

REPORT REFERENCE NO.	DSFRA/21/22
MEETING	DEVON & SOMERSET FIRE & RESCUE AUTHORITY
DATE OF MEETING	29 SEPTEMBER 2021
SUBJECT OF REPORT	2020-21 ANNUAL STATEMENT OF ASSURANCE (FINAL)
LEAD OFFICER	Director of Governance & Digital Services
RECOMMENDATIONS	<i>That the final Annual Statement of Assurance appended to this report required to accompany the 2020-21 final accounts be approved and published on the Authority's website.</i>
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	<p>The Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 (as amended) and the Fire & Rescue Service National Framework require the Authority to prepare and publish an Annual Statement of Assurance on financial, governance and operational matters demonstrating how the Authority has had regard to both its Integrated Risk Management Plan and the expectations in the Fire & Rescue Service National Framework.</p> <p>The Annual Statement of Assurance is primarily backward looking but also features an action plan to address, in the forthcoming financial year, any significant governance issues identified as part of the review process.</p> <p>This year, additional consideration has been given to the impact of Covid-19 on the the Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue Service ("the Service"). Whilst Covid-19 has undoubtedly presented many challenges, the Annual Statement of Assurance reflects the ways in which the Service has adapted and responded to those challenges.</p> <p>The Annual Statement of Assurance for 2020-21 has been submitted, along with the draft 2020-21 Statement of Accounts, to the Authority's external auditors for review.</p> <p>This review did not identify any significant issues with the Annual Statement of Assurance. The following points were set out for consideration and comment and are followed by the Authority's response to each:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Page 22 – refers to a value for money conclusion which strictly speaking under the new code is no longer provided by external audit, rather it is more a value for money commentary. <p>Response: Amended "value for money conclusion" to "value for money commentary".</p>

	<p>2. Paragraph 3.17 – refers to reviewing arrangements to strengthen the target setting process – should this appear in the action plan?</p> <p>Response: It is considered that this is included within the planning and performance management framework action on page 26.</p> <p>3. The code requires an opinion on the level of assurance that the authority’s governance arrangements can provide? External audit cannot see where this is explicitly included?</p> <p>Response: Opinion added to paragraph 14 on page 17.</p> <p>4. The Internal Audit draft opinion sets out a number of areas where limited assurance was provided – should the results of the staff survey be included in the action plan?</p> <p>Response: The staff survey is covered by the final point in the action plan linked to People: Implement the “Safe To...” intervention throughout the Service so that people feel included and feel safe to speak up, to learn, to contribute and to challenge.</p>
RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS	Nil.
EQUALITY RISKS AND BENEFITS ANALYSIS	The contents of this report are considered compatible with existing equalities and human rights legislation.
APPENDICES	A. 2020-21 Annual Statement of Assurance FINAL
BACKGROUND PAPERS	Report APRC/21/4 (2020-21 Draft Annual Statement of Assurance) to the [then] Audit & Performance Review Committee meeting on 5 March 2021 and the Minutes of that meeting.

MIKE PEARSON
Director of Governance & Digital Services