



## Draft Statement of Assurance 2020-21

## Contents

	<b>Page</b>
1. Foreword .....	3
2. Introduction.....	4
3. Financial Assurance .....	4
4. Governance Assurance .....	6
5. Operational Assurance .....	11
6. Fire and Rescue National Framework for England.....	18
7. Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services ..... (HMICFRS)	19
8. Coronavirus Pandemic.....	20

## 1. Foreword

Cheshire Fire Authority recognises the importance of having good management, effective processes and appropriate controls in place to deliver services to the communities of Cheshire East, Cheshire West and Chester, Halton and Warrington.

Fire authorities are accountable for their performance and should be open to evaluation by the communities they serve. By producing this Statement of Assurance, we aim to provide information to communities, government, local authorities and other partners which will allow them to make a valid assessment of our performance

Overall we are satisfied that the Authority's financial, governance and operational assurance arrangements are adequate and operating effectively and meet the requirements detailed within the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England.

**Cllr Bob Rudd**  
**Chair**  
**Cheshire Fire Authority**



**Mark Cashin**  
**Chief Fire Officer and**  
**Chief Executive**  
**Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service**



## 2. Introduction

The Statement of Assurance is published annually to provide an easy and accessible way for communities, government, local authorities and partners to make a valid assessment of the Authority's performance and governance arrangements.

The Authority is required to publish an annual Statement of Assurance as part of the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England.

Fire and Rescue authorities must provide annual assurance on financial, governance and operational matters and show how they have had due regard to the expectations set out in their Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) and the requirements included in the Framework. To provide assurance, fire and rescue authorities must publish an annual Statement of Assurance.

The Statement of Assurance may include any potential improvements the Authority has identified across its accounting, governance or operational responsibilities and any plans to achieve the improvements.

National guidance on the content of Statements of Assurance published in May 2013 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. This Statement includes extracts or links to key documents, where relevant.

## 3. Financial Assurance

The Authority is responsible for ensuring public money is properly accounted for and used efficiently and effectively.

### Annual Statement of Accounts

Cheshire Fire Authority provides financial assurance through the publication of the 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](#).

The Treasurer is responsible for ensuring 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.

### Annual Governance Statement

The [Annual Governance Statement](#), which is a requirement under the Accounts and Audit Regulations (England) 2015 and which is published as part of the Annual Statement of Accounts, sets out the systems and procedures that are in place to ensure that the Authority's resources are used in accordance with the law and provide best value for the taxpayer.

### Transparency

In addition to the statutory requirement to publish annual financial results, the Authority is committed to increasing transparency. The Authority has adopted the best practice guidance set out in the Local Government Transparency Code 2015 as far as is practical and publishes key documents and information on the Authority's website regarding how money is being spent. This includes details of payments for goods and services to external bodies and suppliers above £500, details of salaries and allowances paid to staff and Members and tender and procurement information.

[Transparency](#)

[Local Government Transparency Code 2015.](#)

### Auditors

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

- Audit of the 2019-20 financial statements
- Opinion on the Authority's accounts
- Value for Money conclusion

The Internal Audit function for 2019-20 was provided by Mersey Internal Audit Agency (MIAA). A number of audits were commissioned in line with the Authority's risk profile which provided an independent assurance level on the Authority's control frameworks.

#### Key evidence links

- [Accounts and Audit \(England\) Regulations 2015](#)
- [Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014](#)
- [Statement of Accounts](#)
- [Annual Governance Statement](#)
- [Efficiency plan 2015/16-2019/20](#)
- [Medium Term Financial Plan](#)
- [Transparency](#)
- [Local Government Transparency Code 2015.](#)

## 4. Governance

The Authority's governance arrangements and framework aim to ensure that in conducting its business it:

- Operates in a lawful, open, inclusive and honest manner.
- Makes sure public money is safeguarded, properly accounted for and spent wisely.
- Has effective arrangements in place to manage risk.
- Meets the needs of the communities of Cheshire East, Cheshire West and Chester, Halton and Warrington.
- Secures continuous improvements in the way it operates.

