



DEVON &  
SOMERSET  
FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE

# Devon and Somerset Fire & Rescue Authority

2019-20 Annual Statement of  
Assurance

Devon and Somerset  
Fire & Rescue Authority

27/08/2020

## **Contents**

1. Introduction.....	3
2. Operational.....	5
3. Governance.....	16
4. Performance Management.....	23
5. Audit & Review.....	24
6. Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) .	24
7. Financial Assurance.....	25
8. Data Transparency.....	27
9. Future Improvements.....	28
10. Conclusion.....	29

## **1. Introduction**

- 1.1. The Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Authority (“the Authority”) recognises that good governance leads to effective management, sustained performance, accountability of public money, continued public engagement and helps to deliver outcomes for citizens. Through good governance the Authority can deliver its vision as well as ensuring there are effective mechanisms for control and the management of risk.
- 1.2. The Authority is responsible for ensuring that its business is conducted in accordance with the law and proper standards, and that public money is safeguarded and properly accounted. The Authority also has a duty under the Local Government Act 1999 to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness.

### **Accounts and Audit (England) Regulations 2015 Requirements**

- 1.3. The Accounts and Audit (England) Regulations 2015 require authorities to prepare an annual governance statement in support of their Statement of Accounts. The 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 for England Requirements**

- 1.4. The Fire and Rescue National Framework for England (May 2018) sets out the requirement for fire and rescue authorities to publish an annual Statement of Assurance. The Framework sets out that the statement should outline the way in which the authority and its fire and rescue service has had regard to the Framework, the Integrated Risk Management Plan and to any strategic plan (e.g. the Fire and Rescue Plan) prepared by the authority for that period. Each authority must also provide assurance to their community and to government on financial, governance and operational matters.
- 1.5. 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. The Statement of Assurance will be used as a source of information on which to base the Secretary of State’s biennial report under section 25 of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004.

### **Authority Approach**

- 1.6. The Authority has agreed that the most appropriate way to manage both the National Framework and the Accounts and Audit (England) Regulations 2015 requirements is through the creation of one assurance report entitled ‘Annual Statement of Assurance’. The Annual Statement of Assurance details the approach for how the Authority has developed and applied its governance framework in accordance with its statutory responsibilities.

- 1.7. The Annual Statement of Assurance is submitted as a draft version alongside the Statement of Accounts for the year in question, for verification by the Authority's external auditors. The Annual Statement of Assurance is then submitted for approval by the Audit & Performance Review Committee prior to signature by the Committee's Chair and the Chief Fire Officer. The final Annual Statement of Assurance is then published alongside the approved Statement of Accounts for the financial year in question on the Authority's website.

### **Covid-19**

- 1.8. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the period covered by Annual Governance Statements must be extended from the close of the financial year, to the date that the Statement of accounts is signed by the responsible financial officer. During this extended period, there have been changes made to the Authority's governance system, which are detailed as follows.
- 1.9. As with other public authorities, social distancing measures introduced in response to the Covid-19 pandemic have impacted on the Authority's governance arrangements. On 4 April 2020, the Government introduced Regulations under the Coronavirus Act 2020 providing for formal Authority meetings to be held "virtually" i.e. with remote access (including telephone and video conference) for Authority Members, the press and the public. The Regulations, which at present remain in force until 7 May 2021, also provide that an Annual Meeting need not be held until 2021.
- 1.10. As a result, this Authority has:
- agreed not to hold an Annual Meeting in 2020. Any appointments (e.g. Committees, Outside Bodies such as the Local Government Association Fire Commission) which would normally be made at an Annual Meeting remain in place until the next Annual Meeting;
  - introduced a platform to enable its meetings to be held "virtually", with proceedings livestreamed to the press and public (in compliance with the Regulations);
  - introduced a Remote Meetings Protocol and amended Standing Orders to reflect the provisions of the Regulations and the Protocol. These documents can be found on the Authority's website;
  - approved a calendar of meetings for 2020-21 proportionate to meeting business need while maintaining public transparency and the democratic process. Details of meetings for 2020-21, together with agendas (once published) for the meetings, can be found on the Authority's website and
  - In the absence of timely, formal meetings, used the Urgency provisions of its Standing Orders to make certain decisions (e.g. approval of the Remote Meetings Protocol and amended Standing Orders; 2019-20 budget outturn; disposal of Budleigh Salterton Fire & Rescue Station). Detail of all decisions taken using the Urgency provisions have been published on the Authority's website.

## 2. Operational

2.1. The Authority's functional (operational) activities are discharged through the Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue Service ("the Service) and are set out in a clear statutory and policy framework, the key parts of which are:

- the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004;
- the Civil Contingencies Act 2004;
- the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005;
- the Fire and Rescue Services (Emergencies) (England) Order 2007; and
- the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England 2018.

### **Strategic Planning**

2.2. Two key documents, combined, set out the strategic direction for both the Authority and the Service:

- the Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) 2018-22; and
- the Fire and Rescue Plan 2018-22.

These inform the "Safer Together" change and improvement programme.

2.3. The IRMP is the means by which the Service assesses and analyses the risks faced by the communities we serve. It undergoes regular review and gives a clear mandate to address those risks through the prevention, protection and response activities of the Service.

2.4. The Fire and Rescue Plan contains the Service's vision, purpose, values and priorities. It describes the challenges faced by the Service (for example, the financial challenge) and how the Service proposes to address those challenges, setting out the strategic intent for the key areas of the organisation.

2.5. Having these strategic documents will facilitate greater transparency and clarity, to better achieve the Authority's priorities and the implementation of change and improvement within the Service.

2.6. 'Safer Together' is the Authority's change and improvement programme and is derived from the IRMP and the Fire and Rescue Plan. Established in 2019, the programme contains the prioritised work streams for the next three to four years that the Service must deliver if it is to achieve real improvements in the service provided to communities whilst also making the financial savings required.

2.7. The Safer Together programme is all about working as a team to reshape the Service to prevent and respond to new risks. This includes reviewing staffing at stations, fleet and equipment requirements and the use of digital technology to improve and where possible automate processes. It also means training and supporting employees to manage all of this change.

- 2.8. The strategic documents and the Safer Together programme are underpinned by Annual Directorate Statements, which clearly reflect the priorities set out in those documents, and a series of Group and Departmental Service plans, which describe in more detail how the Service will deliver its organisational priorities during the financial year. Achievement of the objectives set out in the IRMP, the Fire and Rescue Plan and the Safer Together Programme is monitored by the Service Executive Board and the Authority, via its Committees. The Directorate, Group and Departmental Service plans are monitored at least quarterly by their respective management teams. The Safer Together Programme is governed by a programme board, chaired by a member of the Executive Board, with each constituent project also having its own project board.
- 2.9. In order to embed the Service's approach to managing strategic and operational risks, risk management has been integrated within the planning process so that it is part of direction setting, activity and resource planning and activity monitoring. The process includes the identification, assessment and recording of risks and mitigating activities which will be incorporated into Directorate and Service plans. Service plans include an indication of direction of travel of identified risks as well as a facility to escalate risks to the corporate risk register.
- 2.10. Programme and Project risks are subject to the governance arrangements established for our Safer Together Programme, which includes a Business Design Authority, ensuring all the business outputs of the projects remain aligned to the organisational goals and are pulling in the same direction.
- 2.11. The Service's planning framework requires all the plans to be reviewed, updated and re-focussed where required at least annually.

