



**Annual Statement of Assurance
2015 - 2016**

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1. Introduction

Evidence Links

This is Cheshire Fire & Rescue Authority's fourth annual Statement of Assurance in line with the Government's requirements set out in the *Fire and Rescue National Framework* for England.

Intended Purpose of Statement of Assurance

The aim of the Statement of Assurance is to provide an easy and accessible way in which communities, government, local authorities and partners may make a valid assessment of their local fire and rescue authority's performance.

Statements of Assurance are published annually by fire and rescue authorities to integrate where practicable with existing governance reporting arrangements.

Complying with the Statement of Assurance

The published Statement of Assurance guidance sets out compliance requirements under three broad headings :

Financial:

Cheshire Fire Authority is responsible for ensuring public money is properly accounted for and used economically, efficiently and effectively. The Authority has a robust budget monitoring process that is subject to close scrutiny. The Head of Finance is responsible for ensuring that the right controls are in place to ensure that financial assets are properly managed, financial reporting is accurate and that the Annual Statement of Accounts is prepared in accordance with statutory requirements.

[Financial Regulations](#)

[Statement of Accounts](#)

Governance:

The Authority is required to ensure that its business is conducted in accordance with the law and proper standards and that public money is safeguarded, properly accounted for, and used economically, efficiently and effectively. The Authority is required by law to produce an "Annual Governance Statement" (AGS). The AGS and supporting compliance evidence can be located in section 3 of this document.

Operational:

The Authority is required to comply with a range of laws, regulations and guidance, the following is a list of some of the key legislation:

[Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004](#)

[Civil Contingencies Act 2004](#)

[Regulatory Reform \(Fire Safety\) Order 2005](#)

[Fire and Rescue Services \(Emergencies\) \(England\) Order 2007](#)

[Localism Act 2011](#)

[Fire and Rescue National Framework for England 2012](#)

[Local Government Act 1999](#)

[Health & Safety & Work Act 1974](#)

To ensure that the Authority can demonstrate how it complies with these requirements, a number of detailed assessments are undertaken. These include:

- Health and Safety policy and framework with regular progress being presented to the Service Management Team (SMT).

- Operational capability against risk to ensure that the right resources, procedures and skills are available to professionally respond to communities within target response times and that resources are aligned to risk.
- An annual review of operational risk and performance supplemented by quarterly scrutiny Member and officer meetings.
- Risk Management Board monitoring and scrutiny of corporate risks.
- Compliance against National Framework requirements.

[Operational Assurance Guidance Principle 7](#)

Accountable to our Communities

This statement is underpinned by detailed documented evidence, most of which has been made available to the public on the Service website. Agendas, minutes and supporting reports relating to Cheshire Fire Authority's meetings are all published on the website. This includes incident and performance data, quarterly performance reports, policy decisions, audit and assurance reports.

www.cheshirefire.gov.uk

The Authority measures and monitors performance using a range of key Performance Indicators (KPI's) that are also used to compare performance against other fire and rescue authorities in England. The Authority publishes an Annual Report in September each year summarising progress against plans and a range of other performance measures which is sent to all homes in its area. All performance information available to the public can be accessed via the Service website and continues to be reviewed and refined.

[Annual Report](#)

In addition, the Authority has adopted the best practice guidance set out in the [Local Government Transparency Code 2015](#) as far as is practical.

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2. Financial Assurance

Evidence Links

The Cheshire Fire Authority provides financial assurance through the publication of an Annual Statement of Accounts. This is a statutory requirement under the [Accounts and Audit \(England\) Regulations 2015](#) and the accounts are prepared following the *CIPFA Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting*. The financial statements are subject to review by independent auditors as directed by the [Audit Commission Act 1998](#).

[Statement of Accounts](#)

In addition to the statutory requirement to publish annual financial results, the Authority is committed to increasing transparency. One of the first steps in this process is for the publication of expenditure in excess of £500. This is compliant with Local Government Transparency Code.

[CFRS Website: What we spend](#)

External Audit:

Grant Thornton Limited Liability Partnership (LLP) is the appointed external auditor for Cheshire Fire Authority and is responsible for completion of the following assurance activities:

- Audit of the 2015-16 financial statements
- Opinion on the Authority's accounts
- Value for Money conclusion

Internal Audit:

The Internal Audit function for 2015 - 16 was provided by Mersey Internal Audit Agency (MIAA) and their audit opinion for the year ending March 2016 can be located in Section 3 of this document.

3. Annual Governance Statement

What is the Annual Governance Statement?

An Annual Governance Statement (AGS) publicly explains how an organisation manages its governance and internal control measures. It is an open and honest account of how an organisation ensures its financial management system is adequate and effective, as well as ensuring it has a sound system of internal control, assuring utmost integrity in all its dealings.

