



DEVON &
SOMERSET
FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE

Devon and Somerset Fire & Rescue Service

2013-14 Annual Statement of
Assurance

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1. Background

The Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG) Requirements

The revised Fire and Rescue National Framework for England sets out the requirement for fire and rescue authorities to publish Statements of Assurance. It says:

‘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 and the requirements included in the Framework. To provide assurance, fire and rescue authorities must publish an annual Statement of Assurance’.

One of the principal aims of the Statement of Assurance is to provide an accessible way in which communities, Government, local authorities and other partners may make a valid assessment of their local fire and rescue authority’s performance.

The Statement of Assurance will be used as a source of information on which to base the Secretary of State’s biennial report under section 25 of the *Fire and Rescue Act 2004*.

The Statement of Assurance should be signed off by an elected member of the relevant authority who is able to take responsibility for its contents.

Statements of assurance should be published annually by fire and rescue authorities. It is for fire and rescue authorities to decide when they should publish depending on individual reporting arrangements.

Accounts and Audit (England) Regulations 2011 Requirements

The Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue Authority (the Authority) is responsible for ensuring that its business is conducted in accordance with the law and proper standards, and that public money is safeguarded and properly accounted for, and used economically, efficiently and effectively. The Authority also has a duty under the Local Government Act 1999 to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness.

The *Accounts and Audit (England) Regulations 2011* requires authorities to prepare an annual governance statement in support of this statement of accounts. This governance statement is an expression of the measures taken by the authority to ensure appropriate business practice, high standards of conduct and sound governance.

Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue Service Approach

The Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue Service (the Service) has established a Corporate Governance group to periodically review the governance arrangements. The group consists of Managers from the following teams:

- Audit & Review
- Democratic Services & Corporate Support
- Finance
- Risk & Insurance
- Procurement
- Information Assurance
- Operations

It was agreed that the most appropriate way to manage both requirements is through the creation of one assurance report entitled 'Annual Statement of Assurance'.

2. Financial Assurance

Statement of Accounts

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 (CIPFA) which aims to give a "true and fair" view of the financial position and transactions of the authority.

The Treasurer is responsible for the approval of the statement of accounts prior to publication. To ensure that External Audit requirements are met, the draft statement of accounts is produced by the end of June with the final audited statement of accounts published by the end of September.

External Audit Arrangements

On an annual basis, the statement of accounts is subject to External Audit scrutiny. Following the recent changes to the Audit Commission and the subsequent regional procurement exercise, Grant Thornton has been appointed as the External Auditors for the South West region.

Grant Thornton is therefore responsible for the completion of the following assurance activities:

- Audit of the 2013-14 financial statements
- Proposed opinion on the Authority's accounts
- Proposed Value for Money conclusion

Internal Audit Arrangements

To support the External Audit process, the Service has in place a robust system for Internal Auditing. The Audit & Review Team has worked with Senior Managers and Members to develop strategic and annual audit plans that are delivered across the organisation. The plan includes a contract with the Devon Audit Partnership to delivery specialised key financial and ICT audits.

Performance against the plan is reported to Senior Managers and Members on a quarterly basis, with a year-end report produced in April/May time. The Internal audit plan was successfully delivered in 2013-14.

The 2013-14 year end Internal Audit report concluded that the Service has an effective control framework for managing the key financial systems.

Data Transparency

The Service has utilised the CLG 'Code of Recommended Practice for Local Authorities on Data Transparency' when releasing public data. The following activities are in place:

- A Freedom of Information Publication Scheme
- The publication of our annual statement of accounts
- The publication of all expenditure over £500
- The publication of all senior employee salaries
- The publication of Members allowances and expenses
- The publication of External Audit reports
- The publication of all committee reports

The Service is currently reviewing the updated Local government transparency code 2014, to ensure the requirements can be demonstrated.

3. Governance

Code of Corporate Governance

The Authority has approved and adopted a code of corporate governance, which is consistent with the principles of the CIPFA/SOLACE framework Delivering Good Governance in Local Government. A copy of the code is on the Authority's website at www.dsfire.gov.uk or can be obtained from the Clerk to the Authority. This Statement explains how the Authority has complied with the code and also meets the requirements of regulation 4(2) of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2011 (as amended) in relation to the publication of a statement on internal control.

