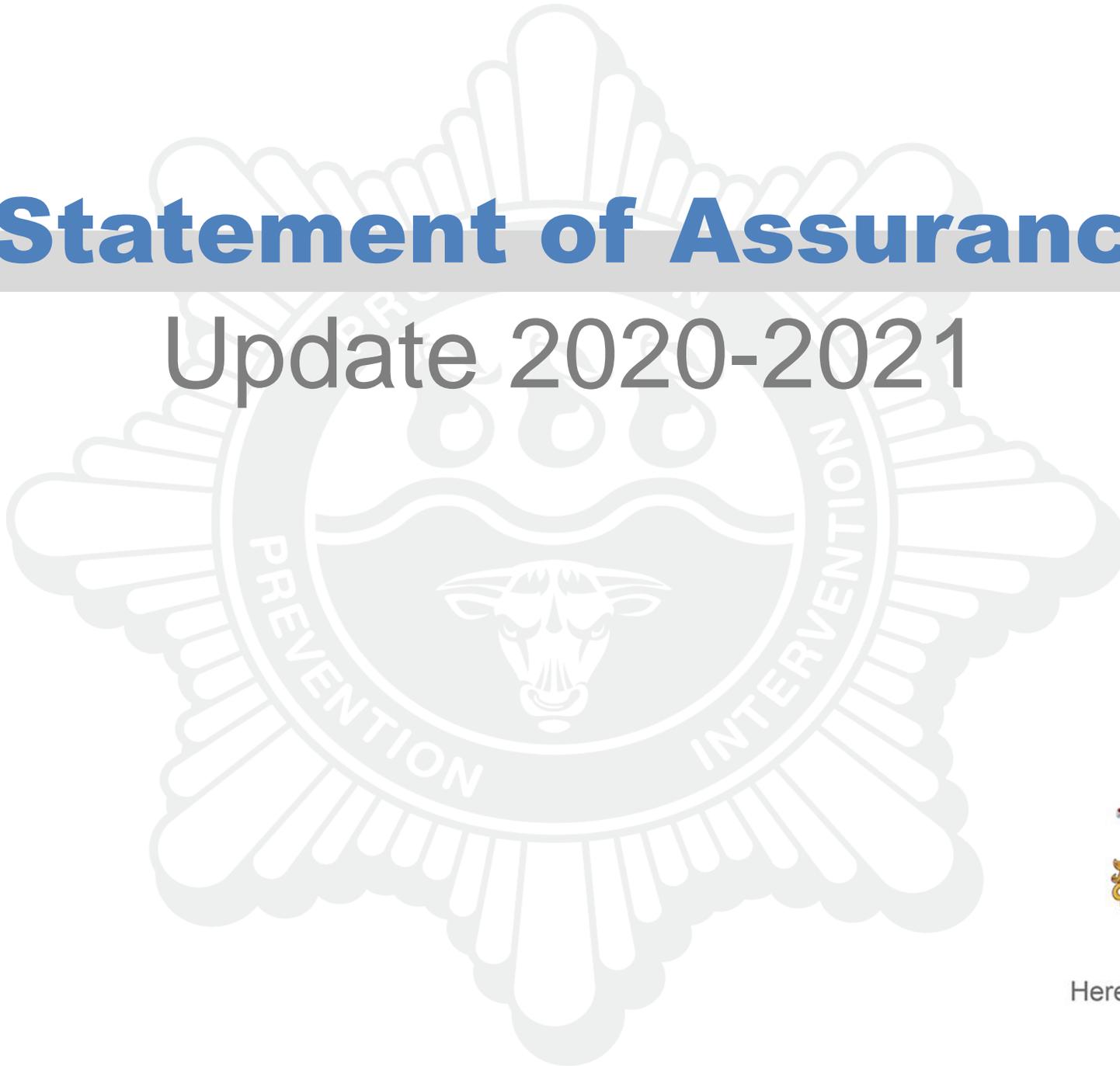


Statement of Assurance

Update 2020-2021



Hereford & Worcester
Fire Authority

Foreword

The Statement of Assurance is an annual report designed to provide an assurance that we are doing everything we can to keep our communities safe and well.

