



Annual Governance Statement

2025-26

HEREFORD & WORCESTER
HWFR
FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

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1. Scope of Responsibility

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

2. The Purpose of the Governance Framework

2.1 Governance is about how the Authority ensures that it is doing the right thing, in the right way for the right people in a timely, inclusive, open, honest and accountable manner. It comprises the systems and processes, cultures and values, by which the Authority is directed and controlled and through which it accounts to and engages with its communities.

2.2 The system of internal control is designed to manage risk to a reasonable level (rather than to eliminate all risk). The Authority maintains a sound system to protect against risks and mitigate their impact. The systems are regularly reviewed and updated.

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

3.1 The Authority has adopted a Code of Corporate Governance, which sets out how the Authority promotes good governance. A copy of the code is available at <https://hwfire.cmis.uk.com/hwfire/Documents/DocumentLibrary.aspx> or may be obtained from Hereford & Worcester Fire Authority Headquarters, Hindlip Park, Worcester, WR3 8SP.

3.2 The Authority has the following protocols and processes in place which demonstrate

the core principles as required by the CIPFA/ SOLACE Delivering Good Governance in Local Government Framework 2016, as updated in the Addendum published in May 2025.

Core Principle



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

Members' Code of Conduct and Registers of Interests – a local Code of Conduct for all Members is in place and a Register of Financial Interests for each Member is published on the Authority's website.

Declarations of Gifts & Hospitality – in accordance with the Code of Conduct and the Authority's Gifts & Hospitality Protocol, Members are required to register any gifts or hospitality they receive valued at £50 or more, as well as recording any significant gift or hospitality they were offered but have refused to accept.

Core Code of Ethics for Fire & Rescue Services – the Authority has adopted the Core Code of Ethics for Fire and Rescue Services in England, which was developed in partnership by the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC), the Local Government Association and the Association of Police Crime Commissioners. Authority members and staff have received external training from IODA relating to organisational culture.

Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Plan – sets out the Authority's commitment to being an inclusive organisation which recognises the diverse backgrounds, beliefs and needs of our staff and the communities we serve.

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Code of Conduct for Staff and Register of Staff Interests – requires employees to perform their duties with honesty, integrity, impartiality and objectivity.

Whistleblowing Policy – in place for receiving and investigating complaints from staff and/or contractors.

Independent Staff Reporting Line – The Authority has implemented an independent and confidential reporting line for staff concerns using 'Safecall' 0800 915 1571 / www.safecall.co.uk/hwfrs.

Complaints Systems – in place for receiving and investigating complaints from the public. A procedure is also in place for complaints relating to alleged breaches of the Code of Conduct by Members.

Anti-Fraud, Bribery and Corruption Policy – the Authority has a zero tolerance approach to fraud, bribery and corruption, whether it is attempted from inside or outside the organisation.

Ethical Behaviour by Contractors – we review contractors' internal policies and Modern Slavery & Human Trafficking Statements as part of the procurement process. Our terms & conditions of contract require contractors to comply with the Authority's ethical framework and key policies.

How we ensure compliance – the Authority is represented on Local Strategic Partnerships, the Safer Roads Partnership and local Community Safety Partnerships. The Authority has also worked closely with West Mercia Police with regards to sharing buildings and assets and has led a strategic partnership for the delivery of a new fire control system with Shropshire & Wrekin Fire & Rescue Service, Cleveland Fire & Rescue Service and Durham & Darlington Fire & Rescue Service.

Core Principle

B

Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement is demonstrated through:

Members' Code of Conduct and Registers of Interests – a local Code of Conduct for all Members is in place and a Register of Financial Interests for each Member is published on the Authority's website.

Decision Making – All decisions are made in accordance with the following principles:

- proportionality (i.e. the action must be proportionate to the desired outcome);
- due consultation and the taking of professional advice from officers;
- respect for human rights;
- a presumption in favour of openness; and
- clarity of aims and desired outcomes

Elected Members receive written reports from their officers setting out the background to all decisions that are required to be made, including any relevant policy, financial and legal considerations. Equality & diversity and data protection impact assessments are undertaken where appropriate. All reports include a professional recommendation for Members to consider.

Openness of & transparency – All meetings of the Authority and its committees are open to the public unless confidential matters are being discussed. Members of the public can register to speak and raise any topic at full Authority meetings if it is relevant to the duties and power of the Fire Authority. All Fire Authority and Committee agendas and minutes are available on the Authority's website. There is also a transparency

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section on the website where the public can view strategic documents and financial information about the Authority.

Public Consultation – Strategic decisions such as the Resources Review (2024) and the Community Risk Management Plan are subject to public consultation as appropriate. Public consultation on the Community Risk Management Plan 2025-30 took place between February and April 2025. This included public focus groups, social media advertising and an on-line questionnaire sent to key stakeholders and representative bodies. The outcome of the consultation was reported to the Authority when the plan was approved in October 2025.