The Purpose of the Governance Framework

The governance framework comprises the systems and processes, and culture and values, by which the Authority is directed and controlled and its activities through which it

accounts to, engages with and leads the community. It enables the Authority to monitor the achievement of its strategic objectives and to consider whether those objectives have led to the delivery of appropriate, cost-effective services.

The system of internal control is a significant part of the framework and is designed to manage risk to a reasonable level. It cannot eliminate all risk of failure to achieve policies, aims and objectives and can therefore only provide reasonable and not absolute assurance of effectiveness. The system of internal control is based on an ongoing process designed to identify and prioritise the risks to the achievement of the Authority's policies, aims and objectives, to evaluate the likelihood of those risks being realised and the impact should they be realised, and to manage them efficiently, effectively and economically.

The governance framework has been in place for the Authority up to the year ended 31 March 2014 and up to the date of consideration of the statement of accounts.

Review of Effectiveness

The Authority has responsibility for conducting, at least annually, a review of the effectiveness of its governance framework including the system of internal control. The review of the effectiveness is informed by the work of the executive managers within the Authority who have responsibility for the development and maintenance of the governance environment, the Head of Internal Audit's annual report, and also by comments made by the external auditors and other review agencies and inspectorates. The 2012/13 review identified the following key elements to the Authority's governance framework:

- a. The Authority (a combination of the former Devon Fire & Rescue Authority and Somerset County Council as a fire authority) was constituted under the Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Authority (Combination Scheme) Order 2006. The Authority has strategic responsibility for discharging fire and rescue authority functions for the combined area with the day-to-day responsibility resting with the Chief Fire Officer and the Executive Board.
- b. The Authority is made up of 24 Members appointed by the constituent authorities. In addition, there is an "independent person" appointed in accordance with the requirements of the Localism Act 2011.
- c. The Authority operates with the following committee structure:-
 - Resources Committee
 - Human Resources Management and Development Committee;
 - Audit and Performance Review Committee;
 - Community Safety and Corporate Planning Committee;
 - Determinations and Dispensations Committee;
 - Commercial Services Committee;
 - Capital Programme Working Party.

Terms of reference for each of these bodies have been approved and are subject to annual review.

- d. The Audit and Performance Review Committee operates in accordance with the CIPFA best practice guidance on audit committees. It provides an additional level of review and scrutiny of the organisations internal and external audit arrangements (including consideration and monitoring of any reports and associated action plans and), corporate governance and risk arrangements, financial statements (Annual Statement of Accounts). The Committee has responsibility for the operation of the organisations strategy for the prevention and detection of fraud and corruption and monitors the organisations performance against those measures contained in the approved Corporate Plan (which incorporates the organisation's integrated risk management plan).
- e. The constitutional governance arrangements are contained in the following documents:-
- Members Roles and Responsibilities
 - Standing orders
 - Financial Regulations
 - Treasury Management Policy
 - Procurement and Contract Regulations
 - Scheme of Delegations
 - Members Code of Conduct
 - Protocol for Member / Officer Relations
 - Policy on Register for Gifts and Hospitality
 - Scheme of Members Allowances
 - Corporate Governance Code
 - "Whistleblowing" Code (Confidential Reporting Policy)
 - Strategy on the prevention and Detection of Fraud and Corruption
 - Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity

These documents are subject to review at least annually and are updated as and when necessary to reflect legislative change or best practice, as relevant, to ensure they remain up-to-date and fit for purpose.

