

Report of the Head of Corporate Services

9. Annual Statement of Assurance 2013-14

Purpose of report

1. To consider the draft Statement of Assurance 2013-14 prior to consideration by the Authority on 3 October 2014.
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Recommendation

The Audit and Standards Committee recommends that the Authority adopts the draft Statement of Assurance 2013-14 and approves it for publication.

Introduction and Background

2. As part of its Terms of Reference the Audit and Standards Committee can make recommendations to the Authority on the Annual Assurance Statement.

Annual Statement of Assurance

3. A new Fire and Rescue National Framework for England was published in July 2012 by the Department for Communities and Local Government. The Framework provides an overall strategic direction to Fire and Rescue Authorities and sets out the Government's expectations and requirements.
4. The key priorities for Fire and Rescue Authorities in the new Framework are to:
 - identify and assess the full range of foreseeable fire and rescue related risks their area faces, make provision for prevention and protection activities and respond to incidents appropriately;
 - work in partnership with their communities and a wide range of partners locally and nationally to deliver their services; and
 - be accountable to communities for the services they provide.
5. Under the new Fire and Rescue National Framework, Fire and Rescue Authorities must provide annual assurance on financial, governance and operational matters and show how they have had due regard to the expectations set out in their Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) and the requirements included in the National Framework. To provide these assurances to the public an Annual Statement of Assurance must be published.
6. The Statement of Assurance sits alongside existing documents such as the Fire and Rescue Authority Plan, the IRMP, the Statement of Accounts (elsewhere on this agenda) and the Annual Governance Statement (elsewhere on this agenda) and shows what measures are in place to provide assurance to the public and Government that the Authority's performance is effective, economic and efficient.
7. Each Fire and Rescue Authority is expected to sign off the Statement, ensuring that it has been subject to the Authority's scrutiny arrangements. Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Authority does not operate executive arrangements and therefore does not have a

dedicated Overview and Scrutiny Committee. This Authority operates a traditional committee structure, where the Authority's committees undertake the role of the 'critical friend'. The Audit and Standards Committee were asked to consider and scrutinise the Statement of Assurance.

8. At its meeting on 26 September 2013 the Audit and Standards Committee considered the Statement of Assurance 2013-14 and were satisfied that the Statement provided assurance to the public on financial matters, governance matters and operational matters and recommended its adoption and publication to the Authority.
9. The draft Annual Statement of Assurance is attached at Appendix 1. It is suggested that prior to consideration of the Statement by the Authority in October that the Committee satisfies itself that the Statement provides assurance to the public on:
 - a) financial matters;
 - b) governance matters; and
 - c) operational matters.

Conclusion/Summary

10. Following the publication of the new Fire and Rescue National Framework for England in July 2012, Fire and Rescue Authorities now have a duty to publish an Annual Statement of Assurance to provide assurance to the public and others on financial, governance and operational matters. The Statement of Assurance sits alongside existing documents such as the Fire and Rescue Authority Plan, the IRMP, the Statement of Accounts and the Annual Governance Statement. It is therefore recommended that the Authority approves the Annual Statement of Assurance 2012-13 for publication on the Authority's website.

Corporate Considerations

Resource Implications (identify any financial, legal, property or human resources issues)	Financial, property and human resources activities are highlighted in the Statement of Assurance.
Strategic Policy Links (identify how proposals link in with current priorities and policy framework and if they do not, identify any potential implications)	The Statement of Assurance sits alongside existing documents such as the Fire and Rescue Authority Plan, Statement of Accounts, the Governance Statement and the IRMP.
Risk Management /Health & Safety (identify any risks, the proposed control measures and risk evaluation scores)	The Statement of Assurance highlights the work of the Authority around Risk Management / Health & Safety.
Consultation (identify any public or other consultation that has been carried out on this matter)	Senior Management Board consultation undertaken.
Equalities (has an Equalities Impact Assessment been completed? If not, why not?)	Not completed as links to Equality & Diversity activities are highlighted in the Statement.

Supporting Information

Appendix 1 – Draft Statement of Assurance 2013-14

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Statement of Assurance 2013-14

Background

The Fire and Rescue National Framework (which provides an overall strategic direction and sets out the Government's priorities and objectives) requires Fire and Rescue Authorities to provide an annual assurance on financial, governance and operational matters and show how they have had due regard to the expectations set out in their Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) and the requirements included in the National Framework. To provide assurance, Fire and Rescue Authorities must publish an annual Statement of Assurance and provide information on their activities which enables individuals, communities and partners to make a valid assessment of performance. It should also help to enable the public to hold their Authority to account for the way it spends public money.

The Statement of Assurance sits alongside existing documents such as the Fire and Rescue Authority Plan, Statement of Accounts, the Governance Statement and the IRMP and shows what measures are in place to provide assurance to the public and the Government that the Authority's performance is effective, economic and efficient.

