



DORSET FIRE AUTHORITY PUBLIC STATEMENT OF ASSURANCE 2014/15

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Why are we producing a statement of assurance?

Each year we look very carefully at the risks facing our communities and plan accordingly to ensure that we have the right people, with the right skills and resources to keep you, our staff and partners safe. Our aim is prevent fires and other emergencies before they happen, but if they do occur, to respond quickly and professionally. We set out our approach to how we do this in our **Community Safety Plan**ⁱ. As we move through the year we closely monitor our performance in key areas through our **quarterly performance reports**ⁱⁱ. Because of the work involved in combining with Wiltshire Fire & Rescue Service which will take place on 1 April 2016, it has been decided that no further Community Safety Plans or Annual Reports should be produced solely by Dorset Fire Authority. However, all the information normally contained within the Annual Report is available through the website at www.dorsetfire.gov.uk.

We are required under the Government's **Fire and Rescue Service National Framework**ⁱⁱⁱ to provide an annual assurance on financial, governance and operational matters and how we have had regard to this Framework. This Statement is a broad summary of our arrangements. It is supported by a number of other, more detailed documents that we would be happy to provide or explain to you.

Where can you get further information?

Further detailed documents referenced to this Statement are available on our website. Should you wish to receive paper copies they may be obtained from us by writing to the Head of Information Management, Dorset Fire and Rescue Service Headquarters, Peverell Avenue West, Poundbury, Dorchester, DT1 3SU or telephoning (01305) 252641 or emailing us vikki.shearing@dorsetfire.gov.uk. We would be happy to talk you through these documents if you need our help understanding them.

What are we assuring?

Financial assurance

We are responsible for ensuring that public money is properly accounted for and used economically, efficiently and effectively. Each year we carefully assess the money we need against the money that we secure from Government, fire precept payers and other sources. We have very robust budget monitoring processes that are subject to close scrutiny. We also plan for the **medium term**^{iv} looking carefully at what resources we will need and how we might fund this. Our appointed Treasurer is responsible for ensuring that we have proper controls in place to manage our financial assets and to safeguard against fraud and other irregularities. He is also responsible for ensuring accurate reports are kept and that an **annual statement of accounts** is produced. In addition we have a range of auditors appointed by our treasurer and government. These auditors produce an independent **annual management report**^v which we consider and if necessary action any points arising from it. Similar to the majority of public bodies we have a number of concerns about our financial outlook, however, our auditors, treasurer and ourselves have no significant financial concerns about how we account for and use public money.

Governance - *the way we direct and control our money, people and resources*

We are required to ensure that our business is conducted in accordance with the law and proper standards, and that public money is safeguarded, properly accounted for, and used economically, efficiently and effectively. We appoint a Clerk, Treasurer and Chief Fire Officer to ensure this happens. We have robust frameworks and processes in place that are scrutinised by us and our auditors. We have very high levels of performance, very praiseworthy peer assessments and no significant failings. We are required in law to produce an **Annual Governance Statement**^{vi} that sets this out along with the key risks facing us. This Statement and supporting documents are all publically available.

Operational assurance

We are required to comply with a range of laws and regulations. They key documents for us are:

- **Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004**^{vii}
- **Civil Contingencies Act 2004**^{viii}
- **Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005**^{ix}

- **Fire and Rescue Services (Emergencies) (England) Order 2007^x**
- **Localism Act 2011^{xi}**
- **Fire and Rescue National Framework for England 2012^{xii}**

To help us establish a clear understanding of how we are doing against these requirements, we undertake a number of detailed assessments. In particular we look carefully at our:

- health and safety policy and produce a **Health and safety assurance statement^{xiii}**
- **operational capability^{xiv}** against the risks we face and the incidents we attend to ensure that we have the right procedures, resources and skills to professionally respond
- compliance against the **National Framework^{xv}** including the Fire and Rescue Services Act

In addition, we have provided:

- a **Diversity and inclusion assurance statement^{xvi}** to help us make sure that we are working in the best possible way to meet the differing needs our communities and staff
- an **Information Management assurance statement^{xvii}** to explain how we manage the sensitive information we hold

We have very comprehensive systems for ensuring that we consider all external advice and instructions to comply with health and safety legislation. We have learnt a lot from other incidents where firefighters have been killed and seriously injured and have changed our procedures and equipment where we feel that it is appropriate to do so.

Whilst we have a number of challenges and issues, we have concluded that there are no significant failures or weaknesses in our operational capability.

Future plans

In November 2014, Dorset Fire Authority and Wiltshire and Swindon Combined Fire Authority voted unanimously to merge the two Services, with a Combination Order being submitted to the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government just in December 2014.

Earlier this year Dorset and Wiltshire & Swindon Fire Authorities successfully gained the support of the Secretary of State to combine, and have now started on the journey for full combination, which comes into effect on the 1 April 2016. The Services have appointed a joint Programme Team to manage this transition.

The combination will make substantial savings of between £4-6 million per year, which will help us to protect frontline services as much as possible and continue to develop the services we provide to the community in the most efficient way. The combination will allow the two authorities to come together to build a safe, strong and resilient combined Fire and Rescue Service fit for the future.

Full details of the combination journey can be found on our website www.dorsetfire.gov.uk

And finally...

We hope that this Statement of Assurance provided you with a general overview of how we maintain the highest standards in using our resources and safeguard public money. Should you have any queries or requests for further information, please do not hesitate to contact us and we would be more than happy to help you.

Hyperlinked documents

- i Community Safety Plan 2014-19
- ii Quarterly performance reports to DFA 2014/15
- iii National Framework 2012
- iv Medium Term Finance Plan
- v Management letter KPMG 18 September 2015 Audit and Scrutiny Committee
- vi Annual Governance Statement 18 September 2015 Audit and Scrutiny Committee
- vii Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004
- viii Civil Contingencies Act 2004
- ix Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005
- x Fire and Rescue Services (Emergencies) (England) Order 2007
- xi Localism Act 2011
- xii Fire and Rescue National Framework for England 2012
- xiii Annual Health and Safety Assurance Statement, 18 September 2015, Audit and Scrutiny Committee
- xiv Operational Capability Assurance Statement, 18 September 2015, Audit and Scrutiny Committee
- xv Assessment against National Framework, 18 September 2015, Audit and Scrutiny Committee
- xvi Annual Diversity and Inclusion Assurance Statement, 18 September 2015, Audit and Scrutiny Committee
- xvii Annual Information Management Assurance Statement, 18 September 2015, Audit and Scrutiny Committee