



Statement of Assurance
2012/2013
Draft

Contents

1. Introduction	3
2. Financial Assurance	3
3. Governance	5
4. Operational Assurance	7
5. Integrated Risk Management Planning	8
6. Mutual Aid, Regional and National Resilience	9
7. Declaration	11
Appendix:	
2012/13 Public Safety Plan Targets - Performance Summary	12

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Although Fire and Rescue Services in England are run by local government bodies, the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 requires that local fire and rescue authorities must have regard to direction from central government. This direction is issued in the form of a 'National Framework' which sets out the Government's strategic aims and requirements for Fire and Rescue Services. In the most recent update to the National Framework, in 2012, the Government introduced a requirement that:

'Fire and rescue authorities must provide annual assurance on financial, governance and operational matters and show how they have due regard to the expectations set out in their integrated risk management plan and the requirements included in the Framework. To provide assurance, fire and rescue authorities must publish an annual statement of assurance'.

1.2 The first of the new statements of assurance are due for publication during the 2013/14 financial year and annually thereafter.

1.3 The purpose of this document is to provide the public and Government with assurance that Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire Authority ('The Authority') meets the requirements set out in the National Framework and accompanying Government guidance¹.

1.4 Where relevant the document draws on, consolidates and summarises the findings of existing assurance processes relating to financial, governance and operational matters that were set up to meet other statutory and regulatory requirements of fire and rescue authorities.

2. FINANCIAL ASSURANCE

2.1 It is a statutory requirement under the Accounts and Audit (England) Regulations 2011 for authorities to publish the financial results of their activities for the year. This 'Statement of Accounts', shows the annual costs of providing the service and is determined by a Code of Practice which aims to give a "true and fair" view of the financial position and transactions of the authority.

¹ 'Guidance on Statements of assurance for fire and rescue authorities in England, Department for Communities and Local Government, May 2013.

2.2 The Annual Financial Statements for the Year Ending 31 March 2013 can be found on our website:

http://www.bucksfire.gov.uk/NR/rdonlyres/7E5EB140-7DA8-40E5-BE1C-701F53DD9105/0/Annual_Financial_Statements_2012_13.pdf

2.3 The financial statements are required to be audited under the Audit Commission Act 1998. The auditors are responsible for:

- forming an opinion on the financial statements;
- reviewing the Annual Governance Statement;
- forming a conclusion on the arrangements that the Authority has in place to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources.

2.4 The table below summarises the findings from all elements of the appointed auditors work:

Audit the financial statements of the Authority for the financial year ended 31 March 2013 in accordance with International Standards on Auditing (UK & Ireland)	On 30 September 2013 we issued an unqualified audit opinion for the Authority.
Form a conclusion on the arrangements the Authority has made for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources.	On 30 September 2013 we issued an unqualified value for money conclusion.
Issue a report to those charged with governance of the Authority (the Overview and Audit Committee) communicating significant findings resulting from our audit.	On 25 September 2013 we presented and issued our report for the Authority
Report to the National Audit Office on the accuracy of the consolidation pack the Authority is required to prepare for the Whole of Government Accounts.	We reported our findings to the National Audit Office on 30 September 2013.
Consider the completeness of disclosures in the Authority's Annual Governance Statement, identify any inconsistencies with the other information of which we are aware from our work and consider whether it complies with CIPFA / SOLACE guidance.	No issues to report.
Consider whether, in the public interest, we should make a report on any matter coming to our notice in the course of the audit.	No issues to report
Determine whether any other action should be taken in relation to our responsibilities under the Audit Commission Act.	No issues to report.
Issue a certificate that we have completed the audit in accordance with the requirements of the Audit Commission Act 1998 and the Code of Practice issued by the Audit Commission.	On 30 September we issued our audit completion certificate.