The Authority recognises its duty to publish an annual Statement of Assurance and is satisfied that it has well established and robust assurance arrangements in place that fulfil the National Framework requirements. The purpose of this Statement of Assurance is to set out the relevant documents which show how the Authority provides assurance and accountability within the organisation and amongst external stakeholders such as local councils and other blue-light services.

The remainder of this Statement outlines information on our Service profile, risks, community engagement, challenges and review processes. It also contains links to further detailed information and assurance documents as per national guidance.

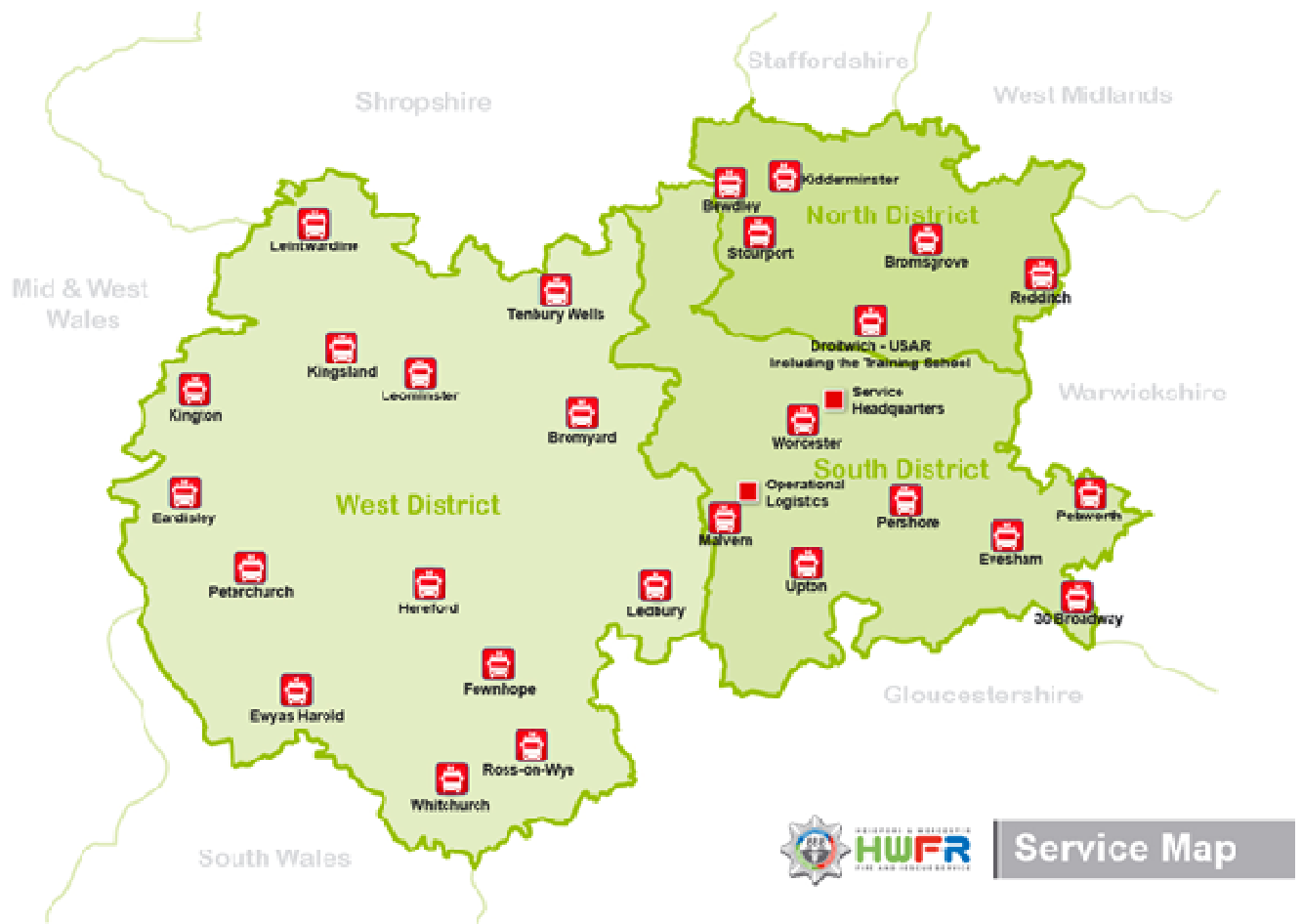
Our Service

The Fire and Rescue Authority's area covers the two counties of Herefordshire and Worcestershire, some 1,500 square miles. It's a very attractive place in which to live, with most people living in areas surrounded by beautiful landscape and rich countryside. There is a population of around 740,000 people residing in the two counties, predominantly in Worcestershire.

