



# Making Cheshire Safer

## Annual Statement of Assurance 2016 - 2017



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### 1. Introduction

### Evidence Links

This is Cheshire Fire & Rescue Authority's fifth annual Statement of Assurance in line with the Government's requirements set out in the *Fire and Rescue National Framework* for England.

#### Intended Purpose of Statement of Assurance

The aim of the Statement of Assurance is to provide an easy and accessible way in which communities, government, local authorities and partners may make a valid assessment of their local fire and rescue authority's performance.

Statements of Assurance are published annually by fire and rescue authorities to integrate where practicable with existing governance reporting arrangements.

#### Complying with the Statement of Assurance

The published Statement of Assurance guidance sets out compliance requirements under three broad headings :

##### *Financial:*

Cheshire Fire Authority is responsible for ensuring public money is properly accounted for and used economically, efficiently and effectively. The Authority has a robust budget monitoring process that is subject to close scrutiny. The Head of Finance is responsible for ensuring that the right controls are in place to ensure that financial assets are properly managed, financial reporting is accurate and that the Annual Statement of Accounts is prepared in accordance with statutory requirements.

[Financial Regulations](#)

[Statement of Accounts](#)

##### *Governance:*

The Authority is required to ensure that its 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. The Authority is required by law to produce an "Annual Governance Statement" (AGS). The AGS and supporting compliance evidence can be located in section 3 of this document.

##### *Operational:*

The Authority is required to comply with a range of laws, regulations and guidance, the following is a list of some of the key legislation:

[Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004](#)

[Civil Contingencies Act 2004](#)

[Regulatory Reform \(Fire Safety\) Order 2005](#)

[Fire and Rescue Services \(Emergencies\) \(England\) Order 2007](#)

[Localism Act 2011](#)

[Fire and Rescue National Framework for England 2012](#)

[Local Government Act 1999](#)

[Health & Safety & Work Act 1974](#)

[Policing and Crime Act 2017](#)

To ensure that the Authority can demonstrate how it complies with these requirements, a number of detailed assessments are undertaken. These include:

- Health and Safety policy and framework with regular progress being

presented to the Service Management Team (SMT).

- Operational capability against risk to ensure that the right resources, procedures and skills are available to professionally respond to communities within target response times that are resources are aligned to risk.
- An annual review of operational risk and performance supplemented by quarterly scrutiny Member and officer meetings.
- Risk Management Board monitoring and scrutiny of corporate risks.
- Compliance against National Framework requirements.

[Operational Assurance Guidance Principle H](#)

### Accountable to our Communities

This statement is underpinned by detailed documented evidence, most of which has been made available to the public on the Service website. This includes incident and performance data, quarterly performance reports, policy decisions, audit and assurance reports.

[www.cheshirefire.gov.uk](http://www.cheshirefire.gov.uk).

The Authority measures and monitors performance using a range of key Performance Indicators (KPI's) that are also used to compare performance against other fire and rescue authorities in England. The Authority publishes an Annual Report in September each year summarising progress against plans. All performance information available to the public can be accessed via the Service website and continues to be reviewed and refined.

[Annual Report](#)

In addition, the Authority has adopted the best practice guidance set out in the [Local Government Transparency Code 2015](#) as far as is practical.

## 2. Financial Assurance

Evidence Links

The Cheshire Fire Authority provides financial assurance through the publication of an Annual Statement of Accounts. This is a statutory requirement under the [Accounts and Audit \(England\) Regulations 2015](#) and the accounts are prepared following the *CIPFA Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting*. The financial statements are subject to review by independent auditors as directed by the [Audit Commission Act 1998](#).

[Statement of Accounts](#)

In addition to the statutory requirement to publish annual financial results, the Authority is committed to increasing transparency. One of the first steps in this process is for the publication of expenditure in excess of £500. This is compliant with Local Government Transparency Code.

[CFRS Website: What we spend](#)

### External Audit:

Grant Thornton Limited Liability Partnership (LLP) is the appointed external auditor for Cheshire Fire Authority and is responsible for completion of the following assurance activities:

- Audit of the 2016-17 financial statements
- Opinion on the Authority's accounts
- Value for Money conclusion

### Internal Audit:

The Internal Audit function for 2016-17 was provided by Mersey Internal Audit Agency (MIAA) and their audit opinion for the year ending **March 2017** can be located in Section 3 of this document.



### 3. Annual Governance Statement (AGS)

#### What is the Annual Governance Statement?

An Annual Governance Statement (AGS) publicly explains how an organisation manages its governance and internal control measures. It is an open and honest account of how an organisation ensures its financial management system is adequate and effective, as well as ensuring it has a sound system of internal control, assuring utmost integrity in all its dealings.

[Delivering  
Good  
Governance  
2016](#)