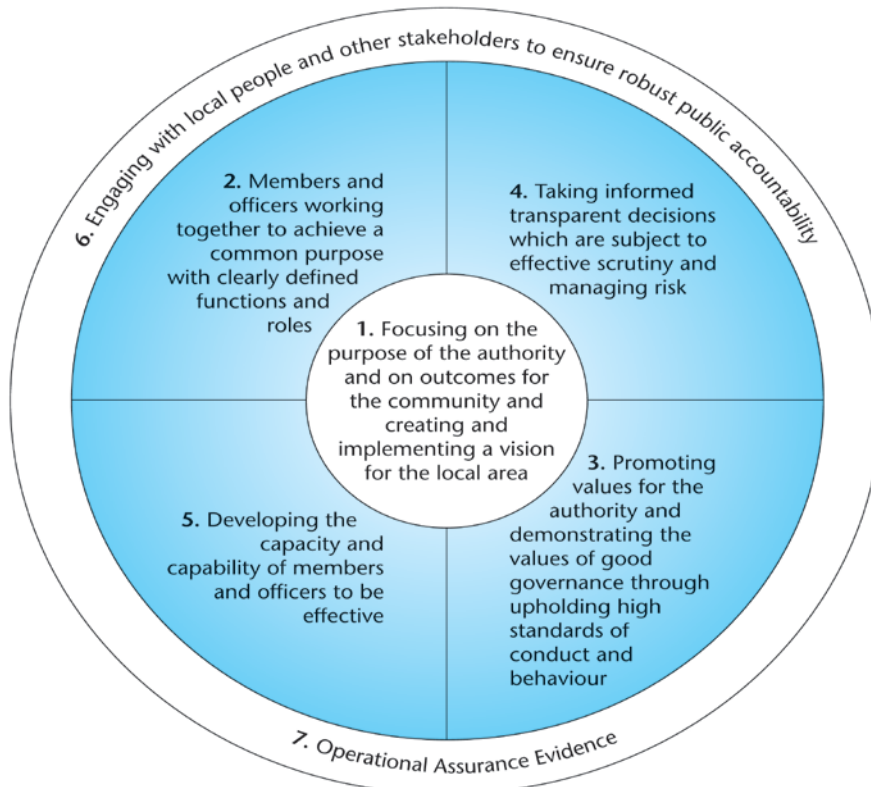
[Delivering Good Governance](#)

What is the governance framework?

The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) and the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE) published the advisory framework 'Delivering Good Governance in Local Government' ('the framework'), in 2007 and an Addendum to the framework was published in December 2012.

The framework defines six core principles that underpin the governance of each local government body. These principles were used to inform the development of our Service Local Code of Corporate Governance which was refreshed and approved by the Authority in 2013. The seventh principle in the model requires evidence of operational assurance and compliance with the National Framework. The Authority's Local Code of Corporate Governance and compliance evidence is published on the Authority's website. An outline of the seven key areas is set out in the following model (access the links to compliance documentation for more detail):

[Local Code of Corporate Governance Principals 1-7](#)



Scope of Responsibility

Cheshire Fire Authority

The Authority has responsibility for ensuring that its business is conducted in accordance with the law and proper standards and that public money is safeguarded, properly accounted for and used economically, efficiently and effectively.

The Authority has a duty under the [Local Government Act 1999](#) to show how it aims for continuous improvement and best value in delivering its services, taking into account a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness.

Members and Officers

In discharging the statutory responsibilities of the Authority, Members and Senior Officers are responsible for ensuring that proper governance arrangements are in place. These need to demonstrate good management of the Authority's key risks in accordance with legislation and proper standards.

The Authority's Governance and Internal Control Framework

The Authority's local governance and internal control framework includes the systems, processes, procedures, culture and core values by which it is directed and controlled, and through which it accounts to and engages with the communities and other stakeholders. It includes arrangements to monitor the achievement of its strategic objectives and to consider whether those objectives have led to the delivery of appropriate and value for money services.

This framework centres on the Authority's strategic aims and objectives and include:

- The organisation's vision and purpose which drive the service planning, delivery, risk, project and performance management frameworks
- The annual Integrated Risk Management Plan
- Consultation and Communications Strategies
- A published set of core values
- The Authority Constitution
- Responsible Financial and Monitoring Officers
- Established structure of Authority and Committee meetings, each with formal Terms of Reference (ToR)
- Scrutiny by Members e.g. Performance and Overview Committee responsible for thematic agendas such as Finance, Risk, Equality and Diversity, Performance Management, Health and Safety
- Integrated Corporate and Financial planning processes with regular reporting
- Treasury Management Strategy
- A refreshed Local Code of Corporate Governance Action Plan reviewed by the Governance and Constitution Committee.
- Policies which govern the activities of the Authority, overseen by the internal Policy Approval Group (PAG)
- Risk Management Board responsible for maintaining and championing an effective Risk Management Policy, framework and Corporate Risk Register
- Published Anti-Fraud, Corruption, Whistle-blowing and Complaints policies and procedures
- Medium term financial planning and budget management processes.

