safety and Advice](#)
- [Your Right To Know](#)
- [Join Us](#)
- [News and Events](#)
- There is also a [Publication Scheme](#), which sets out what information we make publicly available.

Links to national legislation and other guidance:

- [Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004](#)
 - [Civil Contingencies Act 2004](#)
 - [Regulatory Reform \(Fire Safety\) Order 2005](#)
 - [Fire and Rescue Services \(Emergencies\) \(England\) Order 2007](#)
 - [Localism Act 2011](#)
 - [Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974](#)
 - [Fire and Rescue National Framework for England 2012](#) and [Addendum 2014](#)
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Your right to know: access to information

Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service collects and maintains information and data to enable it to carry out its statutory duties. A great deal of information on the Service is already available in the public domain through our Publication Scheme and [Transparency Webpage](#). Service staff will help you obtain the information you want unless disclosure would be against the law.

You have a right to request information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000, which gives you a general right of access to recorded information held by the Service. The Act is designed to ensure greater accountability, as well as to promote a more open culture. If you want to know what personal information is held about you, you can make a request under the Data Protection Act 1998. To find out more, please follow the link: [Your Right to Know](#).



What do you think of our Statement of Assurance?

We welcome any views you may have on the content of this Statement of Assurance.

If you have any comments or would like to contact us about any issue, please visit our website at www.hwfire.org.uk where you will find full contact details along with links to further information about our services and activities.

If you have any general enquiries, please call 0845 122 4454 or email us at info@hwfire.org.uk.

You can also follow us on
Twitter at @HWFire
(<https://twitter.com/hwfire>)

or find us on
Facebook at
www.facebook.com/hwfire

Alternatively you may write to:

Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service Headquarters,
2 Kings Court,
Charles Hastings Way,
Worcester
WR5 1JR.

If you would like this information in an alternative language or format such as large print or audio, please contact us on 0845 122 4454.