#### **Fleet, Equipment and Water Supplies**

- 2.12. In 2018-19 the Service agreed a Fleet, Equipment and Water supply strategy setting out the organisational responsibilities to ensure a safe, fit for purpose fleet, for what is the largest fleet capability of a fire and rescue service outside London. The strategy sets out the Service's intention for supporting a new service delivery model, modernising fleet management operations and collaboration and innovation to reflect an increasingly diverse workforce and the environmental aims of communities served. The Service has a 10 year replacement programme with the capital budget approved by the Authority. The Service follows the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) Best Practice Manual for the maintenance of Fire Service Vehicles. The NFCC has a representative Council which enables locally accountable Chief Fire Officers (CFO), Chief Officers, Chief Executives or their representatives to coordinate the work of the UK Fire & Rescue Services to protect the public and improve community safety. Under the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004, the Service has a duty to secure water. Adopting the National Guidance Document for provision of water for fire-fighting purposes (2017), the Service operates a risk based approach for the 57,000+ hydrant management and maintenance requirements. Priorities in 2020/21 are to progress the fleet capital replacement programme.

### **Operational Debriefs**

- 2.13. An operational debrief strategy and policy is in place, and currently subject to review to ensure consistency with new national guidance. Debriefs provide the opportunity for operational personnel to identify good practice and any lessons learned for further improving the delivery of service.

### **Process for Operational Assurance**

- 2.14. The Fire & Rescue Plan 2018-2022 contains a commitment to improve staff safety and consists of a number of key components:
- Considering new technologies and equipment in our service design to support staff safety, provide better firefighting tactics, and increase inclusive and efficient ways of working.
  - Ensuring staff are appropriately supported and well trained, providing risk-based training and development that is centred on safety-critical elements.
  - Making sure firefighters remain fit and take a holistic approach to health, safety and wellbeing across the whole organisation.
- 2.15. To ensure the right focus in the right areas, an Organisational Safety Assurance Team has been embedded into the organisational structure. This team monitors and reports on a variety of activities linked to operational response. Key activities such as incident and exercise monitoring, station assessments and station visits form part of this framework. Working closely with the Service's policy and performance groups, and our Training Academy, the team works to ensure that the Service has a clear line of sight on trends and performance to address any identified areas of concern.
- 2.16. Following every incident a "hot debrief" should take place to review what happened and why, and to discuss areas that went particularly well and areas that didn't. A new process has been introduced to allow operational crews to submit learning points from these debriefs.

### **National Learning**

- 2.17. In accordance with the Authority's commitment to public and staff safety, the Operational Assurance Team ensures that the learning outcomes from significant national events are fed back into the Service. This learning, from other fire and rescue services directly affected, comes via:
- the National Operational Learning portal;
  - Coroners Regulations 28/29 reports (formerly known as 'Rule 43' reports); and
  - Health and Safety Executive recommendations to all fire and rescue services.

A process has been implemented to enable efficient management of learning and outcomes.

- 2.18. The Operational Assurance Team works with the Service to digest the information, review the Service's ways of working, feed in improvements from the lessons learned, raise awareness across Service personnel and provide any additional training events.

## **Collaborative and Partnership Working and National Roles**

- 2.19. The Service is committed to forming or joining partnerships that assist it in achieving its organisational goals and contribute to its purpose “to Protect and Save”.
- 2.20. The Service continues to strengthen its partnership working with other fire and rescue services, bluelight services, local authorities, community groups and other organisations by working to common objectives at the local, regional and national level. The improvement of prevention and protection work is a major priority and the Service also contributes to wider community objectives identified in Local Area Agreements where appropriate.
- 2.21. Collaborative working continued to grow through the South West Emergency Services Collaboration (SWESC) group, to achieve a number of agreements. This group continues to liaise and work together on new pieces of work, and has changed from a group that worked together to reach agreement on changing practice in individual organisations into a good practice sharing forum. For example, the Service will share its experience of the trial on community responders (the dual role of a firefighter and special constable) and police access to fire stations.
- 2.22. Other pieces of work currently being progressed are:
- Initial visual checks – wholtime stations will receive information on missing vulnerable persons within 30 minutes of notification, so they can report any sightings to the police.
  - Road closures – closing roads and managing traffic at incidents where police are not required, reducing the demand on Devon & Cornwall Police and enabling DSFRS to legally close a road.
  - Community responders – 7 existing firefighters have been trained as special constables, to keep the fire appliance available, be a visible police presence in the community and be proactive in community engagement i.e. leading and participating in local events.
  - Police access to fire stations – access granted for use by Devon & Cornwall Police of the welfare facilities and meeting the public (not for any meetings under caution for offences)
  - Clinical governance – ensuring the organisation is safely working within guidelines of NHS and South Western Ambulance Service Foundation Trust (the Ambulance Service) when delivering any first aid at incidents, this includes our training course content.
  - Drones – using Dorset Police drones to gain vision at height, e.g. over view of an incident ground to assist in developing a plan for resolving.
- 2.23. Early considerations for:
- ‘GoodSam’ – an alert is sent to those who register to provide initial assistance at a situation eg member of public collapsed in high street. This work has been paused because the Ambulance Service identified a number of issues in the pilot. The Service is maintaining an awareness for future consideration.



2.24. Future projects:

- Fire investigation – understand and address the impact of new International Organisation for Standards (ISO) requirements;
- Explore opportunities with non-blue light partners; and
- Multi Agency Incident Transfer– This is about emergency services sharing information coming into their control rooms via 999 etc to benefit the responders and deliver a more effective service to members of public.

2.25. Fire and Rescue Indemnity Company (FRIC), the mutual protection provider that has 11 fire and rescue authorities as members, has completed its third year of operations culminating in surplus being achieved every year since it was formed, with a current total of £832k. This is a significant result for FRIC and shows what can be achieved when fire authorities collaborate in an innovative and mutually beneficial manner. Surplus generated would otherwise have gone out of the public sector, instead it can be retained to support further improvements and drive better risk management and ultimately, deliver lower costs for FRIC's members.

2.26. The continued success is due primarily to lower than expected claims experience, which is set at the lower range of scenarios predicted. Another contributing factor has been a drive to improve motor claims reporting times, enabling third party capture for “at fault claims”. Evidence shows that third party costs can be as much as two thirds lower if contact is made with third party claimants quickly and claims handled by the mutual rather than third party insurers.

**Networked Fire Services Partnership**

2.27. The Networked Fire Services Partnership (NFSP) is a significant collaboration between three fire services (Hampshire, Devon & Somerset and Dorset & Wiltshire) initially set up to deliver a networked fire control solution which was achieved in April 2016. An Information Governance Partnership Group meets regularly to review the required governance procedures that are required under legislation and monitor current and emerging risks to the information the system holds. A risk remediation plan is in place to ensure security risks are managed effectively and there is an annual IT health check for assurance. This supports the Authority's compliance with the Airwave Code of Connection, and the upcoming Emergency Services Network which is due to replace the Airwave service.

