



Improvement Plans Assurance Review

September 2023



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Section 1: Background and Scope of Work



Background and Scope of Work

A holistic assurance review was carried out on the current improvement plans that are in place across Buckinghamshire's Fire & Rescue Service. The objective of the review was to develop an independent view of how the Service's plans fit together, created to support ongoing improvement across the Service, and identifying opportunities for improvement and, where appropriate, rationalisation. We agreed with the key stakeholders that our focus should be on the following areas:

- Interrogate previous reviews and internal audit reports to understand what improvement recommendations have been issued to the Service.
- Evaluate all existing improvement plans in order to understand what actions have been included, and how (or if) they link to previous reviews and internal audit reports.
- Conduct a thorough gap analysis by interviewing key contacts and reviewing any existing policy documentation and risk registers associated to continuous improvement within the Service.
- Assess and visually map the Service's existing reporting landscape and information flow, identifying opportunities to gain efficiencies and synergies.
- Identify any duplication and key themes across improvement plans to understand how they link together, and where improvements can be consolidated to ensure efficient and timely implementation.

Using the information obtained from the review of documentation, and the insights derived from facilitated workshops with key individuals across the Service, we have developed a visual "map of plans", detailing interdependencies, themes, synergies and triggers that relate to individual plans. Furthermore, we have identified current progress against actions across the Service, where this was documented across the materials.

Throughout the review, the stakeholders we met have been very helpful and receptive, and we would like to take this opportunity to thank them for their openness, cooperation and valuable contribution. Please find a full list of individuals that were interviewed as part of the review on slide 18.



Section 2: Executive Summary



Executive Summary

Improvement Plans Assurance Review

Alignment and Purpose of Plans

- We found evidence of solid project planning efforts across the Service, evidenced through improvement plans, action plans, objectives and strategy documents.
- We do, however, note that different terms are being used across Directorates to refer to “improvement plans”*, which means it is not always clear what the purpose of a document is. Some strategies or objectives overviews contain actions, whereas others do not.
- This means it can be difficult to maintain oversight of the number of improvement initiatives (or: action items) in place across the Service
- More robust and aligned wording is recommended to describe the plans that are put in place within Directorates in order to clarify the type of document and their purpose

Progress Tracking and Dashboards

- We note that some “improvement plans” contain their current status against actions and/or progress comments, whereas other documents do not.
- Different progress reporting methodologies are used, stretching from a RAG status to marking actions as “complete” or “ongoing”. There is no shared understanding of the usage of RAG colours, resulting in the colours holding a different meaning between Directorates.
- We recommend clarifying the reporting requirements for progress against actions (or objectives/commitments) for each plan and putting in place the required PM tools to allow for smoother reporting across the Service (i.e. Gantt chart or PowerBI dashboard)

Rationalisation of Plans and Governance Arrangements

- Alongside obtaining a visual overview of the number of “improvement plans” the Service has in place, we also reviewed their relevant governance arrangements and their linkage to internal or external triggers with the aim to identify opportunities for rationalisation and efficiencies.
- The Service has a clear governance structure in place, though we note that some “improvement plans” go through several forums for their inputs. Alongside clarifying the reporting requirements per plan (see “Progress Tracking and Dashboards”), we suggest reviewing the information flow to ensure that key stakeholders are kept up-to-date with progress against items.
- A self-reporting tool (i.e. PowerBI dashboard) can be put in place to visualise progress to remove the need to discuss progress updates in several forums.

Ownership and Prioritisation of Actions

- We note that not all “improvement plans” reference an owner against each action.
- Currently, there is limited, documented prioritisation of actions where they fall within the same category. Some actions may be marked as “in progress”, but in some cases it is unclear to what extent these actions need to be phased or prioritised based on their urgency.
- We recommend incorporating an action prioritisation approach to enhance project monitoring and management. A prioritisation matrix is recommended to categorise actions based on their urgency, impact and complexity.
- Assigning ownership to each action will also be critical to facilitate accountability and ensure that actions are addressed in a timely manner.