- f. The Treasurer is responsible for ensuring that effective financial stewardship is in place across the Service in conducting the business of the Authority. The Authority's financial management arrangements conform to the governance requirements of the CIPFA Statement on the Role of the Chief Financial Officer in Local Government.
- g. The statutory functions of the Section 112 and Monitoring Officers provide a source of assurance that the organisation's systems of governance and internal control are effective and being complied with.
- h. The 2013/14 Internal Audit Plan was approved by the Audit and Performance Review Committee on the 8 May 2013. The plan sets out the combined scope of internal audit work to be completed by the Audit & Review Team and the Devon Audit Partnership. A total of 370 Internal Audit days were utilised to provide assurance to the Authority relating to the management of risks and associated operational activities. The Audit & Review Team and the Devon Audit Partnership are accountable for the delivery of the plan and the policy includes the requirement to report progress to the Audit and Performance Review Committee at least three times per year. The Authority's shared service Internal Audit arrangements conform to the

governance requirements of the CIPFA Statement on the Role of the Head of Internal Audit in public service organisations.

- i. The operation of the Authority's Corporate Risk Register is periodically reviewed by Service management to ensure that risks to the Authority's strategic objectives and corporate plans are appropriately identified and managed.
- j. A new Health & Safety system has been procured that includes a risk management module. Service risk registers are now being populated and reviewed periodically.
- k. The 2013/14 External Audit provision was provided by Grant Thornton. The scope of the External Audit work includes the Accounting Statements and Whole of Government Accounts and a Value for Money Statement. No significant issues have arisen to date from the External Audit work completed in 2013/14.
- l. The Authority participates in the National Fraud Initiative scheme. No significant issues have arisen to date from the data matches in 2012/13.
- m. The Service has a Health & Safety Joint Safety Committee which meets every 2 months to monitor health, safety and welfare of employees as per section 2(7) of the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974.
- n. A Health & Safety Audit Plan has been rolled out to ensure all Devon and Somerset premises are audited against Health & Safety service policies.
- o. An Operational Assurance Team has been established. As part of the 'Safe Person Concept' the Operational Safety Assurance Team monitors and reports on a variety of activities linked to Operational Response.
- p. A single strategic programme has been established that applies programme and project management approaches and standards to corporate projects, including changes as a result of the corporate planning proposals.
- q. An Information Assurance Manager has been appointed to manage our information governance processes. This year has seen the successful conclusion of the Secure Information Interchange Programme and the achievement of the Public Services Network (PSN) certification. Information assurance policies are in place and a supporting culture is being developed to ensure compliance with the Security Policy Framework and the Data Protection Act.
- r. The Procurement Team has applied a category management approach for managing organisational spends. This has included prioritising high spend areas and identifying any significant spend areas that are currently not managed through a central contract.
- s. Red One Ltd has been established to allow the Service to deliver commercial activities within the legislative framework that applies. The Authority has taken legal advice to ensure compliance with governance arrangements.
- t. Our Equality Plan for 2012-2016 'Safer Lives, Brighter Futures' sets out our commitment and approach to equalities, both in the workplace and the community. It sets out what we need to do to meet our legal responsibilities and to achieve the 'excellent' level of the national Fire & Rescue Service Equality Framework. The plan is monitored by the corporate Equality Steering Group which has representatives from across the service, including the staff networks and representative bodies.

- u. The Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue Service Governance Officer Group, comprising of Service Managers from Audit & Review, Finance, Democratic Services, Risk & Insurance, Procurement, Information Assurance and Operations meets at least annually to complete a review of the Authority's governance arrangements.

The review has concluded that there are good systems and processes in place to manage the Authority's governance arrangements.

4. Operational Assurance

Statutory Responsibility

Fire and rescue authorities function within a clearly defined statutory and policy framework. The key documents setting this out are:

- 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

The Devon and Somerset Fire & Rescue Service has the following internal assurance processes and activities to ensure its statutory responsibilities are met:

Corporate Planning

On an annual basis, Devon and Somerset Fire & Rescue Service produces a [Corporate Plan](#). This is published on the Service Internet.

The plan also incorporates the requirements of Integrated Risk Management Action Planning where the Service seeks to balance and match its resources to the level of community risk.

In addition to and complementing the Corporate Plan, the Service develops a bespoke Local Community Plan for each community area around its fire stations. Each plan is unique to that area and contains the actions the Service will take to reduce risk and improve community safety. The plans are informed by a community risk profile which brings together historic incident data, demographic, commercial and infrastructure risk factors.