[CFRS Vision, Mission, Core values](#)

[IRMP](#)

[Treasury Management Strategy](#)

[Whistle-blowing Policy](#)

- Performance Management Group which is responsible for monitoring and reviewing organisational performance including the Corporate Performance Scorecard setting out the Authority's key indicators
- A dynamic, intelligent training programme which is tailored to the development needs of the Authority's frontline staff
- Appraisal and personal development programmes
- IRMP Programme Board which monitors and challenges performance of key programmes and projects
- Established Health and Safety policies
- Partnership Steering Group
- ICT Steering Group which provides strategic direction for the Authority's ICT and Information Management and Security policies
- SMT which considers all financial issues
- Information Governance
- Code of Conduct
- Crisis Management Plan

Engaging with our Communities

Extensive efforts are made to engage with the communities and stakeholders of Cheshire East, Cheshire West and Chester, Halton and Warrington. A comprehensive twelve week programme of community consultation and stakeholder engagement is carried out each year to seek feedback on the Authority's key priorities and proposals set out in its draft annual Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP). IRMP 12 covered the period ending **31st March 2016**.

[IRMP](#)

The principles by which the Authority carries out consultation are set out in the Consultation and Engagement Strategy and on key issues the Authority works with the Consultation Institute to assess its performance against best practice.

Identifying and Communicating the Authority's vision

Following a period of public consultation the Fire Authority formally approved the publication of the new Five Year Strategy "Planning for a Safer Cheshire" at its meeting 17th June 2015. The Authority's vision remains "A Cheshire where there are no deaths, injuries or damage from fires or other emergencies" and the Strategy sets out the approach to achieving that vision in the context of the challenges and risks faced by the organisation.

[Five Year Strategy](#)

Risk Management:

The Risk Management Framework and Policy is reviewed by Risk Management Board (RMB) annually. In 2015 there was a full refresh of the framework resulting in the policy and the practitioner's guidance being produced as two separate documents. The Corporate Programme Office (CPO) worked closely with RW Training who agreed to be our 'critical friend' and reviewed both documents for compliance/best practice. The following feedback was received from RW Training:

'A full review of both the policy/strategy and practitioner documents has been completed and a few areas for improvement have been identified, both documents are really well written, very understandable and comprehensive'

Risk Management Board accepted the new Framework at the October meeting and the policy and framework was approved by the Policy Committee December 2015. The framework ensures all strategic, service plans, programme and project risks are

assessed against the achievement of objectives. RMB review the strategic risk register regularly.

Equality and Inclusion

Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service has been using the Fire and Rescue Equality Framework to assess its equality performance since its launch six years ago, it has proved to be an invaluable tool. The Authority achieved the highest level of the equality framework 'Excellent' in 2011 and is looking for reaccreditation in 2016/17. Evidence is currently being compiled and the Authority is working hard to secure an 'Excellent' rating.

[Equality and diversity](#)

Stonewall

Cheshire Fire & Rescue Service has once again been praised by the leading LGBT charity Stonewall. The Authority has been a Diversity Champion since 2009 and has featured in the top 50 of Stonewall's Workplace Equality Index Top 100 for the last four years. In 2016 the Authority ranked 13th and was the highest placed of any of the emergency services in the UK.

[Stonewall Top Employers 2016](#)

The Environment

The Authority has an ambitious carbon reduction target of 40% by 2020. Significant progress has been made over the last year and to date the Authority has achieved a carbon reduction of 1071 tonnes. A major HQ boiler replacement programme has proved particularly successful in reducing carbon emissions and generating income through the Government's incentive programmes. Successful grant applications have enabled the leasing of a fleet of electric vehicles and the installation of charging points at key fire stations. The pilot project will continue during 2016-17 to assess the viability of a longer term commitment by the Authority to the use of electric vehicles in its fleet.

[Environmental Strategy 2014 - 2020](#)

Working in Partnership



In 2013 the Authority was appointed the lead agency for a sub-regional Community Safety Transformation Programme "Transforming Community Safety (TCS). This Programme involved a collaboration of **Cheshire Probation Trust, the Police and Crime Commissioner, Cheshire Constabulary, Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service (CFRS)** and the **four Local Authorities** in Cheshire, Warrington and Halton. The programme which ended in March 2016 achieved its objective of implementing a 'Do it Once' approach to community safety resulting in consistency of practice across a number of areas.

The TCS programme's work to join up residents most likely to be affected by community safety issues with those characterised as 'troubled families' resulted in a bid for a programme to tackle Complex Dependencies (CD). This secured a £5 million Transformation Challenge Award from the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG). The Programme began in April 2015 and has a core team based at North West Fire Control in Warrington, including dedicated staff from CFRS. The Authority has agreed to part fund three fire service posts to work in each of the integrated front door teams, which are to be located in each local authority area, building on the model already in place in Cheshire West and Chester.