**Please refer to the Appendix for an overview of the documentation that forms part of this review. This slide refers to “improvement plans” for documents that we found contained actions, commitments or objectives.*



Section 3: Visual of Maps and Methodology



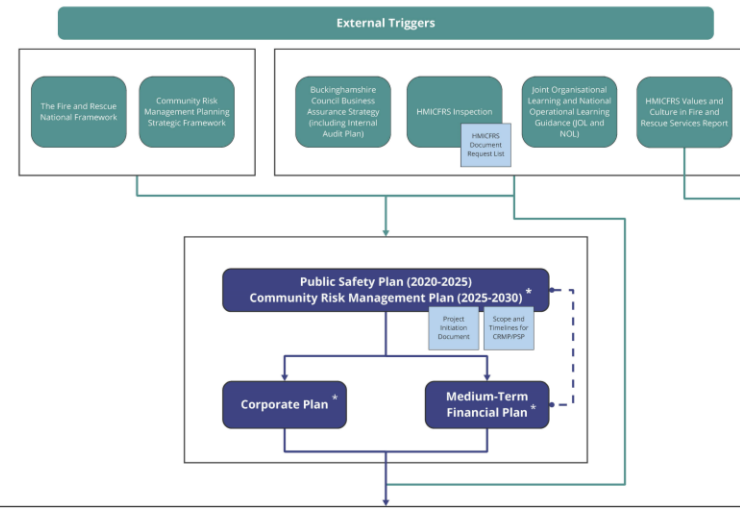
Visual Map of Plans Summary

Following our discussions and facilitated workshops with key stakeholders across the Service, we have developed a snapshot overview of the documentation the Service has in place in order to foster improvement across its Directorates.

This visual outlines the dependencies and interdependencies between individual documents, as well as external or internal triggers, such as His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services inspection, that were shared with us.

As this document will outline in the next slides, we note that different terms are being used across Directorates to refer to "improvement plans". As such, this overview contains all documentation that was shared with us that contain a degree of actions or commitments.

Please note that a separate PDF document has been provided to you which allows you to better see the details contained within the visual.

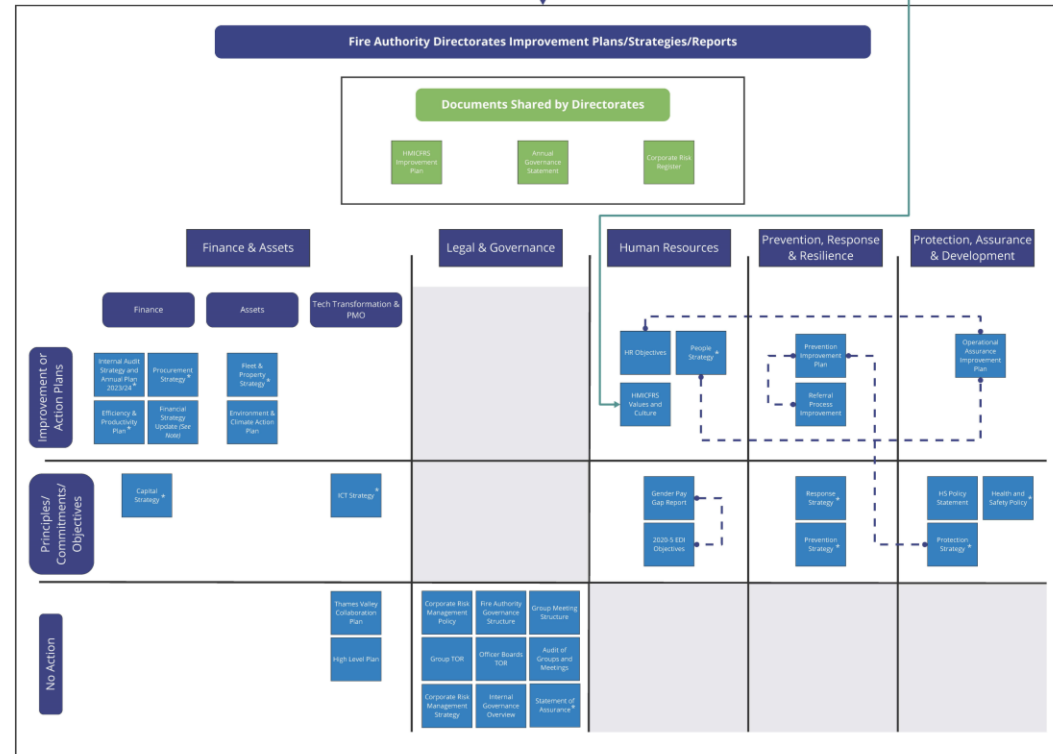


Key:

- Group of documents, triggers or plans
- B is dependant on A
- A and B are interdependent
- Part of the HMICFRS inspection

Disclaimer:
This overview should be read from top to bottom, showcasing the layers of plans across the Service and their external triggers. The Public Safety Plan, Corporate Plan and Medium-Term Financial Plan set the strategic and financial direction for the Service and subsequently, directly or indirectly, influence the Directorate plans, which is the final layer.