### Annual Governance Statement

The Authority is required to produce an “**Annual Governance Statement**” (AGS) which is published as part of the Annual Statement of Accounts. The AGS is an expression of the measures taken by the Authority to ensure appropriate business practice, high standards of conduct and sound governance. It explains how the organisation manages its governance and internal control arrangements and measures the effectiveness of those arrangements.

The [AGS](#) for the period 1<sup>st</sup> April 2020 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021 is published on the Authority's website within the Annual Statement of Accounts.

### Local Code of Corporate Governance

CIPFA published a new version of the framework ‘Delivering Good Governance in Local Government’ in 2016. This best practice guidance sets out seven principles of good governance A to G which are illustrated below, and each principle is considered in the AGS:



### How the Authority Works

#### Cheshire Fire Authority

The Authority has responsibility for ensuring that its business is conducted in accordance with the law and that proper standards are in place.

The Authority was created in 1997 by the Cheshire Fire Services (Combination Scheme) Order. It is made up of twenty-three elected Members appointed by the constituent authorities of Cheshire East, Cheshire West and Chester, Halton and Warrington Borough Councils. There are also two non-elected independent members who act in an advisory role.

In 2017 the Authority enabled the Police and Crime Commissioner for Cheshire (PCC) to attend and speak at its meetings. This was intended to help develop further integration of those services and assets that are the responsibility of the Authority and the Police and Crime Commissioner. In March 2020 the Combination Scheme was amended by the Government to allow the PCC to sit as a Member of the Authority with voting rights if he makes a formal request to do so and if the Authority agrees to the request.

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

The **Constitution** of the Authority covers:

- An explanation of key documents produced by the Fire Authority
- Members decision making bodies
- Procedural matters
- Outside bodies
- Members roles
- Protocols
- Members Code of Conduct
- Members allowances
- Financial regulations
- Scheme of Delegation

The Authority's committee structures allow Members to consider key policies and to monitor performance. The Authority has an effective strategic and financial planning process which includes rigorous review and challenge by Members.

The Authority operates with the following main Committee structure:

- Performance and Overview Committee
- Governance and Constitution Committee
- Brigade Managers Pay and Performance Committee
- Staffing Committee
- Estates and Property Committee

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

Member Champions are assigned to a number of thematic areas to provide additional scrutiny and challenge; these include risk, equality, young people, older people, pensions, finance and the environment.

### **The Service Management Team (SMT) Structure**

The operations of the Authority are directed through a clear leadership and management structure with defined roles and responsibilities. The Service Management Team is comprised of:

- Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive
- Two Assistant Chief Fire Officers
- Director of Governance and Commissioning
- Treasurer
- Director of Transformation
- Heads of Department

### **Monitoring Officer:**

During the 2020-21 financial year the Director of Governance and Commissioning fulfilled the statutory role of Monitoring Officer for the Authority, ensuring all actions taken were lawful.

### **Treasurer/Section 151 Officer:**

The Joint Corporate Services Head of Finance has responsibility for day to day financial management in accordance with CIPFA guidance with the Treasurer/Section 151 Officer employed by the Fire Authority responsible for the matters set out in Section 151 of the Local Government Act 1972.

### **Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP)**

Cheshire Fire Authority has created a plan called the IRMP which assesses local fire and rescue related risks and details how these will be addressed. The IRMP is published on the Authority's website.

In 2019 the Authority decided to produce a four year IRMP covering the period 2020-2024.

### **Vision and Mission**

The Authority's **vision** is defined as

*"A Cheshire where there are no deaths, injuries or damage from fires or other emergencies"*

and it's **mission**

*"To help create safer communities, to rescue people and protect economic, environmental and community interests"*

### Core Values

The Authority also has a set of values and behaviours to define what is expected of everyone involved with Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service.

Following consultation and engagement with staff new Core Values were introduced in March 2020.