2.28. Subsequently the NFSP has committed to scoping further collaboration opportunities that will support all three Services in achieving increased effectiveness and efficiency as well as sharing and developing good practice with regards to staff issues.

**Co-Responding**

2.29. The Authority has a formal partnership agreement in place with the Ambulance Service to provide a co-responder medical response (an initial medical provision to stabilise casualties in life-threatening emergencies prior to the arrival of the ambulance service).

2.30. Co-responding continues to be part of the Service's 'business as usual' with 621 calls responded to between 1 April and 31 Dec 2019. There has been a fall in demand due to internal changes in the Ambulance Service.

## **National Resilience**

- 2.31. The Emergency Planning Team is responsible for ensuring that the Service meets the Authority's obligations as laid out in the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 and the Fire Services Act 2004.
- 2.32. Effective arrangements are in place to collaborate with partners through Local Resilience Forums, the National Inter-Agency Liaison Officers network and Safety Advisory Groups which support multi-agency planning activity and the Critical National Infrastructure in line with Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Principles.
- 2.33. Previously the Service had created a specialist team of volunteers to respond to Marauding Terrorist Attacks (MTA). Following changes in the National Planning Assumptions, the Service has supplemented this capability with a further 16 specialist responders based at Plympton funded via a Home Office Grant.
- 2.34. This MTA capability has been established in order to support specialist emergency service response alongside Police and Ambulance responders in response to an MTA incident within the Authority area or, under National Mutual Aid, to any other location within the UK as requested. The overall aim is to save life, and the two main strands of fire and rescue supports support during this type of incident are for casualty care and fire hazards management.
- 2.35. The capability is made up of two key groups;
- (a). National Interagency Liaison Officers (known as NILOs); and
  - (b). Specialist Response Team (SRT) Operatives
- 2.36. Both of the above groups undergo specialist training for responding to the MTA threat, but fulfil different specific functions within a response.

## **Specialist Operations**

- 2.37. The Specialist Operations programme was set up after the events of 11 September 2001, which prompted the Government to review and improve the UK's capacity to respond to the increased threats arising from a 'new dimension' of emergency. Such threats include major incidents involving chemical, biological or radioactive materials, which would require a mass decontamination of large numbers of people, or rescue from collapsed structures.
- 2.38. The programme is also a response to increased risks from non-terrorist emergencies, such as major flooding resulting from changing climate patterns. The UK has faced the challenge of large scale flooding, the fuel crisis and a major epidemic of Foot and Mouth Disease. The Service needs to be able to cope with and recover from a range of unexpected disruptive events, for example building collapse, or natural disasters.
- 2.39. The programme is split into six sections, all directly linked to each other:
- Mass Decontamination
  - Urban Search and Rescue
  - Water Capability

- Long Term Management
  - Command & Control
  - Logistics
- 2.40. The Service has mobilising procedures and policies in place to be able to respond to incidents anywhere in the Country, and work closely with other emergency services and organisations to provide an integrated service.
- 2.41. Different levels of response apply depending on the severity and location of the incident. These levels have been set nationally by The Home Office.

#### **Over the Border Mutual Aid Arrangements**

- 2.42. Sections 13 and 16 of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 allow mutual assistance arrangements to be agreed with neighbouring Services to improve resilience and capacity in border areas. The Service has arrangements in place with its neighbouring fire and rescue authorities for response to incidents requiring their support.
- 2.43. In addition to sections 13 and 16 there is a partnership agreement between this Authority, Dorset & Wiltshire and Hampshire Fire and rescue Authorities to provide a common, networked mobilising system with the principle of ensuring that the response mobilised to an incident is always the nearest and most appropriate resource/s based upon travel time and attributes (i.e. having the necessary skills or equipment) to deal with the incident.

#### **Business Continuity and Resilience**

- 2.44. The Service has a Strategic Business Continuity Policy which was approved by the Executive Board in July 2019. This document sets out the corporate business continuity management structure and goals for business continuity assessment, training and exercising.
- 2.45. The Service has 32 Tactical business continuity plans in place to ensure that it is prepared for a range of threats and challenges. Business continuity management processes are also undertaken so that the Service can continue to deliver services following a disruptive incident.
- 2.46. The Service business continuity arrangements cannot be considered reliable unless they are reviewed, tested and plans kept up to date. Testing the plans is essential for the development of teamwork, competence and confidence in the knowledge of experience that is vital during a disruptive event.
- 2.47. A business continuity exercise for strategic and tactical management took place in March 2019 focusing on an escalating Pandemic Flu epidemic.
- 2.48. Exercise 'Long Drag', held in October 2019, was a strategic business continuity exercise designed to validate the Service's response to a 'no deal' Brexit scenario.

- 2.49. Exercise 'Mariana' was held on 2 December 2019 which was designed to allow players from all levels of the organisation to consider an internal and external response to a catastrophic IT systems failure. The event was attended by a number of senior managers who were able to contribute from a 'Strategic' perspective. Department and team managers taking part were able to consider the 'tactical' elements of the response such as providing equipment, resources, and appropriate numbers of staff etc. Operational staff took in the exercise to think through the 'hands on' implications of how to physically respond and recover from the incident. The exercise also provided an opportunity for individual loggists to gain experience at noting 'actions and decisions' that were made during this session.
- 2.50. The Service employs a Business Continuity Manager in who is responsible for providing specialist advice and guidance on business continuity issues, including the co-ordination, development, implementation and review of business continuity plans, processes and procedures. The Business Continuity Manager also has the responsibility of meeting with identified directorate representatives to review the effectiveness of 'Business Impact Analysis' assessments and business continuity plans as required.
- 2.51. The Service embraces the principles of 'Plan, Do, Check, and Act' and aligns with aspects of the ISO: 22301 (Societal Security – Business Continuity management systems and requirements).
- 2.52. A Contingency Response Team is set up as necessary to manage business continuity incidents and, in addition, an Operational Support Team can be activated as required.
- 2.53. During the Covid-19 pandemic, it was necessary for the Service to employ business continuity arrangements. Whilst the business continuity plans were found to be effective, the opportunity to evaluate these during a "live" business continuity event over a sustained period has provided valuable learning enabling further refinement of the existing processes.

#### **Covid-19 Service Response**

- 2.54. The Service deployed its Business Continuity measures as a result of Covid-19 on 16 March 2020, following well-rehearsed processes to implement organisational and operational response to the outbreak and to support Local Resilience Forums. Due to restrictions on travel, office-based staff were asked to work from home and non-essential activity was paused. The Service has seen low levels of absence from Covid-19 and staff absence has not impacted on the ability to maintain core services.
- 2.55. Focus was placed on the ability to maintain fire and rescue response activities, which meant that face-to-face prevention and protection activity could not go ahead. As part of the South Western Ambulance Service NHS Foundation Trusts (SWAST) continued response to Covid-19, a 'combined crewed' fleet of 15 patient support vehicles has been deployed in partnership with fire and rescue services from Cornwall, Devon and Somerset, Dorset and Wiltshire, Avon and Gloucestershire. These vehicles are crewed by one firefighter and one SWAST emergency care assistant initially.