Note:
Whilst the Financial Strategy Update is not on the HMICFRS list, it does contain the Reserves Strategy, which is on the list.



Methodology

Document Review

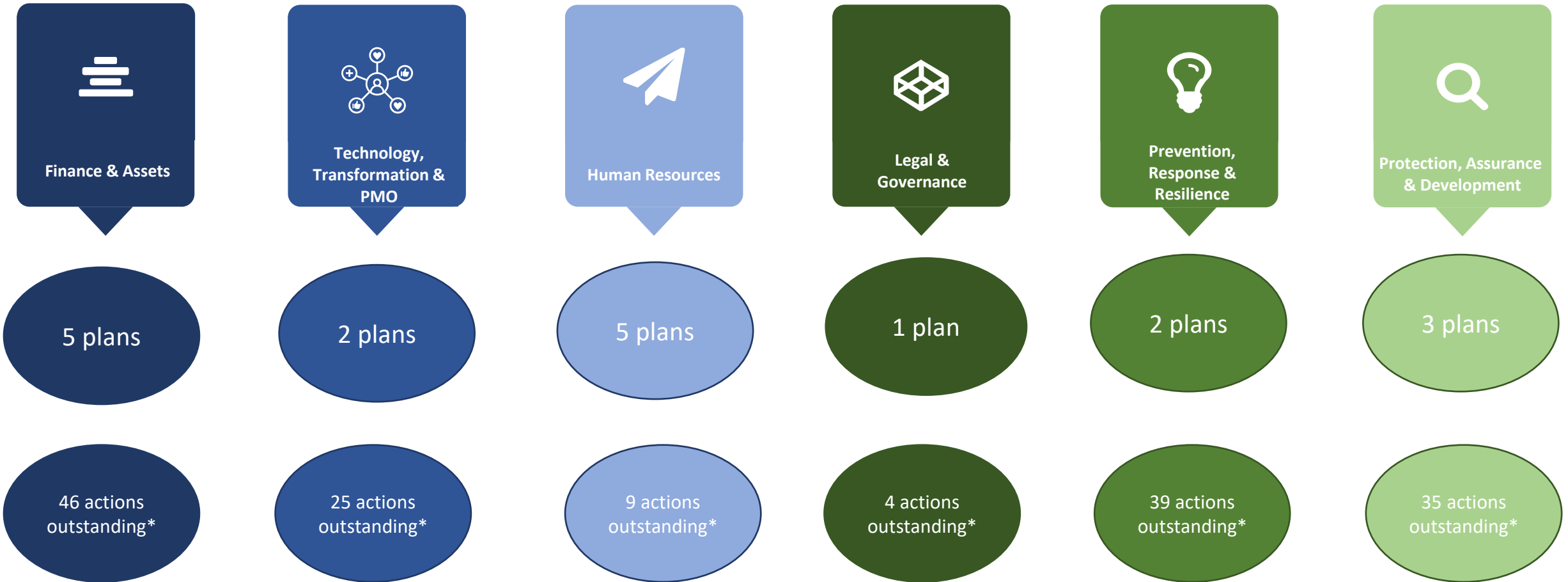
- As part of our documentation review, we received 43 documents from the Directorates, including action plans, strategies, reports, policies, objectives, and statements.
- We identified three key categories/themes across these documents:
 - **Improvement or Action Plan** – 15 documents
 - **Principles or Commitments or Objectives** – 9 documents
 - **No actions** – 19 documents *
- We note that whilst some of these plans contain clear action points, others solely contain principles and objectives which are not always documented through the “SMART” methodology, meaning progress tracking can be difficult.
- As part of our assessment, we have reviewed the number of improvement plans for each Directorate, and the status of action points in terms of rates of completion versus outstanding actions. This is discussed in the following slides.
- As mentioned, we note that there are inconsistencies in the way progress tracking is done across the Service’s Directorates, particularly when using RAG rating. This can be demonstrated in the table on the right, with each colour referring to various different meanings.