These **Core Values** are:

**Be Inclusive:** By acting fairly, with integrity, respect and without prejudice

**Do the Right Thing:** By holding each other to account for ensuring high standards of professionalism in everything we do

**Act with Compassion:** By being understanding and offering help to each other and to our communities with warmth, patience and kindness

**Make a Difference:** By making an impact in our organisation and in our communities in whatever ways we can, for as many people as we can

### Performance Management: How we performed during 2020 – 2021

As part of the corporate planning process the Authority measures and monitors performance using a range of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) that are also used to compare performance against other fire and rescue authorities in England.

Achievements against these indicators are scrutinised quarterly by the Performance and Overview Committee and Performance and Programme Board and annually by the Fire Authority.

**TO BE REPLACED WITH UPDATED DATA**

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

An Annual Report is produced in September each year setting out how the Authority has performed over the last 12 months.

Performance information can be accessed in the Performance section of the Authority's website.

### Auditors

#### Internal Audit:

The Authority's Internal Audit function for 2020-21 was outsourced to Mersey Internal Audit Agency (MIAA). A risk-based internal audit plan has been delivered by MIAA. A number of audits were commissioned in line with our risk profile and appetite which provided an independent assurance level on the Authority's control frameworks.

## Statement of Assurance 2020 - 21

The internal audit team completed a number of compliance and assurance audits during 2020-21 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 deal with any issues found during the audits.

*Internal Audit Opinion 2020-21:*

TO BE INSERTED WHEN AVAILABLE

### **External Audit:**

The Authority has appointed Grant Thornton as external auditors and established protocols are in place for working with External Audit.

*External Audit Opinion 2020-21:*

TO BE INSERTED WHEN AVAILABLE.

#### Key evidence links

[Delivering Good Governance 2016](#)  
[Local Code of Corporate Governance](#)  
[Principals A-G](#)  
[Annual Governance Statement](#)  
[Integrated Risk Management Plan](#)  
[CFRS Vision, Mission, Core values](#)  
[Constitution](#)  
[Annual Report for 2020](#)  
[Corporate Scorecard 20/21](#)  
[Internal Audit Opinion](#)

## 5. Operational Assurance

The Fire and Rescue Services National Framework for England outlines the requirement placed upon fire and rescue authorities to provide assurance on operational matters which are determined locally by them.

### Statutory Responsibilities

Fire and Rescue Authorities function within a clearly defined statutory and policy framework. The Authority is required to comply with a range of laws, regulations and guidance. 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 2018](#)

[Local Government Act 1999](#)

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

[Policing and Crime Act 2017](#)

To ensure that the Authority can demonstrate how it complies with this statutory and policy framework a number of detailed assessments are undertaken.

- Progress against the Authority's Health and Safety policy/framework is regularly presented to the Health, Safety and Wellbeing Committee.
- The Authority regularly assesses operational capability against risks in the area covered by the Authority to ensure that the right resources, procedures and skills are available to respond to incidents within target response times.
- The Authority undertakes an annual review of operational risk and performance, supplemented by scrutiny at quarterly Member and officer meetings.
- The Risk Management Board monitors and scrutinises strategic risks.

### Corporate Planning

There is a robust corporate planning process in place which facilitates the development of the Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP).

### Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP)

Fire authorities must produce an IRMP which assesses local fire and rescue related risks and details how these will be addressed. The IRMP takes account of the requirements of the Fire and Rescue National Framework and outlines the key risks and influences facing Cheshire and how the Authority is currently structured to address them.

The Authority has outlined its plans for 2020-24 in its Integrated Risk Management Plan “Saving Lives, Changing Lives, Protecting Lives”. This was approved by the Authority in July 2020 following a period of public and staff consultation. It is anticipated that further annual delivery plans will be agreed by the Fire Authority during the lifetime of the Plan.

