



West Yorkshire
Fire & Rescue Authority

Statement of Assurance- 2020-21

OFFICIAL

Ownership: Corporate Services

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Introduction

West Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Authority (WYFRA) is required to produce an annual Statement of Assurance as part of the [Fire and Rescue National Framework for England](#). The purpose of the statement is to provide independent assurance to communities and the Government that the service is being delivered efficiently and effectively. Whilst the Fire and Rescue National Framework sets out the Government's priorities and objectives for fire and rescue authorities in England, it does not prescribe operational matters as these are determined locally by fire and rescue authorities.

In April 2020, West Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service (WYFRS) published [Your Fire & Rescue Service 2020-23](#) which outlines the key priorities and builds upon the delivery and achievements of our previous Service Plan. A report on the programme of change is produced regularly to focus the work of WYFRS and to manage and monitor performance in order to achieve our ambition of 'Making West Yorkshire Safer'.

This Statement of Assurance provides assurance that WYFRA is providing an efficient, effective and value for money service to the community of West Yorkshire in its financial, governance and operational matters.

Financial

In accordance with the 2020/21 Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting based on International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS) for 2020/21 and the Accounting Codes of Practice published by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA), WYFRA has produced the [Statement of Accounts 2020/21](#). As the Authority is funded by public money, it has a responsibility to ensure this money is used lawfully, effectively, efficiently and economically.

The [Annual Governance Statement](#), which is included within the Statement of Accounts, sets out the systems and procedures that are in place to ensure that the Authority's resources are used in accordance with the law and provide best value for the tax payer.

The Authority's governance framework comprises systems and processes, and cultures and values, by which the Authority is directed and controlled. It enables the Authority to monitor the achievement of its strategic objectives and to consider whether those have led to the delivery of appropriate, cost effective services.

Each year, the external auditors, Deloitte LLP, issue an [audit opinion](#) on the Authority's financial statement. There is a new reporting requirement from 2020/21, which is a separate Value for Money report which is expected to be completed in April 2022.

For 2020/21 the Authority once again received an unqualified opinion on the Statement of Accounts.

The Medium-Term Financial Plan which was approved by the Full Authority in February 2021 shows that the Authority has a balanced budget for 2021/22. This has been assisted by an improved budget monitoring reporting system coupled with the introduction of Command, Leadership and Management. The Authority has received another one-year financial settlement in 2022/23, and it is expected that a multi-year settlement will be applied from April 2023 which will facilitate longer term financial planning.

Internal Audit

The Authority's Chief Finance and Procurement Officer has a statutory duty to provide a continuous and effective internal audit. This internal audit service is provided under a service level agreement with Kirklees Council, which provides approximately 160 days of audit time each year.

Internal Audit assesses the adequacy and effectiveness of the Authority's risk management system and internal control environment against an annual audit plan. The plan targets areas of highest risk as determined by the Authority through its risk management process and the resulting risk management matrix. Auditing of these risks accounts for approximately half of the available audit resource, with the other half involving the review of key financial systems and processes. The internal audit plan also considers audit areas where most value can be added.

Internal audit 'opinions' based on the level of assurance concerning each risk, system or process control is reported to the Authority's Audit Committee on a quarterly basis. The [Internal Audit Plan 2021/22](#) resulted in the majority of audits concluding with a 'substantial or adequate assurance', which confirms a robust framework of all key controls exists, that are likely to ensure that objectives will be achieved. Internal Audit provides recommendations where it is thought that risks can be reduced, and the control environment improved.

The audit plan and subsequent audits ensure an independent review is conducted at least once in a year of the effectiveness of the Authority's systems of internal control, which assists with the formulation of the Annual Governance Statement.

Transparency

In accordance with the Local Government Transparency Code 2015, WYFRA is committed to greater openness and financial transparency through the publication, on the website, of information regarding how public money is being spent. This includes payments for goods and services to external bodies and suppliers above £500, details of salaries and allowances paid to staff and Members, transactions made via Government Procurement Cards, tender and procurement information, details of land and assets owned by WYFRA and details relating to Trade Unions.

The data is routinely published on either a quarterly or annual basis in accordance with the requirements of the Code. All published data can be viewed on the [Data Transparency](#) section of the website.

Governance

WYFRA has an approved [constitution](#) which sets out how the Authority operates, how decisions are made and the procedures which are followed to ensure that these are efficient, transparent and accountable to local citizens. Some of these processes are required by the law, while others are a matter for the Authority to determine.

The Authority is composed of 22 members, all of whom are a Councillor elected to one of the five constituent district councils within West Yorkshire; Bradford, Calderdale, Kirklees, Leeds and Wakefield. The overriding duty of Members of the Authority is to the whole community of West Yorkshire.

