



West Yorkshire
Fire & Rescue Authority

Statement of Assurance 2015/16

OFFICIAL

Ownership: Corporate Services
Date Issued: 23 September 2016



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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 2015, WYFRA published the [Service Plan 2015-2020](#) which outlines the key priorities and objectives and builds upon the delivery and achievement of the Service Plan 2011-2015. The Service Plan 2015-2020 is fully electronic to make use of new technologies and enable ease of access to up to date information. [Annual action plans](#) are produced during the five year period to focus the work of West Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service and to manage and monitor performance in order to achieve our ambition of 'Making West Yorkshire Safer'.

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 2015/16 Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting based on International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS) for 2015/16 and the Accounting Codes of Practice published by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA), WYFRA has produced the [Statement of Accounts 2015/16](#). 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. For 2015/16 the Authority once again received an unqualified opinion on both the Statement of Accounts and the arrangements for securing value for money.

The 2016/17 local government finance settlement provided details of a four year settlement covering the period to 2019/2020 showing total grant loss of a further £7.9m. The Authority has the option to secure this settlement by publishing a four year efficiency plan by 14 October 2016.

When the settlement is built into the medium term financial plan, the Authority is still required to make further savings of £12m by the end of 2019/2020. However, the impact of the front loading of the efficiency savings coupled with the use of revenue balances will enable the Authority to recommence recruitment in 2017/18.

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 2015/16](#) 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 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

The Authority continues to develop, implement and embed a robust information governance framework needed for the effective management and protection of WYFRA information.

Information governance describes the approach within which accountability, standards, policies and procedures are developed and implemented, to ensure that all information created, obtained or received by WYFRA is held and used appropriately.

The Authority has an [Information Governance Strategy and Policy](#) which describes its commitment to ensuring effective information governance as a means to enable the service, to ensure it can make the best use of its information and to provide a solid foundation to enable it to be open and transparent.

At the same time it takes account of, and supports WYFRA's operational objectives and ensures that a balance is struck between operational and compliance objectives.

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 seven years.

Risk and Business Continuity

WYFRA has a [Risk Management Strategy and Policy](#) and [Business Continuity Management Strategy](#) which provide clear and defined strategies to be implemented, adhered to and developed to aid achievement of the following objectives:

- Implement and maintain risk policy arrangements including a risk framework and processes, which will enable the organisation to identify, assess and manage strategic and corporate risks in an effective, systematic and consistent manner. This also assists in embedding a risk management culture.
- Implement and maintain a business continuity management system to ensure that key services can be maintained in the event of any disruption that threatens the delivery of services to the community of West Yorkshire.
- Protect the organisation from disruptive events and service interruptions and facilitate a co-ordinated recovery of organisational services and critical functions during and following such events.

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 2015 was awarded full compliance against the 57 elements of the standard including fourteen '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. Performance against targets are reported to the Fire and Rescue Authority on a regular basis, with the latest annual [Performance Management Report](#) for 2015/16 submitted in June 2016.

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 progressing well, the last of the 2011 IRMP proposals was implemented in August 2016 with one fire station due to open in October 2016, one in 2017 and the remaining one in 2018. These changes enable WYFRS to provide appropriate emergency cover and fire prevention activity whilst 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 Authority continues to face similar challenges and further levels of financial cuts over the coming years. The Community Risk Management Strategy continues to be the foundation for minimising the impact of the cuts and maintaining a focus on reducing the number of incidents. The Efficiency Options Programme has been completed resulting in a range of proposals that will be considered as part of the next phase of the IRMP.

The development of a revised strategy to ensure Safer Communities is well underway, with several pilots being carried out to meet the needs of specific parts of the community. The Authority will ensure that all those who are the most vulnerable are identified and that appropriate interventions are made available either through our actions or that of partners in order to reduce the risk as far as is possible. WYFRA has been successful in establishing a wide range of education programmes that help and support young people whatever their challenges may be. Within the building safety environment, the Authority continues to respond to the needs of business and the demands placed upon them by fire safety regulation. The Primary Authority Scheme continues to grow and now encompasses both individual businesses and associations of business. These schemes allow consistent assured advice to be provided. WYFRA has played a significant role in the development of the nationally adopted short audit which helps to reduce the bureaucratic burden on business and have recently introduced nationally approved standard letters and paragraphs, again with the aim of making fire safety legislation both more consistent and proportionate. Overall the focus is now very much one of support, although where appropriate the full range of enforcement options is still used.

