



West Yorkshire
Fire & Rescue Authority

Statement of Assurance 2014/15

OFFICIAL

Ownership: Corporate Services

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Introduction

West Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Authority (WYFRA) is required to produce an annual Statement of Assurance as part of the [Fire and Rescue National Framework for England](#). The purpose of the statement is to provide independent assurance to communities and the Government that the service is being delivered efficiently and effectively. Whilst the Fire and Rescue National Framework sets out the Government's priorities and objectives for fire and rescue authorities in England, it does not prescribe operational matters as these are determined locally by fire and rescue authorities.

In April 2011, WYFRA published the [Service Plan 2011-2015](#) which provided details of what the service intended to do over the four years to meet the challenging needs and risks within the community and deliver an excellent fire and rescue service whilst achieving efficiencies and providing value for money services. [Annual action plans](#) were produced during the four year period and performance against the actions was reported to, and monitored by, West Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Authority.

In April 2015, the [Service Plan 2015-2020](#) was published which outlines the key priorities and objectives and builds upon the delivery and achievement of the Service Plan 2011-2015. The new Service Plan is fully electronic to make use of new technologies and enable ease of access to up to date information. Each year an annual action plan will be produced to focus the work of West Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service and to manage and monitor performance.

This Statement of Assurance provides assurance that WYFRA is providing an efficient, effective and value for money service to the community of West Yorkshire in its financial, governance and operational matters.

Financial

In accordance with the 2014/15 Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting based on International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS) for 2014/15 and the Accounting Codes of Practice published by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA), WYFRA has produced the [Statement of Accounts 2014/15](#). As the Authority is funded by public money, it has a responsibility to ensure this money is used lawfully, effectively, efficiently and economically.

The Annual Governance Statement, which is included within the Statement of Accounts, sets out the systems and procedures that are in place to ensure that the Authority's resources are used in accordance with the law and provide best value for the tax payer.

The Authority's governance framework comprises systems and processes, and cultures and values, by which the Authority is directed and controlled. It enables the Authority to monitor the achievement of its strategic objectives and to consider whether those have led to the delivery of appropriate, cost effective services.

Each year, the external auditors, currently KPMG, issue an [audit opinion](#) on the Authority's financial statements and an assessment of the arrangements to achieve value for money in the use of resources. The auditors have provided an unqualified opinion on the Authority's 2014/15 Statement of Accounts and concluded that the Authority had made proper arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in the use of resources and certified completion of the audit.

The 2015/2016 settlement already shows a further loss of grant of £4.6m and based on similar levels of grant cuts for the rest of the spending review period, the Authority is forecasting a budget deficit of around £15.6m by the end of 2019/2020.

The continuation of the policy of non-recruitment of full time firefighters will reduce the establishment by a further 300 wholetime posts delivering further salary savings of around £9.6m leaving a deficit of around £6m still to be identified.

Internal Audit

The Authority's Chief Finance and Procurement Officer has a statutory duty to provide a continuous and effective internal audit. This internal audit service is provided under a service level agreement with Kirklees Council, which provides approximately 160 days of audit time each year.

The adequacy and effectiveness of the Authority's risk management system and internal control environment is assessed by Internal Audit against an annual audit plan. The plan targets areas of highest risk as determined by the Authority through its risk management process and the resulting risk management matrix. Business risk based auditing accounts for approximately half of the available audit resource, with the other half involving the review of key financial systems and processes. The internal audit plan also considers audit areas where most value can be added.

Internal audit 'opinions' based on the level of assurance concerning each risk, system or process control is reported to the Authority's Audit Committee on a quarterly basis. The [Internal Audit Plan 2014/2015](#) resulted in the majority of audits concluding with a 'substantial assurance' which confirms a robust framework of all key controls exists that are likely to ensure that objectives will be achieved. Internal Audit provides recommendations where it is thought that risks can be reduced and the control environment improved.

The audit plan and subsequent audits ensure an independent review is conducted at least once in a year of the effectiveness of the Authority's systems of internal control, which assists with the formulation of the Annual Governance Statement.

Transparency

In accordance with the Code of Recommended Practice for Local Authorities on Data Transparency, WYFRA is committed to greater openness and financial transparency through the publication, on the website, of information regarding how public money is being spent. This includes payments for goods and services to external bodies and suppliers above £500, details of salaries and allowances paid to staff and Members, transactions made via Government Procurement Cards, tender and procurement information, details of land and assets owned by WYFRA and details relating to Trade Unions.

The data is routinely published on either a quarterly or annual basis in accordance with the Code's timescales. All published data can be viewed on the [Data Transparency](#) section of the website.

Governance

WYFRA has an approved [constitution](#) which sets out how the Authority operates, how decisions are made and the procedures which are followed to ensure that these are efficient, transparent and accountable to local citizens. Some of these processes are required by the law, while others are a matter for the Authority to determine.

The Authority is composed of 22 members, all of whom are a Councillor elected to one of the five constituent district councils within West Yorkshire; Bradford, Calderdale, Kirklees, Leeds and Wakefield. The overriding duty of Members of the Authority is to the whole community of West Yorkshire.