Members have an approved [Code of Conduct](#) designed to ensure high standards in the way they undertake their duties and are required to comply with the [Principles of Public Life](#).

- Codes of Conduct and Protocols included within the Constitution are:
- Code of Conduct for Members
- Officer Code of Conduct
- Member/Officer Relations and Procedural Protocol
- Officer Employment Procedure Rules
- Protocol regarding the use of Authority resources by Members
- [Compliments and Complaints Policy](#)
- [Whistle Blowing Policy](#)

In accordance with the Code of Corporate Governance and pursuant to the corporate performance monitoring processes an annual [Corporate Health Report](#) is submitted to the Annual General Meeting of the Authority to enable Members to scrutinise and challenge performance. A [Performance Management Report](#) is also presented quarterly to the Full Authority meeting to enable ongoing performance monitoring, scrutiny and challenge.

Information Governance

The Authority has developed and implemented a robust information governance framework for the effective management and protection of information held by WYFRA.

Data Protection audits are carried out across the Service, which during the Covid period have been via departments self assessing against relevant criteria as part of the Service Assurance process. This ensures appropriate arrangements are in place.

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

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

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

The Authority has achieved excellent audit reports in respect of the handling and processing of information including the personal information relating to customers. This includes the achievement of the highest level of Compliance Plus within the annual [Customer Service Excellence report](#) for the strategic approach to Information Management particularly relating to our customers' privacy and confidentiality. This standard was first achieved in 2009 and has been maintained at this level over the last eleven years.

The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) came into force on 25 May 2018, extending the privacy rights granted to EU individuals. The GDPR placed many new obligations upon organisations that process personal data. The Data Protection Act 2018 incorporated the GDPR and brought it into UK law.

An audit of the Authority's data protection compliance was undertaken by Kirklees Internal Audit in December 2020/January 2021 which resulted in Substantial Assurance for the arrangements in place.

Risk and Business Continuity

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

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

Operational (Service Delivery)

WYFRA operates within a clearly defined statutory and policy framework and the key documents setting this out are:

- the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004
- the Civil Contingencies Act 2004
- the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005
- the Fire and Rescue Services (Emergencies) (England) Order 2007
- the Localism Act 2011
- the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England
- the Fire Safety Act 2021

The Authority's [Statement of Purpose](#) reflects the key documents in highlighting WYFRA's commitments and expectations through its strategic priorities and objectives.

At strategic level, Community Risk Management Planning (CRMP) is an integral part of the business planning process in West Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service (WYFRS). The Service's strategic assessment of risk covers all foreseeable risk within the County and establishes baseline standards of service.

The [Your Fire & Rescue Service 2020-23](#) explains who we are, what we do, how we identify, assess and manage risk in West Yorkshire and provides information on how WYFRS services are delivered. This document also provides the overarching business case for delivering prevention, protection, response, and resilience in a risk proportional manner. The Community Risk Management Plan provides the means to deliver excellent but cost-effective fire and rescue services to the communities across West Yorkshire. This latest Community Risk Management

Plan continues to underpin a flexible approach to managing risk and deliver future efficiency savings. The 2022-25 Community Risk Management Plan is in draft and subject to formal consultation. It has been updated to reflect the recent national fire standard for Community Risk Management Planning and our updated organisational priorities and programme of change.

Customer Service Excellence

Since 1998, WYFRA has consistently attained the Charter Mark standard; the Government's national standard of customer service excellence for organisations delivering public services. In August 2009 the Authority invited an assessment against the new Customer Service Excellence standard, which was being phased in and which has now fully replaced the Charter Mark standard. The Customer Service Excellence standard is derived from the core concepts of customer focus and the delivery of excellent customer service and assesses, in great detail, the following areas:

- Customer Insight
- The Culture of the Organisation
- Information and Access
- Delivery
- Timeliness and Quality of Service

WYFRA has an independent assessment against the standard annually and in 2021 was awarded full compliance against the 57 elements of the standard including 25 'Compliance Plus' awards, which are awarded for behaviours or practices that exceed the requirements of the standard, and are viewed as exceptional or as an exemplar for others – either within the organisation or in the wider public service arena. The summary of the [Customer Service Excellence report](#) clearly demonstrates the continuous commitment of the Authority to provide an excellent service to customers.

Communication and Engagement

WYFRS follows the Government's Consultation Principles 2018 in delivery and promotions of its consultations. The principles can be found [here](#).

Service Delivery Performance

Service delivery standards are established in the Your Fire & Rescue Service document. Performance against targets is reported to the Fire and Rescue Authority on a regular basis, with the latest annual [Performance Management Report](#) for 2020/21 submitted in June 2021.