A number of the priority work streams which featured within the TCS Programme will continue to progress during 2016-17 as part of the Complex Dependency (CD) programme and this will enable work on Domestic Abuse and Anti Social Behaviour (ASB) to progress in a way that will go beyond original ambitions of the TCS programme.

National Campaigns

Smoke Alarm Campaign

Cheshire Fire & Rescue Service (CFRS) played a leading role in a three year campaign to achieve Government commitment to bring in new safety legislation making it compulsory for all landlords to fit smoke alarms on every floor of a rented property. In 2015 the Authority saw the successful culmination of the campaign when Parliament approved the new legislation and it played a leading role in marketing and promoting the new requirements to both private landlords and their tenants.

North West Fire Control (NWFC)

The North West Fire Control Project facilitates a unique collaboration between four partner fire and rescue services Cheshire, Cumbria, Lancashire and Greater Manchester. Over the past year the Authority has continued to work closely with NWFC and the partners to resolve issues and, where possible, devise collaborative solutions. Quarterly statistical performance data is sent from NWFC to each FRS for scrutiny by the Authority and by Members of the Performance & Overview Committee.

Blue Light Collaboration Programme (BLC)

The aim of this programme is to ensure that the three emergency services responsible for protecting the communities of Cheshire have a shared commitment to improving the safety of our residents. Cheshire is currently safer than it has ever been but maintaining those improvements while also making major savings to cope with cuts in central funding is a significant challenge. The programme sets out to ensure that through working together more closely and sharing some resources and premises real efficiencies can be achieved as well as delivering a more joined-up service to local communities.

During 2015-16 a specific programme team was established and a detailed work plan developed with the ultimate aim of the Authority moving from its current Headquarters to share accommodation and facilities at the Constabulary's nearby Headquarters in Winsford by April 2018. The move is designed to make efficiencies by combining common systems and processes and the majority of support service areas.

At its meeting on 9th December the Fire Authority approved more detailed preparation work on the Blue Light Collaboration Programme to go ahead. Work will continue in 2016-17 on ensuring the correct governance is in place to deliver both the programme vision and the effective future management of the services required by the organisation.

Fire and Rescue Indemnity Company Limited (FRIC)

The Authority works in partnership with eight other Authorities to provide protection against claims made against the Authority and to ensure that the Authority fulfils its requirements to have the appropriate insurance cover in place. The partnership also informs the Authority's risk management activities.

Evaluation of Effectiveness

Cheshire Fire Authority has a responsibility for conducting a review of the effectiveness of its governance framework, including the system of internal control, at least annually. This is informed by the assurances of senior officers within the Authority, who have responsibility for the development, maintenance and management of the governance and internal control arrangements.

Cheshire Fire Authority is made up of twenty-three elected Members appointed by the constituent Authorities. There are also non-elected independent members who act in an advisory role and do not vote.

The Authority operates with the following main Committee structure:

- Policy Committee
- Performance and Overview Committee
- Governance and Constitution Committee
- Brigade Managers Pay and Performance Committee
- Staffing Committee

Terms of Reference for each Committee are subject to regular review.

The Authority has a Health Safety & Welfare Committee which meets quarterly and is chaired by the Deputy Chief Fire Officer.

[Health Safety and Welfare](#)

Member Champions

Member Champions are assigned to a number of thematic areas to provide additional scrutiny and challenge as highlighted previously, these include risk, equality, ICT, young people, older people and the environment.

The Service Management Structure

The operations of the Authority are directed through a clear management structure with defined roles and responsibilities. The Policy Approval Group (PAG) comprises of the Chief Fire Officer, Deputy Chief Fire Officer, Head of Legal & Democratic Services (Monitoring Officer) and Head of Finance, Section (151 Officer). For the majority of 2015-16 the Authority also had an Assistant Chief Fire Office role which was removed in February 2016 as part of a senior management restructure.

The full Service Management Team (SMT) is made up of PAG and Heads of Department. SMT is responsible for delivering the aims and objectives that focus on the achievement of the Cheshire Fire Authority's vision. This includes the key priorities which reflect community, regional and national issues.

Monitoring Officer:

During the 2015 – 2016 financial year the Head of Legal and Democratic Services fulfilled the statutory role of Monitoring Officer for the Authority, ensuring all actions taken were lawful.

Chief Finance Officer:

For the financial year 2015 – 2016 the Head of Finance had responsibility for day to day financial management in accordance with CIPFA guidance and responsibilities set out in Section 151 of the Local Government Act 1972.

How we performed during 2015 – 2016 - Performance Management:

As part of the corporate planning process the Authority sets out the key corporate performance indicators which measure the delivery of its strategic objectives and provide key business intelligence to help target prevention and protection activities. Targets are set where appropriate to ensure continuous improvement and evaluation. Achievements against these indicators are scrutinised quarterly by the Performance and Overview Committee and Performance Management Group and annually by the Fire Authority.