### **Community Risk Management**

Through its Community Risk Management (CRM) Model, the Service undertakes risk and performance analysis in order to ensure that strategic, tactical and operational activities are intelligence-led and evaluated. This is achieved by using specialist systems, software, data and skills delivered by the Joint Corporate Service Business Intelligence team located at Clemonds Hey.

### **Unitary Area Plans**

In addition to, and complementing the IRMP, each council area has a Unitary Performance Group (UPG) involving local Fire Authority members in performance management. The UPG meets quarterly to scrutinise data and performance. Unitary Area Plans are developed for each unitary area. Each plan is unique to that area and contains the actions the Unitary teams will take in order to mitigate risk and improve community safety. These plans are informed by the Community Risk Management Model which brings together historic incident data, demographic, commercial and external risk factors.

### **Stakeholder Engagement**

The Authority is committed to involving all of its stakeholders in the development of its strategies and plans. It encourages this by carrying out a comprehensive annual consultation programme on its draft IRMP. Local communities, partners, staff, representative bodies and other stakeholders are invited to comment to ensure that before any decision is taken a broad range of views 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 and via social media, in consultation packs, which are distributed at community roadshow events held across Cheshire, and also at key local stakeholder forums and meetings.

### **Fire Prevention (Community Safety)**

The Authority has a risk based approach to prevention. This risk profile is developed through Community Risk Management Model using a range of tools including Exeter data from health partners. It’s Safe and Well programme was developed in conjunction with NHS and local health partners. Safe and Well visits provide advice to householders on fire safety in the home but also address health priorities such as the prevention of slips, trips and falls, smoking cessation and alcohol reduction, bowel cancer screening and tests for atrial fibrillation.

The Service also works with partner agencies to deliver road safety initiatives targeted at vulnerable users such as young drivers and motorcyclists.

The Authority is commissioned to provide early intervention programmes such as RESPECT and is a delivery partner for the Prince’s Trust programme.

It has also had a significant commitment to raising awareness and prevention through its safety and life skills centre, Safety Central.

### Fire Protection

The Authority operates a risk based intelligence-led inspection programme of non-domestic premises. If a business is audited, the audit will be carried out by a qualified fire-safety officer who will follow a set procedure which is designed to establish compliance with the requirements of the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005. The Authority always aims to help businesses comply with fire safety legislation; however, at times it has to enforce the law by implementing a formal enforcement procedure and will on occasion prosecute. This is always a last resort and the Authority will endeavour to avoid this course of action by working with business owners/managers via a range of key interventions:

- A dedicated team of non-enforcing officers who proactively deliver interventions and offer advice tailored to the different sectors of the business community.
- Protection staff offer support to businesses to assist in complying with legislation.
- Information provided digitally to support businesses.
- Proactively working with partners and key stakeholders to raise awareness of the fire safety benefits of sprinkler systems.

The Government's Primary Authority Scheme is a means for a business to receive assured and tailored advice on meeting environmental health, trading standards or fire safety regulations through a single point of contact. This enables the business to invest with confidence in products, practices and procedures, knowing that the resources they devote to compliance are well spent. The Authority supports the Primary Authority Scheme and will consider entering into partnerships with a business or organisation to provide assured and tailored fire safety advice. The approach it adopts creates a more consistent and co-ordinated regulatory environment.

Fire investigation is an integral part of the Service's Prevention and Protection activities. The main purpose of fire investigation is to determine the origin, cause and development of a fire and to contribute to organisational learning.

All fires attended will be investigated to establish the cause of fire. Where a fire has occurred, investigators have the power of entry under Section 45 of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 which allows an authorised employee to gain entry to premises in order to investigate the cause and progression of the fire that has occurred there.

Investigation outcomes will steer future prevention and protection activities and may assist in the prevention and detection of crime. They may also lead to inspections focused on certain risks or themes.

