

# Statement of Assurance 2014-15

## Background

This is Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Authority's second annual Statement of Assurance in line with the Government's requirements set out in the [Fire and Rescue National Framework](#). It provides access to information on the wide range of activities carried out by the Fire and Rescue Service so that individuals, communities and partner organisations can assess its performance and value for money.

As with last year's Statement, this new Statement follows National Framework guidance by providing an overall review of the Service and how it manages risk, along with a number of links to key documents where further details can be found on financial, governance and operational matters. This avoids the need for unnecessary duplication while ensuring that the requirements of the National Framework have been met.

Most of the information needed to provide assurance can be found in the [Fire Authority Annual Report 2014-15](#), the draft [Community Risk Management Plan 2014-20](#) (the draft CRMP) and the Fire Authority's [Statement of Accounts](#) for 2013-14. Further information is signposted through the Directory at the end of the Statement. The Directory is a list of links to relevant documents and reports already publicly available through the Service's website and through reports to the Fire and Rescue Authority and its Committees. Note that the CRMP is still a draft document subject to further consideration by the Fire and Rescue Authority.

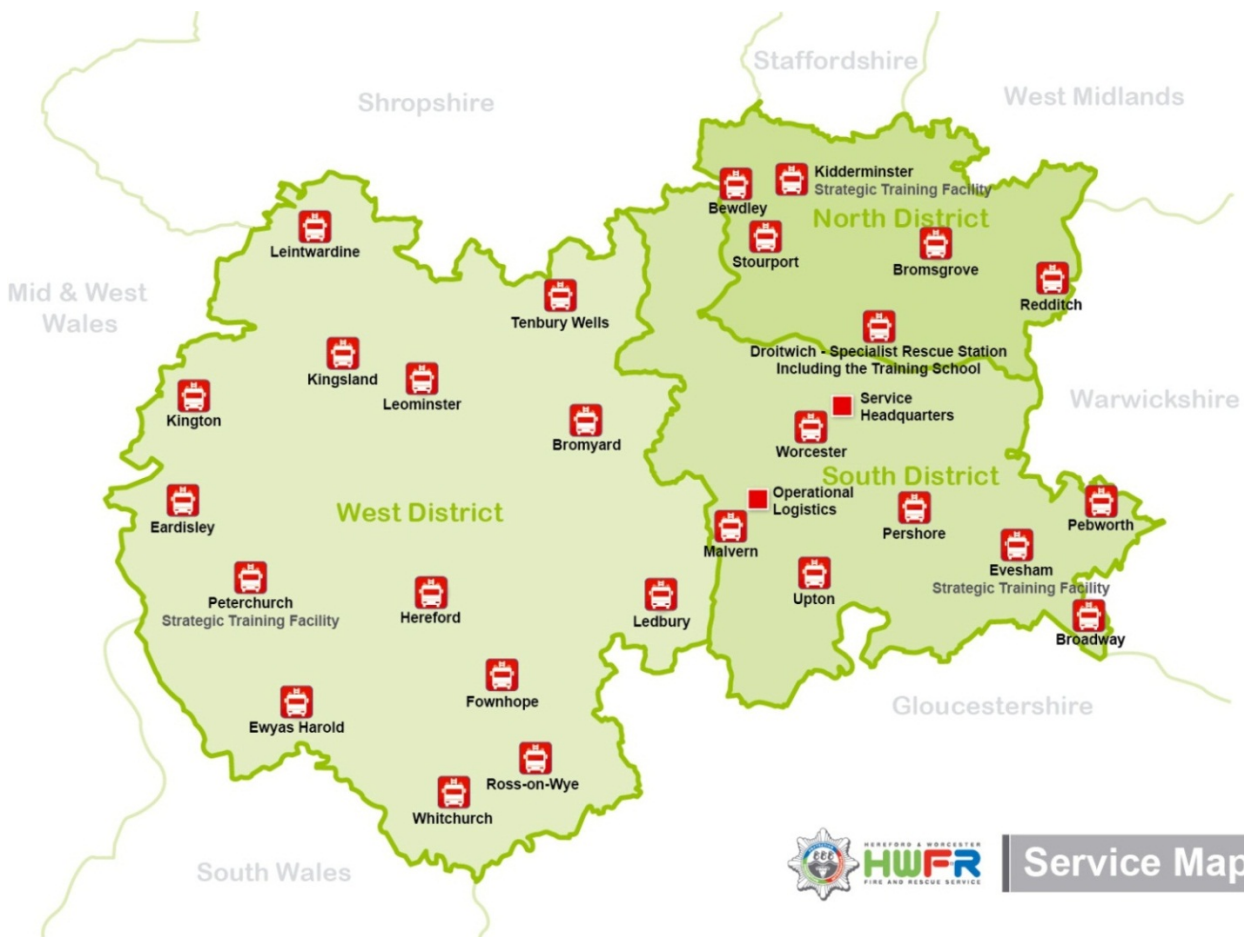
The following sections provide an overview of our Service profile, risks, community engagement, challenges and review process. It also contains links to further detailed information and assurance documents as advised in the national guidance.