RAG rating	Meanings across different plans
Blue 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete • Business As Usual (BAU)
Green 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ongoing • On track • Proceeding as planned / delivering expected benefits • Done, and continuing to maintain this • Complete
Amber 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In progress • Behind plan / not delivering expected benefits, but recoverable • Behind schedule • New target date set
Red 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Behind plan / not delivering expected benefits, and irrecoverable • Delayed • Not started • Unsuccessfully implemented

Improvement Plans Assurance Review (1/4)

Top-Level Progress Overview

The visual below provides a summary of each Directorate and the number of plans they have in place. Please refer to the Appendix for an overview of documents that we have considered as either “improvement or action plans” and “Principles / Commitments / Objectives documents”. The overview also covers how many actions are outstanding versus completed across the Directorate and its plans.



BUCKINGHAMSHIRE COUNCIL

Please note that this information was based on the latest document we have received, and we understand that progress may have been made since then.

Improvement Plans Assurance Review (2/4)

Top-Level Progress Overview

KEY:

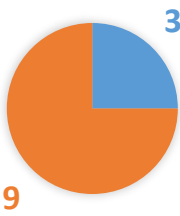
Complete

Outstanding

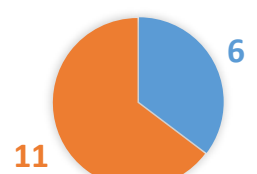


Finance & Assets

Environment & Climate Action Plan Update



Financial Strategy Update



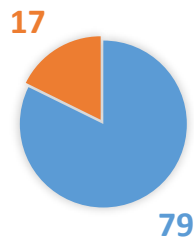
Procurement Strategy

15 actions, no status

Fleet & Property Strategy



Internal Audit Report



Document	Version	RAG	Other methodology?
Environment & Climate Action Plan Update	12 Jul 2023	✓	✗
Financial Strategy Update	12 Jul 2023	✓	✗
Fleet & Property Strategy	12 Jul 2023	✗	✓ - comments, including 'completed', 'ongoing', or 'target date for completion'
Internal Audit Report	15 Mar 2023	✗	✓ - priority rating and action progress (%)
Efficiency & Productivity Plan	Not dated	✗	✓ - 'complete' or 'in progress'
Procurement Strategy	09 Nov 2022	✗	✗ - no status



Technology, Transformation & PMO

ICT Strategy

Vision, mission and principles, no status

Document	Version	RAG	Other methodology?
HMICFRS Improvement Plan	May 2023	✗	✓ - 'complete', 'on track', 'delayed', or 'not started'
ICT Strategy	Feb 2021	✗	✗ - no status

His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) Improvement Plan



Improvement Plans Assurance Review (3/4)

Top-Level Progress Overview

KEY:

Complete

Outstanding

Human Resources

HMICFRS Values and Culture

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Objectives

8 objectives, no status

Gender Pay Gap Report

4 objectives, no status

Human Resources (HR) Objectives

4 core objectives, no status

People Strategy

5 Equality Impact areas, no status

Document	Version	RAG	Other methodology?
HMICFRS Values and Culture	14 Jun 2023	✓	✗
EDI Objectives	14 Jun 2023	✗	✗ - no status
Gender Pay Gap Report	22 Mar 2023	✗	✗ - no status
HR Objectives	Not dated	✗	✗ - no status
People Strategy	12 Oct 2022	✗	✗ - no status

Legal & Governance

Annual Governance Statement

Document	Version	RAG	Other methodology?
Annual Governance Statement	20 Jul 2022	✓	✗

Improvement Plans Assurance Review (4/4)

Top-Level Progress Overview

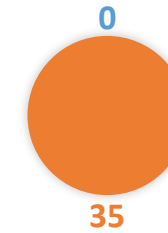
KEY:

Complete

Outstanding



Document	Version	RAG?	Other methodology?
Prevention Improvement Plan	Jul 2023	✓	✗
Referral Process Improvement	Not dated	✗	✓ - 'complete' or 'in progress'



7 objectives, no status



13 principles, no status

Document	Version	RAG?	Other methodology?
Operational Assurance Improvement Plan	09 Nov 2022	✓	✗
Health & Safety Policy	Aug 2022	✗	✗ - no status
HS Policy Statement	Aug 2022	✗	✗ - no status