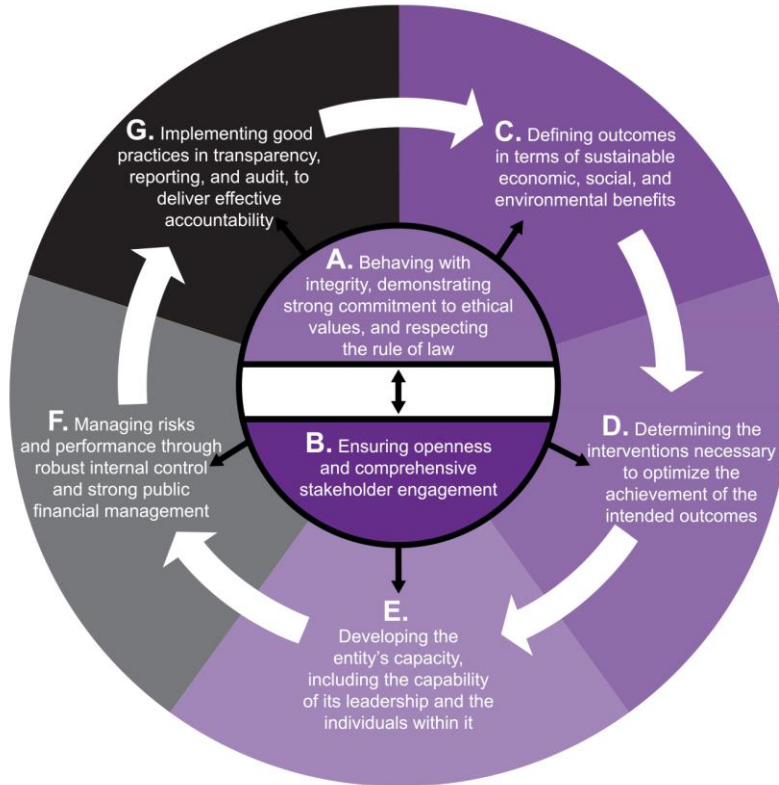
#### What is the governance framework?

The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) and the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE) published the advisory framework 'Delivering Good Governance in Local Government' ('the framework'), in 2007 and an Addendum to the framework was published in December 2012.

CIPFA/SOLACE published a new version of the framework 'Delivering Good Governance in Local Government' in 2016. The concept of the new framework is to make it more transparent and to help local authorities take responsibility for developing and shaping an informed approach to governance.

The framework defines seven core principles (A-G) that underpin the governance of each local government body. These principles are used to inform the development of our Local Code of Corporate Governance which was refreshed to reflect the new framework published in 2016. Principle H in the Local Code of Corporate Governance requires evidence of operational assurance and compliance with the National Framework and was included in the Local Code for consistency. The Authority's Local Code of Corporate Governance and compliance evidence is published on the Authority's website. An outline of the seven key areas is set out in the following model (*access the links to compliance documentation on the right for more detail*):

[Local Code of  
Corporate  
Governance  
Principals A-H](#)



## Scope of Responsibility

### **Cheshire Fire Authority**

The Authority has responsibility for ensuring that its 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.

The Authority has a duty under the Local Government Act 1999 to show how it aims for continuous improvement and best value in delivering its services, taking into account a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness.

### **Members and Officers**

In discharging the statutory responsibilities of the Authority, Members and senior officers are responsible for ensuring that proper governance arrangements are in place. These need to demonstrate good management of the Authority's key risks in accordance with legislation and appropriate standards.

## The Authority's Governance and Internal Control Framework

The Authority's governance and internal control framework includes the systems, processes, procedures, culture and core values by which it is directed and controlled, and through which it accounts to and engages with the communities and other stakeholders. It includes arrangements to monitor the achievement of its strategic objectives and to consider whether those objectives have led to the delivery of appropriate and value for money services.

This framework centres on the Authority's strategic aims and objectives and includes:

- The organisation's vision and purpose which drive the service planning, delivery, risk, project and performance management frameworks
- The annual Integrated Risk Management Plan
- Consultation and Communications Strategies
- A published set of core values
- The Authority's Constitution
- Responsible Statutory Officers (Financial and Legal)
- Established structure of Authority and Committee meetings, each with formal Terms of Reference (ToR)
- Scrutiny by Members e.g. Performance and Overview Committee responsible for thematic agendas such as Finance, Risk, Equality and Diversity, Performance Management
- Integrated Corporate and Financial planning processes with regular reporting
- Treasury Management Strategy
- A refreshed Local Code of Corporate Governance Action Plan reviewed by the Governance and Constitution Committee.
- Policies which govern the activities of the Authority, overseen by senior managers Policy Approval Group (PAG)
- Risk Management Board responsible for maintaining and championing an effective Risk Management Policy, Framework and regularly reviewing the Strategic Risk Register
- Published Anti-Fraud, Corruption, Whistle-blowing and Complaints policies and procedures
- Medium term financial forecasting and budget management processes.
- Performance Management Board which is responsible for monitoring and reviewing organisational performance including the Corporate Performance Scorecard setting out the Authority's key indicators
- A dynamic, intelligent training programme which is tailored to the development needs of the Authority's frontline staff
- Appraisal and personal development programmes
- Project and Programme Board which monitors and challenges performance of key programmes and projects
- Established Health and Safety policies
- ICT Steering Group which provides strategic direction for the Authority's ICT and Information Management and Security policies
- SMT considering all financial issues
- Information Governance
- Code of Conduct
- Crisis Management Plan

[CFRS Vision, Mission, Core values](#)

[IRMP](#)

[Treasury Management Strategy](#)

[Whistle-blowing Policy](#)

### Engaging with our Communities

Extensive efforts are made to engage with the communities and stakeholders of Cheshire East, Cheshire West and Chester, Halton and Warrington. A comprehensive twelve week programme of community consultation and stakeholder engagement is carried out each year to seek feedback on the Authority's key priorities and proposals set out in its draft annual Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP). IRMP 13 covered the period ending **31st March 2017**.

[IRMP](#)

The principles by which the Authority carries out consultation are set out in the Consultation and Engagement Strategy and on key issues the Authority works with the



Consultation Institute to assess its performance against best practice.

## Identifying and Communicating the Authority's vision

Following a period of public consultation the Fire Authority formally approved the publication of the new Five Year Strategy "Planning for a Safer Cheshire" at its meeting 17<sup>th</sup> June 2015. The Authority's vision remains "A Cheshire where there are no deaths, injuries or damage from fires or other emergencies" and the Strategy sets out the approach to achieving that vision in the context of the challenges and risks faced by the organisation.