## Our Service

The Fire and Rescue Authority's area covers the two counties of Herefordshire and Worcestershire, some 1,500 square miles. It's a very attractive place in which to live, with most people living in areas surrounded by beautiful landscape and rich countryside. There is a population of around 750,000 people residing in the two counties, predominantly in Worcestershire.

Both counties are largely rural; about a third of Worcestershire's 560,000 residents and more than half of Herefordshire's 180,000 residents live in rural areas. While having the smaller population of the two counties, Herefordshire is larger by area and is one of the most sparsely populated counties in England.

Our fire and rescue response services are primarily organised across three geographic Districts: North and South, which cover most of Worcestershire, and West, which covers the whole of Herefordshire and a small section of Worcestershire. This arrangement helps us to provide a balanced response to reducing community risk throughout the two counties. This is supported by a range of support services delivered through Service Headquarters in Worcester, training services at the Training and Development Centre in Droitwich and support to fleet and supplies at the Operational Logistics centre in Malvern.



The three Districts are served by 27 Fire Stations strategically located across the two counties to provide an appropriate response as soon as an emergency call is received. In 2013-14 we received nearly 10,000 emergency calls requesting assistance at a wide variety of incidents, including property and countryside fires, road traffic collisions, collapsed structures, water rescues, hazardous materials and animal rescues. In all, we attended 6,622 incidents across the two counties, which is around 127 incidents a week. This is similar to the previous year, and continues a general overall downward trend in incident numbers.

While the Service can never be complacent about falling incident levels, it does help to show that our communities are becoming more and more aware of fire safety precautions, as well as highlighting the value of our ongoing work with partners and businesses and the community safety activities carried out by the Service.

We work with our partner agencies and our local communities and businesses to make sure that all foreseeable fire and rescue related risks (from local fires to multi-agency flood response) that could affect our communities are reduced as far as reasonably possible.

## **Local Risks**

This Statement highlights some of our past work and looks to the future. During the year, the Service prepared a review of risks and resources across the two counties and considered how best to make changes to our fire cover arrangements. This work was presented in the draft [Community Risk Management Plan 2014-20](#), which was opened to public consultation in October 2013. The draft CRMP is our strategic plan that looks ahead to 2020 and sets out the broad areas that the Service will be involved in in the coming years. It reviews how risks are changing over time, including fire and rescue risks and financial risks and resources, and plans the Service's activities in the light of these changes. The review included proposals to change the ways in which we deliver our frontline response services. These proposals and other options are currently under consideration by the Fire and Rescue Authority. All details can be found on the Service's [website](#).

We are firmly committed to ensuring that any changes to how we deliver our functions must also maintain excellent services to our communities. This will be achieved through our balanced approach to reducing community risk, which includes prevention activities such as home fire safety checks and school visits, protection activities such as business premises inspections and enforcing fire safety measures, and intervention activities such as responding quickly to emergency calls. This approach is undertaken through a flexible and risk based deployment of resources in order to improve community safety, to prevent incidents occurring, to mitigate damage and to create a safer environment for firefighters.