Section 4: Document Governance



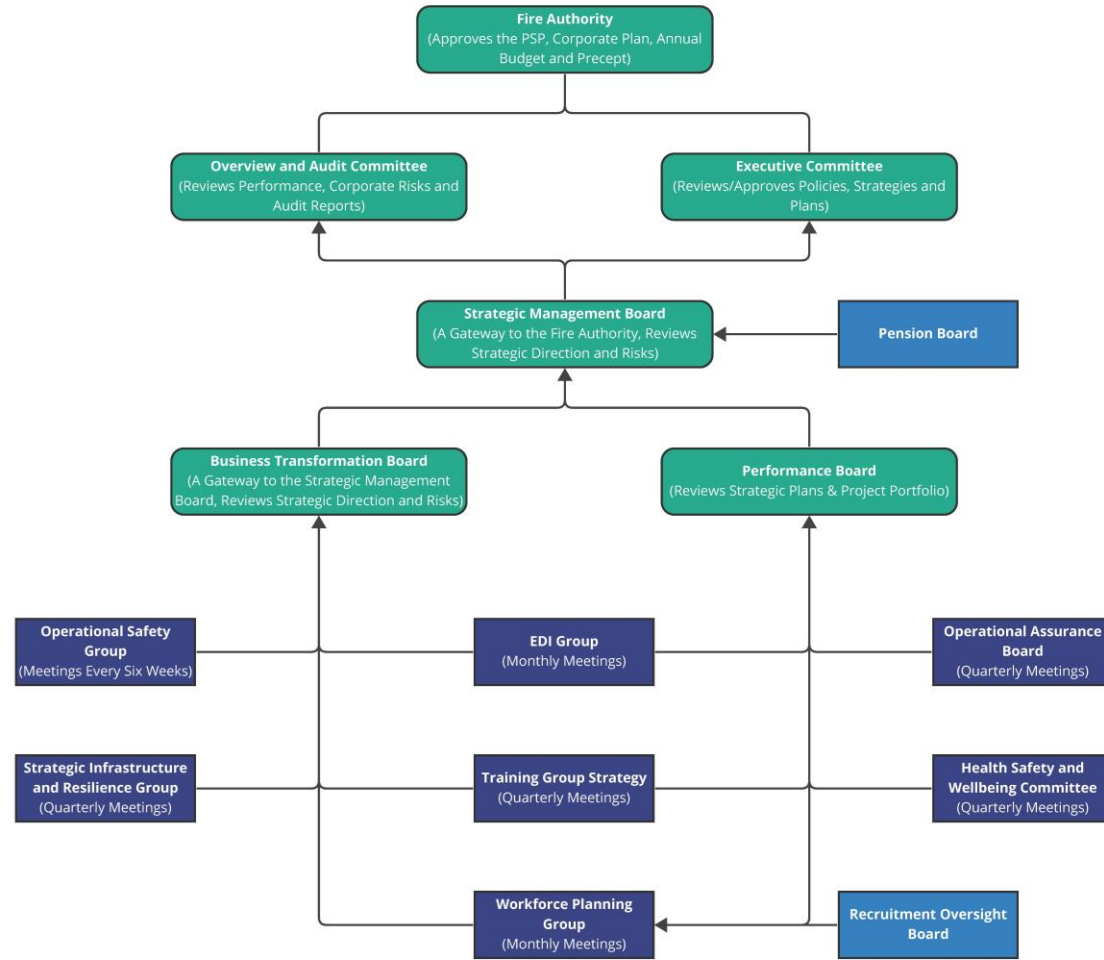
Improvement Plans Governance Boards

We have developed a snapshot overview of the governance arrangements we understand the Service has in place to obtain sign-off for its plans. The visual on this slide outlines the different Boards that exist across the Service and how often they meet.

Please note that a separate PDF document has been provided to you which allows you to better see the details contained within the visual.

The next two slides showcase “which document goes where”, where we were able to source this information. Please note we have solely included documents that we have considered as either “improvement or action plans” and “Principles / Commitments / Objectives documents”.

Please see the Appendix for further details on this split.



Disclaimer:
Source: Terms of Reference Groups document. The frequency at which these Groups and Boards meet has been shown, where this information was available.
It should be noted that the JCF does not have any decision-making authority, and is a mechanism for awareness and discussion.




Joint Consultation Forum




























Improvement Plans Governance

What goes where?

