

Report of the Head of Legal Services

Draft Annual Governance Statement 2019/20

Purpose of report

1. To consider evidence compiled during the self assessment review which provides the assurances that sit behind the Annual Governance Statement.
 2. To put forward the Draft Annual Governance Statement 2019/20 for approval.
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Recommendation

It is recommended that the Draft Annual Governance Statement 2019/20 be approved.

Introduction and Background

3. Governance is about how the Authority ensures that it is doing the right thing, in the right way for the right people in a timely, inclusive, open, honest and accountable manner. It comprises the systems and processes, cultures and values, by which the Authority is directed and controlled and through which it accounts to and engages with its communities.
4. The Accounts and Audit (England) Regulations 2015 require that the Fire Authority reviews its arrangements for governance and systems of internal control at least on an annual basis. To meet this requirement, the operation of the Authority's governance arrangements is subject to an annual self assessment against the CIPFA (the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy) and SOLACE (the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives) framework.
5. The annual self assessment review sets out the evidence of how the Authority has performed against the CIPFA/SOLACE framework and identifies any actions that are needed for the forthcoming year.

Annual Governance Statement

6. The Annual Governance Statement is essentially a summary of the governance arrangements of which Members are familiar. It reports publicly on the extent to which the Authority's governance arrangements have met the values, principles and best practice, as set out in the Authority's Code of Corporate Governance. Likewise, should the Authority have any significant governance weaknesses these will also be disclosed publicly within the Annual Governance Statement.

7. The Annual Governance Statement is a backward looking document up to the date of the approval of the Statement of Accounts. The draft Annual Governance Statement is attached at Appendix 1.
8. It includes how the Authority has monitored the effectiveness of its governance arrangements, setting out any planned changes for the current period and sets out to:
 - identify the Authority's obligations and objectives;
 - identify tasks to achieve those objectives;
 - establish controls to manage risks; and
 - ensure the controls are working effectively.
9. The Annual Governance Statement will be audited by the External Auditors who will examine it as part of their work on the financial statements and the Value for Money Conclusion, which are included in the External Audit Findings 2019/20 to be reported elsewhere on the agenda for this meeting.
10. In addition to the Annual Governance Statement, the Authority is required to publish an Annual Statement of Assurance, as required by the revised Fire and Rescue National Framework that was published by Government in July 2012. The Annual Statement of Assurance will be reported to this Committee.

Self- Assessment

11. The self assessment uses the CIPFA/SOLACE Framework. The framework sets out 91 behaviours and actions against which the Authority must demonstrate good governance in practice. Officers have assessed existing arrangements and documents against the CIPFA/SOLACE requirements and the status of how the Authority complies with each requirement is included.
12. The evidence compiled during the self assessment review forms the assurances that sit behind the Annual Governance Statement (attached at Appendix 2). The self assessment review document incorporates progress on the actions identified for 2019/20, which were as follows:
 - the updated organisational values were considered by Members as part of the Fire Authority Annual Report 2020/21
 - any potential review of constitutional arrangements was delayed due to the PCC Business Case in respect of Fire Authority Governance
 - a Members' Induction took place on 11 June 2019 and there are continued opportunities for Members to obtain further fire-specific knowledge through events such as Service Exercise, Dying to Drive, Wyre Forest Hub Visit
 - the review of Financial Regulations was completed and approved by this Committee in January 2020
 - an audit was undertaken in January 2019 to assess the organisation against the '12 Steps to GDPR Compliance' as advocated by the Information Commissioners Office as best practice
 - the HMICFRS Inspection was undertaken and improvement plan is in place with quarterly update reports considered by P&R Committee

13. Members will note from the self-assessment that the Authority has provided evidence of compliance with all the core and supporting principles of good governance. There are no areas where immediate action is required, however some work is still in progress in relation to GDPR following the audit undertaken in January 2019. Although this is an area where some further improvement is in progress, the direction of travel has improved due to the improvements that have been already been made.
14. Members will also note that there were no areas where the direction of travel had decreased during 2019/20. There were three areas (shown within Core Principle F) where the direction of travel has improved which is due to:
 - the review of Financial Regulations
 - the GDPR Audit
15. Further assurances are included at Appendix 3. These assurances relate to the requirements from the CIPFA Statement on the Role of the Chief Financial Officer in Local Government.

Conclusion/Summary

16. The Annual Governance Statement reports publicly on the extent to which the Authority's governance arrangements have met the values, principles and best practice, as set out in the Authority's Code of Corporate Governance. Likewise, should the Authority have any significant governance weaknesses these will also be disclosed publicly within the Annual Governance Statement.
17. The Committee has delegated responsibility to approve the Annual Governance Statement which will accompany the Statement of Accounts. The draft Annual Governance Statement is attached together with the relevant assurances for consideration.

Corporate Considerations

Resource Implications (identify any financial, legal, property or human resources issues)	The Annual Governance Statement provides assurance for Members that effective governance arrangements are in place.
Strategic Policy Links (identify how proposals link in with current priorities and policy framework and if they do not, identify any potential implications)	The Annual Governance Statement links with 'Our Strategy' as it demonstrates how the Authority ensures the delivery of quality services.
Risk Management / Health & Safety (identify any risks, the proposed control measures and risk evaluation scores)	The Annual Governance Statement provides assurance for Members that effective governance arrangements are in place.

Consultation (identify any public or other consultation that has been carried out on this matter)	
Equalities (has an Equalities Impact Assessment been completed? If not, why not?)	No this has not been necessary as the Annual Governance Statement is a summary of existing arrangements. There are no new proposals set out that would need to be assessed in terms of equalities.

Supporting Information

Appendix 1 – Draft Annual Governance Statement
Appendix 2 – Annual Governance Statement Assurances
Appendix 3 – Chief Financial Officer Statement

Background papers:
Accounts and Audit (England) Regulations 2015
CIPFA/SOLACE Delivering Good Governance in Local Government Framework 2016
Hereford & Worcester Fire Authority Code of Corporate Governance