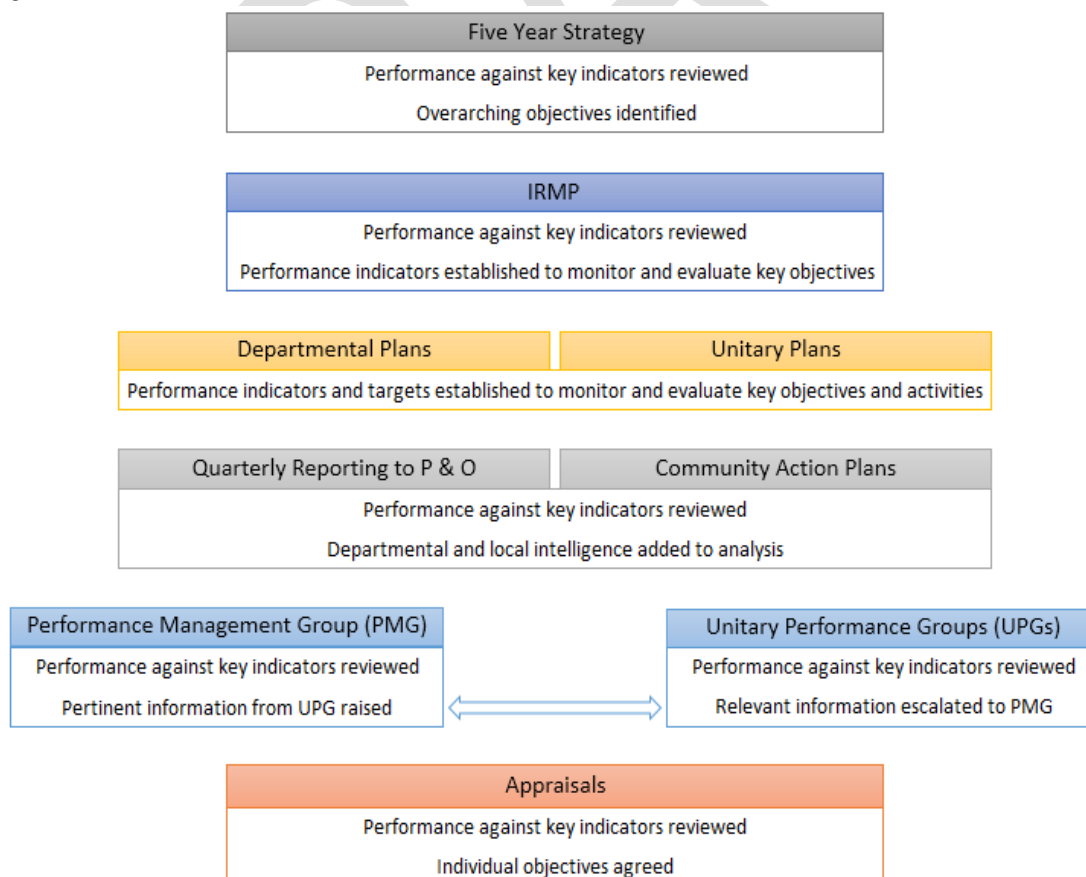
[Corporate Scorecard 15-16](#)

Performance relating to the handling of calls by North West Fire Control is also monitored quarterly, in line with agreed standards.

The Annual Report sets out how the Authority has performed over the last 12 months.

[Annual Report](#)

The diagram below presents the CFRS performance reporting model in place for 2015-16:



Monitoring and Reporting:

The Authority has an approved process of quarterly performance and financial monitoring and reporting highlighting progress against projects and activities, budget and performance indicators identified within Departmental, Unitary and Community Action Plans. These reports are presented to Members of the Authority in line with a corporate reporting cycle.

Value for Money Reviews:

The Authority's previous four year strategy committed to carrying out departmental reviews across the organisation; 2013-14 was the last year of the three year cycle and focused on the efficiency and effectiveness of services provided. The underpinning principle of the reviews was the Authority's duty to make best use of its resources in improving the quality of life for its communities. A full evaluation of the programme was undertaken in 2015 with the key findings reported to Performance & Overview Committee. The report confirmed expected savings in the region of £1.3m by the end of 2015-16.

During 2015-16 the first phase of the new organisational review programme was launched with an initial target of delivering a further £1 million in savings. That initial phase produced savings of £700,000 approximately which were removed for the 2016-17 budget.

Key Governance Improvements made during 2015-16:

In last year's AGS the Authority set out a number of improvements it intended to implement during the year. Progress against implementation of these actions is presented to the Governance and Constitution Committee.