The grids on slides 16-18 show that some documents go through several forums for key stakeholder input before final sign-off is obtained. These individuals may, or may not, expect to be updated on key progress made against improvement initiatives throughout the year. The latter will be difficult to achieve without setting out clear reporting requirements, which has meant that some progress updates on some plans date back to October 2022. Please note we have solely included documents that we have considered as either “improvement or action plans” and “Principles / Commitments / Objectives documents”.

KEY:


-  Risks/issues escalation
-  General progress reporting
-  Final sign-off
-  Draft sign-off/input








































Document name	Owner (Directorate)	JCF	OSG	SIRG	EDIG	TSG	WPG	OAG	HSWC	PMB	BTB	SMB	OAC	EC	FA
Public Safety Plan	N/A														
2020-2025 Corporate Plan	N/A														
Environment and Climate Action Plan Update	Finance & Assets														
Financial Strategy Update	Finance & Assets														
Fleet and Property Strategy	Finance & Assets														
Internal Audit Report - Update on Progress of Audit Management Actions March 2023	Finance & Assets														
Procurement Strategy 2022-6	Finance & Assets														
Annual Governance Statement 2021/2	N/A														
Prevention Improvement Plan	Prevention, Response & Resilience														

Improvement Plans Governance

What goes where?

KEY:


-  Risks/issues escalation
-  General progress reporting
-  Final sign-off
-  Draft sign-off/input






















Document name	Owner (Directorate)	JCF	OSG	SIRG	EDIG	TSG	WPG	OAG	HSWC	PMB	BTB	SMB	OAC	EC	FA
HMICFRS Improvement Plan	Technology, Transformation & PMO														
2020-5 EDI Objectives	Human Resources									 		 			
Operational Assurance Improvement Plan	Protection, Assurance and Development		 												
Medium-Term Financial Plan	Finance & Assets										 	 			
Gender Pay Gap Report 2022	Human Resources													 	
Referral process improvement	Prevention, Response & Resilience														
ICT Strategy	Technology, Transformation & PMO														
Health and Safety Policy Version 5 - August 2020	Protection, Assurance and Development														
HS Policy Statement August 2022	Protection, Assurance and Development														
Protection Strategy 2023-2024 V4 May 2023	Protection, Assurance and Development														

Improvement Plans Governance

What goes where?

KEY:

-  Risks/issues escalation
-  General progress reporting
-  Final sign-off
-  Draft sign-off/input

Document name	Owner (Directorate)	JCF	OSG	SIRG	EDIG	TSG	WPG	OAG	HSWC	PMB	BTB	SMB	OAC	EC	FA
Response strategy	Prevention, Response & Resilience														
Prevention Strategy 2022-2025	Prevention, Response & Resilience														
People Strategy 2020-2025	Human Resources										 	 			 
HMICFRS Values and Culture and Exploring our Culture	Human Resources														
HR Objectives 2023-2024	Human Resources														




Section 5: Observations







Improvement Plans

High-Level Observations and Areas of Improvement

KEY:



-  High priority
-  Medium priority
-  Low priority




Observations/ Insights	RAG	Improvement Opportunities
<p>Linkage to overarching strategy – The Service have both a Public Safety Plan and a Corporate Plan in place, the former being a public document which is co-created with residents and communities. These plans are both refreshed on a 5-year basis as a minimum. Whilst some individual Directorate plans create clear links between their strategy and the Service’s overarching Corporate Plan, others do not. This may lead to challenges when reporting upon progress against the Corporate Plan within Directorates, whilst it may also signal that not all plans currently in place, follow the direction set at management level within the Service.</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider creating closer linkages between these plans by reflecting the strategic objectives and strategic enablers contained within the Corporate Plan in individual Directorate plans • Documenting the linkage between proposed actions and the Corporate Plan helps to set out the rationale behind the individual Directorate plan’s purpose and the overall vision for the Service
<p>Alignment of plans within Service: Following our document review, we note that whilst some Directorates use the term “improvement plan”, other Directorates refer to their plans as a “report”, “strategy”, or “objectives”. Whilst some of these documents contain actions or tasks identified for continuous improvement, others do not. Furthermore, we note that some plans contain current status or progress comments, whereas in other documents, this detail is lacking.</p> <p>Due to the lack of consistency between Directorates in how they document their strategies, action plans and progress reports, and what these documents are titled, it can be difficult to maintain oversight of the number of improvement initiatives in place across the Service. Additionally, because not all documents contain a status against each action, an overall view of progress across the Service is challenging to obtain.</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More robust and aligned wording is recommended to describe the plans that are put in place within Directorates in order to clarify the type of document and their purpose • As a next step, clarify the reporting requirements for progress against actions (or objectives/commitments) for each plan and put in place the required project management tools to allow for smoother reporting (i.e. Gantt chart)
<p>Progress reporting methodology: We understand that different progress reporting methodologies are used within each Directorate, stretching from a RAG status to marking actions as “complete” or “ongoing”. We also note that there is currently no shared understanding of the usage of RAG colours, resulting in the colours (blue, red, amber, green) holding a different meaning between Directorates. For example, green means “completed” to some, whereas it means “in progress” to others. This can lead to difficulties in cross-Directorate reporting and may even lead to misinterpretations of data. Please also refer to slide 10.</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a standardised RAG rating template to align interpretations of colours across Directorates within the Service, as a “single source of truth”
<p>Rationalisation of HR plans - Following our documentation review, we conclude that 15 out of 28 documents across the whole Service formed part of the HMICFRS inspection for 2023-2025. As such, it is good practice to keep these documents separate. However, we note that the Human Resources Directorate currently has five plans in place, which all contain either actions or commitments/objectives. Four out of five plans currently do not have a status reported against these actions or commitments/objectives. Please see slides 12-14 for further detail.</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify the reason for the lack of progress updates made on the plans the Human Resources Directorate have in place. Ensure progress updates are documented on a reoccurring basis • Consider rationalising and/or merging individual plans such as the HR objectives and the EDI objectives to gain better oversight of the plans in place within the Directorate, and to speed up reporting efforts

Improvement Plans

High-Level Observations and Areas of Improvement

KEY:

-  High priority
-  Medium priority
-  Low priority

Observations/ Insights	RAG	Improvement Opportunities
<p>Prioritisation and ownership of action items – Whereas most Directorates utilise some form of progress tracking against each action item (whether that is through a RAG rating or otherwise), we note that there is limited, documented prioritisation of actions where they fall within the same category. For example, some actions may be marked as “in progress”, but in some cases it is unclear to what extent these actions need to be phased or prioritised based on their urgency.</p> <p>Additionally, we note that not all action plans reference an owner against each action.</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> While a RAG status offers a quick snapshot of project progress, we recommend incorporating an action prioritisation approach to enhance project monitoring and management A prioritisation matrix is recommended to categorise actions based on their urgency, impact and complexity to allow stakeholders to focus on critical actions Assign ownership to each action to facilitate accountability and ensure that actions are addressed in a timely manner
<p>Cross-over between strategy plans and action plans – We note that, dependent on the Directorate, some strategic plans or strategy documents contain action items (i.e. People Strategy, Fleet & Property Strategy), whereas other Directorates keep these items separate (Prevention Strategy). When action items are included within a strategic plan, this forms a requirement to keep the document “live” in order to track progress against actions. Some Directorates may find that splitting their strategic plans from their action plans leads to a clearer distinction between the overarching vision and the tasks required to achieve that vision.</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Where strategic plans or strategy documents contain actions, consider splitting these out as a separate action plan to avoid creating multiple versions of the original strategic plan Ensure these actions are discussed and progress is logged on a reoccurring basis; frequency will be dependent on the plan in question Whenever changes are made to the action plan, this should be saved as a new version to create an audit trail
<p>Documentation governance arrangements – In this report (slides 18 and 19), we have set out the governance arrangements we understand the Service has in place to inform its key decision makers of progress made against actions, or to obtain final sign-off for a plan. These arrangements are not always clarified for each plan, and we note that some plans go through several forums before they are shared with the Fire Authority / Executive Committee / Overview and Audit Committee. Whilst this sequence may be required for some plans, there might be an opportunity for rationalisation (i.e. 2020-5 EDI Objectives which is discussed in five forums).</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Carry out a review of the different forums the Service has in place to understand their scope, and by whom they are attended. Understand whether rationalisation of certain forums is appropriate, particularly where they are mostly attended by the same individuals, in order to free up senior management time. A PowerBI dashboard can be put in place to visualise progress against each individual plan to remove the need to discuss progress updates in several forums across the Service. This would create a self-service reporting tool which can be accessed by stakeholders on an as-needed basis.