- 2.56. Devon & Somerset acted as the lead fire and rescue service to provide for clear lines of communications and a consistent approach to this project. The Service provided blue light drivers for five patient support vehicles as part of this project.
- 2.57. A Covid-19 Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) was introduced which drove a number of changes to the work that would have been undertaken usually. The most significant of these were:
- Home safety technicians redeployed to provide telephone fire safety advice to about 2,000 people that had existing bookings. Full visits will take place for those clients upon return to business as usual.
  - Home safety technicians working with local councils to visit those that are shielding due to age and or long-term health effects.
  - Insight driven communications targeted members of the public to alert to the dangers around emerging risks and change behaviours. This included risks around BBQs, garden bonfires, road risk, water safety, and advice for businesses.
  - Businesses with Site Specific Risk Information (SSRI) contacted to confirm that all information held is up-to-date.
  - A technical fire safety helpdesk was established to support businesses during working hours.
  - The introduction desktop fire safety audits developed by the National Fire Chief's Council (NFCC).
  - Bespoke technical fire safety support provided to key sectors, such as healthcare and care home providers.
  - The introduction of risk-based compliance checks of communal areas of high rise residential buildings.
  - Provision of guidance to businesses throughout the phases of lockdown, such as 'closing your business', 're-opening your business', and frequently asked questions. At the time of producing this Statement, the Service is in the process of producing further communications to support those business balancing Covid-19 secure requirements with fire safety.
  - Planning of up to date training on care homes, factories and high-rise buildings.
  - Protection team mask fitting and provided training and access to PPE for 'dangerous conditions' inspections.
  - Consultation and support provided to the design and build of Nightingale Hospital (Covid-19) in Exeter.
- 2.58. At the time of producing this Statement, the Service is in a recovery planning phase and a recovery impact assessment has been issued to key functions and stakeholders to identify the impacts, opportunities and risks that this business continuity event have shown. While the government continues to evaluate the changing environment and reviews the rules and regulations originally in place, the Service will respond accordingly to ensure its approach to recovery remains measured, coordinated and safe.

- 2.59. This business continuity event has provided the Service with the unique opportunity to review and ensure that all department and strategic plans pull in the same direction.
- 2.60. Rather than return to 'business as usual', the Service is planning the recovery to ensure it learns from a variety of sources and adapts from the opportunities and lessons learnt. This reflection will feed into strategic objectives to evaluate Service learning. At time of signing off financial statements, the recovery plan was in planning and evaluation stage and therefore further detail on the impact to the Authority's longer-term strategy will be available in due course.

### **Training and Development - Academy**

- 2.61. The Service, through its Academy, has enabled the delivery of quality assured training to its staff to improve safety and overall effectiveness, which is underwritten by the ISO 9001 (2015) Quality Management Framework.
- 2.62. Over the past twelve months significant changes have been implemented to how training is structured and delivered. The Service has moved away from a 'school' structure, and the instructors are now able to deliver training more locally. In addition to this, Associate instructors have been recruited from existing station based personnel to assist with delivery of local training.
- 2.63. This will enable the firefighting workforce to get the most out of drill nights and training events, by participating in locally based training and assessments, on the subjects that are most required.
- 2.64. The new functional leads within the Academy will take responsibility for:
- **Quality assurance** – Reviewing governance arrangements and standards in training, process mapping, permit to teach standards and quality assurance of training activities.
  - **Training Assets** – Management of estates, equipment and vehicles which are used for training, management of the learning library (which includes e-learning and course development), maintaining the asset register and liaison with other key departments such as the Health & Safety team, the Estates department and the Fleet & Equipment department.
  - **Planning & Resourcing** – Planning, scheduling and updating the training and event programme, and includes allocation of required resources, from venues and equipment to trainers and assessors.
  - **Customer Service & Administration** – Supporting the management of information assets and general administration functions to support the training teams. This will also involve liaising with external agencies, suppliers and partners. Financial and reporting functions will also be the responsibility of this functional area.
  - **Training delivery** – Responsible for the delivery of training events and assessments as required.

- 2.65. The Service has invested in new vehicles to assist in the delivery of training, such as the Mobile Safety at Height and Confined Spaces (SHACS) training vehicle and a mobile Incident Command Training Vehicle which has received excellent feedback from staff.
- 2.66. The Academy has also released a new e-learning system that links with other IT applications. This utilises a “single-sign in” approach to ensure that it is fully accessible to all users, and uses an intuitive system which will target training towards the users.
- 2.67. The Service has also been working with an external provider to develop a training needs assessment algorithm, to ensure that our staff get the right training, at the right time, in the right place.
- 2.68. The Service has developed new applications/systems which provide better accessibility and transparency when employees are checking their core competencies (the key training that they require in order to ensure they are completing their job in the most appropriate manner).

#### **Firefighter Fitness**

- 2.69. In December 2014 the [then] Department for Communities and Local Government approved an Addendum to the National Framework for England in relation to firefighter fitness and the principles that should be applied to help ensure that firefighters maintain the standards of personal fitness required to safely perform their duties and that they are supported in remaining fit and in continued employment.
- 2.70. The National Fire Chief’s Council (NFCC) has a Firefit Steering Committee which provides guidance and recommendations to the fire & rescue services on fitness standards, protocols and policy.
- 2.71. The Service has a Physical Fitness Policy and three dedicated Fitness Advisors in post to support firefighters to attain and maintain the fitness standards that are required. The Service has also introduced Fitness Advocates who are existing operational staff that provide an additional fitness role to the Service and are qualified to a minimum of a Level 2 Gym Instructor.
- 2.72. There is an opportunity for the Service to improve and test information quality regarding this subject, to enable comparison with other fire & rescue services.

#### **Commitment to Health & Safety**

- 2.73. The Authority recognises and accepts its responsibility for the health, safety and welfare of its employees and others who may be affected by its activities. To achieve this, the Service looks to meet all relevant requirements of the Health & Safety at Work Act 1974 (together with all other statutory provisions associated with it) and support staff in meeting their obligations under the Act and subordinate legislation.
- 2.74. Health, Safety and Wellbeing has been identified as a key theme within the People Strategy, with specific subject areas identified for review. Progress towards achieving the aims are monitored via the People Strategy monitoring group.