The involvement of stakeholders and partners in developing future plans is important as it is recognised that their involvement will not only help raise awareness of the Service's plans but may help to identify new approaches. Stakeholders are invited to comment on the proposed changes included in the Draft Corporate Plan to ensure that before any decision is taken that all perspectives are taken into account.

Partnership Working

Sir Ken Knight's Facing the Future report recognises that collaborative and partnership working are key elements of driving future efficiencies. The Service has embraced this approach by combining in 2007 and continuing to seek opportunities to work in partnership with other organisations, community groups, etc and to collaborate with other organisations where appropriate.

The Service is committed to forming or joining partnerships that assist it achieving its organisational goals and contribute to its Mission of Acting to Protect and Save. We continue to strengthen our partnership working around common objectives at the local, regional and national level. Improving community safety is a major priority and we also contribute to wider community objectives identified in Local Area Agreements where appropriate.

The Service is involved in effective multi agency liaison arrangements, joint exercises and the sharing of resources which contribute to an enhanced incident response. Effective arrangements are in place to collaborate with partners through Local Resilience Forums (LRFs), the National Inter-Agency Liaison Officers (NILO) network, the Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Programme (JESIP), the Critical National Infrastructure (CNI) and Safety Advisory Groups which support multi-agency planning activity.

The recent flooding across Somerset is a good example of how the Service works with its key partners to keep the communities of Devon and Somerset safe. The efforts of staff during this time have drawn national praise, including from the Prince of Wales.

Establishing a Charity

The Service have set up a Charitable Incorporated Organisation called SAFE - a South West charity established to support and develop community safety across communities in Devon and Somerset in new and innovative ways. (www.safesouthwest.co.uk).



The charity has provided the opportunity for successful funding applications to help develop new areas of community safety activity. A recent example has seen the service awarded a grant from South West Water to deliver Flood Warden Training to our communities in partnership with the Police, Voluntary Sector and Environment Agency.

Training and Development

In recent years, the Training Department has carried out a thorough review of what it does and how it is structured. The development of our Training Academy has enabled the delivery of quality assured training to the organisations staff and to others to support

the organisation's commercial ambition. Activities are focused on learning and developing rather than just 'training'.

The Academy provides training for other fire services and industry on behalf of the Services trading company, Red One Limited. The commercial work is scheduled using spare capacity or utilising people employed on separate contracts to provide training in this area. The money generated is re-invested into the Service and contributes towards improving facilities and equipment. The Academy's key priority is, and always will be, the safety of Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue Service firefighters.

Working towards a three year plan, the Academy adds value by delivering training to ensure the Service has a safe and competent workforce, able to meet the expectations of those that live, work and visit Devon and Somerset.

The Training and Development Policy is designed to ensure that all employees receive the highest standard of training and development necessary to enable them to perform their roles in a safe and competent manner at all times.

As part of the management of training, the Service operates an annual Training Needs Analysis process designed to capture the organisational training and the role development needs of all staff.

The Service Training & Development department was successful in retaining the Investors in People (IIP) award in 2012, achieving at Bronze level.

Red One Limited



Red One Limited (www.red1ltd.com) provides industrial subcontracting, standby rescue, fire equipment commissioning/testing, fire and safety training and consultancy services for businesses both within the UK and overseas. Red One Limited is a trading company of the Authority and all income generated by Red One is used for the specific purpose of maintaining and improving the ongoing safety of our local community and firefighters.

Business Continuity and Resilience

The Service has a Business Continuity Plan setting out the framework and process by which Business Continuity Management (BCM) is integrated into day to day activities throughout the Service.

Such procedures, combined with the existence and maintenance of the Business Continuity Plans (BCP), ensure the Service can continue to function should it ever

experience a business interruption from internal or external influences, and that it meets its statutory duties under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 as a Category 1 Responder.

The Contingency Response Team provides the mechanism for the delivery of continuity of service in all BCM events. The recent national industrial action, centred on a dispute between central government and the Fire Brigades Union over proposed reforms to firefighter pensions, has enabled the Service to test its BCM capability in a live environment. In doing so, the organisation has secured considerable success in delivering an effective and efficient operational capability during all periods of industrial strike action to date.