[Five Year Strategy](#)

## Risk Management:

The Risk Management Framework and Policy is reviewed by Risk Management Board (RMB) annually. The Board accepted the new Framework at the October 2016 meeting and the policy and framework was approved by the Policy Committee in December 2016. The framework ensures all strategic, departmental, operational, programme and project risks are assessed against the achievement of objectives. RMB reviews the strategic risk register on a regular basis.

## Equality and Inclusion

Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service has used the Fire and Rescue Equality Framework to assess its equality performance and achieved the highest level of the equality framework, 'Excellent' in 2011. In advance of a new national inspection regime for fire and rescue service being introduced later in 2017, the organisation uses a number of external accreditations to benchmark and affirm its commitment to equality – including the Stonewall Workplace Equality Index and the Disability Confident scheme. It is also a Mind Blue Light Programme champion. The Authority launched a new Equality, Diversity and Inclusion strategy 2017-2020 in April 2017.

[Equality and diversity strategy 20-17-20](#)

## Stonewall

In 2017 Cheshire Fire Authority featured in the top ten of LGBT charity Stonewall's Equality Index Top 100 list of employers. The Authority has been a Stonewall Diversity Champion since 2008 and has featured in the top 50 of the Top 100 for the last five years. In 2017 the Authority ranked 8<sup>th</sup> and was the highest placed of any of the emergency services in the U.K.

[Stonewall Top Employers 2017](#)

### *Positive action*

In 2016-17 the Authority undertook a successful positive action campaign to support its recruitment of 17 wholetime fire fighters. This included targeted communications, taster days, the assignment of buddies and mentors and canvassing for potential applicants at a number of local and regional events.

The campaign delivered the following successful outcomes in terms of diversity:

- BME – 1 successful candidate – 6% of successful candidates
- Female – 4 successful candidates – 24% of successful candidates
- LGBT – 4 successful candidates – 24%
- No candidates declared a disability

## The Environment

The Authority maintains its commitment to reduce energy consumption and overall carbon emissions, with the objective of a 40% reduction by 2020. The opening of four new fire stations does present a challenge in terms of energy consumption and carbon emissions but this challenge is mitigated by environmental thinking within the planning and development stages, use of sustainable materials and planning strategic energy projects across the wider estate. New LED lighting upgrades in Widnes, Birchwood and Macclesfield Fire Stations are showing the energy reduction benefits and LED installs will be a focus in all station up-grades works in the future.

[Environmental Strategy 2014 - 2020](#)

The up-grade of oil based heating to gas supply in Northwich Fire Station delivers cleaner fuel supply, new efficient heating system and creates a better working environment for colleagues.

The Authority aims to improve its environmental evaluation of all aspects which could impact in the local environment and community.

## Information Security

The Authority maintains an information security policy which represents 'best practice' within the security industry. The policy exists to protect Authority information against any type of accidental loss, damage or abuse, by its staff, third parties and partners. In addition it maintains a safeguard to ICT systems that process, store, display and transmit information. The Head of Legal & Democratic Services is the Authority's Senior Information Risk Officer (SIRO), and is responsible for the effective implementation of a consistent framework for management of information security across the Authority.

[Information Management Policy](#)

### *Information Governance Survey*

During the first quarter of 2017 the Fire Service undertook an Information Governance Survey. The purpose of the survey was to:

- Feed into the Service's annual statement of assurance;
- Report to the Senior Information Risk Owner; and
- Identify any additional areas where Information Management can assist, particularly with the upcoming changes to data protection legislation and the Blue Light Collaboration programme.

The survey discovered that across the Service 84% of staff have successfully completed the mandatory data protection module. An additional 12% of staff have started the module but not completed the assessment. Only 4% have yet to start the training (or their training has expired).

The survey identified that over 70% of corporate policies had been recently reviewed and updated with plans in place for the remainder to be refreshed during the next 12 months.

During 2016/2017, there were 8 incidents recorded in the Service's information security incident log. Of these, 7 were breaches, and one was a near miss. The incidents included:

- Lost mobile devices (two incidents)
- Inappropriate disclosure of information (five incidents)

- Inappropriate destruction of information (one incident)

Measures are being put in place to address issues raised during the survey, including:

- Roll out of new functionality within the document management system to facilitate the document review process;
- Reminders will be sent out to staff to complete mandatory data protection training;
- Updating the Service's information asset and information risk register, and working with departments to mitigate information risks;
- Working with the Communications team to raise awareness of data protection and information handling;
- Specialised information governance support for high risk projects that involve processing of personal data;
- Development and implantation of a project plan to work towards compliance with the General Data Protection Regulations.

The survey highlighted that a number of data cleansing exercises are underway in relation to the move to the new shared headquarters at Clemonds Hey. These exercises are being supported by the information management workstream of the Blue Light Collaboration programme.

## Working in Partnership

### North West Fire Control (NWFC)

The North West Fire Control is a unique collaboration between four partner fire and rescue services Cheshire, Cumbria, Lancashire and Greater Manchester. NWFC is run by a company owned by the fire services. Over the past year the Authority has continued to work closely with NWFC and the partners to ensure that the company delivers the call handling and mobilisation service to the requisite standards. Quarterly statistical performance data is sent from NWFC to each service for scrutiny. Members of the Performance & Overview Committee review this for the Authority.

### Blue Light Collaboration Programme (BLC)

During 2016/17 work has continued on the Blue Light Collaboration (BLC) Programme which aims to merge the Cheshire Constabulary and Cheshire Fire Authority back office transactional services to create Joint Corporate Services (*IT, HR, Finance, Stores and Procurement, Planning and Performance, Strategic Change, Estates, Communications, Information Management, Legal*).