Appendix



Document Review

Materials In Scope

Document received	Directorate	Category
Fire Authority Governance structure	Legal & Governance	No Actions
Officer Boards Terms of Reference	Legal & Governance	No Actions
Groups Terms of Reference	Legal & Governance	No Actions
Public Safety Plan	Strategy	Improvement or Action Plan
2020-2025 Corporate Plan	Strategy	Improvement or Action Plan
Environment and Climate Action Plan Update	Finance & Assets	Improvement or Action Plan
Financial Strategy Update	Finance & Assets	Improvement or Action Plan
Fleet and Property Strategy	Finance & Assets	Improvement or Action Plan
Internal Audit Report - Update on Progress of Audit		
Management Actions March 2023	Finance & Assets	Improvement or Action Plan
Procurement Strategy 2022-6	Finance & Assets	Improvement or Action Plan
Annual Governance Statement 2021/2	Legal & Governance	Principles or Commitments or Objectives
Corporate Risk Management Strategy	Legal & Governance	No Actions
Prevention Improvement Plan	Prevention, Response & Resilience	Improvement or Action Plan
HMICFRS Improvement Plan	Technology, Transformation & PMO	Improvement or Action Plan
2020-5 EDI Objectives	Human Resources	Principles or Commitments or Objectives
Operational Assurance Improvement Plan	Protection, Assurance and Development	Improvement or Action Plan
Efficiency and Productivity Plan	Finance & Assets	No Actions
Capital Strategy	Finance & Assets	No Actions
Medium-Term Financial Plan	Finance & Assets	No Actions
Gender Pay Gap Report 2022	Human Resources	Principles or Commitments or Objectives
HMICFRS document request list	External	No Actions

Document Review

Materials In Scope

Document received	Directorate	Category
Referral process improvement	Prevention, Response & Resilience	Improvement or Action Plan
Thames Valley Collaboration Business Plan 2022-2027	Technology, Transformation & PMO	No Actions
2023-34 High Level Plan	Technology, Transformation & PMO	No Actions
Inphase Performance Management System (website)	N/A	No Actions
Community Risk Management Planning strategic framework	External	No Actions
ICT Strategy	Technology, Transformation & PMO	Principles or Commitments or Objectives
Health and Safety Policy Version 5 - August 2020	Protection, Assurance and Development	Principles or Commitments or Objectives
HS Policy Statement August 2022	Protection, Assurance and Development	Principles or Commitments or Objectives
Protection Strategy 2023-2024 V4 May 2023	Protection, Assurance and Development	Principles or Commitments or Objectives
Response strategy	Prevention, Response & Resilience	Principles or Commitments or Objectives
Prevention Strategy 2022-2025	Prevention, Response & Resilience	Principles or Commitments or Objectives
2025-30 CRMP and Corporate Plan scope and timelines	Strategy	No Actions
Project Initiation Document for the 2025-30 CRMP	Strategy	Improvement or Action Plan
Internal Governance Overview - 17 May 2022	Legal & Governance	No Actions
Board - Group Meeting Structure	Legal & Governance	No Actions
Audit of Groups and Meetings	Legal & Governance	No Actions
2021-2022 Statement of Assurance (annual)	Legal & Governance	No Actions
Corporate Risk Management Policy	Legal & Governance	No Actions
Corporate Risk Register	Legal & Governance	Risk Management and Mitigations
People Strategy 2020-2025	Human Resources	Improvement or Action Plan
HMICFRS Values and Culture and Exploring our Culture	Human Resources	Improvement or Action Plan
HR Objectives 2023-2024	Human Resources	Improvement or Action Plan

Document Governance

List of Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Meaning
JCF	Joint Consultation Forum
OSG	Operational Safety Group
SIRG	Strategic Infrastructure & Resilience Group
EDIG	EDI Group
TSG	Training Strategy Group
WPG	Workforce Planning Group
OAG	Operational Assurance Group
HSWC	Health, Safety & Wellbeing Committee
PMB	Performance Monitoring Board
BTB	Business Transformation Board
SMB	Strategic Management Board
OAC	Overview and Audit Committee
EC	Executive Committee
FA	Fire Authority

Stakeholder interviews held

Overview

Name	Role
Mark Hemming	Director of Finance & Assets
Anne-Marie Carter	Head of Technology, Transformation & PMO
Simon Tuffley	Head of Prevention, Response & Resilience
Calum Bell	Head of Protection, Assurance & Development
Anne Stunell	Head of Human Resources
Stuart Gowanlock	Corporate Planning Manager