2.5 The appointed auditors noted some additional key findings in their annual audit letter:

- Financial statement audit – in our view, the quality of the process for producing the accounts, including the supporting working papers was good. We had no issues to report to those charged with governance;

- Value for money conclusion – our audit did not identify any significant matters;
- Control themes and observations – our audit did not identify any significant deficiencies in internal control.

2.6 In addition to the statutory requirement to publish annual financial results, the government is committed to increasing transparency across local authorities. One of the first steps in this process is for the publication online of information relating to spend items in excess of £500. In accordance with that requirement, the Authority is publishing monthly schedules of payments, which can be found on our website:

<http://www.bucksfire.gov.uk/BucksFire/What+we+spend+and+how+we+spend+it/Spend+over+£500.htm>

3. GOVERNANCE

3.1 The Authority is responsible for maintaining a sound system of internal control supports the achievement of its policies, aims and objectives whilst safeguarding public money and organisational assets. There is also a requirement to ensure that the Authority is administered prudently and economically and that resources are used efficiently and effectively and that sound arrangements are in place for the identification and management of risks.

3.2 The Authority's approach to governance is based on the six core principles of good governance set out in the CIPFA / SOLACE governance framework ("*Delivering Good Governance in Local Government*"):

1. Focusing on the purpose of the Authority and on outcomes for the community and creating and implementing a vision for the local area;
2. Members and officers working together to achieve a common purpose with clearly defined functions and roles;
3. Promoting values for the Authority and demonstrating the values of good governance through upholding high standards of conduct and behaviour.
4. Taking informed and transparent decisions which are subject to effective scrutiny and managing risk;
5. Developing the capacity and capability of members and officers to be effective;

6. Engaging with local people and other stakeholders to ensure robust public accountability.

3.3 There is already a statutory requirement for the Authority to produce an annual governance statement to demonstrate and evidence that it operates an effective system of internal control. The internal control systems underlying the annual governance statement are assessed by Internal Audit to ensure that they are adequate and effective so that:

- The Authority can establish the extent to which they can rely on the whole system; and,
- Individual managers can establish the reliability of the systems and controls for which they are responsible.

3.4 The Chief Internal Auditor's most recent opinion on the Authority's internal control environment was published in the Annual Governance Statement for the 2012/13 financial year. This stated that:

'In my opinion the system of internal control provides reasonable assurance regarding the effective, efficient and economic exercise of the Authority's functions. During 2012/13 there has been further significant improvement to Bucks & Milton Keynes Fire Authority's system of internal control through the on-going development of policies and procedures covering the key control processes. This demonstrates a positive direction of travel towards strong and effective internal control and risk management that will facilitate the effective exercise of the Authority's functions.'

3.5 Additionally, in the Chief Internal Auditor's annual audit letter, the Authority was required to consider the completeness of disclosures in the Authority's Annual Governance Statement, identify any inconsistencies with the other information identified by the auditor's work, and consider whether it complies with Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA)/ Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE) guidance. This work was completed and did not identify any areas of concern.

3.6 Further details of the Authority's governance arrangements and the internal auditor's findings in relation to these can be found in the Annual Governance Statement 2012/13:

http://www.bucksfire.gov.uk/NR/rdonlyres/BBC9A86E-6D95-4ECC-967D-175329D47556/0/Annual_Governance_Statement_FINAL.pdf

4. OPERATIONAL ASSURANCE

4.1 The Government requires Fire Authorities to provide assurance that they meet the requirements arising out of the legislative and policy framework for fire and rescue services. In particular:

- Details of specific events that raise issues of operational competence or delivery such as advice received under health and safety or other legislation together with assurance that these matters have been considered and, where appropriate, acted on;
- That integrated risk management plans are consulted on and that during the consultations appropriate information was provided to enable active and informed participation;
- Details of any agreements and / or mutual aid arrangements with other relevant bodies such as neighbouring fire and rescue services.