[Blue Light  
Collaboration  
Programme](#)

In December 2015 the Authority approved: the scope of the BLC Programme; the implementation budget and approach to funding; and the approach to the apportionment of costs and resultant savings. Since then work on the BLC Programme has been progressing steadily to ensure the smooth transition from the current separate organisations support services to joint services that provide services to both organisations. This has included service/departmental design and development of the approach for the overarching management of the arrangements. The expected completion date for the entire BLC Programme is April 2018.

The BLC Programme Board (which is made up of the Chief Executive of the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner, the Assistant Chief Officer for the police and the Head of Legal and Democratic Services for fire) approved the BLC Programme Plan which sets out the phasing and timing of moves from fire headquarters to Clemonds Hey. A People Strategy and People Transition processes documents have also been approved by the Board. The Strategy set out the guiding principles to help staff understand how both organisations will work together with staff and trade unions/staff associations in a fair, transparent and consistent way.

[People Strategy](#)

Staff receive regular communications, and a number of visits have taken place for staff directly affected by the move to the new joint Headquarters at Clemonds Hey.

Preparation of the legal documentation associated with the programme is progressing and officers are working on the financial arrangements that will underpin the collaboration. These will be contained in a Collaboration Agreement.

Detailed work has taken place to create new structures and define service levels for each joint support service. In September 2016 the Fire Authority made the decision to retain the Sadler Road site for the CFRS training requirements with some of the operational and support staff remaining at Sadler Road. In December 2016 the Fire Authority agreed to remove from the Blue Light Collaboration Programme the creation of a joint vehicle workshop, retaining the facility at Sadler Road and workshop staff as Fire Authority employees.

The formal staff transfer has commenced, staff in IT, Estates and Strategic Change have undergone a period of TUPE consultation and are now police employees. The staff in Planning and Performance, Communications, Legal and Information Management are due to transfer in October 2017. The final phase of the transfers will take place in April 2018. The site at Clemonds Hey will become the joint headquarters late summer 2017.

### **Fire and Rescue Indemnity Company Limited (FRIC)**

The Authority works in partnership with eight other fire and rescue authorities to provide discretionary protection against claims made against the Authority and procures insurance cover on its behalf. The partnership also helps to inform the Authority's risk management activities.

### **Safe and Well**

Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service has a strong record of prevention work to help target and protect vulnerable people from the effects of fire in the home. The key delivery mechanism for fire safety advice and information to householders in Cheshire is through Home Safety Assessments (HSA). Nationally, HSA work has played a key role in helping to reduce preventable fire deaths in England. Accidental dwelling fire fatalities, which account for three fifths of all fire fatalities, have reduced by around 50% over the past decade. In line with the national picture, fire deaths, injuries and incidents have reduced dramatically in Cheshire during the same period. This national success and proactive intervention work has received recognition and praise from the Cabinet Office, NHS and Public Health England. NHS England and Public Health England, have publicly called for the wider role of the fire and rescue service to be recognised and used to support the broader health agenda.

[Safe and Well Visits](#)

Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service wished to support the national programme of work

to assist the health agenda. In partnership with NHS Cheshire and Merseyside, CFRS and Merseyside Fire and Rescue Services hosted a Health and Fire Summit at Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service's HQ in July 2016. The Summit was a great success. Health colleagues fully recognised the contribution and value Cheshire (and Merseyside) Fire and Rescue can make to the health agenda by expanding the traditional HSA to create a broader Safe and Well visit. At the Summit, health colleagues identified the following issues they considered Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service could contribute to as part of a Safe and Well visit:

- Slips, trips and falls – prevention
- Hospital discharge for the elderly admitted for a fall
- Smoking cessation and alcohol reduction
- Bowel cancer screening

Reducing hypertension and blood pressure are key objectives for Directors of Public Health in Cheshire and Merseyside. They have therefore subsequently asked that hypertension and blood pressure checks be added to the Safe and Well programme. Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service is happy to take on this additional area of work as part of Safe and Well visits. Similarly, Halton Borough Council Public Health also asked CFRS to help identify people at risk from Atrial Fibrillation.

The following elements are currently covered in the Safe and Well visit:

- Slips, trips and falls
- People with mobility issues and at risk of falls
- Smoking cessation and alcohol reduction
- Bowel cancer screening
- (Atrial Fibrillation in Halton only)

### Delivering Partnership Outcomes

Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service currently delivers 25,000 HSAs per year. In order to support the broader health agenda, CFRS has agreed to increase the current number of HSAs from 25,000 to 40,000 Safe and Well visits from 1 April 2016. We utilise all our advocates and operational firefighters to deliver against this volume of visits. During 2016 the appropriate training and awareness sessions for Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service staff to deliver this work programme was completed in conjunction with our NHS colleagues who provided the necessary training for all the elements of Safe and Well, free of charge. The training was a mixture of group training augmented with online training for some specific issues, such as smoking cessation.

Early indications are that Phase 1 of the project have been an outstanding success. From 1st February to 7 May 2017, Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service has conducted **8,976** Safe and Well visits, resulting in:

- **708** referrals to NHS Bowel Cancer Screening Hub;
- **201** referrals to Local Authority falls teams for help and support;
- **22** referrals to Local Authority smoking cessation teams for help and support;
- **4** referrals to Local Authority alcohol reduction teams for help and support; and,
- **200** Atrial Fibrillation screening tests for Halton.

So far, **10.5%** of Safe and Well visits have resulted in a referral to health agencies.



CFRS is now in the process of identifying the elements to be included in a Phase 2. Phase 2 will comprise:

- Hypertension and blood pressure;
- Loneliness and Isolation;
- Affordable Warmth;
- Rolling out Halton Atrial Fibrillation pan-Cheshire;
- Hospital discharge for over 65s admitted to ward for a fall.