Both counties are largely rural; about a third of Worcestershire's 560,000 residents and more than half of Herefordshire's 180,000 residents live in rural areas. While having the smaller population of the two counties, Herefordshire is the larger by area and is one of the most sparsely populated counties in England.

The Service is organised across three geographic Districts: North, South and West, which helps us to provide a balanced response to reducing risks throughout the two counties. We receive nearly 12,000 emergency calls each year requesting assistance at a wide variety of incidents, including property and countryside fires, road traffic collisions, collapsed structures, water rescues, hazardous materials and animal rescues. In all, we attend just over 6,500 incidents each year – over 125 incidents every week.

Whilst we make sure we are able to respond to emergencies effectively and safely, we are also concerned with trying to prevent those emergencies happening in the first place. We work with our partner agencies and our local communities and businesses to make sure that all foreseeable fire and rescue related risks that could affect our communities (from local fires to multi-agency flood response) are reduced as far as reasonably possible.



The three Districts are served by 27 Fire Stations strategically located across the two counties, as shown in the map above, to provide an appropriate response as soon as an emergency call is received. The five busiest Fire Stations are permanently crewed 24 hours a day (Wholetime at Hereford, Worcester, Kidderminster, Bromsgrove and Redditch). Three other Fire Stations are permanently crewed during the day (Day Crewed at Droitwich, Evesham and Malvern) and by On-Call (Retained) Firefighters during the night. The other 19 Fire Stations are crewed by On-Call (Retained) Firefighters who live locally to the Station and can respond quickly should they be called.

Local Risks

Our recent joint approach with Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service for Operational Assessment identified the need for the Service to work on a longer term approach to Integrated Risk Management Planning. Called the “Community Risk Management Plan” (CRMP), which balances our limited resources against the risks we face, this will provide a new overarching framework and will demonstrate clearer links to the Service’s Prevention, Protection and Response Strategies. To plan ahead we have looked at what changes might affect our two counties in the forthcoming years, especially what might have an impact on how we deliver our services. Some of the main issues we considered stand out: the economic situation, population growth and the changing environment and they give a good picture of what our Service will be dealing with over the next few years.

This statement highlights some of our past work and looks to the future and we are firmly committed to ensure that any changes to how we deliver our functions, must also maintain excellent services to our communities via our balanced approach to reducing community risk, which includes prevention, protection and intervention activities. These activities such as home fire safety checks and school visits for prevention, business premise inspections and enforcing fire safety measures for protection and reacting quickly to emergency calls for response are undertaken via a flexible and risk based deployment of resources in order to improve community safety, prevent incidents occurring, to mitigate damage and also to create a safer environment for Firefighters.

Extending the lifespan of the CRMP will help the Service align to the Chief Fire Officers Association's 'Fire 2020' research project which looked at what changes the future may hold and the potential implications they may have for Fire and Rescue Services. This will also help us to look further ahead to 2020 with high level "outcomes to achieve" rather than just the three years that we traditionally plan for and will show the direction we are heading in and enable us to track our progress over a greater length of time.

The inclusion of corporate risk and value for money into the new CRMP will allow you to more fully understand the relationship between the operating constraints of the future and how this might affect service delivery. The development of the new CRMP also presents an opportunity to engage staff and stakeholders including local Authority Members appointed by Local Councils, staff, staff representative bodies, multi-agency partners and community representatives in both content and implementation.

Partnerships and Community Engagement

We may be a Service that fights fires and rescues people in times of emergency but we also understand our wider role in the community. Our community safety work extends into schools, voluntary groups and partner organisations and we visit vulnerable people in the comfort of their own homes. We are keen to get volunteers and young people involved in positive activities that inspire them, such as our Young Firefighters Association which is growing in strength. We also know the value of working with others, especially our neighbouring Fire and Rescue Services and other Emergency Services, to help to make sure that we all work together seamlessly when called upon.

Assurance and Challenges

Like many other Public Sector organisations we find ourselves having to meet a tough financial challenge and difficult decisions will have to be made over the medium to long term. The scale of cuts in funding is such that we have reviewed how we deliver our services both now and for the future. The Service has already made substantial savings but we expect to have to make more significant savings over the next few years. Despite this, we believe Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service is one of the top Fire and Rescues Services in the country; we achieve strong results and we aim to maintain high standards of service delivery. Our strong and improving performance is testament to the commitment and drive of our staff which, we believe is second to none.

Following the internal review of operational assurance in 2011-12 (based upon the findings from eight other Fire and Rescue Services that were audited by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) in 2010) HWFRS shared the work with our colleagues in the

region and we invited them to engage in the same process. Their findings were then used to populate an overarching audit document which was shared in order to enable participants to identify and share examples of best /good practice. Current regional collaborative work includes the development of a bespoke Fire and Rescue Service Health and Safety audit model.