An Independent review completed by a recognised industry expert (Paragon Risk Management Services) has identified that DSFRS has a comprehensive approach to Business Continuity Planning with full suite of documentation that is seen as best practice within the fire insurance consortium group.

Process for Operational Assurance and commitment to Health and Safety

The service's integrated risk management plan (IRMP) incorporates a commitment to improve firefighter safety, which is summed up by the 'zero harm' campaign consisting of a number of key components:-

- Listening to staff and trade unions as to how fire-fighter safety can be further improved.
- Ensuring training is not just good enough but 'excellent' as staff deserve no less.
- Ensuring systems for sharing information between fire safety and operational staff are seamless.
- Supporting incident commanders making difficult decisions at operational incidents.

To ensure the right focus in the right areas, operational staff have joined the former Health & Safety Team to create a new group - the Organisational Safety Assurance Team (OSAT).

This Team monitors and reports on a variety of activities linked to Operational Response. Key activities such as incident & exercise monitoring, station assessments and station visits form part of this framework. Working closely with the organisation's policy and performance groups, the Team works to ensure that the organisation has a clear line of sight on trends and performance to address any identified areas of concern.

The organisation recognises and accepts its responsibility for the health, safety and welfare of its employees and others who may be affected by its activities. To achieve this, the organisation looks to meet all relevant requirements of the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974 (together with all other statutory provisions associated with it) and support staff in meeting their obligations under the Act.

Detailed health, safety and welfare specific arrangements based on the Health and Safety Executives (HSE's) HS(G)65 methodology, are set out in harmonised Service policies and have been developed to take account of relevant legislation and guidance.

The policies provide employees with relevant and comprehensive information on the risks they face and the preventative and protective measures required to control them.

A robust system for actively monitoring the effectiveness of the organisations Health and Safety Management procedures is in place. The process includes the completion of bi-annual RoSPA Health & Safety Audits as well as a rolling 3 year programme of audits of all premises and departments.

Following a recent comprehensive RoSPA audit of its Health and Safety procedures, the organisation was awarded with the highest Quality Safety Audit (QSA) award possible at Level 5 (Diamond). Additionally, RoSPA informed the organisation that it had achieved a second significant milestone by showing that it now complied with all requirements for certification in Occupational Health and Safety standard (OHSAS) 18001.

Performance Management

In order to make sure the organisation delivers an excellent service, a set of nine measures have been developed to track our performance against previous years and facilitate comparison with other fire and rescue services throughout the UK. These measures also give the public the opportunity to see how the organisation is performing.

Quarterly Performance reports are produced and discussed at the Audit and Performance Review Committee. They are also published on the organisation's Internet pages:

[Our Performance](#)

Audit & Review

The organisation has its own internal Audit & Review Team whose remit is to provide independent assurance to Senior Managers and Members as to the effectiveness of the risk management, internal control and governance arrangements in delivering organisational objectives.

The scope of audit work includes the review of operational activities including Response, Resilience, Protection, Prevention, Fire Control and all supporting departments.

External Assurance

To support the internal assurances processes, the Chief Fire Officers Association (CFOA) in conjunction with the Local Government Association has developed the Operational Assessment and Fire Peer Challenge Toolkit.

The organisation has maintained a self-assessment against the framework and has invited a Peer Challenge Team to complete a formal assessment in September 2014. The results from the peer challenge are to be published and will feed into the organisation's improvement programme.