### **Evaluation of Effectiveness**

Cheshire Fire Authority has a responsibility for conducting a review of the effectiveness of its governance framework, including the system of internal control, at least annually. This is informed by the assurances of senior officers within the Authority, who have responsibility for the development, maintenance and management of the governance and internal control arrangements.

Cheshire Fire Authority is made up of twenty-three elected Members appointed by the constituent Authorities. There are also non-elected independent members who act in an advisory role.

[Fire Authority](#)

The Authority operates with the following main Committee structure:

- Policy Committee
- Performance and Overview Committee
- Governance and Constitution Committee
- Brigade Managers Pay and Performance Committee
- Staffing Committee

Terms of Reference for each Committee are subject to regular review.

The Authority has a Health Safety & Welfare Committee which meets quarterly and is chaired by the Deputy Chief Fire Officer.

### **Member Champions**

Member Champions are assigned to a number of thematic areas to provide additional scrutiny and challenge as highlighted previously, these include risk, equality, ICT, young people, older people, finance and the environment.

### **The Service Management Structure**

The operations of the Authority are directed through a clear management structure with defined roles and responsibilities. The Policy Approval Group (PAG) comprises of the Chief Fire Officer, Deputy Chief Fire Officer, Head of Legal & Democratic Services (Monitoring Officer) and Head of Finance, Section (151 Officer).

The full Service Management Team (SMT) is made up of PAG and Heads of Department. SMT is responsible for securing the delivery of the Authority's aims and objectives which support the achievement of the Authority's vision. This includes key priorities which reflect community, regional and national issues.

**Monitoring Officer:**

During the 2016 – 2017 financial year the Head of Legal and Democratic Services fulfilled the statutory role of Monitoring Officer for the Authority, ensuring all actions taken were lawful.

**Chief Finance Officer:**

For the financial year 2016-17 the Head of Finance had responsibility for day to day financial management in accordance with CIPFA guidance and fulfilled responsibilities set out in Section 151 of the Local Government Act 1972.

**How we performed during 2016 – 2017 - Performance Management:**

As part of the corporate planning process the Authority sets out the key corporate performance indicators which measure the delivery of its objectives and provide key business intelligence to help target prevention and protection activities. Targets are set where appropriate to ensure continuous improvement and evaluation. Achievements against these indicators are scrutinised quarterly by the Performance and Overview Committee and Performance Management Group and annually by the Fire Authority.

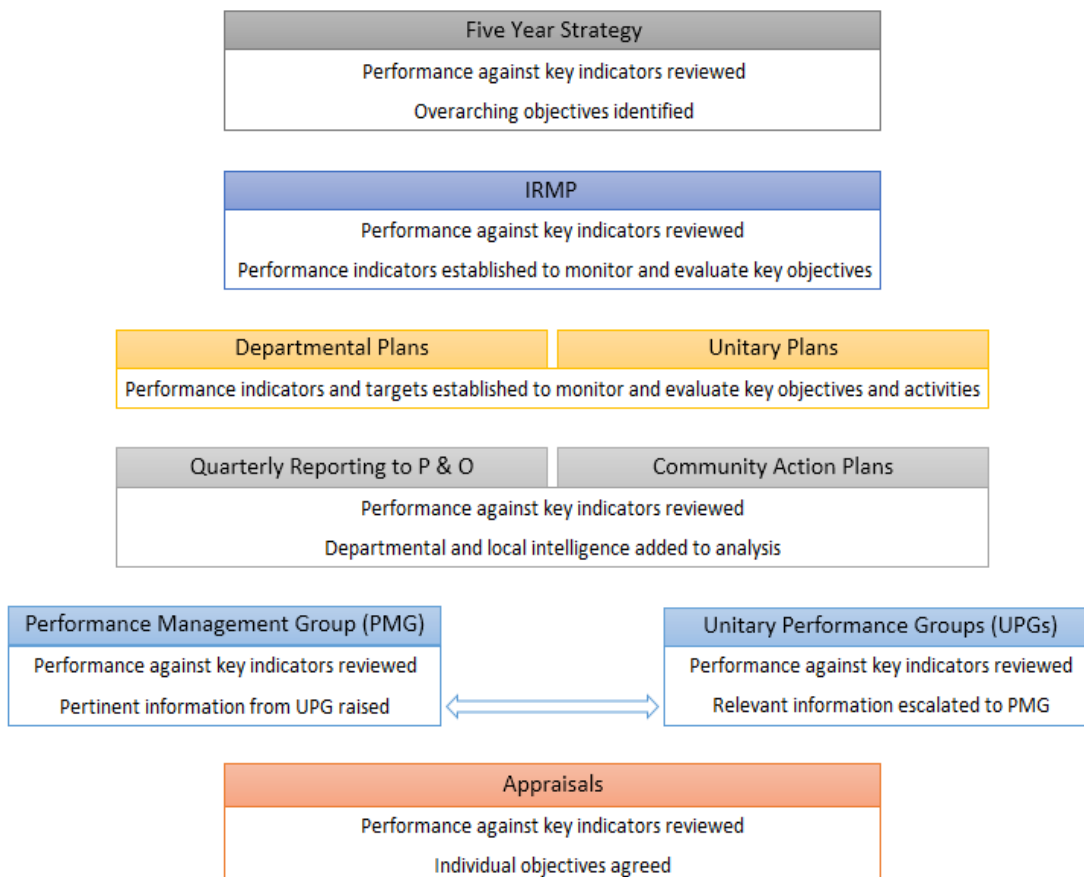
[Corporate Scorecard 16-17](#)

Performance relating to the handling of calls by North West Fire Control is also monitored quarterly, in line with agreed standards.

