

REPORT REFERENCE NO.	AGC/23/2
MEETING	AUDIT & GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE
DATE OF MEETING	18 JANUARY 2023
SUBJECT OF REPORT	2021-22 ANNUAL STATEMENT OF ASSURANCE
LEAD OFFICER	DIRECTOR OF GOVERNANCE & DIGITAL SERVICES
RECOMMENDATIONS	<i>That the final Annual Statement of Assurance appended to this report - required to accompany the 2021-22 final accounts – be approved and published on the Authority’s website.</i>
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	<p>To comply with both the Accounts and Audit Regulations and the Fire & Rescue Service National Framework, the Authority is required to produce and publish an Annual Statement of Assurance on financial, governance and operational matters and show how the Authority has had regard to both its Integrated Risk Management Plan (now Community Risk Management Plan) and the expectations in the Fire & Rescue Service National Framework.</p> <p>The Audit and Governance Committee reviewed the draft Annual Statement of Assurance on 10 May 2022 and resolved that, subject to inclusion of the amendments as detailed in paragraph 1.3 of this report, the draft Annual Statement of Assurance 2021-22 be approved and submitted to the Authority’s external auditor.</p> <p>The Annual Statement of Assurance has been reviewed by the Authority’s external auditor, the outcome of which is that three minor points, were noted, all of which have now been addressed as detailed in paragraph 1.4of this report.</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. 2021-22 Annual Statement of Assurance FINAL
BACKGROUND PAPERS	Nil.

1. **INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1. To comply with both the Accounts and Audit Regulations and the Fire & Rescue Service National Framework, the Authority is required to produce and publish an Annual Statement of Assurance on financial, governance and operational matters and show how the Authority has had regard to both its Integrated Risk Management Plan (now Community Risk Management Plan) and the expectations in the Fire & Rescue Service National Framework.
- 1.2. 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.
- 1.3. The Audit and Governance Committee reviewed the draft Annual Statement of Assurance on 10 May 2022 and resolved that, subject to inclusion of the amendments as indicated below, the draft Annual Statement of Assurance 2021-22 be approved in principle and submitted to the Authority's external auditor alongside the draft financial statements for the same financial year:

1. Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue Service had fared particularly well in the specific inspection undertaken by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services into the fire service response to the COVID pandemic and that this could be referenced in the Annual Statement of Assurance.

This particular review was conducted in 2020, included in the 2020-21 Annual Statement of Assurance and therefore is not relevant to the 2021-22 Annual Statement of Assurance. However, the 2021-22 full inspection report was published in July 2022 allowing inclusion of the outcome of this inspection in the Annual Statement of Assurance (see paragraphs 3.18 and 3.19).

2. The reference on page 26 of the draft Statement that "The Service uses an agency to draft and check recruitment adverts to ensure they don't inadvertently obstruct applications from people from under-represented groups" could be further clarified.

Further information has been provided to the Member that raised this point for clarification and it is considered that no further clarity is required within the Annual Statement of Assurance other than to add the word 'external' to clarify that recruitment adverts are reviewed by an external agency.

- 1.4. The Annual Statement of Assurance for 2021-22 has been submitted, along with the draft 2021-22 Statement of Accounts, to the Authority's external auditor for review. The outcome of this review is that no significant points were noted. The following points were raised for consideration and have been addressed:
 - "Paragraph 4.2 - states publication deadline is end of September 2022. For 2021/22 it is end of November 2022." Document amended.

- “Paragraph 4.11 - link to MTFP brings up 21/22 MTFP which is correct however, the link to the reserve’s strategy brings up 2020/21 - this is out of date for the period in question.” Document updated with a link to the latest Reserves Strategy.
- “Paragraph 4.11 - There is no link to a commercialisation strategy. I have checked the website and cannot find this. Does the Authority have a commercialisation strategy? and can it be linked for consistency?” The Authority does not have a commercial strategy and the document has been updated accordingly.

MIKE PEARSON

Director of Governance & Digital Services