The table below summaries progress made to date:

Key Improvement Area	Update Position
There are a number of key policies scheduled for review during 2015-16	Continue during 2016-17
Full review of the Risk Management Policy & Framework will be undertaken in 2015	Complete
Re map of partnerships to clearly determine what is a partnership and what is an arrangement	Work ongoing during 2016-17 with the introduction of a Partnership toolkit which is currently in development and will provide descriptions of partnerships/ collaborations.
Obtain Annual Statement of Assurance of NWFC Governance arrangements for 2014-15	Complete

The following table summarises the improvements identified during the process for 2015-16 by the relevant Governance Principal Owners:

Improvements Identified for 15-16	Lead Department
Policy Management - continue to facilitate comprehensive review of all corporate policies due for review	Legal & Democratic Service/Planning Performance & Communications
Review of Performance Management Framework	Planning Performance & Communications

Internal Audit:

The Authority’s Internal Audit function for 2015-16 was outsourced to Mersey Internal Audit Agency (MIAA), and established protocols were put in place for working with External Audit. A risk-based internal audit plan and three year strategy was agreed with senior management and approved by the Authority in 2015. A number of audits were commissioned in line with our risk profile which provided an independent assurance level on the Authority’s control frameworks.

The internal audit team completed a number of compliance and assurance audits during 2015-16 aligned to the approved internal audit plan, which have generally resulted in positive opinions with a small number of recommendations made as a result of their findings. Action Plans have been put in place to resolve the issues and deliver solutions.

Internal Audit Opinion 2015-16:

In accordance with Public Sector Internal Audit Standards, the Director of Internal Audit (HoIA) is required to provide an annual opinion, based upon and limited to the work performed, on the overall adequacy and effectiveness of the organisation’s system of internal control.

The purpose of this Director of Internal Audit Opinion is to contribute to the assurances available to the Accountable Officer and the Authority which underpin their own assessment of the effectiveness of the organisation’s system of internal control. This Opinion will assist the Authority in the completion of its Annual Governance Statement (AGS).

Director of Internal Audit Opinion:

Significant Assurance, can be given that that there is a generally sound system of internal control designed to meet the organisation’s objectives, and that controls are being applied consistently. However, some weaknesses in the design or inconsistent application of controls may put the achievement of particular objectives at risk

[Director of Audit's Opinion and Annual Report \(2015/16\)](#)

All recommendations for improvements identified by Internal Audit are populated on the Authority’s Cheshire Planning System for monitoring and tracking delivery of actions.

External Audit Opinion:

External Audit Opinion will be provided September 2016.

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4. Operational Assurance

Evidence Links

Statutory Responsibilities

Fire and Rescue Authorities function within a clearly defined statutory and policy framework. Links to some of the key legislation/guidance can be accessed below:

- [Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004](#)
- [Civil Contingencies Act 2004](#)
- [Regulatory Reform \(Fire Safety\) Order 2005](#)
- [Fire and Rescue Services \(Emergencies\) \(England\) Order 2007](#)
- [Localism Act 2011](#)
- [Fire and Rescue National Framework for England 2012](#)
- [Local Government Act 1999](#)
- [Health & Safety At Work Act 1974](#)

Corporate Planning - Integrated Risk Management Planning for Safer Communities

During 2015/16 Cheshire Fire Authority published a new five year strategy, titled 'Planning For A Safer Cheshire 2015-2020'. The strategy clarifies some of the stark choices facing the Authority and outlines the approach and principles adopted to ensure the Authority does not compromise on its commitment to protecting local communities, reducing risk and maintaining firefighters' safety.

[Five Year Strategy](#)

[IRMP](#)

Community Risk Management

Through its Community Risk Management Policy the Service provides risk, intelligence and performance analysis in order to ensure that strategic, tactical and operational activities are evidence-led and fully evaluated. This is achieved by using specialist systems, software, data and skills delivered by the Service's Business Intelligence team.

[CRM Policy](#)

Unitary Area Plans

In addition to and complementing the IRMP, Unitary Area plans are developed for each council area. Each plan is unique to that area and contains the actions the Unitary teams will take in order to reduce risk and improve community safety. These plans are informed by the Community Risk Model which brings together historic incident data, demographic, commercial and external risk factors.

[CE Unitary Area Plan 14 15](#)
[CWAC Unitary Area Plan 14 15](#)
[Halton Unitary Area Plan 14 15](#)
[Warrington Unitary Area Plan 14 15](#)

Stakeholder Engagement

The Authority is committed to the involvement of stakeholders in the development of the plans and it encourages this by carrying out a structured consultation programme on its draft IRMP each year. Local communities, partners, staff, representative bodies and other stakeholders are invited to comment to ensure that before any decision is taken all perspectives are taken into account. To enable active and informed participation, data and information relevant to the plan is made available to the public on the Service's website, in consultation packs that are distributed at community roadshow events across Cheshire, and also at key local stakeholder meetings.