Scheme of Delegation – Some decisions have been delegated for officers to make. These are set out in the Scheme of Delegation.

Internal engagement – the Authority is committed to ensuring effective engagement with its staff. In addition to consultation and negotiation with recognised trade union bodies, for example via the Joint Consultative Committee (JCC), staff groups such as Women@HWFire and the Neurodiverse Staff Network provide forums for engagement with staff. In 2023, the Service conducted a staff survey as well as commissioning an independent, external, Cultural Audit.

Active engagement with partners – the Authority is represented on Local Strategic Partnerships, the Safer Roads Partnership and local Community Safety Partnerships. The Authority has also worked closely with West Mercia Police with regards to sharing buildings and assets and has led a strategic partnership for the delivery of a new fire control system with Shropshire & Wrekin Fire & Rescue Service, Cleveland Fire & Rescue Service and Durham & Darlington Fire & Rescue Service.

Core Principle



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

Community Risk Management Plan 2025-2030 (CRMP) – sets out how we will deliver sustainable, risk-based services to meet the needs of our communities.

Core & Enabling Strategies – the Service has published core strategies for Prevention, Protection and Response showing how the commitments in the CRMP will be delivered. They are complimented by enabling strategies such as the People Strategy 2025-2030, Asset Management Strategy 2025-2030 and Digital & Data Strategy 2024-2030.

Annual Service Review 2025-26 – assesses the performance of the Service during the last year and how the Authority delivered against the CRMP (below).

Annual Service Plan 2026-27 – incorporates the outlook and objectives for the year.

Monitoring Performance – The Senior Leadership Board monitor performance against the agreed strategies and this is reported to the Authority on a quarterly basis using a comprehensive set of key performance indicators.

Environmental Sustainability Plan 2026-2030 – sets out how we will continue to improve the ways in which we use our resources to ensure the least harm to our environment.

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Working with partners – The Authority has co-location arrangements with West Mercia Police at Bromsgrove, Redditch, Wyre Forest, Tenbury and Peterchurch. There are also joint working arrangements with Police and the Ambulance Service regarding missing persons searches and gaining entry.

Procurement – Contract Standing Orders define the thresholds above which certain procurement requirements, such as competitive quotations or full tenders are required in order to ensure value for money. All contract opportunities above £20,000 are published on the Governments Central Digital Platform. Where appropriate, the Authority utilises sector-wide procurement frameworks to ensure value for money.

Strategic Risk Register – identifies controls to mitigate inherent identified risks and is monitored on an on-going basis with exception reporting to the Strategic Leadership Board and to the Audit, Scrutiny & Standards Committee. Departmental Risk Registers are reviewed by managers on a quarterly basis.

His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) – undertake independent inspections of the Service's performance and issue reports. The most recent inspection was in February 2026 and the report is currently awaiting. The Service will prepare an improvement plan to address any issues identified in the inspectors' findings.

Core Principle

D

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

Community Risk Management Plan, Core & Enabling Strategies – The Community Risk Management Plan 2025-2030 defines the long term objectives for the Authority to address the needs of the community. The core and enabling strategies define how those objectives will be delivered.

Annual Service Review 2025-26 – reviews how well the Authority delivered on its objectives over the past year.

Annual Service Plan 2026-27 – describes the Authority's objectives for the year ahead.

Medium Term Financial Plan – identifies the financial resources available and how these will be utilised to deliver services.

Core Principle

E

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

Constitution – defines the roles and responsibilities of the Authority, Committees, Members and Officers, including the Scheme of Delegation to Officers.

Fire Authority Members – all new Members are provided with an induction and information is available for all Members to further develop fire-specific knowledge during their tenure.

Strategic Leadership Board (SLB) – involves all Principal Officers and Assistant Directors in supporting the Chief Fire Officer to lead the Service.

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Statutory Officers – The Authority is required to appoint three statutory officers – the Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive is Head of Paid Service; there is also a Chief Finance Officer (Treasurer) and a Monitoring Officer. The Authority's practices, procedures and arrangements for discharging these roles accord with the Code of Practice on Good Governance for Local Authority Statutory Officers.

Financial Management – The Authority has adopted the CIPFA Statement on the role of the Chief Finance Officer in Local Government. The Authority complies with the principles in that code as well as the principles of the CIPFA Financial Management Code.

Staff Development Process – the People Strategy 2025-2030 sets out how the Authority is supporting its workforce to become more resilient and diverse, to develop their skills and maximise their wellbeing at work. Individual appraisals are in place for all staff to enable personal objectives to be set which contribute to the overall aims of the Authority. We have also implemented our 'Step Framework' for developing officer potential as well as programmes for aspiring middle managers and aspiring strategic leaders.

