



Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Fire Authority

Meeting and date: Overview and Audit Committee, 19 July 2023

Report title: 2021/22 Statement of Assurance

Lead Member: Chairman, Overview and Audit Committee

Report sponsor: Graham Britten, Director of Legal and Governance

Author and contact: Stuart Gowanlock, Corporate Planning Manager

Action: Decision

Recommendations: That the 2021/22 Statement of Assurance be approved for signature by the Chairman of the Overview and Audit Committee and the Chief Fire Officer.

Executive summary:

The Fire and Rescue National Framework, published by the Department of Communities and Local Government in July 2012, introduced the requirement for fire and rescue authorities in England to produce a 'Statement of Assurance' on an annual basis. An updated National Framework was published in May 2018. This maintained the requirement that every authority must publish an annual statement of assurance of compliance with the Framework. The statements are 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.

The precise form, content and methodology used to prepare the 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.

Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire Authority already produces and publishes a variety of separate statements relating to financial, governance and operational performance such as the Annual Governance Statement and Annual Financial Statements. The draft 2021/22 Statement of Assurance, shown at Appendix 1, draws on, summarises, and includes relevant extracts from these more detailed assessments. Changes from the 2020/21 Statement of Assurance are shown as shaded text. Officers are of the view that collectively the assurance processes underpinning the range of existing statements covers the scope and nature of what is

required for the statement of assurance. However, with regard to section 2 of the Statement, concerning financial assurance, note that there have been delays to:

- the audit of the annual financial statements for the year ending 31 March 2022 (further details can be found within the public notice: <https://bucksfire.gov.uk/authority/audit-of-accounts/>); and,
- production of the appointed external auditors Audit Results Report for the year ended 31 March 2022.

The above items will be presented to the Overview and Audit Committee following completion and any material findings from them, included in the 2022/23 Statement of Assurance.

The statement of assurance should be signed off by an elected member of the Authority who is able to take responsibility for its contents. It is for authorities to decide who the most appropriate person is.

In respect of Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire Authority, officers are of the view that the most appropriate person is the Chairman of the Overview and Audit Committee.

Financial implications:

There are no direct financial implications arising from the production of the annual Statement of Assurance.

Risk management:

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.

Legal implications:

Section 21 of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 (FRSA 2004) provides the statutory authority for the National Framework and requires Fire and Rescue Authorities to 'have regard' to it in carrying out their functions. However, Section 22 of the Act 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".

Also "The Secretary of State must report to Parliament on—

(a) the extent to which fire and rescue authorities are acting in accordance with the Framework prepared under section 21;

(b) any steps taken by him for the purpose of securing that fire and rescue authorities act in accordance with the Framework".

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 Fire & Rescue Services Act 2004.

Privacy and security implications:

Following consultation with the Data Protection Officer, no privacy or security issues have been identified or associated with the Statement of Assurance.

Duty to collaborate:

The statement is designed to provide assurance in relation to the operations of the Authority and details any relevant collaborative work with the other Thames Valley Fire Authorities and other agencies.

Health and safety implications:

There are no direct health and safety implications arising from this report.

Environmental implications:

None identified.

Equality, diversity, and inclusion implications:

There are no direct equality, diversity or inclusion implications arising from this report.

Consultation and communication:

The requirement for Statements of Assurance arose from the revisions to the National Framework published by the Department for Communities and Local Government in July 2012. An evaluation of the implications of the new Framework was reported to the Fire Authority at its 27 September 2012 meeting.

The 2020/21 Statement of Assurance was approved on 16 March 2022:

<https://bucksfire.gov.uk/documents/2022/03/oa-item-12-160322.pdf/>

Background papers:

Appendix	Title	Protective Marking
1	Draft 2021/22 Statement of Assurance	None
2	CLG Guidance on Statements of Assurance	None