[Annual Report](#)

An Annual Report sets out how the Authority has performed over the last 12 months.

The diagram below presents the CFRS performance reporting model in place for 2016-17:



### Monitoring and Reporting:

The Authority has an approved process of quarterly performance and financial monitoring and reporting highlighting progress against projects and activities, budget and performance indicators identified within Departmental, Unitary and Community Action Plans. Reports are presented to PAG, SMT and Members of the Authority in line with a corporate reporting cycle.

### Value for Money Reviews:

The Authority's previous four year strategy committed to carrying out departmental reviews across the organisation; 2013-14 was the last year of the three year cycle and focused on the efficiency and effectiveness of services provided. The underpinning principle of the reviews was the Authority's duty to make best use of its resources in improving the quality of life for its communities. A full evaluation of the programme was undertaken in 2015 with the key findings reported to Performance & Overview Committee. During 2015-16 the first phase of the new organisational review programme was launched with an initial target of delivering a further £1 million in savings. That initial phase produced savings of approximately £700,000 which were removed for the 2016-17 budget.

#### *Key Governance Improvements made during 2016-17:*

In last year's AGS the Authority set out a number of improvements it intended to implement during the year. Progress against implementation of these actions is presented to the Governance and Constitution Committee.

*The table below summaries progress made to date:*

Key Improvement Area	Update Position
Policy Management - continue to facilitate comprehensive review of all corporate policies due for review	This work is almost complete and will be finalised during 2017-18
Review of Performance Management Framework	Complete

*The following table summarises the improvements identified during the process for 2016-17 by the relevant Governance Principal Owners:*

Improvements Identified for 17-18	Lead Department
Policy Management – build on the work undertaken in 2016 and complete comprehensive review of all corporate key policies	Legal & Democratic Services
Relaunch of the Partnership Toolkit; Policy and Governance model	Prevention

## Statement of Assurance 2016 - 17

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Focus on initiatives highlighted in the Environmental Strategy 2014-20 supporting achievement of 40% carbon emissions target by 2020	Property Management
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### **Internal Audit:**

The Authority's Internal Audit function for 2016-17 was outsourced to Mersey Internal Audit Agency (MIAA), and established protocols are in place for working with External Audit. A risk-based internal audit plan and three year strategy was agreed with senior management and approved by the Authority in 2016. A number of audits were commissioned in line with our risk profile which provided an independent assurance level on the Authority's control frameworks.

The internal audit team completed a number of compliance and assurance audits during 2016-17 aligned to the approved internal audit plan, which have generally resulted in positive opinions with a small number of recommendations made as a result of their findings. Action Plans have been put in place to resolve the issues and deliver solutions.

### **Internal Audit Opinion 2016-17:**

#### **Director of Internal Audit Opinion:**

**Significant Assurance**, can be given that there is a generally sound system of internal control designed to meet the organisation's objectives, and that controls are generally being applied consistently.

*All recommendations for improvements identified by Internal Audit are populated on the Authority's Cheshire Planning System for monitoring and tracking delivery of actions.*

### **External Audit Opinion 16-17:**

Grant Thornton, the Authority's External Auditors, have given an unqualified audit opinion on the 2016 -17 accounts. The controls were found to be operating effectively and we have no matters to report to the Authority". They have also given an unqualified Value for Money opinion. This gives assurance in relation to the Authority's financial reporting processes and the Authority's commitment to meeting its financial challenges.

#### **Grant Thornton Conclusion**

On the basis of our work, having regard to the guidance on the specified criteria issued by the Controller and Auditor General in November 2016, we are satisfied that in all significant respects the Authority put in place proper arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of its resources for the year ended 31 March 2017.

## 4. Operational Assurance

Evidence Links

### Statutory Responsibilities

Fire and Rescue Authorities function within a clearly defined statutory and policy framework. Links to some of the key legislation/guidance can be accessed below:

- [Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004](#)
- [Civil Contingencies Act 2004](#)
- [Regulatory Reform \(Fire Safety\) Order 2005](#)
- [Fire and Rescue Services \(Emergencies\) \(England\) Order 2007](#)
- [Localism Act 2011](#)
- [Fire and Rescue National Framework for England 2012](#)
- [Local Government Act 1999](#)
- [Health & Safety At Work Act 1974](#)
- [Policing and Crime Act 2017](#)

### Corporate Planning - Integrated Risk Management Planning for Safer Communities

Cheshire Fire Authority published a new five year strategy, titled '*Planning For A Safer Cheshire 2015-2020*'. The strategy clarifies some of the stark choices facing the Authority and outlines the approach and principles adopted to ensure the Authority does not compromise on its commitment to protecting local communities, reducing risk and maintaining firefighters' safety.

[IRMP](#)

#### *Community Risk Management*

Through its Community Risk Management Policy the Service undertakes risk, intelligence and performance analysis in order to ensure that strategic, tactical and operational activities are intelligence-led and fully evaluated. This is achieved by using specialist systems, software, data and skills delivered by the Service's Business Intelligence team.

[CRM Policy](#)

#### *Unitary Area Plans*

In addition to and complementing the IRMP, Unitary Area plans are developed for each council area. Each plan is unique to that area and contains the actions the Unitary teams will take in order to mitigate risk and improve community safety. These plans are informed by the Community Risk Model which brings together historic incident data, demographic, commercial and external risk factors.

[Unitary  
Performance Area  
Profiles 16-17](#)

#### *Stakeholder Engagement*

The Authority is committed to involving all of its stakeholders in the development of its strategies and plans. It encourages this by carrying out a comprehensive annual consultation programme on its draft IRMP. Local communities, partners, staff, representative bodies and other stakeholder's are invited to comment to ensure that before any decision is taken all perspectives are taken into account. To enable active and informed participation, data and information relevant to the plan is made available to the public on the Service's website and via social media, in consultation packs, which are distributed at community roadshow events held across Cheshire, and also at key local stakeholder forums and meetings.



