

CHESHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY

MEETING OF: GOVERNANCE AND CONSTITUTION COMMITTEE
DATE: 10TH APRIL 2019
REPORT OF: DIRECTOR OF GOVERNANCE AND COMMISSIONING
AUTHOR: ANDREW LEADBETTER

SUBJECT: DRAFT STATEMENT OF ASSURANCE 2018-19

Purpose of Report

1. To provide Members with an update on the purpose of this year's Statement of Assurance and to seek approval of the draft.

Recommended: That

- [1] The contents of this report be noted
- [2] Subject to Members comments, the draft Statement of Assurance be approved and presented to the Fire Authority for approval on 24th July 2019

Background

2. Members will be aware that one of the requirements of the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England (the Framework) is the publication of Statement of Assurance (the Statement).
3. The Statement should

“...outline the way in which the authority and its fire and rescue service has had regard to this National Framework, the Integrated Risk Management Plan and to any strategic plan prepared by the authority for that period. The authority must also provide assurance to their community and to government on financial, governance and operational matters.”
4. In previous years the Statement has been combined with the Annual Governance Statement (AGS), although this is not a statutory requirement and it is common practice to publish these documents separately. In October 2018 a working group was established to consider whether the Authority should continue to publish these documents together or to publish them separately.
5. The publication of the AGS is a requirement under the Accounts and Audit Regulations (England) 2015 and it must be published alongside the Annual Statement of Accounts, no later than the 31st July 2019. The Joint Head of

Finance is a member of the working group and explained that it is her responsibility to prepare the AGS for Cheshire Police.

6. The Joint Head of Finance has agreed to prepare the AGS for both Police and Fire going forward, since this is a responsibility of the finance team and will provide some consistency.
7. The guidance on statements of assurance indicates that existing assessment processes might feed into the statements in order to avoid duplication and the Statement contain a summary of and a link to the AGS.
8. Separate publication of these key documents will make them easier to identify and find on the Authority's website. It will also significantly shorten and simplify the Statement.

Information

9. The draft Statement for 2018-2019 is attached to this report as Appendix 1.
10. The draft Statement has been prepared in accordance with national guidance. It includes sections on financial assurance, governance and operational assurance. It also outlines the way in which the Authority has had regard to the Framework. A new version of the Framework was published in May 2018 and the Statement provides evidence to show that the Authority complies with its requirements. The final section provides information about the outcomes from the recent HMICFRS inspection and areas for improvement. This has been added this year to provide further evidence of the Authority's performance.
11. The guidance suggests that where authorities have already set out relevant information that is clear, accessible, and user-friendly within existing documents they may wish to include extracts or links to these documents within their statement of assurance. The draft Statement includes extracts or links to many of the existing key documents and policies such as the IRMP, the AGS, the Annual Statement of Accounts and the HMICFRS report.
12. The Corporate Scorecard for 2018/19 on page 9 will be inserted when it becomes available, as will the opinions of the internal and external auditors.
13. Members are asked to consider the contents of this draft Statement in its present form and if approved, a final version will be presented to the Fire Authority for approval at its meeting on the 24th July 2019 before it is published.
14. Since the Statement refers to the AGS it cannot be published until the AGS has been approved by the external auditors and the Closure of Accounts Committee on 29th May 2019.

Financial Implications

15. There are no financial implications arising from this report.

Legal Implications

16. Under section 21 of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 the Secretary of State must prepare a Fire and Rescue National Framework. Paragraph 4.6 of the current Framework requires each fire and rescue authority to produce an annual Statement of Assurance.
17. 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.
18. The Statement of Assurance should be signed off by an elected member of the authority who is able to take responsibility for its contents. The Chair of the Authority will sign the Statement, together with the Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive. They formally declare that they are satisfied that the arrangements are adequate and operating effectively and meet the requirements of the Framework.

Equality and Diversity Implications

19. There are none.

Environmental Implications

20. There are none.

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