- 2.75. Detailed health, safety and welfare arrangements are set out in Service policies developed to take account of relevant legislation and guidance, including the Health and Safety Executive's HS(G)65 methodology. The policies provide employees with relevant and comprehensive information on the risks they face and the preventative and protective measures required to control them, they also identify roles and responsibilities of duty holders who are to ensure measures are implemented.
- 2.76. Systems for monitoring the effectiveness of the organisation's health and safety management procedures are in place, including proactive and reactive monitoring. The process includes air sampling on station of diesel engine exhaust emissions, provision of accident and near miss incident data to the Strategic Safety Committee for quarterly review, annual completion of premises Health, Safety and Welfare Assessment Report Forms, and a means to fully audit the organisation's health and safety management systems on a two yearly basis.
- 2.77. The Health and Safety Manager has developed a fresh approach for the Health and Safety Team to align to, this will increase their capacity, improve access to specialist advice, assure legislative requirements are being met and improve team welfare and work life balance. The team will move to directly supporting two Service Delivery Groups each, greatly enhancing a positive safety culture. To achieve this the team has been joined by an additional Health and Safety Officer. The next reporting period will see the team fully embed this approach.
- 2.78. Procedures are in place to report all safety events, allocate an investigator and where required make recommendations for corrective action to be completed.

### **3. Governance**

- 3.1. As with functional issues, the Authority's governance arrangements derive from a clearly defined statutory and policy framework the key parts of which are:
- the Local Government Act 1972;
  - the Local Government Finance Act 1988;
  - Local Government and Housing Act 1989;
  - Local Government Finance Act 1992;
  - Local Government Act 2003;
  - the Localism Act 2011;
  - the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015;
  - the Policing and Crime Act 2017;
  - The Accounts and Audit (Coronavirus)(Amendment) Regulations 2020; and
  - The Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020.



## **The Purpose of Corporate Governance**

- 3.2. Corporate Governance comprises:
- the systems, processes, culture and values, by which the Authority is directed and controlled; and
  - those activities through which it accounts to, engages with and leads the community.
- 3.3. Corporate Governance enables the Authority to monitor the achievement of its strategic policy objectives and to consider whether those objectives have led to the delivery of appropriate, cost-effective services.
- 3.4. The system of internal control is a significant and integral part of the governance arrangements designed to manage risk to a reasonable level. It is based on an ongoing process designed to identify and prioritise the risks to the achievement of the Authority's policies, aims and objectives, to evaluate the likelihood of those risks being realised and the impact should they be realised, and to manage them efficiently, effectively and economically. While it cannot eliminate all risk of failure to achieve policies, aims and objectives, it should nonetheless provide a reasonable level of assurance of organisational effectiveness in this area.
- 3.5. Due to Covid-19 arrangements, the period covered by this statement must be extended from the close of the financial year, to the date that the Statement of Accounts is signed by the responsible financial officer. This statement refers to the governance arrangements that have been in place for the authority for the financial year ending 31 March 2020 and over this extended period.

## **Code of Corporate Governance**

- 3.6. The Authority has approved and adopted a Code of Corporate Governance, consistent with the principles of the CIPFA/SOLACE (Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy/ Society of Local Authority Chief Executives) framework "Delivering Good Governance in Local Government". A copy of the Code is on the Authority's website or can be obtained from the Clerk to the Authority. This Statement explains how the Authority has complied with the Code.

## **Review of Effectiveness**

- 3.7. The Authority has responsibility for conducting, at least annually, a review of the effectiveness of its governance arrangements including the system of internal control. The review of the effectiveness is informed by the work of senior managers within the Service who have responsibility for the development and maintenance of the governance environment, and also by comments made by the external auditors and other review agencies and inspectorates.
- 3.8. The key elements of the Authority's governance arrangements are:
- (1) The Authority was constituted under the Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Authority (Combination Scheme) Order 2006. The Authority has strategic responsibility for discharging fire and rescue authority functions for the combined area with the day-to-day responsibility resting with the Chief Fire Officer and other officers within the Executive Board.

- (2) During the 2019-20 financial year, the Authority comprised 26 Members appointed by the constituent authorities (Devon County Council, Somerset County Council, Plymouth City Council and Torbay Council). In addition, an “independent person” is appointed in accordance with the requirements of the Localism Act 2011 and in June 2019 the Authority agreed to the appointment of a second independent person in line with recommendations made by the Committee on Standards in Public Life following its review of local government ethical standards. Also in June 2019, the Authority agreed to increase membership of the Local Pension Board from six to eight, the additional Scheme Manager (employer) representative being an external appointment, i.e. a co-opted member of the Board.
- (3) During the 2019-20 financial year, the Authority operated with the following permanent committees:
- i. Resources Committee (7 Members)
  - ii. Human Resources Management & Development Committee (7 Members);
  - iii. Audit & Performance Review Committee (7 Members);
  - iv. Community Safety & Corporate Planning Committee (7 Members);
  - v. The Appraisals and Disciplinary Committee (from June 2019 – formerly the Chief Fire Officers’ Appraisal Panel) (4 Members);
  - vi. Standards Committee (7 Members plus consultation as required with an independent person).

Terms of reference for each of these committees were approved by the Authority. The committee structure (including terms of reference) is subject to annual review but may also be amended in-year as circumstances dictate.

- (4) The Audit & Performance Review Committee operates in accordance with the CIPFA best practice guidance on audit committees. It provides an additional level of review and scrutiny of the Authority’s internal and external audit arrangements (including consideration and monitoring of any reports and associated action plans), corporate governance and risk arrangements and financial statements (Annual Statement of Accounts). The Committee has responsibility for the operation of the Authority’s strategy for the prevention and detection of fraud and corruption and monitors the Service’s performance.
- (5) The constitutional governance arrangements are contained in the following documents:
- Members Roles and Responsibilities;
  - Standing orders;
  - Financial Regulations;
  - Treasury Management Policy;
  - Contract Standing Orders;
  - Scheme of Delegations;
  - Members’ Code of Conduct;

- Protocol for Member/Officer Relations;
- Policy on Gifts and Hospitality;
- Scheme of Members Allowances;
- Corporate Governance Code;
- “Whistleblowing” Code (Confidential Reporting Policy); and
- Strategy on the prevention and Detection of Fraud and Corruption
- Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity

Each of these documents is published on the Authority’s website. All the documents, with the exception of the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority publicity (which is a national document issued by the Government under Section 4 of the Local Government Act 1986), are subject to review at least annually and are updated as and when necessary to reflect legislative change, organisational change or best practice, as relevant, to ensure they remain up-to-date and fit for purpose. Additionally, the Authority has in place arrangements to investigate and determine alleged breaches of the Members’ Code of Conduct. These arrangements, together with guidance on how to make a complaint, are published on the website.

- (6) The Treasurer is responsible for ensuring that effective financial stewardship is in place across the Service in conducting the business of the Authority. The Authority’s financial management arrangements conform to the governance requirements of the “CIPFA Statement on the Role of the Chief Financial Officer in Local Government”.
- (7) The statutory functions of the Proper Financial and Monitoring Officers provide a source of assurance that the Authority’s systems of governance and internal control are effective and being complied with.
- (8) The 2019-20 Internal Audit Plan was approved by the Audit & Performance Review Committee on 10 May 2019. The plan sets out the combined scope of internal audit work to be completed by the Audit & Review manager, the Information Assurance team and Devon Audit Partnership. A total of 264 internal audit days were utilised to provide assurance to the Authority relating to the management of risks and associated operational activities. The Audit & Review manager, the Information Assurance team and the Devon Audit Partnership are accountable for the delivery of the plan and the policy includes the requirement to report progress to the Audit & Performance Review Committee at least three times per year. This happened on 19 July 2019, 13 November 2019 and 4 March 2020. The Authority’s shared service internal audit arrangements conform to the governance requirements of the CIPFA Statement on the Role of the Head of Internal Audit in public service organisations.