Members have an approved [Code of Conduct](#) designed to ensure high standards in the way they undertake their duties and are required to comply with the [Principles of Public Life](#).

Codes of Conduct and Protocols included within the Constitution are:

- Code of Conduct for Members
- Officer Code of Conduct

- Member/Officer Relations and Procedural Protocol
- Officer Employment Procedure Rules
- Protocol regarding the use of Authority resources by Members
- [Compliments and Complaints Information and Policy](#)
- [Whistle Blowing Policy](#)

In accordance with the Code of Corporate Governance and pursuant to the corporate performance monitoring processes an annual [Corporate Health Report](#) is submitted to the Annual General Meeting of the Authority to enable Members to scrutinise and challenge performance. A [Performance Management Report](#) is also presented to each Full Authority meeting to enable ongoing performance monitoring, scrutiny and challenge.

Information Governance

Management of information is key to effective corporate governance, service planning and performance management and to bring together the requirements, standards and best practice that apply to the handling of information, WYFRA has an [Information Governance Strategy and Policy](#) which fully supports the principles of corporate information governance and recognises public accountability.

The Authority has achieved excellent audit reports in respect of the handling and processing of information including the personal information relating to customers. This includes the achievement of the highest level of Compliance Plus within the annual [Customer Service Excellence report](#) for the strategic approach to Information Management particularly relating to our customers' privacy and confidentiality. This standard was first achieved in 2009 and has been maintained at this level over the last six years.

Risk and Business Continuity

WYFRA has a [Business Continuity Management Strategy](#) and [Risk Management Strategy and Policy](#) which provide clear and defined strategies to be adopted to, adhere to and develop specific plans to aide achievement of the following objectives:

- Enable a response to events that threaten the delivery of services to the community of West Yorkshire
- Protect the organisation from service interruptions
- Facilitate a co-ordinated recovery of organisational services, in the event of service interruptions
- Facilitate a risk management culture to be embedded into the organisation to enable risks to be identified and managed effectively.

Operational (Service Delivery)

WYFRA operates within a clearly defined statutory and policy framework and 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 Authority's [Statement of Purpose](#) reflects the key documents in highlighting WYFRAs commitments and expectations through its strategic priorities and objectives.

At strategic level, Integrated Risk Management Planning (IRMP) is an integral part of business planning process in West Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service (WYFRS). The Service's strategic assessment of risk covers all reasonably foreseeable risk within the County and establishes baseline standards of service.

In April 2015, the [Community Risk Management Strategy 2015-2020](#) was published which explains how WYFRS identify, assess and manage risk in West Yorkshire and provides information on how the services are delivered. This document also provides the underpinning business case for delivering prevention, protection, response and resilience in a risk proportional manner. The strategy provides the means to deliver excellent but cost-effective fire and rescue services to communities across West Yorkshire. This latest strategy continues to underpin a flexible approach to managing risk and deliver future efficiency savings.

Customer Service Excellence

Since 1998, WYFRA has consistently attained the Charter Mark standard; the Government's national standard of customer service excellence for organisations delivering public services. In August 2009 the Authority invited an assessment against the new Customer Service Excellence standard, which was being phased in and which has now fully replaced the Charter Mark standard. The Customer Service Excellence standard is derived from the core concepts of customer focus and the delivery of excellent customer service and assesses, in great detail, the following areas:

- Customer Insight
- The Culture of the Organisation
- Information and Access
- Delivery
- Timeliness and Quality of Service

WYFRA has an independent assessment against the standard annually and in 2014 was awarded full compliance against the 57 elements of the standard including twelve 'Compliance Plus' awards, which are awarded for behaviours or practices that exceed the requirements of the standard, and are viewed as exceptional or as an exemplar for others – either within the organisation or in the wider public service arena. The summary of the [Customer Service Excellence report](#) clearly demonstrates the continuous commitment of the Authority to provide an excellent service to customers.

Communication and Engagement

Extensive consultation is carried out with the community on the Community Risk Management Strategy and the Authority's [Communication and Engagement Strategy](#) determines how West Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Authority engages, communicates, and consults regarding how the service will be delivered. The strategy follows the public body consultation principles published by the government in 2012 which support a proportionate approach to such activities.

Service Delivery Performance

Service delivery standards are established in the Service Plan and the Community Risk Management Strategy. The [Service Plan 2011-2015](#) included targets for reductions in fires, deaths and injuries and performance against these have been reported to the Fire and Rescue Authority on a regular basis, with the latest annual [Performance Management Report](#) for 2014/15 submitted in June 2015. Reporting against the new and challenging targets set for the 2015-2020 period will follow the same process.

The Community Risk Management Strategy includes reference to Risk Based Planning Assumptions (RBPA) for responding to emergencies. These are used to ensure resources are in the best place relative to risk and demand, with life risk incidents being the priority. The impact of any proposed changes can be measured and communicated by reference to the RBPA down to ward level. These were used in comprehensive consultation on changes to emergency cover in [2011](#) and [2012](#). Implementation of these changes is continuing and by the end of 2015, five new fire station will have been opened providing appropriate emergency cover and fire prevention activity and delivering significant financial savings.