### *Prevention and Protection Assurance*

Prevention and Protection managers have an Audit and Assurance function for the Prevention and Protection aspects of the Service. Specific areas of activity aligned to providing assurance against these elements of service delivery include:

- Compliance with the Prevention team's Quality Assurance Framework.
- Compliance with BS EN ISO 9001 - the provision of the Service's Prevention & Protection services has been assessed and accredited to BS EN ISO 9001:2008.
- Compliance with the Matrix standard – the Service's provision of the Prince's Trust Team Programme has been assessed and is accredited to the Matrix international quality standard for organisations that deliver information advice and/or guidance.
- Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 – further detail on how we discharge our responsibilities under fire safety legislation can be accessed via our website.
- Customer surveys are undertaken as part of the Audit and Home Safety Assessment processes.

[Fire Safety advice for Businesses](#)

### **Performance Management – How we performed during 2016-17**

A suite of corporate indicators and targets are used by the Authority and enable Stakeholders to scrutinise delivery of the IRMP.

[Corporate Scorecard 16-17](#)

The Authority publishes all performance and incident data on its website along with the Annual Performance Report to both drive improvement and ensure transparency of its performance. Performance Management is driven through three-tiers of quarterly meetings, Performance & Overview Committee (P&O) chaired by a Member of the Fire Authority, Performance Management Group (PMG) chaired by the DCFO and Unitary Performance Groups in each of the four unitary areas chaired by the Service Delivery Managers.

[www.cheshirefire.gov.uk](http://www.cheshirefire.gov.uk)

[Annual Report](#)

### **External Assurance - Operational Peer Assessment**

The Authority welcomed the Operational Peer Challenge team to Cheshire in July 2012. The team carried out a general health check and review of leadership, capacity and governance, as well as an assessment of a number of key organisational areas. Responsibility for fire formally moved from DCLG to the Home Office in early 2016. The Home Office are looking at options to undertake more formal assessments and inspections and the Authority is keen to take part in any pilot inspection exercises in 2017-18.

[Operational Peer Challenge](#)

### **Operational debriefs**

Operational debriefs are used at both incidents and the Authority's exercises and form part of the quality control system concerned with its core activities. These debriefs provide valuable lessons learned which contribute to improving the service provided. They are undertaken following every incident and at a level which recognises the scale of the incident and also the involvement of other partner agencies. Debriefs will therefore fall into Level 1 Hot debriefs or more in-depth Level II Structured debriefs. Multi agency incidents will also prompt a multi agency debrief which will be facilitated and reported through the Cheshire Resilience Forum with learning outcomes reviewed and managed through the affiliated Cheshire Emergency Response Collaboration (CERC) group.

## Section 28 reform – formerly known as Rule 43 Notices

In accordance with its commitment to ensure a safe and competent workforce, the Authority has conducted a thorough review of policies, procedures and training programmes in response to tragic events nationally. The learning has come from the services directly affected, information notices (**Coroner “Rule 43” Notices**) issued as a result of inquests and recommendations to all FRSS. Rule 43 Notices are used to inform policy and procedural reviews and to advise on the procurement/upgrade of operational equipment where necessary/appropriate.

## Business Continuity – Civil Contingencies Act 2004

Business Continuity is an important part of the Authority’s strategy and a robust programme is well established to ensure responsibilities align to best practice standards, e.g. BS25999-2. Departmental plans which support the Authority’s Crisis Management Plan are maintained and tested regularly. The Crisis Management Plan is owned by the Risk Management Board and reviewed and approved annually.

During 2014-15 there were a number of national strikes by the Fire Brigades Union, therefore the plan has undergone ‘live testing’ over the last few years. The Crisis Management Team meetings were carried out prior to, and after any strikes to plan, prepare and capture any lessons learned. These then inform the Crisis Management Plan.

Business Continuity planning and operational resilience were also tested and proved to be fit for purpose during the major incident at Bosley in 2015 which required a sustained local and regional operational presence over an extended period of time.

## Interoperability, Resilience and Safety

A comprehensive range of risk intelligence data and information is taken into account as part of the risk identification and analysis process underpinning the IRMP. This includes Community Risk Registers, with the Authority having a leading role in the Cheshire Local Resilience Forum (CRF) which focuses on interoperability and joint planning with other emergency services using the Joint Emergency Services Interoperability principles (JESIP).

CRF structures, policies and practices are regularly reviewed to better reflect the changing make up of partner agencies. Governance is managed through a monthly meeting cycle of the Management Group which reports twice yearly to the CRF Executive Group.

## Over the Border Mutual Aid Arrangements

Sections 13 and 16 of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 allow mutual assistance arrangements to be agreed with neighbouring Services to improve resilience and capacity in border areas. Cheshire Fire Authority has in place contractual agreements with the following bordering Fire Authorities for response to life risk incidents:

- Merseyside
- Staffordshire
- Shropshire
- Derbyshire

- Greater Manchester
- North Wales

The creation of the North West Fire Control led to mobilisation and support to a wider range of over the border (OTB) incidents.

### Health and safety

The Authority seeks to comply with the requirements of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 and relevant legislation in managing its health and safety (H&S) duties.

The Authority has an H&S management system based on Health & Safety Executive (HSE) guidance. As part of this we have clearly defined management responsibilities; as far as reasonably practicable we assess and manage the risks arising from our activities, we consult our employees on matters affecting H&S, we provide training and information to our employees.