- (9) Service risk registers are populated and reviewed periodically. This process in turn informs the Corporate Risk Register. In order to embed the Service's approach to managing strategic and operational risks, risk management has been integrated within the planning process so that it is part of direction setting, activity and resource planning and activity monitoring. The process includes the identification, assessment and recording of risks and mitigating activities, which are incorporated into respective Directorate and Service plans. The inspection report from Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS), published in December 2019, confirmed that "the Service uses an innovative risk management approach. It records risks it identifies as an issue on directorate and service plans. This approach is designed to put risks at the right level in the organisation where action can be taken to mitigate them. The Service only takes risks to the corporate risk register if they can't be managed or mitigated at the service or directorate level". HMICFRS identified that the Service needs to assure itself that its risk management and control process has a mechanism that allows escalation of risks to the appropriate level in the organisation and process improvements are ongoing.
- (10) The operation of the Authority's Corporate Risk Register is reviewed by Service management at least on a quarterly basis to ensure that risks to the Authority's strategic objectives and strategic plans are appropriately identified and managed. The corporate risk management process includes horizon scanning that supports deep dive risk identification and assessment. The Corporate Risk Register is discussed with the Audit & Performance Review committee every six months.
- (11) The Authority maintains comprehensive insurance cover to support its management of organisational risk.
- (12) The 2019-20 External Audit provision was provided by Grant Thornton. The scope of the External Audit work includes the Accounting Statements and Whole of Government Accounts and a Value for Money Statement. No significant issues have arisen to date from the External Audit work completed in 2019-20.
- (13) The Authority participates in the biennial National Fraud Initiative scheme. A new data matching exercise was completed in 2018-19, with results being examined throughout 2019-20 and 2020-21. No confirmed fraud cases have been identified through this current data matching exercise, to date.
- (14) The Service has a Strategic Health & Safety Committee which meets quarterly to monitor health, safety and welfare of employees as per section 2(7) of the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974. All representative bodies (trades unions) recognised by the Authority, i.e. the Fire Brigades Union (FBU), the Fire and Rescue Services Association (FRSA), the Fire Officers Association (FOA) and UNISON, are invited to sit on this Committee.
- (15) The Human Resources Management & Development Committee meeting on 5 November 2019 received for the first time a report on the Health, Safety and Wellbeing of the Service. This is now a regular report to the Committee to facilitate performance monitoring in these areas.

- (16) The Operational Assurance Team is embedded in the organisational structure and culture. As part of the 'Safe Person Concept' the team monitors and reports on a variety of activities linked to Operational Response.
- (17) The Organisational Safety and Assurance Manager attends the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) Health and Safety meetings and chairs the regional NFCC Health and Safety meetings.
- (18) A governance framework has been prepared for programme and project management, which defines roles and responsibilities and outlines the methodology that will be applied as the Service embarks on its transformational change programme, "Safer Together".
- (19) The General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) compliance plan and gap analysis has been regularly monitored to inform the Service of any high risk areas of non-compliance. Data retention is an area for improvement and is now a key consideration for all in-house development projects. How data retention is managed within external and legacy systems requires further scrutiny to ensure GDPR principles are complied with. The Personal Information Management System (PIMS) is a framework for how we manage personal information within the service. Performance against the PIMS is included within the quarterly Information Security & Governance Report. The GDPR compliance plan has now become a business as usual activity and is used to inform the Information Assurance work plan on an annual basis.
- (20) Contract Standing Orders (approved by the Authority at its Annual Meeting) are, along with the Authority's other constitutional framework documents, subject to annual review and in-year changes as and when required. Guidance materials on procurement and contract management are available on the Authority website and Service intranet for the Service staff. Priorities for 2019-20 have been to support the Safer Together Programme and the National Fire Chiefs Council's (NFCC) [Fire] Commercial Transformation Programme as well as deliver service priorities and savings.
- (21) The Procurement Team review third party expenditure and manage contracts above £20,000. This is to ensure compliance with EU and UK legislation and best practice; to ensure that the Authority can demonstrate value for money and deliver savings and efficiencies. The procurement team is actively engaged in wider collaborative National Procurement initiatives. The Service's Head of Fleet and Procurement was (until March 2020) the NFCC Commercial Category lead for Fleet as part of the NFCC [Fire] Commercial Transformation Programme, part of the Local Government Association National Advisory Group for Procurement (representing the Fire and Rescue Service nationally) and is part of the South West Procurement Board, which involves first tier and district councils from the region. The Corporate Procurement Manager was (until March 2019) also the NFCC National Procurement Lead as part of the NFCC [Fire] Commercial Transformation Programme. Within the 2019-20 financial year, the Procurement team has been responsible for contract management of the NFCC's Emergency Response Vehicles framework and the NFCC's Respiratory Protective Equipment framework on behalf of the fire sector.

- (22) Red One Ltd. was established in 2012 to allow the Authority to deliver commercial activities within the legislative framework that applies. The Authority has taken legal advice to ensure compliance with legislative requirements and to ensure effective governance arrangements, which were enhanced in January 2018 by the appointment of independent non-executive directors. Governance arrangements were further enhanced in July 2018 by the adoption of revised Articles of Association, which strengthened the composition of the Board to include a mix of:
- Authority Member non-executive directors;
  - independent non-executive directors;
  - Service officer non-executive directors; and
  - company appointed executive directors.
- (23) Corporate commitments to equality, diversity and inclusion are set out in the Fire & Rescue Plan and People Strategy, which address issues relevant to equality, diversity and inclusion in the workplace at each stage of the employee lifecycle, including attraction, recruitment, retention, development and progression. The strategy and plan also state how the Service will meet the needs of different communities and vulnerable people in order to reduce risk and align with the changes needed to support the IRMP and HMICFRS inspection outcomes. The Human Resource Management & Development Committee monitors progress on the linked Diversity & Inclusion plan every six months.
- (24) The Service has a process in place to ensure that potential equality impacts are identified and mitigated when preparing or reviewing policies and procedures. The process is called Equality Risks and Benefits Analysis (ERBA) and it helps in delivering better services and working practices as well as ensuring compliance with the Public Sector Equality Duty. The process was updated in 2018-19 to reflect the latest legal developments. In 2019 the Service introduced a broader assessment of impact i.e. the People Impact Assessment into which the ERBA can be incorporated. Implementation of the People Impact Assessment has broadened the scope to include wider impacts on people including data protection, health & safety and safeguarding. Mandatory equalities training has been reviewed and refreshed with a roll out early 2020 and a Fairness & Respect Policy has replaced our outdated Bullying & Harassment policy.
- (25) “Our Values” set out what the Service stands for and what matters most to employees and the Service. These are:
- We are proud to help
  - We are honest
  - We are respectful
  - We are working together

A cultural audit took place in 2019 which aimed to establish how well understood and accepted our values are across the Service, as well as providing an objective review of our decision making process, levels of staff empowerment. The outcomes have been considered by task and finish groups which will inform action plans. A follow up audit is scheduled for 2020.