Core Principle



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

Risk Management Strategy – the strategic risk register is reviewed quarterly by the Senior Leadership Board to ensure that cost-effective control mechanisms are in place. This is reported to the Audit,

Scrutiny & Standards Committee annually. The strategic risk register is supported by individual departmental risk registers and there is a comprehensive set of business continuity plans in place.

Chief Financial Officer (Treasurer) – ensures the sound administration of the financial affairs of the Authority, as required by the statutory duties associated with s.151 of the Local Government Act 1972, the Local Government Finance Act 1988 and the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015. The Chief Financial Officer is also governed by professional standards set by CIPFA.

Cyber security and information governance – is assured through implementation of the Digital & Data Strategy 2024-2030. The Assistant Chief Fire Officer is the Senior Information Risk Officer; there is an information asset register and all staff have received online training in relation to both data protection and cyber security.

Procurement risks – are managed through the application of Contract Standing Orders and the support of a dedicated Procurement & Contract Manager. There is a contracts register.

Assurance Framework – internal assurance of the Authority's systems, processes and standards is assured through:

- Operational Performance Board
- Service Improvement board
- Business Planning Board
- Change Portfolio Board
- Professional Standards Board

Scrutiny & Audit – is undertaken by the Authority's elected members on both the Audit, Scrutiny & Standards Committee and Policy & Resources Scrutiny Committee. The internal audit function is provided by

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Worcestershire Internal Audit Shared Services.
The external auditor is Bishop Flemming.

Counter Fraud & Anti-Corruption – in addition to financial regulations and anti-fraud and corruption policies that are in place, the Authority participates in the national fraud initiative. These processes and systems are audited by both Internal and external audit functions.

Fire Standard: Internal Governance & Assurance – the authority meets the Fire Standard for internal governance and assurance:

- CRMP 2025-2030 sets clear and realistic objectives. the core strategies for Prevention, Protection and Response describe who these will be delivered
- There are effective processes in place to support continued organisational development and evaluation of internal controls
- Internal governance structures enable the Senior Leadership Board and elected Members to have comprehensive oversight of internal activities to assure them that the Service is operating effectively
- The Service has a learning culture which values internal and external feedback
- It uses the CRMP 2025-2030, Core and Enabling Strategies, annual service review and quarterly performance monitoring to evaluate what it does and provide a better service to the public, while identifying and managing risk
- The Authority acts lawfully and demonstrates this by consistently reporting its progress. Reports are published in an accessible manner to all via the Authority's website
- The Service adheres to national standards, frameworks and best practice where appropriate.

Core Principle



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

Internal Audit – Departmental managers provide a formal response to all Internal Audit reports. Recommendations are reported to the Senior Leadership Board and any high priority recommendations are reported to Audit, Scrutiny & Standards Committee.

External Audit – the Authority's external auditors present their findings, the annual audit letter and values for money assessment to the Audit, Scrutiny & Standards Committee.

HMICFRS – inspection reports are considered by the full Authority. The Authority agrees an improvement plan to address any areas for improvement in the report and delivery of that plan is reported to the Authority's committees.

Health & Safety – all health and safety events, including near misses, are reported and monitored by the internal health & safety committee and any action taken where necessary.

4. Review of Effectiveness

4.1 The Authority has prepared the Annual Governance Statement in accordance with the "Delivering Good Governance in Local Government Framework" and the Addendum published in May 2025 by CIPFA/SOLACE. As part of the process the Authority has reviewed the self-assessment its corporate governance arrangements against the framework to ensure that these are working correctly and are relevant to the current environment.

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4.2 The Authority is satisfied that its financial management arrangements conform with the governance requirements of the CIPFA Statement of the Role of the Chief Financial Officer in Local Government. In addition, the key financial systems are continually reviewed by the Internal Auditor.

4.3 Budget Monitoring reports have been presented to the Policy & Resources Scrutiny Committee and have shown that the Authority's finances continue to be well controlled. Budget pressures in the medium term are well understood and a report with options for future efficiencies will be brought forward for consideration at a future date.

5. Significant Governance Issues

5.1. The External Auditor made a statutory recommendation to the Authority in February 2025 under section 24 of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 in connection with the late publication of the 2023/24 Statement of Accounts. The Authority formally accepted the recommendations at a meeting in March 2025. The 2023/24 Statement of Accounts were subsequently approved. The Accounts for 2024/25 were approved and published in line with Statutory deadlines and in their Report the Auditors recognised that the 2023/24 Recommendation was fully discharged.



Jonathon Pryce
KFSM

Chief Fire Officer /
Chief Executive



Councillor
Roger Phillips OBE

Chairman of the
Fire Authority

Date: 23 June 2026