5. Significant Governance Issues

Continuing appraisal of the governance and internal control mechanisms during the accounting period has identified the following internal control issues which the organisation will address in the next year via Action Plans:

- a. Operational Asset Register – A project is being considered.
- b. Partnership Framework – The organisation has recognised that further work is required to embed the Partnership Framework and Register. To meet future challenges, partnership arrangements need to be robust, consistent and clearly linked to strategy. Having explored the arrangements made in other organisations to identify good partnership practice, it was evident that Cornwall County Council had clear, simple and effective guidance in place. As a result the organisation has worked closely with Cornwall Fire and Rescue Service to develop the operation of the existing Framework and Register. The revised framework will support the development and management of partnerships in the future.
- c. Performance Management – The organisation has recognised that further work is required to develop its performance management framework. It is important that performance management information is fully developed to meet the business need for clear and accessible data to support decision making.
- d. Policy Management – The organisation has recognised that further work is required to ensure all organisational policies are effectively managed and administrated. There are a number of policies that have remained un-harmonised and/or are beyond the requisite time period for review.
- e. Specialist Rescue – Whilst the organisation undertakes a wide range of specialist rescue activities to ensure local communities are kept safe, the supporting controls affecting service delivery have been recognised as requiring further improvement. This links to organisational asset management, including the recording of specialist rescue equipment and how these assets are managed and replaced.
- f. Retained Additional Hours / Payments – The organisation has identified clear inconsistencies in Additional RDS Payments across similar DSFRS stations. These inconsistencies relate to legacy issues arising from combination and the expansion of RDS roles without the associated clarity for staff on what could be claimed. A working party including representatives from across the Service has been established to set clearly defined budgets to enable spend to be more consistent across the retained stations.
- g. Contract Management – The organisation has recognised that further work is required to embed a comprehensive contract register and supporting contract management guidance material. These control improvements will enable us to effectively manage our contracts and apply the appropriate level of governance.
- h. Risk Management – The organisation has made good progress in updating the new risk management system with corporate and service risks. The next step is to ensure risks are regularly reported through to committee. It is expected that this will be fully embedded in the 2014-15 financial year.

The Corporate Governance Group is satisfied that steps are already in place to address the improvement areas identified in this review and will monitor the implementation and operation of these improvement activities as part of the next annual review.

6. Future Improvements

The Annual Statement of Assurance review has identified the following improvement activities that will further strengthen the organisation's governance and assurance processes:

- Procurement Regulations and individual financial thresholds are currently being reviewed to ensure they remain fit for purpose
- The organisation's performance management framework is being further refined and developed in moving towards and seeking to embed a performance driven organisational culture.
- It is intended that the Corporate Governance Group should meet on at least two occasions during the next twelve months to review and monitor the progress of the agreed actions to improve the significant governance issues and discuss any arising governance issues.

7. Framework Requirements

The Devon and Somerset Fire & Rescue Service is satisfied that the systems and processes that are in place across the organisation fulfil the requirements of the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England.

Lee Howell

CHIEF FIRE OFFICER

Ray Radford

**CHAIRMAN, AUDIT AND
PERFORMANCE REVIEW
COMMITTEE**

Appendix A – Action Plan

Identified Issue	Action Needed	Lead Officer
Operational Asset Register	An operational asset register needs to be developed and embedded to ensure all operational equipment is effectively recorded. This will enable the Service to effectively manage, track and test all operational equipment.	Chris Silverthorne
Partnership Framework	The Partnership Framework and supporting Partnership Register need to be embedded. This will enable us to effectively manage our partnership arrangements and apply the relevant level of governance accordingly.	Phil Martin
Performance Management	A performance management framework needs to be developed, embedded and aligned to our corporate measures. This will help us to make informed decisions.	Steve Widnell
Policy Management	A policy management process needs to be developed and embedded. This will ensure that our existing and developing policies are effectively managed and communicated.	Phil Martin
Specialist Rescue	The action plan from the 2013-14 Specialist Rescue Audit needs to be progressed to ensure the controls underpinning specialist rescue activities are robust.	Alex Hanson

Retained Additional Hours / Payments	There needs to be clear guidance and supporting system controls that underpin the retained additional hours / payments. This is currently being progressed through a working party.	Steve Pope
Contract Management	The contract register needs to be fully populated and embedded with supporting contract management guidance documents published. This will enable us to effectively manage our contracts and apply the appropriate level of governance.	Melanie Walsh
Risk Management	There needs to be a clear line of reporting risks through to committee. This will enable Members of the Authority to review how risks are managed across the organisation.	Steve Widnell