- 3.9. The 2019-20 review by the Authority has concluded that there are good systems, procedures and checks in place to manage the Authority's governance arrangements.

## **4. Performance Management**

- 4.1. Significant work was completed in 2019-20 to ensure that the Service is able to effectively measure and review its performance in a way that is meaningful and practical. This work includes developing a suite of performance measures, setting performance targets and designing and launching an electronic dashboard. The paragraphs below explain each of these in more detail.

### **Performance Measures**

- 4.2. Effective performance management is key to delivering services successfully - it ensures a focus on what matters most and enables improvement. Performance measures help the Service to know what current performance actually is and what needs to change to get the Service to where it wants to be.
- 4.3. The Service's Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) cover the Service as a whole and are aligned to strategic priorities and a focus on driving improvements. They form the basis of regular performance monitoring reports to the Authority, the Service Executive Board and the Service Leadership Team (Heads of Department).
- 4.4. It is essential that the KPIs are accounted for within the service planning process, clearly identifying those responsible for the achievement of the targets set against the relevant KPIs. In some cases, additional Directorate, programme or service level indicators are developed as part of the service planning process to monitor operational progress.
- 4.5. All performance indicators are reviewed at least annually to ensure they are still relevant.

### **Performance Targets**

- 4.6. Where appropriate, targets will be set at all levels of the organisation, from strategic KPIs to the targets set for individuals within appraisals. Good progress has been made with the development of a new appraisal system, which went live in the Service in July 2019. Targets for the KPIs will be discussed within the Service to review the resource implications and then be agreed by the Executive Board and the Audit & Performance Review Committee.
- 4.7. In addition, by the beginning of each financial year managers will have also been set forward targets for all other local performance indicators within their service area. Targets will be set with a focus for improvement and, where possible, will be based on trend or benchmarking information.

- 4.8. All targets will be reviewed at least annually.

### **Reporting Performance**

- 4.9. Regular reporting against Service plans and performance measures help to ensure a sustained focus on those things that matter most, resulting in delivery of priorities and the improvement agenda.
- 4.10. Reports of the key measures will be produced and will include interpretation, analysis and any actions to be taken. The audience for these reports are the Authority, the Audit & Performance Review Committee, the Executive Board, the Extended Leadership Team, Group Commands and support departments.
- 4.11. Reports focus on exceptions, i.e. those measures either exceeding target or those not on target. This encourages celebration of success and sharing of good practice along with discussion on actions needed to rectify under performance.

### **Performance dashboards**

- 4.12. The Service has recognised that the visibility of performance information needs to improve in order to support effective performance management. In light of this, the Service is developing “live” performance dashboards to provide teams with the information they need to ensure that they are on target to achieve their objectives. In 2019, the first of these dashboards went live. The Service Delivery Dashboard displays performance indicators and targets identified by the Service Delivery Directorate and is used to inform daily decision-making and focus weekly performance discussions.
- 4.13. Provision of an organisation-wide capability is planned to be delivered through the Safer Together Programme. In the interim, work is underway to streamline delivery of existing Microsoft Excel-based performance dashboards to improve the efficiency of performance information production.

## **5. Audit & Review**

- 5.1. The delivery of the annual Internal Audit Plan provides independent assurance to senior managers and Authority Members on the effectiveness of the risk management, internal control and governance arrangements in delivering organisational objectives. The scope of audit work includes the review of operational activities including Response, Resilience, Protection, Prevention, Fire Control and all supporting departments.

## **6. Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS)**

- 6.1. In summer 2017, Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary took on inspections of England’s fire & rescue services, assessing and reporting on their efficiency, effectiveness and leadership. The Inspectorate consequently became Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) to reflect this new responsibility. A national inspection programme was completed of the 45 fire and rescue services in England.



- 6.2. The inspection for the Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue Service (the Service) concluded that it was 'Good' in its Effectiveness, but 'Requires Improvement' in Efficiency and in looking after People. A number of recommendations were made by HMICFRS. The Service has compiled an action plan to address these recommendations. Progress against this action plan will be monitored by the Executive Board and will be used as evidence during the next inspection.

## **7. Financial Assurance**

### **Statement of Accounts**

- 7.1. It is a statutory requirement under the *Accounts and Audit (England) Regulations 2015* for authorities to publish the financial results of their activities for the year. The 'Statement of Accounts', shows the annual costs of providing the service and is determined by a Code of Practice published by CIPFA, which aims to give a "true and fair" view of the financial position and transactions of the Authority.
- 7.2. The Treasurer is responsible for the approval of the Statement of Accounts prior to publication. To meet the requirements of the Regulations, the draft Statement of Accounts is published by the end of May with the final audited Statement of Accounts published once the audit process has been completed.

### **External Audit Arrangements**

- 7.3. On an annual basis, the Statement of Accounts is subject to external audit. Following a national procurement exercise, Grant Thornton was appointed as the external auditors for the South West region.
- 7.4. Grant Thornton is therefore responsible for the completion of the following assurance activities:
- Audit of the 2019-20 financial statements
  - Proposed opinion on the Authority's accounts
  - Proposed Value for Money conclusion

### **Internal Audit Arrangements**

- 7.5. To support the external audit process, the Authority has in place a robust system for internal auditing. The Audit & Review Manager worked with senior managers and Authority Members to develop an annual Internal Audit Plan that is delivered across the Service. The plan includes a contract with the Devon Audit Partnership to deliver specialised key financial audits, and detailed review of potential risk areas identified.
- 7.6. A full competitive procurement process was undertaken in 2018-19 to ensure that the appointed internal audit providers delivered appropriate value and quality; this process awarded Devon Audit Partnership with a 3 year contract to continue providing internal audit for the authority.

- 7.7. Performance against the Plan is reported to senior managers and Members on a quarterly basis, with a year-end report produced in April/May time. The number of audit days completed within 2019-20 was below that approved by the Authority in the 2019-20 Audit Plan, because of staff vacancies and other prioritised responsibility. The plan was therefore reviewed and prioritised according to risk, to ensure that all high-priority audit activity was addressed appropriately, and to minimise risk to the authority.
- 7.8. The Service uses four levels of audit assurance opinion levels; High Standard, Good Standard, Improvements required and Fundamental Weaknesses Identified. The 2019-20 year end Internal Audit report concluded that the systems in operation within the Service demonstrated a good level of internal control, defined as follows: *The systems and controls generally mitigate the risk identified but a few weaknesses have been identified and / or mitigating controls may not be fully applied. There are no significant matters arising from the audit and the recommendations made serve to strengthen what are mainly reliable procedures.*
- 7.9. Agreed management actions are monitored through the Service's assurance tracking process alongside the outcomes of external and internal audits, external reviews, security events, and safety events.