Prevention and Protection Assurance

Prevention and Protection managers have an Audit and Assurance function for the Prevention and Protection aspects of the Service. Specific areas of activity aligned to providing assurance against these elements of service delivery include:

- Compliance with the Prevention team's Quality Assurance Framework.
- Compliance with BS EN ISO 9001 - the provision of the Service's Prevention & Protection services (including fire safety enforcement, fire investigation, business safety, unwanted fire signal and arson reduction initiatives, home fire safety, road safety, youth and community cohesion activities) has been assessed and accredited to BS EN ISO 9001:2008
- Compliance with the Matrix standard – the Service's provision of the Prince's Trust Team Programme has been assessed and is accredited to the Matrix international quality standard for organisations that deliver information advice and/or guidance.
- Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 – further detail on how we discharge our responsibilities under fire safety legislation can be accessed via our website.
- Customer surveys are undertaken as part of the Audit and Home Safety Assessment processes.

[Fire Safety advice for Businesses](#)

Performance Management – How we performed during 2015-16

A suite of corporate indicators and targets are used to support the Authority and enable Stakeholders to scrutinise delivery of the IRMP.

[Corporate Scorecard 15-16](#)

The Authority publishes all performance and incident data on its website along with the Annual Performance Report to both drive improvement and ensure transparency of its performance. Performance Management is driven through three-tiers of quarterly meetings, Performance & Overview Committee (P&O) chaired by a Member of the Fire Authority, Performance Management Group (PMG) chaired by the DCFO and Unitary Performance Groups in each of the four unitary areas chaired by the Service Delivery Managers.

www.cheshirefire.gov.uk

[Annual Report](#)

External Assurance - Operational Peer Assessment

The Authority welcomed the Operational Peer Challenge team to Cheshire in July 2012. The team carried out a general health check and review of leadership, capacity and governance, as well as an assessment of a number of key organisational areas. The Fire & Rescue Service formally moved from DCLG to the Home Office in early 2016. The Home Office are looking at options for Fire & Rescue Services undertaking more formal assessments and inspections and the Authority is keen to take part in any pilot inspection exercises in 2016-17.

[Operational Peer Challenge](#)

Operational debriefs

Operational debriefs are used at both incidents and the Authority's exercises and form part of the quality control system ensuring effectiveness of core activities. These debriefs provide valuable lessons learned which contribute to improving the service provided.

They are undertaken following every incident and at a level which recognises the scale of the incident and also the involvement of other partner agencies. Debriefs will therefore fall into Level 1 Hot debriefs or more in-depth Level II Structured debriefs.

Multi agency incidents will also prompt a multi agency debrief which will be facilitated and reported through the Cheshire Resilience Forum with learning outcomes reviewed and managed through the affiliated Cheshire Emergency Response Collaboration (CERC) group.

Regulation 28 Coroners Report – formerly known as Rule 43 Notices

In accordance with its commitment to ensure a safe and competent workforce, the Authority has conducted a thorough review of policies, procedures and training programmes in response to tragic events nationally. The learning has come from the services directly affected, information notices (**Coroners “Regulation 28” Report**) issued as a result of inquests and recommendations to all FRSs. Regulation 28 reports are used to inform policy and procedural review and to advise on the procurement/upgrade of operational equipment where necessary/appropriate.

Business Continuity – Civil Contingencies Act 2004

Business Continuity is an important part of the Authority’s strategy and a robust programme is well established to ensure responsibilities align to best practice standards, e.g. BS25999-2. Departmental plans which support the Authority’s Crisis Management Plan are maintained and tested regularly. The Crisis Management Plan is owned by the Risk Management Board and reviewed and approved annually.

During 2014-15 there were a number of national strikes by the Fire Brigades Union, therefore the plan has undergone ‘live testing’. Crisis Management Team meetings have been carried out prior to, and after the strikes to plan, prepare and capture any lessons learned. These then inform the Crisis Management Plan.

Business Continuity planning and operational resilience were also tested and proved to be fit for purpose during the recent major incident at Bosley which required a sustained local and regional operational presence over an extended period of time.

Interoperability, Resilience and Safety

A comprehensive range of risk intelligence data and information is taken into account as part of the risk identification and analysis process underpinning the IRMP. This includes Community Risk Registers, with the Authority having a leading role in the Cheshire Local Resilience Forum (CRF) which focuses on interoperability and joint planning with other emergency services using the Joint Emergency Services Interoperability (JESIP) principles.

CRF structures, policies and practices were reviewed and amended in 2013 to better reflect the changing make up of partner agencies. Governance is managed through a monthly meeting cycle of the Management Group which reports twice yearly to the CRF Executive Group.

Over the Border Mutual Aid Arrangements

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. Cheshire Fire Authority has in place contractual agreements with the following bordering Fire Authorities for response to life risk incidents:

- Merseyside
- Staffordshire
- Shropshire

- Derbyshire
- Greater Manchester
- North Wales

The creation of the North West Fire Control has also led to agreement between Lead Principal Officers (POs) from the four FRSs (Greater Manchester, Cumbria, Lancashire & Cheshire) on an additional set of mobilising and charging rules which allow for mobilisation and support to a wider range of Over the Border (OTB) incident types.

Health and safety

The Authority seeks to comply with the requirements of the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 in managing its health and safety (H&S) duties.