At the end of 2012, we voluntarily participated in what is called an 'Operational Assessment and Peer Challenge', co-ordinated by the Local Government Association, which was undertaken by a team from other Fire and Rescue Services and West Mercia Police, who have a detailed understanding of our role and can therefore cast a critical eye over what we do. The assessment looked at seven strategic areas covering the full range of our activities and identified many strengths but also raised some areas that we need to examine further during 2013-14 to make sure that we keep improving.

Areas for Improvement: Operational Assessment

Areas to be addressed were investigated during 2012-13 and we are now working on the implementation of these recommendations via a detailed action plan (see the link under Section E: Our Performance in the Directory of Key Assurance Documents overleaf.) This contains actions in areas such as Incident Command, Risk Planning (both operational and financial), Training, Fire Control, Member Involvement, Public Consultation and support functions such as Human Resources, Data and Project Management.

Annual Audit Letter 2011/12:

The latest external Audit and Value for Money reports by the Audit Commission found that the actions taken by the Authority were financially robust, were delivering efficiencies and were securing value for money. The District Auditor from the Audit Commission issued an unqualified Value for Money Conclusion as his work did not identify any matters which would lead him to believe that the Authority did not have proper arrangements in place for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness. The District Auditor was satisfied on the basis of his work that in all significant respects Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Authority has put in place proper arrangements to secure value for money in its use of resources for the year ending 31 March 2012. For the detailed report, please see the link overleaf under Section F: Financial Performance in the Directory of Key Assurance Documents.

Review of the Statement of Assurance

The Statement of Assurance is subject to the regular monitoring and review undertaken as part of the overall assurance for the Authority. As part of this process, actions may be identified that could further improve the assurance arrangements for the Authority. The Statement of Assurance is considered by the Audit and Standards Committee prior to approval by the Authority and is signed by the Authority Chairman and Chief Fire Officer. The Statement of Assurance is published within three months of the Authority's Statement of Accounts each year.

Your Right to Know - Access to Information

Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service collect and maintain information and data to enable us to carry out our 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 to 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](#)

Detailed Assurance Information

Please find overleaf a Directory of Key Assurance Documents with links to documents which show how the Authority provides assurance on the four specific areas of finance, governance, operational matters and National Framework/IRMP requirements.

This is as per National guidance which states that: “Where fire and rescue authorities have already set out relevant information that is clear, accessible, and user-friendly within existing documents, they may wish to include extracts, or links to these documents within their statement of assurance.”

Further information is also contained on our website at www.hwfire.org.uk and we would welcome any views that you have on the content of this statement or the way in which Hereford & Worcester Fire Authority delivers its services. Please call 0845 122 4454 or email info@hwfire.org.uk.

Directory of Key Assurance Documents

<p>A. The communities we serve and the risks we face</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HWFR Authority Plan 2013-14 • Integrated Risk Management Plan 2009-2012 	<p>B. Overview of HWFRS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HWFR Authority Plan 2013-14 • Service Structure • Our Fire Stations • Our Vehicle Fleet • Our Specialised Units • Sustainability, Environment Policy • Equality & Diversity • Your Safety • Safety Advice for Businesses
<p>C. Governance arrangements</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Your Fire Authority • Fire Authority Constitution • Fire Authority Meeting Dates • Asking Questions at Fire Authority Public Meetings • Fire Authority Agendas & Minutes • Meetings of the Policy and Resources Committee • Meetings of the Audit Committee • Annual Governance Statement 2011-12 • Code of Corporate Governance 2013 • CLG-Fire and Rescue National Framework for England 2012 • Risk Management Strategy-p43-61 • Strategic Risk Register-p33-39 	<p>D. Our Purpose</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HWFR Authority Plan 2013-14 • Our Partners • Health and Safety • Preparing for Emergencies • Business Continuity Management
<p>E. Our Performance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HWFR Authority Plan 2013-14 • CLG Fire Statistics Monitor 2012-13 • CLG Fire Operational Statistics Bulletin 2011-12 • CLG National Fire Statistics 2011-12 • Operational Assessment 2012-p50-76 • Operational Assessment Action Plan-p79-83 	<p>F. Financial Performance (Statement of Accounts)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual Statement of Accounts 2012-13 • Council Tax-How Your Money is Spent • Invoice Payments • Pay Policy Statement 2013-14 • Medium Term Financial Plan-p18-49 • District Auditor's Annual Audit Letter 2011-12 • Government Spending Review 2013
<p>G. Our Future Plans</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HWFR Authority Plan 2013-14 	<p>H. Our Community Engagement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service Contact Details • Request a Home Fire Safety Check • Access to Information-Transparency • Publication Scheme • Complaints against Fire Authority Members • Comments, Compliments and Complaints