

Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Fire Authority



MEETING	Overview and Audit Committee
DATE OF MEETING	12 March 2014
OFFICER	Graham Britten, Director of Legal and Governance
LEAD MEMBER	Councillor David Watson (Chairman, Overview & Audit Committee)
SUBJECT OF THE REPORT	2012/13 Statement of Assurance
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	<p>The purpose of the report is to apprise the Committee of the requirement for a "statement of assurance" to be approved and published on behalf of the Authority.</p> <p>The draft 2012/13 Statement of Assurance, Annex A, draws on, summarises and includes relevant extracts from more detailed assessments as recommended in DCLG guidance Annex B.</p>
ACTION	Decision.
RECOMMENDATIONS	That the 2012/13 Statement of Assurance be approved and attested by the signature of its Chairman.
RISK MANAGEMENT	<p>Financial, governance and operational assurance processes form part of the Authority's risk management framework. The effectiveness of these contributes to the identification, reduction and mitigation of corporate and operational risks.</p> <p>Collectively the assurance processes underpinning the range of existing statements covers the scope and nature of what is required for the new statement of assurance.</p> <p>In future officers intend to examine the opportunity afforded by the introduction of the new statement to rationalise existing assurance and performance reporting arrangements. As a first step towards this the former 'annual report' has been produced in summary form, and appended to the draft statement of assurance.</p>
FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS	There are no direct financial implications arising from the introduction of the statement of assurance.

<p>LEGAL IMPLICATIONS</p>	<p>Section 21 of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 (FRSA 2004) requires the relevant minister to prepare, review and revise National Framework guidance to which fire and rescue authorities must 'have regard'.</p> <p>Section 22 of the FRSA 2004 gives the Secretary of State the power to intervene if he considers that "...a fire and rescue authority is failing, or is likely to fail, to act in accordance with the Framework prepared under section 21".</p> <p>The draft Statement of Assurance (Annex A) is required to be approved by virtue of paragraphs 3.2 and 3.3 of the extant National Framework: 3.2 "Fire and rescue authorities must provide 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 and the requirements included in this Framework. To provide assurance, <i>fire and rescue authorities must publish an annual statement of assurance.</i>" 3.3 "The Government will be providing light touch guidance on the nature of the assurance statements. Each <i>fire and rescue authority is expected to sign off their statement, ensuring that it has been subject to the authority's scrutiny arrangements.</i> The guidance will make suggestions on the contents of the statement with communities and the Government in mind. It is likely that the contents of these assurance statements already exist in the information held or published by fire and rescue authorities, for example as part of their annual report or service plan." Annex B is the above mentioned 'light touch guidance.'</p> <p>The Statement of Assurance will be used as a source of information by the Secretary of State when preparing biennial reports required by section 25 of the FRSA 2004.</p>
<p>HEALTH AND SAFETY</p>	<p>There are no direct health and safety implications arising from this report.</p>
<p>EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY</p>	<p>There are no direct equality and diversity implications arising from this report.</p>
<p>USE OF RESOURCES</p>	<p>Communication and consultation</p> <p>The officers with responsibility for the areas reported on in the Statement of Assurance have been responsible for supplying the information and responses necessary for its preparation.</p>
<p>PROVENANCE SECTION &</p>	<p>The requirement for Statements of Assurance arose from the revisions to the National Framework published by the DCLG in July 2012. They are</p>

<p>BACKGROUND PAPERS</p>	<p>intended to provide assurance to the public on financial, governance and operational matters and demonstrate that National Framework requirements, including those relating to integrated risk management planning, are being met.</p> <p>The precise form, content and methodology used to prepare these statements are left to local discretion. Where authorities "have already set out relevant information that is clear, accessible, and user-friendly within existing documents" they may draw on these in preparing their statements of assurance.</p> <p>An evaluation of the implications of the extant Framework was reported to the Fire Authority at its 27 September 2012 meeting, together with a copy of the Framework guidance itself: Item 8</p> <p>http://www.bucksfire.gov.uk/NR/rdonlyres/E6EE2A89-79F6-45B3-B02E-CE3675D252A3/0/270912Agendaandreports.pdf</p> <p>This Authority already produces and publishes a variety of separate statements relating to financial, governance and operational performance such as the Annual Governance Statement (AGS) which must also be annually approved under 4(3) of the Accounts and Audit (England) Regulations 2011, and Annual Financial Statements.</p> <p>AGS 2012/13</p> <p>http://www.bucksfire.gov.uk/NR/rdonlyres/BBC9A86E-6D95-4ECC-967D-175329D47556/0/Annual Governance Statement FINAL.pdf</p> <p>The AGS is based on the CIPFA/ SOLACE guidance (2007, revised and updated 2012). This is the most relevant best practice sector guidance for governance in local authorities against which the authority is judged, albeit that the combined authorship appear ignorant of fire authority governance: <i>"In the fire service, the fire brigade operates as the executive arm with the fire service providing scrutiny"</i> [Section 3, in both editions].</p> <p>CIPFA /SOLACE 'Delivering Good Governance in Local Government - Guidance Note for English Authorities'</p> <p>http://www.solace.org.uk/knowledge/reports_guides/goodgovernance-England-2007-02.pdf</p> <p>The CIPFA/SOLACE guidance draws from the earlier Independent Commission on Good Governance in Public Services publication 'The Good Governance Standard for Public Services' 2004, which is also the reference document for the local government</p>
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	<p>informatives in BSI 13500:2013 '<i>Code of practice for delivering effective governance of organizations</i>', 2013 The British Standards Institute.</p> <p><i>The Good Governance Standard for Public Services</i>. OPM Ltd/CIPFA. 2004.</p> <p>http://www.cipfa.org/-/media/Files/Publications/Reports/governance_standard.pdf</p>
APPENDICES	<p>Annex A: Draft 2012/13 Statement of Assurance</p> <p>Annex B: CLG Guidance on Statements of Assurance</p>
TIME REQUIRED	15 Minutes.
REPORT ORIGINATOR AND CONTACT	<p>Stuart Gowanlock</p> <p>sgowanlock@bucksfire.gov.uk</p> <p>01296 744435</p>