Extending the lifespan of the draft CRMP beyond the usual three years will help the Service to align with the Chief Fire Officers Association's 'Fire 2020' research project, which looked at what changes the future may hold and the potential implications they may have for Fire and Rescue Services. It will also help us to look further ahead to 2020 with high level "outcomes to achieve" and will show the direction we are heading in enabling us to track our progress over a greater length of time.

The inclusion of corporate risk and value for money into the draft CRMP will help communities to more fully understand the relationship between the operating constraints of the future and how this might affect service delivery. The development of the draft CRMP has also given an opportunity to consult and engage with a wide range of stakeholders including local Authority Members appointed by Local Councils, Trade Unions, Service staff, multi-agency partners and community representatives in both its content and its potential implementation.

## **Partnerships and Community Engagement**

We are well-known as a Service that fights fires and rescues people in times of emergency, but we also understand our wider role in the community. Our community safety work extends into schools, various youth and voluntary groups as well as our partner organisations. We have continued to develop our understanding of risk to improve our ability to target areas and vulnerable people, who would benefit most from our community safety activities; this often includes visiting people in the comfort of their own homes. In the coming years, there will continue to be a focus on the ageing population and greater youth engagement within local

communities. We are keen to get volunteers and young people involved in positive activities that inspire them, such as our Young Firefighters Association which is growing in strength. We also know the value of working with others, especially our neighbouring Fire and Rescue Services and other Emergency Services, to help to make sure that we all work together seamlessly when called upon.

## **Assurance and Challenges**

Like many other Public Sector organisations, we find ourselves having to meet a tough financial challenge and difficult decisions will have to be made in the future. The Service has already made substantial savings, but we expect to have to make more significant savings over the next few years. Despite this, we will continue to provide our communities with sustainable, high quality firefighting, rescue and preventative services. Recent examples of this include enhancing our operational response capabilities for road traffic collisions, water rescue, animal rescue and urban search and rescue. Operational training facilities have been significantly improved with the opening of three strategic training facilities at the fire stations in Peterchurch, Evesham and Kidderminster in 2013. Operational training has also been enhanced in 2013-14 to include tactical ventilation, responding to vehicles in water and the opening of a new Incident Command Assessment suite.

Many efficiencies have been made in order to realise these achievements, and these have not impacted on the operational response we provide for our communities. Examples include new working patterns for personnel at Bromsgrove and Droitwich fire stations. These efficiencies are being introduced alongside further improvements such as the opening of new replacement fire stations at Malvern and Bromsgrove in 2014, a new replacement fire station at Worcester in early 2015 and proposed replacement fire stations in Hereford, Redditch and Evesham in future years. Further information regarding the above examples is provided in the [Fire Authority Annual Report 2014-15](#).

## **Operational Assessment - Internal Audits**

Auditing our operational activities helps to ensure that they are working effectively, efficiently and safely, and that there are high standards of management and sustainable high quality firefighting and rescue services on the ground. It is also a requirement of the National Framework for Fire and Rescue Authorities to provide assurance on operational matters. In response to this, an internal audit of Operational Assurance was completed in October 2013, which covered areas such as operational policies, training, risk information, incident monitoring, debriefs and operational health and safety. The Audit found many examples of effective systems and working practices in place, whilst also making recommendations for improvements, which will be implemented in 2014-15.

The Audit identified the process used for monitoring incidents as the highest priority for action. In response to this, a web-based Active Incident Monitoring system has been created; this was introduced in July 2014. The system enables managers to monitor the performance of Incident Commanders at operational incidents against specific national occupational standards set for their role. It supports the Service's commitment to meeting its health and safety responsibilities and is designed to improve firefighter and community safety, whilst providing evidence of the delivery of quality services to our communities. In addition, this system will also promote personal development by creating direct links with incident command assessments, training, exercises and workplace assessment programmes.

A dedicated post of Operational Assurance manager has been created from existing staff, which reports to the Senior Management Board on a quarterly basis in six key safety critical operational areas – Training, Intelligence, Policy, Incident Monitoring, External Health and

Safety Factors and proposed Thematic Reviews. These areas focus on achieving community and firefighter safety, whilst ensuring the delivery of quality firefighting and rescue services.

An internal audit of Health and Safety was also carried out in November 2013 to ensure that the Service meets high standards of health, safety and welfare in the operational environment. It found that there was a well embedded health and safety culture within the Service and that there was a strong management commitment to ensuring health and safety. The audit made several recommendations for continued improvement including amendments to policies, training and firefighter recruitment, and these will be implemented during 2014-15.

### **Annual Audit Letter 2012/13**

The Annual Audit letter summarises the findings from the 2012-13 audit, which comprises of two elements: Audit of Accounts and Value for Money. The Audit reported that the financial constraints facing the Authority in the coming years require budget reductions at unprecedented levels, in common with other local government bodies. The Authority will have to ensure that the implementation of the draft CRMP remains on track as the process unfolds, whilst maintaining its services to its prescribed target levels.

The Auditors concluded that the Authority's financial statements were considered to be true, fair and presented without material mis-statement. They also concluded that in all significant respects Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Authority has put in place proper arrangements to secure value for money, economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources for the year ending 31 March 2013.

### **Review of the Statement of Assurance**

The Statement of Assurance is subject to the regular monitoring and review undertaken as part of the overall assurance for the Authority. As part of this process, actions may be identified that could further improve the assurance arrangements for the Authority. The Statement of Assurance is considered by the Audit and Standards Committee prior to approval by the Authority, and is signed by the Authority Chairman and Chief Fire Officer. The Statement of Assurance is published within three months of the Authority's Statement of Accounts each year.

### **Your Right to Know - Access to Information**

Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service collects and maintains information and data to enable it to carry out its statutory duties. A great deal of information on the Service is already available in the public domain through our [Publication Scheme](#) and [Access to Information - Transparency webpage](#). Service staff are available to help you to obtain the information you want unless disclosure would be against the law. You also have a right to request information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000, which provides you with access to already 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 follow this link on the Service website: [Your Right to Know](#)

## **Detailed Assurance Information**

Set out on the next page is a Directory of Key Assurance Documents with links to documents and reports showing how the Authority provides assurance on performance in the three specific areas of finance, governance and operational matters, along with links to the Integrated Risk Management Plan requirements as set out in the National Framework. Further information is also available on our website at [www.hwfire.org.uk](http://www.hwfire.org.uk).

We welcome any views that you may have on the content of this Statement or the way in which Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Authority delivers its services. Please call 0845 122 4454 or email [info@hwfire.org.uk](mailto:info@hwfire.org.uk).

## Directory of Key Assurance Documents

### A. Finance

Details of the Authority's finances and performance can be found in the following documents:

- the [Annual Statement of Accounts 2013-14](#) provides details of the Authority's finances. The latest accounts are awaiting external audit.
- the previous year's [Annual Statement of Accounts 2012-13](#) which have been externally audited
- the related [Annual Audit Letter 2012-13](#) can be found as Agenda Item 6 on pages 20-31 of the Audit and Standards Committee meeting on 22 January 2014
- the latest [Budget and Precept 2014/15 and Medium Term Financial Plan](#) was reported to the Authority on 19 February 2014, and can be found as Agenda Item 6 on pages 5-36
- the Service website also contains further information on spending with a number of guides:
  - [Council Tax – How Your Money Is Spent](#)
  - [Invoice Payments over £500](#) and
  - [Pay Policy Statement 2013-14](#)
- the [Spending Round 2013](#) provides an overview of Government public sector spending priorities for 2013

### B. Governance

The Fire Authority's governance arrangements are set out in detail on the [Service's website](#). The main links are as follows:

- [Your Fire Authority](#) provides information and further links to all aspects of the Authority's governance arrangements including:
  - the [Fire Authority Constitution](#), which sets out the Authority's role and responsibilities, rules and procedures, codes and protocols, plus the [Members' Allowance Scheme](#)
  - details of the [Fire Authority Members](#), [Meeting Dates](#), and [Agendas and Minutes](#)
  - links to the details and reports of the [Audit and Standards Committee](#) and the [Policy and Resources Committee](#)
  - a guide for members of the public when [Asking Questions at Fire Authority Public Meetings](#)
  - the Authority's overall [Code of Corporate Governance 2013](#)
  - the Authority's [Annual Governance Statement 2012-13](#), which can be found on pages 63-67 of the Authority's [Annual Statement of Accounts 2012-13](#)
  - the [Code of Conduct Complaints Procedure](#) sets out how members of the public can make complaints against Fire Authority Members

- other links to assist members of the public to access information and guidance include:
  - [General Enquiries](#) and other contact details for access to a range of services
  - [Comments, Compliments and Complaints](#) procedures
  - [Your Right to Know](#) provides links to guides to access information including [Freedom of Information](#), [Data Protection](#) and [Sustainability](#)
  - [Who We Are And What We Do](#) provides a link to all published information in the [Publication Scheme](#), with further information available in the [Access to Information – Transparency](#) page on the website
- Government guidance on assurance and accountability can be found in the [Fire and Rescue National Framework for England 2012](#)

## C. Operations

The Authority publishes annual reports on all its services, outlining the overall strategy, performance against the strategy and work completed each year as well as plans for future activities and financial matters. The Authority also publishes a strategic plan called the Community Risk Management Plan (sometimes known as an Integrated Risk Management Plan), which reviews risks and resources across the two counties and plans how best to make changes to our fire cover arrangements. The following links provide more information:

- the [Fire Authority Annual Report 2014-15](#) is the latest annual summary of the Service's activities and performance. Reports for previous years can be found on the [Our Publications](#) page on the website.
- the draft [Community Risk Management Plan 2014-20](#) is the latest strategic plan, and will cover the years 2014-20. Previous Integrated Risk Management Plans and related papers can be found in the [Our Publications](#) page on the website.
- further information on the Service's operational resources can be found through the following links:
  - [Service Structure](#)
  - [Our Fire Stations](#)
  - [Our Vehicle Fleet](#)
  - [Our Specialised Units](#)
- other links to Service policies, activities and advice can be found through the following links:
  - [Equality & Diversity](#) with links to the [Equality Scheme Assurance Statement](#) and the [Equality Monitoring Report 2012-13](#)
  - the [Risk Management Strategy](#) can be found as Agenda Item 8 on pages 37-55 of the Audit Committee meeting on 16 January 2013
  - the [Strategic Risk Register](#) can be found as Agenda Item 8 on pages 27-33 of the Audit Committee meeting on 17 April 2013
  - [Your Safety](#) provides a range of community safety advice for members of the public, including how to request a [Home Fire Safety Check](#)
  - [Safety Advice for Businesses](#) provides links to advice on business fire
  - [Preparing for Emergencies](#) has a range of information on what to do in the event of an emergency including [Business Continuity](#) and [Emergency Planning](#)



- [Our Partners](#) including the [Signposting](#) service
- [Health and Safety](#) information including the [Health and Safety General Policy Statement](#)
- overall operational performance is reported to the Fire Authority on a quarterly basis, and the latest [Annual Performance 2013-14](#) report can be found as Agenda Item 10 on pages 34-58 of the Policy and Resources Committee meeting on 2 June 2014
- the [Operational Assessment 2012](#) is an independent peer assessment of the Authority and can be found as Agenda Item 8 on pages 44-70 of the Fire and Rescue Authority meeting on 13 February 2013
- the [Health and Safety Audit 2013](#) can be found as Agenda Item 10 on pages 40-99 of the Policy and Resources Committee meeting on 26 March 2014
- operational performance in relation to all national fire and rescue services can be found through the Government's Department for Communities and Local Government [Public Safety and Emergencies](#) website including:
  - the [Fire Statistics Monitor 2013-14](#)
  - the [Operational Statistics Bulletin 2012-13](#)
  - the [National Fire Statistics 2012-13](#) Great Britain