### Emergency Response

The Authority responds to a range of emergency incidents with 35 fire engines operating from 28 fire stations across Cheshire. Stations are crewed by operational staff who work different shift patterns depending upon local risk:

- Wholtime: firefighters operate on stations 24 hours per day, working 12 hour shifts.
- Day Crewing: during the daytime the station is crewed by wholtime firefighters who also live next to the station to provide emergency cover overnight
- Nucleus: stations are crewed by wholtime firefighters during day time hours and by on-call firefighters overnight

- On-Call: firefighters live or work in the local community near to the station and respond to emergency calls via an alerter

The Authority has in place a Cheshire Standard to respond to life-risk incidents (e.g. house fires and road traffic collisions) within ten minutes on 80% of occasions.

Pre-determined attendance requirements are developed through the analysis of risk information from sources such as incident data and site specific risk information. Through the Authority's review of emergency response, specialist assets have been placed in strategic locations to improve response to incidents across Cheshire and respond to local risks, such as road traffic collisions on motorways.

The Authority's debrief policy outlines processes for evaluating operational learning and improvement.

Incident command is embedded within the internal assessment procedures, with incident commanders assessed regularly through live and simulated exercises arranged locally and centrally.

Organisational performance, including the Service's emergency response and call handling performance of North West Fire Control (NWFC), is scrutinised through structures such as Performance and Programme Board, Unitary Performance Groups, the Fire Authority's Performance and Overview Committee and by Directors of the NWFC Board.

The Authority conducts Site Specific Risk Inspections (SSRIs) for high risk premises in Cheshire. The procedure has recently been internally audited, receiving an outcome of 'significant assurance'. A dedicated SSRI training officer is in post alongside an SSRI portfolio holder for on-call stations.

Cheshire has 28 Control of Major Accident Hazard (COMAH) sites and employs a high-risk training officer. Both on-site and off-site incident plans are managed by the Cheshire Resilience Forum and tested through multi-agency exercises.

The Authority influences the development of operational response, training and occupational standards at a regional level through membership of a number of regional fire and rescue services and multi-agency groups and forums.

### **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.

### **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 Cheshire's Community Risk Register, with the Authority having a leading role in the Cheshire Resilience Forum (CRF) which focuses on interoperability and joint planning and training exercises with other emergency services using the Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Principles (JESIP). Additional joint training and planning has taken place following the Manchester Arena terrorist attack to ensure the effectiveness of the Authority's response to a similar event within Cheshire.

CRF structures, policies and practices are regularly reviewed 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.

The Authority is represented on the Cheshire CONTEST group, which has developed plans for notification of, and response to, a multi-agency marauding terrorist firearms attack (MTFA). Cheshire's National Inter-Agency Liaison Officers (NILOs) have received MTFA response training via regional NILO groups.

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

Sections 13 and 16 of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 allow mutual arrangements to be agreed with neighbouring fire and rescue 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

### **Health and Safety**

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

The Authority has an H&S management system based on Health & Safety Executive (HSE) guidance. There are clearly defined management responsibilities; as far as reasonably practicable the Authority assesses and manages the risks arising from its activities, consults its employees on matters affecting H&S, and provides training and information to employees.

The Authority has an Occupational Health Unit to support the health and wellbeing of staff. The Authority has signed up to the MIND Blue Light campaign to support mental health and wellbeing in the workforce and provided training to mental health champions and is looking to introduce more widely a Trauma Risk Management (TRiM) process. The Authority recruited a Mental Health Advisor in 2019 who has developed the Mental Health Strategy and introduced a Mental Health Steering Group.

The Authority has introduced an electronic system to support the reporting and investigation of all accidents and near misses that occur and to track the investigations conducted with the intention of preventing a recurrence.

As part of the H&S Management System there is a programme of audits and inspections. The audits are based on the Royal Society for Prevention of Accidents Quality Safety Audit system and its performance indicators. These audits and inspections inform the annual review of H&S Policy and performance. They also contribute towards an Annual Health and Safety report submitted to the Authority's Performance and Overview Committee.

### **Firefighter Fitness**

The Authority has had a policy to ensure the fitness of its operational staff for some time. In December 2014 the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) issued an

addendum to the National Framework for England in relation to firefighter fitness. In 2015 the Authority proposed amendments to its then current fitness policy to align it to the National Framework requirements and the national fitness standards.

The Authority recruited a full-time Fitness Advisor to lead on supporting the firefighters to attain and maintain the fitness standards required, and to undertake fitness testing. Fitness testing for all operational staff takes place annually. Performance is monitored at the Service Health Safety and Wellbeing Committee.

An audit of compliance with the National Framework requirements on management of firefighter fitness concluded that the Authority complied.

### **Operational Training**

The Service has an Operational Training Strategy which outlines its approach to ensuring that its operational staff are trained and competent in order to fulfil the various operational demands placed upon them.

All new firefighters attend basic training which is broken down into modules and each module is assessed.

All front line operational staff, inclusive of new starters, attend regular station planned training as detailed within their Station Training Forecast in order to maintain their operational abilities and competence. They also attend centrally planned refresher training in order to support this maintenance programme.

Breathing apparatus refresher training takes place in dedicated 'hot fire' conditions annually and the Authority aims to ensure that 100% of all eligible staff attend. An electronic course management system aids the monitoring of training.

Compartment fire behaviour training capability is refreshed every two years and the Authority aims to ensure 100% of all eligible staff attend.

Road traffic extrication techniques, trauma care, dealing with hazardous materials, and working safely at height skills are refreshed over a three-year period and each year the Service aims to refresh the skills, knowledge and understanding of one third of its operational workforce with the intention to achieve 100% of all eligible staff attendance after three years. The swift water rescue capability of the Service's key water incident fire stations is validated by the staff attending two days of assessment every year.

The Service delivers in-house Large Goods Vehicle training on a one to one basis for its front line firefighters. Once they are designated as an appliance emergency response driver they then go on to attend a one-day emergency response driving refresher within a five-year period.

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 and assessment.

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 and

rescue services and other emergency services as well as private and public organisations including several high risk industries.

In 2019 the Authority began construction work on its new operational training centre, based at its site in Sadler Road, Winsford. The Training Centre was completed in late summer 2020 and crews have started to utilise its facilities. While the success of our prevention work has led to a long term reduction in fires, this does mean that firefighters are more reliant on training and simulation to develop their learning experience instead of operational firefighting. The training centre, a significant investment at over £11m, provides firefighters with realistic and immersive training to safely and effectively deal with a wide range of incidents that may occur across Cheshire.

### Key evidence links

[Integrated Risk Management Plan](#)  
[CRM Model](#)  
[Unitary Performance Area Profiles](#)  
[Safe and Well](#)  
[Safety Central](#)  
[Fire Safety advice for Businesses](#)  
[JESIP](#)  
[Annual Health and Safety Report](#)  
[Firefighter Fitness Addendum](#)  
[Firefighter Fitness Policy](#)  
[Operational Training Strategy](#)

## 6. Fire and Rescue National Framework for England

Under the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 the Secretary of State must prepare a Fire and Rescue National Framework which sets out priorities and objectives for fire and rescue authorities and contains guidance in connection with the discharge of any of their functions.

Every fire and rescue authority **must** have regard to the Framework in carrying out their functions.

In May 2018 a new National Framework was published. There is an emphasis in this latest Framework upon the national programme of reform within the sector and a number of requirements which fire authorities **must** comply with in the areas of:

- **Delivery of functions:** a need to identify and assess risk, prevent fire and promote fire safety, respond effectively to incidents and a statutory duty to consider collaboration
- **National Resilience:** identify and address any gaps in capability and prepare to respond to terrorist attacks
- **Governance:** to produce an IRMP, Annual Statement of Assurance and financial plans
- **Achieving Value for money:** having a policy on reserves, commercial transformation and trading
- **Workforce:** the need for a People Strategy and implementation of the new Professional Standards when published.
- **Inspection, Intervention and Accountability:** co-operation with the new inspection regime and compliance with the Local Authority Transparency Code.

A review was undertaken of the mandatory requirements under the Framework and evidence gathered to demonstrate compliance and a report was presented to the Performance and Overview Committee in September 2019.

In March 2020 a further review was undertaken and a new compliance document was being prepared when Coronavirus (Covid-19) began to impact upon the Service.

### Key evidence links

[Fire and Rescue National Framework for England 2018](#)

[Fire and Rescue National Framework for England 2018 - Compliance Report \(Performance and Overview Committee 04.09.2019\)](#)

## 7. Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS): Inspection Outcomes 2018

HMICFRS carried out an inspection of Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service in the summer of 2018. The inspection process asked three key inspections:

- a. How effective is CFRS at keeping people safe and secure from fire and other risks?
- b. How efficient is CFRS at keeping people safe and secure from fire and other risks?
- c. How well does CFRS look after its people?

### The report summary said:

*“ We are pleased with most aspects of the performance of Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service in keeping people safe and secure. But it needs to improve how it looks after its people, to give a consistently good service.*

*The service is effective at keeping people safe and secure. It understands risk and is good at preventing it. The service makes good use of fire regulation to protect the public. Its response to fires and emergencies is good and it responds well to national risks too.*

*The service is efficient. It uses resources well and it is affordable.”*

The inspection report identified some areas for improvement and an action plan has been prepared to address each of these, with details of any action taken to be taken, the lead officer with responsibility for the actions, a timetable and how success will be measured.

A report was presented to the Performance and Overview Committee on the 10<sup>th</sup> July 2019 together with the HMICFRS Inspection 2018 Action Plan, both of which are published on the website.

The Service was due to be inspected again during March and April 2020 but due to the Coronavirus (Covid -19) outbreak HMICFRS suspended all inspection work.

A virtual inspection took place during February and March 2021 and the report is expected late in 2021. The report will be published and available both on the HMICFRS's website and the Service's website.

#### Key evidence links

[HMICFRS Inspection Report](#)

## 8. Coronavirus Pandemic

The Coronavirus Pandemic continued throughout the period covered by this document. It has had an impact on Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service, but this has been managed.

Cheshire Fire Authority has operated effectively during the pandemic. It has adopted rules and procedures which have enabled it to conduct remote meetings so that it can transact all the business that was necessary.

The Service Management Team met regularly throughout the Pandemic to: ensure that it fully understood Government guidance; maintain and enhance its communication to staff, analyse risk and deliver safe systems of work; and decide how best to protect staff and maintain as many aspects of the services it delivers as possible in the prevailing circumstances.

The Service Management Team prioritised the Service's ability to deliver its core statutory functions, i.e. emergency response. However, it also enabled as many staff as possible to work from home in order to continue to do their jobs effectively. There was some impact upon the achievement of departmental objectives and targets, e.g. the number of Safe and Well visits conducted were heavily impacted because it was not possible to go into homes.

The Service did ensure that its strategic aims were met by utilising its resources and adapting operations to support the communities within Cheshire. This involved the Service liaising with the partner agencies through the Local Resilience Forum and establishing a Covid-19 Community Support Management Team to co-ordinate partnership work. Additional activities that were conducted included checking on those shielding; assisting hospitals with Covid-19 testing of patients at home before scheduled operations; supporting food bank collections and deliveries; distributing personal protective equipment to nursing home, schools and community groups; and delivering free school meals, education packs and laptops to eligible households. More recently the Service is providing staff to vaccinate.

The HMICFRS were commissioned by the Home Secretary to inspect how fire and rescue services in England were responding to the Pandemic in August 2020. The Service was inspected between 21<sup>st</sup> September and 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2020.

The Service received positive feedback with HMICFRS stating “the service has effectively carried out its statutory functions during the pandemic”. HMICFRS was impressed by how the service looked after the welfare of its staff, and the additional support it gave to the community during the first phase of the pandemic.

### Key evidence links

[HMICFRS COVID-19 Inspection Report](#)