The Service has an Occupational Health Unit to support the health and wellbeing of staff. We have a program of health and wellbeing campaigns e.g. we have signed up to the MIND Blue Light campaign to support mental health and wellbeing in the Service and provided training to mental health champions

[Annual Health and Safety Report 2015](#)

We have introduced an electronic system to support the reporting of all accidents and near misses that occur within the Service and to track the investigations conducted with the intention of preventing a recurrence. The Service seeks to learn not only from events that happen within the Service but also from events that occur in other FRSSs; we have conducted reviews of our own policies and procedures in light of these and made improvements when necessary with actions tracked through the Cheshire Planning System.

We have arrangements to respond to any emergency that occurs at work.

As part of the H&S Management System there is a program of audits and inspections; the audits are based on the Royal Society for Prevention of Accidents Quality Safety Audit (ROSPA) (QSA) system and its performance indicators. These audits and inspections inform our annual review of H&S Policy and performance. They also contribute towards an annual H&S report submitted to the Authority's Performance and Overview Committee.

### Firefighter Fitness

The Authority has had a policy to ensure the fitness of its operational staff for some time; in December 2014 the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) issued an addendum to the National Framework for England in relation to firefighter fitness. In 2015 the Authority proposed amendments to its then current fitness policy to align it to the National Framework requirements and the national fitness standard proposed by CFOA.

The Authority recruited a fulltime Fitness Advisor to lead on supporting firefighters to attain and maintain the fitness standards required, and to undertake fitness testing. Fitness testing for all operational staff takes place annually.

[Firefighter Fitness Addendum](#)

An audit of compliance with the National Framework requirements on management of firefighter fitness concluded that the Authority complied with the requirements of the framework.

[Firefighter Fitness Policy](#)

## Operational Training

The operational training strategy was formally launched in 2012. This strategy is underpinned by a number of specialist training policies and together these deliver a competence training framework covering a three year training cycle. The Service is now in its fifth year of training planning, delivery and review against this strategy.

[Operational Training Strategy](#)

All new firefighters attend basic training which is broken down into modules and each module is assessed. Whilst attending at the Training Centre on their initial training they are regarded as Trainee Firefighters. After this training they are posted to their fire station where they are allowed to commence riding the station's fire appliance in a limited capacity and under the close watch of their supervisory managers and their competent co workers. As the newly appointed firefighter enters their development phase of their career they are enrolled and registered with the awarding body Edexcel onto a level three National Vocational Qualification Diploma, Operations in the Community. During this phase they are assessed by competent qualified vocational assessors who ensure that the firefighters meet the assessment criteria of National Occupational Standards within their role map and go on to achieve competence within three years. This robust process of assessment is internally quality assured by vocationally qualified level 4 Internal Quality Assurers. It is later externally quality assured by an independent external Standards Verifier from Edexcel, the awarding body.

All front line operational staff, inclusive of new starters attend regular station planned training in order to maintain their operational abilities and competence. They also attend centrally planned refresher training in order to support this maintenance programme.

Breathing apparatus refresher training, which takes place in dedicated 'hot fire' conditions is scheduled annually and the Authority aims to ensure that 100% of all eligible staff attend through an electronic course management and staffing system.

Compartment fire behaviour training capability is refreshed every two years and a joint venture with Manchester Airport Fire Service and Greater Manchester Fire & Rescue Service commenced in June 2013 whereby all three services use training facilities at the airport to train and assess gas cooling and backdraft awareness skills, knowledge and understanding. This collaboration continues to be successful and effective and has underpinned the Authority's operational capability to deal safely and competently with severe compartment scenarios. Once again the Authority aims to ensure 100% of all eligible staff attend.

Road traffic extrication techniques, trauma care, hazardous materials, and working safely at height skills are refreshed over a three year period and each year the Service aims to refresh the skills, knowledge and understanding of one third of its operational workforce with an overall target set to achieve 100% of all eligible staff attendance after three years.

The Swift water rescue capability of the Service's key water stations is validated by the staff attending two days of assessment every year.

The Service's emergency response drivers attend a one day emergency response driver training refresher within a five year period. The Service is just introducing an Emergency Fire Appliance Driver Risk Index rating assessment in order to identify if any of its drivers display any 'high' risk indicators whilst driving at high speed. This assessment will result in a coaching plan being prepared for anyone identified with these tendencies.

To enhance the teaching and training capability of the instructional staff, all have now achieved or are in the process of achieving the level three award in education and training.

The Operational Training Group (OTG) also manages the Authority's Accredited Centre; currently Edexcel and Skills for Justice are the awarding bodies. Visits by external standards verifiers annually assess and confirm that the Authority operates to and maintains the awarding standards and this assists OTG in quality assuring its planning, delivery and review of training.

As well as external verification OTG also review all operational training delivery against its policies and annual training plan to assess its effectiveness and to ensure that the requisite number of operational personnel have attended these continuous professional development programmes.

Managers are all trained and assessed for their skills, knowledge and understanding in Incident Command. A dedicated Command Training Group (CTG) of vocationally qualified Officers plan, deliver and assess these training programmes. The quality of the Incident Command Training within the Service has attracted business from several other Fire & Rescue Services including Cumbria, Shropshire and Nottinghamshire as well as several high risk industries.



## 5. Assurance Conclusion

This Statement of Assurance provides an accurate account of Cheshire Fire and Rescue Authority's Financial (and associated documentation), Governance and Operational Assurance arrangements to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2017. In addition we are satisfied that Cheshire Fire and Rescue Authority conducted its business practices within the appropriate legal framework and standards and that public money was properly accounted for and used economically, efficiently and effectively.

**Signatures:**

Fire Authority (Chair):



Chief Fire Officer/  
Chief Executive Officer:



Treasurer:

