

ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT 2020/21

1. Scope of Responsibility

- 1.1 The Fire Authority (the Authority) has a statutory responsibility to ensure that its business is conducted in accordance with the law and proper standards, and that public money is safeguarded and properly accounted for. To do this the Authority must ensure that proper arrangements exist for the governance of its affairs. This includes maintaining a sound system of internal control and ensuring that robust arrangements for the management of risk are in place.

2. The Purpose of the Governance Framework

- 2.1 Governance is about how the Authority ensures that it is doing the right thing, in the right way for the right people in a timely, inclusive, open, honest and accountable manner. It comprises the systems and processes, cultures and values, by which the Authority is directed and controlled and through which it accounts to and engages with its communities.
- 2.2 The system of internal control is designed to manage risk to a reasonable level (rather than to eliminate all risk). The Authority maintains a sound system to protect against risks and mitigate their impact. The systems are regularly reviewed and updated.

3. Key Elements of the Governance Framework and Internal Control System

- 3.1 The Authority has adopted a Code of Corporate Governance, which sets out how the Authority promotes good governance. A copy of the code is available at hwfire.cmis.uk.com/hwfire/Documents/DocumentLibrary.aspx or may be obtained from Hereford & Worcester Fire Authority Headquarters, Hindlip Park, Worcester, WR3 8SP.
- 3.2 The Authority has the following protocols and processes in place which demonstrate the core principles as required by the CIPFA/SOLACE Delivering Good Governance in Local Government Framework 2016:

Core Principle A: Behaving with integrity, demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values and respecting the rule of law is demonstrated through:

- **Members' Code of Conduct and Registers of Interests** – a local Code of Conduct for all Members is in place and a Register of Financial Interests for each Member is published on the Authority's website.
- **Ethical Framework** - reflects the Authority's commitment to always operating fairly and ensuring dignity and respect in the workplace and in the communities we serve, in an environment which values individual contributions and work towards the elimination of unlawful discrimination.
- **Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Plan** – sets out the Authority's commitment to being an inclusive organisation which recognises and diverse backgrounds, beliefs and needs of our staff and the communities we serve. There is an Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Officer in post and two Fire Authority Members are appointed as Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Champions
- **Code of Conduct for Staff and Register of Staff Interests** - requires employees to perform their duties with honesty, integrity, impartiality and objectivity.

- **Whistleblowing Policy** - in place for receiving and investigating complaints from staff and/or contractors.
- **Complaints Systems** - in place for receiving and investigating complaints from the public. A procedure is also in place for complaints relating to alleged breaches of the Code of Conduct by Members.
- **Anti-Fraud, Bribery and Corruption Policy** – the Authority has a zero tolerance approach to fraud, bribery and corruption, whether it is attempted from inside or outside the organisation.
- **Monitoring Officer** - provides advice on the scope of the powers and responsibilities of the Authority. The Monitoring Officer has a statutory duty to ensure lawfulness and fairness of decision making and also to receive allegations of breaches of the Code of Conduct by Authority Members. The Head of Legal Services acts as the Authority's Monitoring Officer and is governed by the professional standards set by the Solicitors' Regulation Authority.

Core Principle B: Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement demonstrated through:

- **Public Participation at Authority meetings** – members of the public can raise any topic at full Authority meetings as long as it is relevant to the duties and power of the Fire Authority. This is still the case with regards to meetings held virtually during the Covid-19 pandemic. All Authority meetings are streamed live on Youtube.
- **Public Consultation** - public consultation on the draft Community Risk Management Plan 2021-25 took place between 6 July 2020 and 25 September 2020. This included public focus groups and an on-line questionnaire sent to key stakeholders, including councillors, parish and town councils, libraries, housing associations and trusts, voluntary organisations, faith and community groups, as well as other fire and rescue services, emergency services and representative bodies.
- **Internal engagement** – the Authority is committed to ensuring effective engagement with its staff. In addition to consultation and negotiation with recognised trade union bodies, for example via the Joint Consultative Committee (JCC), staff groups such as the Organisational Development & Challenge Group, women@hwfire and provide forums for engagement with staff. The Authority has also appointed an Employee Engagement and Wellbeing Officer
- **Active engagement with partners** – the Authority is represented on Local Strategic Partnerships, the Safer Roads Partnership and local Community Safety Partnerships. The Authority has also worked closely with West Mercia Police with regards to sharing buildings and assets and has set up a strategic alliance with Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service with a Strategic Alliance Plan 2018-2022 in place.

Core Principle C: Defining outcomes in terms of sustainable economic, social and environmental benefits demonstrated through:

- **Fire Authority Annual Report 2020/21 (Corporate Plan)** - incorporates the future outlook and objectives for the year.
- **Community Risk Management Plan 2021-2025 (CRMP)** – sets out how we will deliver sustainable services for our communities.