It follows national guidance set out in the 2018 Fire and Rescue National Framework for England, which requires Fire and Rescue Authorities to provide assurance to our community and to government in three main areas:

- **Governance:** making sure our governance arrangements are delivering our services effectively and efficiently
- **Finance:** ensuring our financial arrangements are in order and providing good value for money, and
- **Operations:** organising our services to make sure risks are well understood and we have the right resources in place to tackle them effectively and safely.

The Statement also needs to have due regard to the expectations in the Community Risk Management Plan and the provisions of the National Framework.

The Statement is an update of the previous 2020-21 report in order to bring it into line with new reporting arrangements in place from 1 April 2021.

The Statement sits alongside our strategies, plans, policies and procedures – all of which can be viewed on the [Publications page](#) of the Service website.

The Statement covers the year up to 31 March 2021 – a year that has been dominated by one issue: Covid-19. The pandemic has affected every one of us, and you can read more about how the Service has responded later in the Statement. Thankfully, we are now well-advanced on the national vaccination programme; hopefully, heralding a return to some sense of normality in the coming year.

Despite the pandemic, our fire and rescue work continued throughout the year. We attended 7,016 incidents, down by 11% on the previous year.

During the year, we also prepared our new Community Risk Management Plan 2021-25, which sets out our plans for keeping people, their homes, communities and the environment safe.

As Chairman of the Fire Authority and Chief Fire Officer, we are satisfied that our governance, financial and operational assurance arrangements are effective and appropriate in supporting our aim to deliver our services to the best of our abilities for the communities of Herefordshire and Worcestershire.

Through this Statement, we want to give you an opportunity to review these arrangements and be assured that we have conducted our business in accordance with the law and proper standards and have used our public funding efficiently, effectively and economically.



Councillor Kit Taylor,
Chairman of the Fire Authority



Jonathon Pryce, Chief Fire
Officer / Chief Executive

About us – our area

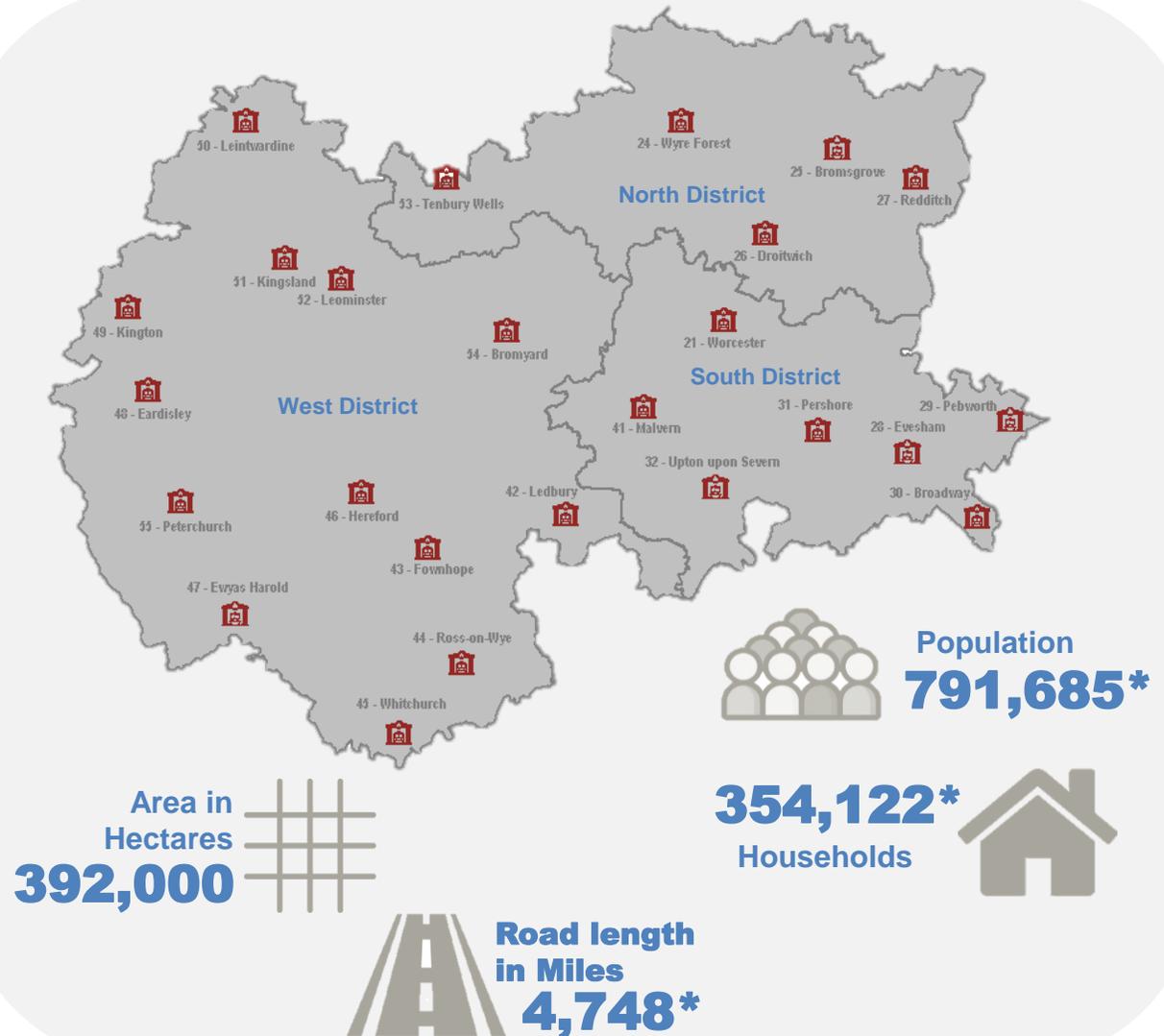
Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service (HWFRS) provides prevention, protection and emergency response services across Herefordshire and Worcestershire.

The two counties cover a large, mostly rural area of 1,500 square miles and are home to 791,685 people, three-quarters of whom live in Worcestershire.

To cover this very large area, we organise our services around three Districts – North, South and West – which provides a balanced response to community risk.

Within the area we have 25 fire stations, mostly located in the main towns, with 41 frontline fire engines supported by 28 specialist vehicles. These are placed strategically to be able to respond effectively and in a timely manner whenever an emergency call is received.

You can read more about our area and the Service on our [Website](#)



* Mid-2020 estimates

About us – our Service in 2020-21

Our work is driven by our **Core Purpose** ...

Keeping people safe from fire and other risks – responding efficiently and effectively to incidents and emergencies.

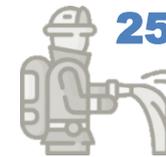
... and our **Values**:



Staff
Members
688
(774 roles)



253
Whole time
firefighters



On call
firefighters
370



126
Support
Staff



Fire
Control
Staff
25



25
Fire
Stations



Fire
Engines
41

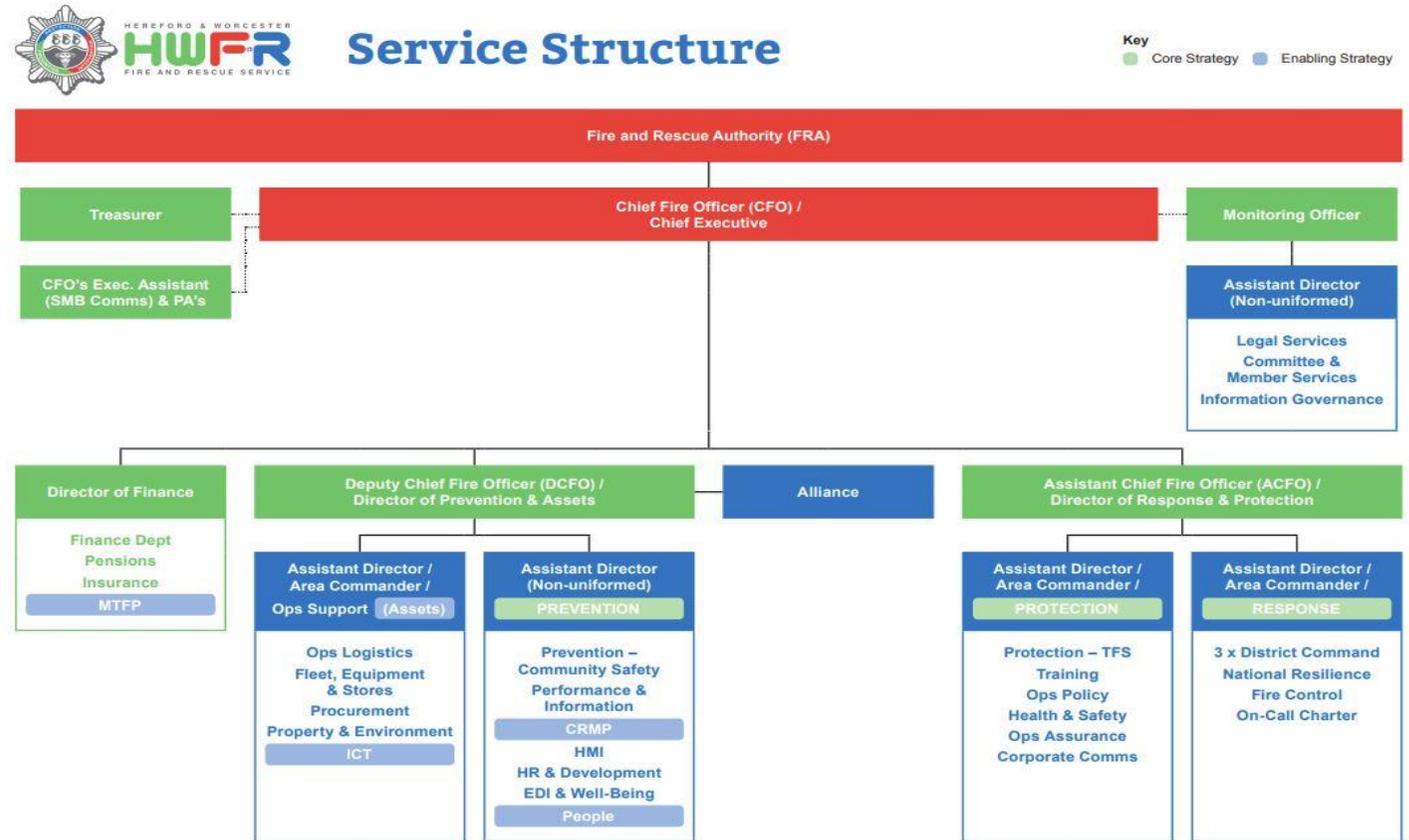


Budget
£36 Million

About us – our Structure

The chart shows how we organise our key prevention, protection and response services into directorates, and most staff are directly involved in delivering these services. They are assisted by professional teams providing support and enabling services such as finance, human resources, legal services and information and communications technology. There is also a Fire Control team, who are the frontline service for receiving emergency calls and deploying crews to incidents.

You can read more about how we are structured and managed on the [About Us](#) page on our Website.



About us – our work in 2020-21

In 2020-21, we attended 7,016 incidents, about 135 each week. This was about 11% less than the previous year. We were called to fewer incidents in all three main categories: fires, special services (non-fire incidents) and false alarms. This includes a 27% fall in the number of non-fire incidents, mainly because of fewer road traffic collisions and flooding incidents during the year.

Over the year, we also continued to provide our key prevention and protection services, such as carrying out Safe & Well Checks, fitting smoke alarms targeted at vulnerable households and undertaking our risk-based audit programme for local business premises.

Throughout 2020-21, there was a significant focus on maintaining and strengthening the workforce through succession planning, including a new Chief Fire Officer, Assistant Chief Fire Officer and temporary Area Commanders. There was also recruitment and promotion for Group and Station Commanders and other new recruits to help to maintain our operational response capability.

The Annual Service Review 2020-21 provides an overview across all aspects of our work including Prevention, Protection, Response, Training and Fleet & Equipment. It also provides information on our new [Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Plan 2020-25](#).

You can also read about the impact of Covid-19; how it has affected the Service and how we are responding. There is also an article on how we are taking on board the recommendations of the Grenfell Tower Inquiry.

We also provide more information on our new Community Risk Management Plan 2021-25, which is our overall strategy for keeping people, their homes, communities and the environment safe.

You can read more about our work in our [Annual Service Review 2020-21](#), which is available on the Service website. You can also read about our plans for the coming year in our [Annual Service Plan 2021-22](#), also on the Service website.



Governance Assurance - 1

The Service's governing body is Hereford & Worcester Fire Authority. It is made up of 25 local councillors, six from Herefordshire Council and 19 from Worcestershire County Council. Since October 2016, the Fire Authority has included the West Mercia Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) in a non-voting capacity.

The Authority:

- makes sure the Service carries out its duties in relation to fire prevention, fire safety, firefighting and rescues, including road traffic collisions and other emergencies such as flooding, as set out in the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004
- makes sure due regard is given to the terms and requirements set out in the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England, as updated in 2018
- sets the budget and approves the Service's overall direction
- appoints the Chief Fire Officer and makes sure the Service has the right people, equipment and training to deliver their services effectively and efficiently in the best interests of the communities of Herefordshire and Worcestershire.

The Authority normally meets four times a year and is supported by three main committees. Most meetings are held in public, though with the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic some meetings have been held virtually. These can be viewed on the [Fire Authority YouTube website](#).

Full details of the Authority, committees, meetings and decisions can be found on [Fire Authority page](#) of the Service website.

The Authority has a responsibility to ensure its business is conducted in accordance with the law and proper standards, and that public money is safeguarded and properly accounted for. This is supported by a [Code of Corporate Governance](#) setting out how good governance will be promoted.

The main elements of the governance framework are:

- [Constitution](#) (including the Members Code of Conduct) – defines the roles and responsibilities of the Authority, Committees, Members and Officers
- [Audit and Standards Committee](#) – reviews arrangements for identifying and managing the Authority's business risks and the approval of policies

- **Monitoring Officer** – provides advice on the scope of powers and responsibilities of the Authority, and has a statutory duty to ensure lawfulness and fairness of decision making
- **Chief Financial Officer (Treasurer)** – ensures the sound administration of the financial affairs of the Authority as required by the statutory duties under the Local Government Act 1972, the Local Government Finance Act 1988 and the Account and Audit (England) Regulations 2015
- [Ethical Framework and Code of Conduct](#) – in place for all staff, and familiarisation is included in the induction process.

Information Governance

The Service collects and maintains information and data to enable us to carry out our statutory duties. The Information Governance service within the Legal Services team ensures information is kept secure and is used fairly and properly. The [Access to Information](#) page of the Service website provides more information, including links to the Freedom of Information and Data Protection acts.

Governance Assurance - 2

Each year, the Authority prepares an [Annual Governance Statement](#) (AGS) setting out how it meets its responsibilities.

It provides assurance in relation to seven Core Principles:

- A: Behaving with integrity, demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values and respecting the rule of law,
- B: Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement
- C: Defining outcomes in terms of sustainable economic, social and environmental benefits,
- D: Determining the interventions necessary to optimise the achievement of the intended outcomes
- E: Developing the entity's capacity, including the capability of its leadership and the individuals within it,
- F: Managing risks and performance through robust internal controls and strong public financial management
- G: Implementing good practices in transparency, reporting and audit to deliver effective accountability.

We have reviewed compliance against these Principles and are assured that all elements are met. This is set out in the [AGS Assurances 2020/21 and Action Plan 2021/22](#), which includes one area where minor action was required.

The Annual Governance Statement will be audited by the External Auditors and included in the External Audit Findings 2020/21 report. **To be updated when report is available**

Internal Audit

During the year, the Worcestershire Internal Audit Shared Service (WAISS) carried out a number of audits in relation to Corporate Governance and System/ Management Arrangements. These audits help to ensure our systems and controls are adequate, effective and functioning correctly.

The audits examined Key Performance Indicators, Charge Cards and Asset Management Registers, and full assurance was achieved. The [Internal Audit Annual Report 2020-21](#) is available on the Service website for further information.

Update on future governance

The provisions of the 2017 Policing and Crime Act enabled Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) to take on responsibility for fire and rescue services.

The West Mercia PCC subsequently submitted a plan to take on governance of both Hereford & Worcester and Shropshire fire and rescue services. The plan was approved by Government, but it was subject to a legal challenge by both Fire Authorities.

A judicial review of the challenge in June 2019 upheld the Home Secretary's decision. However, in the light of changing circumstances, the legal proceeding concluded. The Home Office added that they would not consider any business case until after PCC elections in May 2021.

Following his re-election in May 2021, the West Mercia PCC has reiterated his intention to submit a business case to take over governance of the two fire and rescue services.

Financial Assurance

The Fire Authority is responsible for ensuring public money is properly accounted for and used efficiently and effectively. To ensure that sound financial management policies are in place, the Authority adheres to and implements the provisions of [Financial Regulations](#), updated in January 2020.

The Regulations cover all aspects of financial management and planning, the management of risks and resources, financial systems and processes, arrangements for joint working and delegation limits.

Assurance is provided through an Annual Statement of Accounts. The Statement is designed to provide a true and fair view of the financial position, including a statement of income and expenditure. In preparing the Statement, the Treasurer follows the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in the United Kingdom.

The Fire Authority's arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources is also subject to an independent assessment annually by External Auditors.

The latest [Statement of Accounts](#) covers the Authority's financial year ending 31 March 2021 and is available on the Service website along with the **External Auditor's** audit opinion. **(to be updated when report is available)**

Internal Audit

To provide further assurance, every year a structured programme of internal audit reports of accountancy and finance systems is carried out by Worcestershire Internal Audit Shared Service in line with Public Sector Internal Audit Standards. During the year, five audits were undertaken: Main Ledger, Creditors, Debtors, Payroll & Pensions, and Capital Budgeting. The audit found an assurance level of "full" for the four core financial areas, no limited or below assurance areas, and no high priority recommendations. Further details can be found in the [Internal Audit Annual Report 2020-21](#).

Budget

Each year, the Authority approves a [Medium Term Financial Plan](#), which sets out the resources needed to deliver our services, and agrees an annual budget. A Budget Monitoring report is also presented to the Fire Authority quarterly.

The budget for 2020-21 was £35.8m and a summary of how it was spent is included in the [Annual Service Review 2020-21](#). It shows that the annual cost to the average Council Tax Band D household was £85.99 or £1.65 per week. Full details of the budget and [Council Tax](#) are available on the Service website.

Transparency

In addition to ensuring prudent financial management, the Authority is committed to promoting openness and accountability in local decision making, public spending and democratic processes. As part of this, it has adopted a [Transparency Code of Practice](#), which includes details of payments for goods and services to external bodies and suppliers above £250, details of salaries, allowances and expenses paid to staff and Members.

Operational Assurance - 1

Framed by statutory responsibilities set out in the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004, the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 and other strategic legislation and guidance, we organise our services to make sure our firefighters and communities are kept as safe as possible.

We aim to provide the best training and equipment for our firefighters to do their jobs safely and ensure they have the best incident command and operational leadership available. We constantly assess the level of risk across the two counties and use this to help organise how we target our prevention and protection services.

During the year, we prepared our new [Community Risk Management Plan 2021-25](#) (CRMP), which sets out the Authorities plans to meet current and future risks to our communities. Prepared in conjunction with Shropshire FRS's new Integrated Risk Management Plan as part of the formal [Strategic Fire Alliance](#) between ourselves and Shropshire, it features our plans for prevention, protection and emergency response over the next four years, as well as supporting our workforce and maintaining value for money.

The CRMP is supported by a number of more detailed strategies and risk analyses covering People & Places, Economy, Environment and Transport. All documents are available on the [Publications](#) page of the Service website. Also available are Station Risk profiles for each of our 25 fire stations, which can be found by following station links on the [Fire Stations](#) page of the website.

Key priorities and CRMP activities and plans in 2020-21 are set out in the [Fire Authority Annual Report 2020-21](#). This has now been replaced by two more accessible documents for future reporting - the [Annual Service Review 2020-21](#) and the [Annual Service Plan 2021-22](#).

HMICFRS

[Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services](#) carry out inspections of fire and rescue services to assess their effectiveness, efficiency and support for their people. Because of the Covid-19 crisis, they suspended their inspection programme until early 2021. However, the Service continued to implement actions recommended in the 2018 inspection and [Improvement Plan](#) updates can be found on the [Publications](#) page of the Service website.

Over the autumn of 2020, HMICFRS carried out a national inspection of the fire and rescue service response to Covid-19 during the early months of the pandemic. Their [inspection letter](#) found that the Service had responded effectively, but could have done more in terms of protection and staff communication. Both of these areas have been quickly addressed.

Operational Assurance - 2

Operational Audits

Despite the restrictions arising from Covid-19, the Service's programme of Operational Assurance audits continued throughout the year.

There was a focus on safety critical Breathing Apparatus (BA) training, resulting in 100% operational personnel compliance completing the BA refresher for 2019-21. Station Assurance audits also gained 100% compliance in watch and on-call units completing the audit.

Practical Skills audits were unfortunately postponed given the Covid-19 circumstances, but audits were completed in key safety critical areas, including Compartment Fire Behaviour Training, First Response Emergency Care, learning from operational incidents and health and safety events.

Assessments of knowledge and understanding of safeguarding, operational discretion and information governance were also carried out, following minor amendments to guidance.

Self-assessments carried out by Watches and On-Call units were also examined to review how effective local management processes are, including driving licence checks, return to work interviews, appraisals and active incident monitoring completions.

Findings continue to be very positive in relation to practical and technical abilities and competencies demonstrated, with any outstanding actions needed noted and followed up.

While the impact of Covid-19 throughout the year led to a reduction of some activity, 100% of the Intel programme was delivered, and a significant number of risk reviews (254) were carried out for Care Homes across the two counties. Incident Command competence for all levels of Command across the organisation remained high at 98%, and this assurance supports and drives firefighter safety, particularly at operational incidents.

National Resilience assets also remained available throughout 2020-21 and supported the national High Volume Pump Capability Team with a revised programme for 2021-22 using new facilities available at the Wyre Forest Hub.

Directory of assurance documents

Governance

[Annual Governance Statement 2020-21](#)

Other key governance documents can be found by following the links on the [Transparency Code of Practice](#) page of the Service website.

Key legislation includes:

- [Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004](#)
- [Civil Contingencies Act 2004](#)
- [Regulatory Reform \(Fire Safety\) Order 2005](#)
- [Fire and Rescue Services \(Emergencies\) \(England\) Order 2007](#)
- [Fire and Rescue National Framework for England 2018](#)
- [Local Government Act 1999](#)
- [Localism Act 2011](#)
- [Equality Act 2010](#)
- [Policing and Crime Act 2017](#)
- [Crime and Disorder Act 1988](#)
- [Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974](#)

Finance

[Annual Statement of Accounts 2020-21](#)

- Link to previous [Statements of Account](#)
- [Budget and Precept 2020-21](#) and [Medium Term Financial Plan](#), [Precept Appendices 1-9](#) and [Appendix 10 – Statement of Prudential Indicators](#)
- [Internal Audit Annual Report 2020-21](#)
- [External Audit Findings 2020-21 and Letter of Representation 2021 \(to be added when available\)](#)

Other key finance documents can be found by following links on the [Your Right To Know](#) page of the Service website.

Other legislation and guidance includes:

- [Local Government Finance Act 1988](#)
- [Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015](#)
- [Local Government Transparency Code 2015](#)
- [Public Sector Internal Audit Standards](#)
- [Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014](#)
- [Chartered Institute for Public Finance and Accountability \(CIPFA\) Codes of Practice](#)

Operations

The Fire Authority publishes reports on all its services, including the overall strategy, operational performance, policies and financial plans. Key documents can be found on the [Publications](#) page of the Service website and through the [Publication Scheme](#). Key links include:

- [Fire Authority Annual Report 2020-21](#) – now replaced by the [Annual Service Review 2020-21](#) and the [Annual Service Plan 2021-22](#)
- [Community Risk Management Plan 2021-2025](#)
- [Annual Performance Report 2020-21](#)

The Service website also provides a wide range of information about the Fire Authority and the services delivered by the Fire and Rescue Service. The [Home page](#) will take you to all the links including essential [Safety and Advice](#) information and guidance, [News and Events](#) and recruitment opportunities through our [Join Us](#) page.

Contact us ...

We always welcome any views or comments on our plans, so if you want to contact us about any issues, please visit our website at www.hwfire.org.uk where you will find full contact details along with links to further information about our services and activities.

If you have any general enquiries, please call 0345 122 4454 or email us at info@hwfire.org.uk.

You can also follow us on
Twitter www.twitter.com/hwfire

or find us on

Facebook www.facebook.com/hwfire

Alternatively, you can write to us at:

Hereford & Worcester FRS Headquarters
Hindlip Park
Worcester
WR3 8SP

If you would like this information in an alternative language or format such as large print or audio, please contact us on 0345 122 4454

Your right to know: access to information

A great deal of information on the Service is available in the public domain through our Publications Scheme and Transparency links on the Service website. If you need assistance, Service staff will help you to obtain the information you want, unless disclosure would be against the law.

You have a right to request information under the [Freedom of Information Act 2000](#), which gives you a general right of access to recorded information held by the Service. The Act is designed to ensure greater accountability, as well as to promote a more open culture. If you want to know what personal information is held about you, you can make a request under the [Data Protection Act 1998](#). To find out more, please click on the [Access to Information](#) link.