As legislation will be enacted later this year, in the guise of the Policing and Crime Bill, that places a duty upon WYFRA to consider the scope for collaboration with other Emergency Services and work has been carried out with leaders of both West Yorkshire Police and the Yorkshire Ambulance Service to consider how best to achieve this. A collaboration board has been established to both scope and pursue suitable initiatives which will develop with the goal of greater effectiveness or efficiency. This board will consider all activities defined as in scope and consider where an opportunity exists, or otherwise, to deliver that activity jointly. WYFRA recognises that there is already existing good practice and will seek to promote and expand into new challenges and opportunities. A shared premise arrangement with West Yorkshire Police is already in place and trials at three of our fire stations are taking place of an Emergency Medical Response (EMR) scheme.

A review of technical and specialist response capabilities has been undertaken, the introduction of new ways of working will form part of the Integrated Risk Management Plan and in doing so will support local, regional and national resilience.

Financial pressures will mean the need to continue to make significant changes to how services are delivered. 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 just 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. The 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. The Fire behaviour and Breathing Apparatus facilities at the Training Centre have been significantly improved, the next step will be to upgrade training facilities such as Smoke Houses within the Districts. New developments in equipment and procedures present opportunities to work more effectively but they place ever more technical demands on personnel and training must keep pace with this changes to the ways of working.

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). WYFRA 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; dedicated resources are being put in place to support the region in mobilising for and transition on to the Emergency Services Network as part of the national programme.

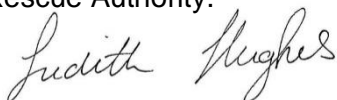
The Authority has completed a Strategic Asset Review which has informed an action plan to be developed to upgrade/rebuild in a cost effective manner a number of older and larger fire stations to ensure that they are fit for purpose and are economical, efficient and effective.

The [Information and Communication Technology Strategy 2016-2020](#) has been developed and a programme of change is being implemented. The Strategy will maximise the use of electronic ways of working, simplify systems and produce a consistent user experience reducing repetition and exploiting the value of the information held within a secure and resilient infrastructure. It will ensure that the systems provide value for money and are fit for purpose whilst remaining within the boundaries of compliance requirements. The aim is to make the most of technology to ensure things are simpler, smarter and engaging.

WYFRA has undergone a very challenging period over the last few years and it has become clear that no amount of investment, restructuring or reconfiguration can, in itself, deliver the step change in working conditions, environment and culture required without fundamentally changing the way change is managed. Recent reviews commissioned by government, including the Thomas Review and a cultural review of Essex County Fire & Rescue Service, have led WYFRA to consider its own culture and to undertake a review and improvement of organisational culture and values. Whilst WYFRA is fundamentally a good organisation to work for and delivers excellent services, there are improvements that can be made. Existing organisational values are not embedded across the organisation and are not overtly publicised. Strong, shared culture organisations tend to have better performance and more engaged staff and there is a real opportunity to drive towards excellence and to become a true Employer of Choice if this intervention is effectively executed. WYFRA wants to create and embed a systematic approach to engage and empower employees around any challenge. The successful realisation of the WYFRA vision will only be acquired by having a workforce that is truly involved and motivated, working together towards a shared and meaningful purpose.

Initial preparations to recommence the recruitment of whole time firefighters are taking place. Recruitment was halted some seven years ago as a way of linking workforce planning to the proposed IRMP interventions. Interventions have been successfully delivered and a baseline establishment of 900 whole time firefighters has been established. It is likely that the number of firefighters will fall below that figure during mid-2018 and so it is intended to have the first cohort of new recruits operational by April 2018. Work has commenced on designing the recruitment and induction programme with a focus on determining the true job requirements of a modern day firefighter, recognising the breadth of duties now required to be undertaken over and above the traditional emergency response and rescue duties.

This Statement of Assurance is signed on 23 September 2016 on behalf of West Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Authority.



Councillor Judith Hughes
Chair of West Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Authority