

<b>REPORT REFERENCE NO.</b>	<b>APRC/14/6</b>
<b>MEETING</b>	<b>AUDIT &amp; PERFORMANCE REVIEW COMMITTEE</b>
<b>DATE OF MEETING</b>	<b>24 SEPTEMBER 2014</b>
<b>SUBJECT OF REPORT</b>	<b>2013-14 ANNUAL STATEMENT OF ASSURANCE</b>
<b>LEAD OFFICER</b>	<b>Audit and Review Manager</b>
<b>RECOMMENDATIONS</b>	<b><i>That that the final Annual Governance Statement - required to accompany the 2013/14 final accounts – be approved and published on the Authority’s website.</i></b>
<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</b>	<p>By virtue of both the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2011 and the Fire &amp; Rescue National Framework for England, the Authority is required to produce and publish an Annual Statement of Assurance on financial, governance and operational matters.</p> <p>The draft 2013/14 Statement was considered and approved in principle by the Committee at its last meeting and submitted as part of the audit process for the 2013/14 Statement of Accounts (Minute *APRC/5 refers). No significant changes have been identified as a result of this audit process and the final Statement of Assurance is now appended to this report for approval.</p>
<b>RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS</b>	Nil.
<b>EQUALITY RISKS AND BENEFITS ASSESSMENT (ERBA)</b>	The contents of this report are considered compatible with existing equalities and human rights legislation.
<b>APPENDICES</b>	2013-14 Annual Statement of Assurance
<b>LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS</b>	<p>2013-14 Draft Statement of Accounts</p> <p>Fire and Rescue National Framework for England</p> <p>CLG – Guidance on statements of assurance for fire and rescue authorities in England</p> <p>CFOA – Proposed Template for Annual Statement of Assurance</p> <p>CIPFA – Delivering good governance in Local Government</p> <p>CIPFA – The role of the Chief Financial Officer in Local Government</p> <p>CIPFA – The role of the Head of Internal Audit in public service organisations</p> <p>CLG – The code of recommended practice for Local Authorities on Data Transparency</p>

## **1. BACKGROUND**

### ***Accounting Requirements***

- 1.1 The *Accounts and Audit (England) Regulations 2011* require authorities to prepare an annual governance statement in support of its statement of accounts. This governance statement is an expression of the measures taken by the authority to ensure appropriate business practice, high standards of conduct and sound governance.

### ***Fire and Rescue National Framework Requirements***

- 1.2 The revised Fire and Rescue National Framework for England sets out the requirement for fire and rescue authorities to publish Statements of Assurance. It says:
- ‘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 and the requirements included in the Framework. To provide assurance, fire and rescue authorities must publish an annual Statement of Assurance’.
- 1.3 One of the principal aims of the Statement of Assurance is to provide an accessible way in which communities, Government, local authorities and other partners may make a valid assessment of their local fire and rescue authority’s performance.
- 1.4 The Statement of Assurance should be signed off by an elected member of the relevant authority who is able to take responsibility for its contents. For this Authority, responsibility for approval of Statement of Assurance rests with this Committee.
- 1.5 While Statements of Assurance must be published annually by fire and rescue authorities, it is for the individual authorities to determine the precise reporting arrangements, including timing of publication, to apply.

## **2. DEVON & SOMERSET APPROACH**

- 2.1 There is considerable overlap between the contents required to satisfy the requirements of the Accounts and Audit Regulations and those for the Statement of Assurance required by the National Framework.
- 2.2 Guidance produced by the Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG) on the production of annual Assurance Statements indicates that, wherever possible, duplication of effort should be avoided. In line with this guidance, the approach adopted by this Authority has been to produce a single assurance report, the “Annual Statement of Assurance”, satisfying the requirements of both the Regulations and the Framework.
- 2.3 The Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue Service has established an officer Corporate Governance group (comprising representatives of key sections e.g. operations; finance; risk management) to oversee the issues covered by the Statement of Assurance, produce the Statement and review it periodically in terms of any approved Action Plan.

## **3. CURRENT STATEMENT OF ASSURANCE 2013-14**

- 3.1 The draft Statement of Assurance for 2013-14 was considered and approved in principle by this Committee at its meeting on 9 July 2014 and submitted, along with the Statement of Accounts for that financial year, as part of the overall external audit process.

3.2 The audit process found no issues with the draft Statement and, since its approval in principle, no material changes have been made to it albeit the opportunity has been taken subsequently to amend wording purely for clarification purposes in certain sections (namely, in relation to paragraphs (a), (b), (e) and (f) in Section 5 – Significant Governance Issues). The final Statement of Assurance for 2013-14 is, therefore, appended to this report for approval and publication on the Authority's website.

**PAUL HODGSON**  
**Audit and Review Manager**