4.2 Statutory Duties and Operational Effectiveness

Fire and rescue authorities operate within in a clearly defined legislative and policy framework comprising of:

- The Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004;
- The Civil Contingencies Act 2004;
- The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005;
- The Fire and Rescue Services (Emergencies) (England) Order 2007;
- The Localism Act 2011;
- The Fire and Rescue National Framework for England.

4.3 The last formal external assurance of the Authority's operational effectiveness and performance in relation to its statutory duties was carried out in 2009 via a Peer Review process developed by the Chief Fire Officers Association in conjunction with the Local Government Association. Amongst other things, this review found that:

'Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire Authority (BMKFA) is operationally effective and, where evidence has been provided, the team is of the opinion that it is meeting its statutory duties'.

4.4 The full findings of the 2009 Peer Review are published on the Authority's website:

<http://www.bucksfire.gov.uk/NR/rdonlyres/2C1C1BF2-F909-471E-B1A7-D98786DB2D30/0/PeerReview.pdf>

4.5A further Peer Review of the Authority's operational effectiveness is scheduled to take place in 2014. Also, in anticipation of the forthcoming Peer Review, the Authority has recently conducted its own operational self-assessment using the Peer Review framework which considers the effectiveness of its:

- Approach to community risk management;
- Risk prevention processes and interventions;
- Processes and interventions for protecting people in public and commercial buildings and, in particular, ensuring compliance with the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005;
- Response to emergencies;
- Health and Safety arrangements;
- Call management and incident support.

4.6 Overall the self-assessment found the Authority's arrangements in respect of the above to be well established and effective. A number of improvement opportunities were also identified but none that would raise concerns about the Authority's operational competency. However all improvement opportunities have been catalogued in the self – assessment for inclusion in service improvement planning and for scrutiny by the external peer assessors.

5. INTEGRATED RISK MANAGEMENT PLANNING

5.1 The National Framework requires that Fire Authorities must produce an integrated risk management plan (IRMP) that identifies and assesses all foreseeable fire and rescue related risks that could affect its community, including those of a cross-border, multi-authority and/or national nature. The plan must have regard to the community risk registers produced by Local Resilience Forums and any other local risk analyses as appropriate. Each fire and rescue authority integrated IRMP must:

- be easily accessible and publicly available; and,
- reflect effective consultation throughout its development and at all review stages with the community, its workforce and representative bodies, and partners.

5.2 The Government guidance relating to statements of assurance requires that they should include details of IRMP consultations and, in

particular, that appropriate information was provided to enable active and informed participation.

5.3 Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire Authority regularly reviews the fire and rescue related risks to the community it serves and updates its IRMP in response to any material changes to the nature and level of the risks identified and assessed.

5.4 The Authority's current IRMP, known as the '2012-17 Public Safety Plan', is published on its website. This sets out the Authority's strategy for achieving its vision of making *'Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes the safest areas in England in which to live, work and travel'*:

<http://www.bucksfire.gov.uk/NR/rdonlyres/340BC385-8B34-4E54-B85B-6CA90ED05542/0/PSP201217.pdf>

5.5 The draft Public Safety Plan was subject to extensive consultations prior to the Authority reaching any decisions. The consultation process embraced key stakeholder groups including the general public, Authority staff, neighbouring fire and rescue services and a range of other organisations with a potential interest in the development of the plan. It also included the use of qualitative consultation methods such as 'community engagement forums' and focus groups which encourage participants to reflect in depth about their priorities for the Authority while both receiving and questioning background information and discussing service delivery issues in detail. Full details of the consultation process and its outcomes are available on the Authority's website:

<http://www.bucksfire.gov.uk/BucksFire/psp.htm>

5.6 The Authority has also established a framework of targets and measures to help it assess progress towards the achievement of its vision. Performance against the targets is reported to the Authority's Executive Committee on a regular basis whose role is to scrutinise any areas of under-performance together with proposals for corrective action. A summary of performance over the 2012/13 financial year is appended to this Statement.