- **Strategic Projects Programme** – a programme of major projects identified as being critical to the success of the organisation because they ensure its on-going resilience in the coming years. The projects in the programme include new fire stations, the roll out of vital new technology upgrades as part of national projects, and pivotal work with local partner organisations.
- **Fleet Strategy 2016-2021** – provides a structured approach to vehicle management that ensures the Authority continues to provide and maintain an effective fleet of vehicles to ensure that staff can undertake their jobs effectively.
- **Property Strategy 2018-2023** – to ensure premises are sustainable, safe and meet operational need
- **ICT Strategy 2017-2020** - provides a comprehensive picture of how the Authority will use ICT to support the services it provides
- **Environmental Sustainability Plan 2021-2025** – sets out how we will continue to improve the ways in which we use our resources to ensure the least harm to our environment

Core Principle D: Determining the interventions necessary to optimise the achievement of the intended outcomes demonstrated through:

- **Performance Management Framework** – a comprehensive set of key performance indicators measures the quality of service for users. Performance is monitored on a quarterly basis by the Authority's Policy & Resources Committee and Senior Management Board to ensure that services are delivered in accordance with the Authority's objectives and best use of resources.
- **Medium Term Financial Plan** - sets out the resources needed to deliver services.
- **Strategic Risk Register** - identifies controls to mitigate inherent identified risks and is monitored on an on-going basis with exception reporting to the Senior Management Board and to the Audit & Standards Committee.
- **Departmental Risk Registers** - reviewed by managers on a quarterly basis.

Core Principle E: Developing the entity's capacity, including the capability of its leadership and the individuals within it demonstrated through:

- **Constitution** - defines the roles and responsibilities of the Authority, Committees, Members and Officers and the protocols to be followed.
- **Fire Authority Members** – all new Members are provided with an induction and information is available for all Members to further develop fire-specific knowledge during their tenure.
- **Senior Management Board (SMB)** – involves all Principal Officers and Assistant Directors in supporting the Chief Fire Officer to lead the Service.
- **People Strategy 2020 - 2022** - sets out how the Authority is supporting its workforce to become more resilient and diverse, to develop their skills and maximise their wellbeing at work.

- **Staff Development Process** – Individual Appraisals are in place for all staff to enable personal objectives to be set which contribute to the overall aims of the Authority. Competency training records and a course management system are also in place.

Core Principle F: Managing risks and performance through robust internal control and strong public financial management demonstrated through:

- **Audit & Standards Committee** - reviews arrangements for identifying and managing the Authority's business risks and the approval of policies in respect of the Authority's governance framework.
- **Chief Financial Officer (Treasurer)** - ensures the sound administration of the financial affairs of the Authority, as required by the statutory duties associated with s.151 of the Local Government Act 1972, the Local Government Finance Act 1988 and the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015. The Chief Financial Officer is also governed by professional standards set by CIPFA.
- **Risk Management Strategy** - ensures that the Authority identifies strategic risks and applies the most cost effective control mechanisms to manage those risks.
- **Business Continuity Plans** – these plans have been implemented during the Covid-19 pandemic to ensure the delivery of core functions.

Core Principle G: Implementing good practices in transparency, reporting and audit to deliver effective accountability demonstrated through:

- **Transparency Information** - published on the website in accordance with the Local Government Transparency Code to promote openness and accountability through reporting on local decision making, public spending and democratic processes.
- **Agendas, minutes and decisions** – published on the website and includes the rationale and considerations on which decisions are based.
- **Internal Auditors** - Worcestershire Internal Audit Shared Service Audit Team provides the internal audit function for the Authority and reports quarterly to the Audit & Standards Committee.
- **External Auditors** - Grant Thornton UK LLP provides the external audit services to the Authority and reports regularly to the Audit & Standards Committee.
- **Annual Assurance Statement** - provides staff, partners and local communities with an assurance that the Authority is doing everything it can to keep them safe and that it is providing value for money.
- **Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services** – provides an additional external perspective on the effectiveness and efficiency of services provided.

4. Review of Effectiveness

- 4.1 The Authority has prepared the Annual Governance Statement in accordance with the “Delivering Good Governance in Local Government Framework 2016” published by CIPFA/SOLACE. As part of the process the Audit & Standards Committee will consider the self-assessment review of its corporate governance arrangements against the CIPFA/SOLACE framework to ensure that the Authority’s governance arrangements are working correctly and are relevant to the current environment.
- 4.2 The Authority is satisfied that its financial management arrangements conform with the governance requirements of the CIPFA Statement of the Role of the Chief Financial Officer in Local Government. In addition, the key financial systems are continually reviewed by the Internal Auditor. There were no major weaknesses identified in the 2020/21 financial year.
- 4.3 2020/21 has been an exceptional year in many ways, but specifically in relation to Authority finances. In February 2020 the Fire Authority approved the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) up to 2024/25. The MTFP was set in light of great uncertainty about future funding arrangements and included a significant range of scenarios. It was also set before the impact of Covid-19.
- 4.4 The continued uncertainty over the delayed Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) has required some re-allocation of revenue budget to support core business activity and address the short-term impacts of Covid-19. Budget Monitoring reports have been presented to the Policy and Resources Committee and have shown that the Authority’s finances continue to be well controlled.

5. Significant Governance Issues

- 5.1 Based on the information provided above there are no significant governance issues identified at this time. We are satisfied that the need for improvements will be addressed and we will thereafter monitor the implementation and operation of any agreed recommendations as part of our next annual review.

Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive

Chairman of the Fire Authority

Date: 21st April 2021