The Authority has a H&S management system based on Health & Safety Executive (HSE) guidance. As part of this we have clearly defined management responsibilities; as far as reasonably practicable we assess and manage the risks arising from our activities, we consult our employees on matters affecting H&S, we provide training and information to our employees, we report and investigate all accidents with the intention of preventing a recurrence and have in place arrangements to respond to any emergency that occurs at work.

As part of the H&S Management System there are annual audits of the health and safety arrangements. An audit and inspection policy is in place which includes:

- Quarterly workplace inspections
- Three themed audits scheduled annually and undertaken by the Health and Safety team
- Three year external Peer Review of the H&S management system and themed performance indicators based on Royal Society for Prevention of Accidents Quality Safety Audit (ROSPA) (QSA)

These audits and inspections inform our annual review of H&S Policy and performance. They also contribute towards an annual H&S report submitted to the Authority Performance and Overview Committee.

[Annual Health and Safety Report 2015](#)

Firefighter Fitness

The Authority has had a policy to ensure fitness of its operational staff for some time; in December 2014 the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) approved an addendum to the National Framework for England in relation to firefighter fitness. Also in 2014 the Chief Fire Officers Firefit Steering Group published the results of research it had commissioned into an appropriate national fitness standard for Firefighters.

[Firefighter Fitness Addendum](#)

In early 2015 the Authority proposed amendments to its then current fitness policy to align it to the National Framework requirements and those of CFOA national guidance on firefighter fitness. This amended document was approved in March 2015 and adopted in June 2015 following consultation with the Health and Safety Committee.

[Firefighter Fitness Policy](#)

The Authority has recruited a fulltime Fitness Advisor to lead on supporting firefighters to attain and maintain the fitness standards required, and to undertake fitness testing. Fitness testing for all operational staff takes place annually.

As part of an assurance audit the Authority asked the auditors to look at the compliance with the National Framework requirements on management of firefighter fitness. The report concluded that the Authority complied with requirements.

Operational Training

The operational training strategy was formally launched in 2012. This strategy is underpinned by a number of specialist training policies and together these deliver a competence training framework covering a three year training cycle.

[Operational Training Strategy](#)

All new firefighters attend basic training which is broken down into modules and each module is assessed. As the newly appointed firefighter enters their development phase of their career they are enrolled and registered with the awarding body Edexcel on to a level three National Vocational Qualification Diploma, Operations in the Community. Assessed by competent qualified vocational assessors the firefighters meet the assessment criteria of National Occupational Standards and achieve competence within three years.

All front line operational staff, inclusive of new starters also attend refresher training. Breathing apparatus refresher training, which takes place in dedicated 'hot fire' conditions is scheduled annually and the Authority ensures that 100% of all eligible staff attend.

Compartment fire behaviour training capability is refreshed every two years and a joint venture with Manchester Airport Fire Service and Greater Manchester Fire & Rescue Service commenced in June 2013 whereby all three services use training facilities at the airport to train and assess gas cooling and backdraft awareness skills, knowledge and understanding. This collaboration is proving to be successful and effective and has underpinned the Authority's operational capability to deal safely and competently with severe compartment scenarios. Once again the Authority ensures 100% of all eligible staff attend.

Road traffic extrication techniques, trauma care, hazardous materials, swift water rescue and working safely at height skills are refreshed over a three year period. The Authority ensures that a third attend each year with a target set to achieve 100% of all eligible staff attendance after three years.

To enhance the teaching and training capability of the instructional staff, all have now achieved or are in the process of achieving the level three award in education and training.

The Operational Training Group (OTG) also manages the Authority's Accredited Centre; currently Edexcel and Skills for Justice are the awarding bodies. Visits by external standards verifiers annually assess and confirm that the Authority operates to and maintains the awarding standards and this assists OTG in quality assuring its planning, delivery and review of training.

As well as external verification OTG also review all operational training delivery against its policies and annual training plan to assess its effectiveness and to ensure that the requisite number of operational personnel have attended these continuous professional development programmes.

Managers are all trained and assessed for their skills, knowledge and understanding in Incident Command. A dedicated Command Training Group (CTG) of vocationally qualified Officers plan, deliver and assess these training programmes. The quality of the Incident Command Training within the Service has attracted business from

several other Fire & Rescue Services including Cumbria, Shropshire and Nottinghamshire as well as several high risk industries.

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5. Assurance Conclusion

This Statement of Assurance provides an accurate account of Cheshire Fire and Rescue Authority's Financial (and associated documentation), Governance and Operational Assurance arrangements to 31st March 2016. In addition we are satisfied that Cheshire Fire and Rescue Authority conducted its business practices within the appropriate legal framework and standards and that public money was properly accounted for and used economically, efficiently and effectively.

Signatures:

Fire Authority (Chair):

Chief Fire Officer/
Chief Executive Officer:

Treasurer:

DRAFT