WYFRA discharges its statutory duties in relation to community safety, fire prevention and fire protection, including enforcement of relevant statutory regulations in accordance with the [Fire Safety Strategy](#), with firefighters and specialist staff being deployed across districts where most needed based on risk.

In 2014, WYFRA introduced a Service Delivery Assurance process which utilises the Operational Assurance (OpA) and Fire Peer Challenge Toolkit developed by the Chief fire Officers Association (CFOA) and the Local Government Association (LGA). This provides the framework for internal assessment and the annual [Service Delivery Assurance Report](#) provides assurance that the organisation, from a service delivery perspective, is performing effectively and efficiently.

Agreements and Mutual Aid Arrangements

Sections 13 and 16 of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 provide clear instructions for fire and rescue services in regard to mutual assistance and the discharge of functions by others. West Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Authority have Section 13 and 16 agreements with:

- Lancashire Combined Fire Authority
- North Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Authority
- Derbyshire Fire and Rescue Authority
- Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Authority
- South Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Authority

These agreements are regularly reviewed and updated as necessary and are supplemented by specific agreements on specialist services, for example line rescue, and WYFRA is a major contributor to national and regional resilience with the capability to respond to major disasters and terrorist attacks.

Future Improvements

Having spent the last few years redesigning the service, moving fire station locations, and ensuring resources remain allocated appropriate to risk and demand, the Service now faces its next challenge with similar levels of financial cuts over the next five years. The Community Risk Management Strategy will need to be increasingly sophisticated if it is to continue to minimise the impact of the cuts and maintain a focus on reducing the number of incidents. Changes to duty systems and flexible and variable resourcing models, which can respond quickly to increased or decreased demand are the main areas of focus for the coming years. The Efficiency Options Programme is currently developing a range of proposals for consideration and fundamental changes to the way we work are an inevitable consequence.

There are many opportunities to further develop processes and systems to assist in making the community safer through other complimentary work. The principles of Safe and Well Visits are being developed that will mean that firefighters are preventing people becoming the victims of a range of hazards including the effect of falls for the elderly or fuel poverty. The development of youth engagement programmes to support the Young Firefighters' scheme will target slightly older and more challenging young people where, for example apprenticeship or intern schemes can be considered.

We will continue to improve how we respond to the needs of business in relation to fire safety regulation, with further development of Primary Authority Schemes and similar schemes which will particularly benefit small and medium sized enterprises. The establishment of online resources which will target and support this particular group of businesses is currently being developed which will further assist compliance with regulations. The introduction in the autumn of changes to legislation regarding smoke and carbon monoxide detection provides opportunities to engage with private landlords with a view to improving safety across what is, undoubtedly, a higher risk sector.

There is clearly opportunity to work much more closely with our blue light colleagues and we are looking at this strategically and at a more tactical level, for example, the planning functions within the blue light services, local authorities and local officers of Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) will be focussing on opportunities to work even more closely together and potentially within the same building, giving a greater level of shared understanding and a more effective response to civil emergencies and the developing threat from terrorism. It has been recognised that harnessing the skills of firefighters to respond to life critical medical emergencies will improve public safety as well as interoperability and collaboration between the fire and rescue service and the ambulance service. The opportunity to provide emergency first responding with Yorkshire Ambulance Service (YAS) is therefore being explored.

A review of technical and specialist response capabilities is currently underway to ensure these arrangements are fit for the future and reflect changes to the level of risk and threat on both a local and national level. This review will provide options for the Efficiency Research Programme and take into consideration changes proposed within the Integrated Risk Management Plan.

Financial pressures will mean that we need to continue to make significant changes to how we deliver our service. This is likely to be in the form of new shift patterns and new equipment to name just two areas. It is vital that in the midst of this change the link between Health and Safety and IRMP remains strong and that the flow of safety critical information, both inside and outside of the Authority is well managed. The importance of good health, as opposed to safety can sometimes be overlooked, but plays a significant role in service delivery. The emphasis on improving mental health and wellbeing by improving our procedures and training, whilst developing a more robust framework of welfare support, continues to be a priority.

As incident numbers have reduced so has experiential learning. Our training priority will be to ensure that realistic training and shared learning continues to be developed to bridge this gap. A review of training assets and a training needs analysis have identified the need for significant investment in both training facilities and training programmes, including practical exercises, to address this area. New developments in equipment and procedures present opportunities to work more effectively but they place ever more technical demands on our personnel and training must keep pace with this change in the way we work.

The call handling and mobilising function will face further challenges with the impending introduction of a new 4G LTE mobile phone network for the emergency services through the national Emergency Services Mobile Communications Programme (ESMCP). WYFRS has taken a lead role in this project, representing the region on the ESMCP Fire Customer Group and formulating and administering the Yorkshire and Humber Regional ESMCP Group. This will become an increasingly important project over the next twelve months with dedicated resources necessary to ensure its success.

This Statement of Assurance is signed on 16 October 2015 on behalf of West Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Authority.



Councillor Judith Hughes
Chair of West Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Authority