6. MUTUAL AID, REGIONAL AND NATIONAL RESILIENCE

6.1 The National Framework requires fire authorities to consider risks of a cross-border, multi-authority and/or national nature and to make

appropriate provision for dealing with these. The Authority does this via:

- Its active participation in the Thames Valley Local Resilience Forum which comprises other Category 1 and 2 responders. The forum maintains a community risk register which the Authority considers as part of its integrated risk management planning process;
- Review of the National Risk Register, National Risk Assessment and National Resilience Planning Assumptions which are maintained by the UK Government Cabinet Office to inform planning in relation to major civil emergencies of a national or regional nature;
- Mutual aid agreements with neighbouring fire and rescue authorities which enable authorities to provide each other with additional resources to deal with emergencies that cannot be dealt with by an authority acting alone. Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire Authority maintains formal mutual aid agreements with all six of its neighbours – Bedfordshire and Luton, Hertfordshire, London, Royal Berkshire, Oxfordshire and Northamptonshire.

6.2 Also the Authority maintains specialist resources to enable it to deal with major civil emergencies such as major transport incidents, natural disasters and terrorist incidents. These include capabilities such as its Urban Search and Rescue, and, Water Rescue Teams which it deploys in support of other Authorities during major emergencies such as the instances of wide area flooding that have taken place in recent years. The cost of providing such assistance is recovered from requesting Authority.

7. DECLARATION

Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire Authority are satisfied that the financial, governance and operational assurance arrangements in place across the organisation meet the requirements set out in the National Framework.

Mark Jones
Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive

Councillor David Watson
Chairman, Overview and Audit Committee

Appendix 2012/13 Public Safety Plan Targets Performance Summary

Public Safety Plan - Performance against target 1st April 2012 to 31st March 2013

Key:

Red			Off target
Amber			Marginally off target
Green			On target

			Year-end Outturn	R A G	Year-end Target	Direction of Travel Vs. previous year
Prevention Priority 1 - Reducing the risks to people from fire in the home						
	IRMP1.1 Number of accidental dwelling fires	Lower is better	429	A	421	Negative
	IRMP1.2 Number of injuries arising from accidental dwelling fires per 100,000 population	Lower is better	2.78	G	3.04	Positive
	IRMP1.5a Number of Deliberate Dwelling Fires per 10,000 dwellings	Lower is better	0.87	G	1.31	Positive
	IRMP1.6cd Number of Home Safety Checks carried out	Higher is better	9507	G	6000	Positive
Prevention Priority 3 - Reducing the number of road traffic collisions						
	IRMP3.1 Reduction in number of killed and seriously injured in road traffic collisions	Lower is better	319	G	345	No Change
Prevention Priority 4 - Reducing ASB & improving social well-being						
	IRMP4.1a % False Alarm Malicious attended	Lower is better	46.4%	R	30%	Negative
Protection Priority 1 - Maintain risk based inspection and enforcing fire safety legislation						
	IRMP2.1 Number of non-domestic fires per 1,000 non-domestic properties	Lower is better	12.65	G	16.61	Positive
Response Priority 1 - Supporting a safe and effective response to incidents						
	IRMP2.2 Number of automatic fire alarms per 1,000 non domestic premises	Lower is better	48.8	G	53	Positive
	IRMP5.1 Number of killed & seriously injured from work related activities	Lower is better	0	G	0	No Change
	IRMP6.1 Per-cent of calls handled within 120 seconds	Higher is better	49.8%	R	75%	Negative
Response Priority 2 - Providing an effective response to fires, road traffic collisions & other incidents						
	IRMP5.2a Per-cent of incidents attended within 10 minutes	Higher is better	77.8%	A	80%	Negative
	IRMP5.2b Per-cent of incidents attended within 20 minutes	Higher is better	99.0%	G	99%	Positive
	IRMP5.3 Per-cent of pre-determined attendance correct for incidents within 20 minutes.	Higher is better	81.7%	A	90%	Positive