#### **Financial Planning**

- 7.10. Currently, the amount of Central Government funding is reviewed annually, with a three year spending review taking place in Autumn 2020 which is likely to determine grant funding for 2021-2024. So that the Authority understand the potential risks regarding funding, a number of scenarios are published within the Medium Term Financial Plan demonstrating the possible funding position for the next 5 years. This is published alongside the underpinning:
- Reserves Strategy;
  - Capital Strategy;
  - Commercial Strategy; and
  - the Safer Together Programme.

#### **Covid-19 impact**

- 7.11. The key financial issues relating to the Covid-19 pandemic were reported to the Resources Committee on 2 July 2020 (available on the Authority website). The cessation of some activity, in particular delays to the capital programme, will have the effect of improving cash flows for the Authority during 2020-21. The Authority has a healthy cash position, with sufficient reserves to ensure protection from any delayed payments in 2020-21. The majority of cash reserves are held in short-term investments which are accessible should the need arise. In addition, fire authorities have been supported by central government who have paid several grants early to ease any cash flow pressures. Cash flow issues are not anticipated to impact the Authority over the medium term financial period.

- 7.12. On the 2 July 2020, the government announced further measures to support local authorities with budgetary pressures arising from loss of income from Council Tax and Business Rates, spreading any losses over a three year period. The Authority, in collaboration with the fire sector, will be seeking to measure and understand the longer-term impact of losses and request government support against any detriment.
- 7.13. Whilst it is not possible to predict the ultimate extent and duration of the pandemic, or its wider impact on the economy, stakeholders will look to authorities to use best endeavours to explain the specific known impacts on their organisation to date, as well as the anticipated future impacts under different scenarios. The specific areas affected by uncertainty are discussed below in more detail, however it is expected that many authorities will have to reconsider their strategies and outlook going forward given the significant impacts of Covid-19. Further, measures to contain the pandemic have placed pressure on governance processes and on elected members in discharging their responsibilities.

### **Public Contracts Regulations 2015 (“the Regulations”)**

- 7.14. The Regulations set out the EU legal framework for contracting public authorities to follow in securing a contract for works, supplies and services where the contract value exceeds set thresholds (unless the contract qualifies for a specific exclusion as defined in the Regulations applies). The Regulations are not static but subject to change, driven by evolving European and domestic case law and UK Regulations. The EU rules reflect and reinforce the value for money focus of the Government’s procurement policy. The EU procurement regime is based on the Treaty principles of transparency, non-discrimination, equal treatment and proportionality. Even where the procurement process is not subject to the Regulations the EU Treaty based principles apply.
- 7.15. The Head of Fleet and Procurement is responsible for review of all third party expenditure and ensuring that the Service processes conform to the Regulations and Treaty principles.

## **8. Data Transparency**

- 8.1. The Authority complies with the Government’s ‘Local Government Transparency Code 2015’ for releasing public data. The following arrangements are in place and published on the website:
- A Freedom of Information Publication Scheme
  - Publication of the annual statement of accounts
  - Publication of all expenditure over £500
  - Publication of all Government Procurement Card transactions
  - Publication of Procurement Information
  - Publication of land ownership
  - Publication of Trade Union facility time
  - Publication of a Pay Policy Statement including all senior employee salaries and pay multiple comparators

- Publication of fraud investigations
- Publication of Members' allowances and expenses
- Publication of External Audit reports
- Publication of all committee reports (other than those where a statutory exemption for publication applies).

## 9. Future Improvements

- 9.1. The following improvements were previously identified as required in the 2018-19 Annual Statement of Assurance. Whilst many of these form parts of the Safer Together programme, these remain the key challenges throughout 2019-20:
- (a). Aligning resources to risk and prioritising prevention and protection activity.
  - (b). The existing shift patterns and some work routines are not always meeting Service needs and the changing risks within communities.
  - (c). By 2024, the Service may need to reduce its costs by up to £8.4 million and will need to plan a balanced budget to accommodate this.
  - (d). Making sure the Service workforce is clear on the organisation's future direction.
  - (e). Further developing contracts and career paths to support inclusivity ensuring that the Service has a workforce that reflects communities served.
  - (f). Managing information in a secure and purposeful way, while mitigating cyber security and data protection risks.
- 9.2. Continuing appraisal of the governance and internal control mechanisms during the accounting period has identified the following internal control issues which the organisation will address in the next year via Action Plans:
- (a). Functional and process issues encountered with the software solution for reporting safety events impacted on the recording and management of safety event investigations as well as the ability to monitor accidents through trend analysis. This reduced the ability to learn from safety events and near misses and take action to reduce further accidents from occurring. This has been raised on the Corporate Risk Register, business continuity measures have been put in place and work is progressing with the development of replacement system.
  - (b). The Service's processes and systems for the management of assets require improvement.

## **10. Conclusion**

- 10.1. The Authority is satisfied that the issues identified above are appropriate and that steps are already in place to address the improvement areas identified in this review. The Audit & Performance Review Committee will regularly monitor the implementation and operation of these improvement activities as part of its quarterly meetings.
- 10.2. Additionally, the Authority is satisfied that the systems and processes that are in place across the organisation fulfil the requirements of the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England.

**CHIEF FIRE OFFICER**

**CHAIR, AUDIT AND PERFORMANCE  
REVIEW COMMITTEE**

**APPENDIX A TO 2019-20 ANNUAL STATEMENT OF ASSURANCE – ACTION PLAN**

<b>Identified Issue</b>	<b>Action Needed</b>	<b>Direction of Travel since 2018-19</b>	<b>Lead Officer</b>	<b>Update</b>
Integrated Service Asset Register (Fleet and Operational Equipment)	An integrated fleet and operational service asset register needs to be developed and embedded to ensure all assets are effectively recorded and managed to provide consistent data to inform replacement plans and ensure operational assets are fit for purpose.	↑	Head of Fleet & Procurement	On track. Part of the safer together programme.
Performance Management	The performance management framework that is currently under development needs to be finalised and rolled out.	↑	Head of Organisational Development and Planning	Planning, performance and Evaluation manager has been recruited, who will be picking this up as part of the role.
Policy Management	A policy management process needs to be developed and embedded.	↑	Head of Organisational Assurance	This is now being managed within our Information Assurance team. Dedicated resource is being allocated to improve this subject.
Collaboration	An appropriate level of governance needs to be applied to Collaborative working initiatives.	↑	Executive Board	
Clinical Governance	Governance arrangements need to be more clearly defined around the care issued by the Service to casualties.	↑	Head of Service Delivery : functions	

Identified Issue	Action Needed	Direction of Travel since 2018-19	Lead Officer	Update
Breathing Apparatus maintenance	The existing disjointed approach to breathing apparatus maintenance is to be investigated.	↑	Head of Procurement and fleet	Project has been <b>completed</b> and is now closed. All risks should be mitigated.
Terrorist/cyber & Data protection	The increase in cyber-attacks presents a growing risk to the Service. Work to align information security practices to ISO 27001 to be completed.	↑	Head of Organisational Assurance	The IT Security Officer role is now well established and embedded. Work to align information security practices to ISO 27001 is on track. A Protective Monitoring System is now in place.
Safety Event Management	Work in underway to facilitate the management and analysis of safety events.	<b>New Addition</b>	Head of Organisational Assurance	Progress expected April 2021