[Your Fire & Rescue Service 2020-23](#) includes reference to Risk Based Planning Assumptions (RBPA) for responding to emergencies. These are used to ensure resources are in the best place relative to risk and demand, with life risk incidents being the priority. The impact of any proposed changes can be measured and communicated by reference to the RBPA down to Lower Layer Super Output Area level data available through the Office of National Statistics. These were used in comprehensive consultation on changes to emergency cover in 2011; 2012; 2016; [2019](#) and [2020](#). These changes enable WYFRS to provide appropriate emergency cover and fire prevention activity whilst delivering significant financial savings.

WYFRA discharges its statutory duties in relation to community safety, fire prevention and fire protection, including enforcement of relevant statutory regulations in accordance with the [Safer](#)

[Communities Strategy](#) and [Fire Safety Strategy](#), with firefighters and specialist staff being deployed across districts where most needed based on risk.

In June 2019, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabularies and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) carried out a formal inspection to assess how we deliver our service; following which we were rated 'Good' in all areas. On receipt of the inspection report we created an action plan, the majority of which have now been implemented with just one area for improvement outstanding. HMICFRS also carried out a COVID19 thematic inspection. We received a narrative judgement which resulted in two additional actions being added to our action plan which have now been addressed. Our second full inspection took place in October and November 2021 and we are awaiting their findings. The WYFRA's Service Assurance Framework details the high-level expectations of the service relating to:

- Compliance with the National Framework 2018.
- The assessment of performance via Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS).
- The annual completion of the Service Assurance process.
- A comprehensive approach to the assurance of service delivery.

This is summarised within the Service Improvement and Assurance Report and provides assurance that the organisation is performing effectively and efficiently.

Agreements and Mutual Aid Arrangements

Sections 13 and 16 of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 provide clear instructions for fire and rescue services regarding mutual assistance and the discharge of functions by others. West Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Authority have Section 13 and 16 agreements with:

- Lancashire Combined Fire Authority
- North Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Authority
- Derbyshire Fire and Rescue Authority
- Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Authority
- South Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Authority

These agreements are regularly reviewed and updated as necessary and are supplemented by specific agreements on specialist services, for example aerial appliances, and WYFRA is a major contributor to national and regional resilience with the capability to respond to major disasters and terrorist attacks. We are the only service in the country to host every national resilience asset. In addition, we are one of the main providers of national resilience training under the national resilience distributed learning (NRDL) model.

Future Improvements

WYFRA's annual budget is £89.3million and despite cuts of £26.2 million since 2010, we believe that we are providing a high-quality affordable service for our communities. During this time, we have redesigned our service, moving fire station locations, removing fire engines, and ensuring resources remain allocated appropriate to risk and demand. The Authority has received one year financial settlements since 2020/21 and it is expected that a Comprehensive Spending Review in 2022 will result in a multi-year funding settlement from April 2023. As such we face financial uncertainty, and we continue to plan our future to deliver improvements in efficiency and productivity, whilst improving our effectiveness and safety.

Our Community Risk Management Plan, Medium-Term Financial Plan and Workforce Plan are now aligned, and a range of financial planning scenarios have been produced which ensures a joined-up approach to the analysis of risk and the deployment of resources. Subject to budget approval we aim to increase firefighter numbers to provide increased capacity within our operational response service.

All our people are fundamental to WYFRS delivering our ambition. We will continue to develop the culture of the organisation and ensure our service values are used to guide our behaviour and decisions. We have cross mapped our values to the recently published Code of Ethics for the Fire and Rescue Service and we are confident they align closely. Our cultural development will be supported by our leadership and development programme, a clear focus on diversity and inclusion within our recruitment processes and improvements in how we all communicate with each other are key priorities.

We have embarked on a programme of change that will realise new, innovative, and more effective ways of working over the forthcoming years. Some of the initiatives we have been delivering include:

Leadership Strategy

A new approach that develops and enhances leadership and our service values at all levels and allow for continuous improvement.

Emergency Services Network Programme

Provision of a national radio scheme utilising mobile phone technology.

Command, Leadership and Management

Improved ways of working through changes to the management structure and realigning responsibilities.

Smarter Working Programme

Review ways of working and processes in various departments within the organisation to determine efficiencies.

Procurement Review

Implementation of the recommendations from the Local Government Procurement Review.

Fire Station replacement programme

The construction of new fire stations on existing sites to replace oversized and outdated fire stations.

Performance Management Framework

Design and implementation of a performance management and assurance framework which supports organisational improvement.

Voice Over Internet Protocol

Replace existing telephony systems with a single brigade wide Voice Over Internet Protocol (VoIP) based system to provide improved functionality and mobility whilst reducing costs.

Implementation of Office 365

Migrate email and Office applications to the cloud to maximise the benefits of our Microsoft licencing agreement and improve flexible ways of working.

Digital and Data Strategy

Develop and implement a digital and data strategy to maximise the benefit of technology and enable smarter working.

Grenfell Programme

Review and implement the recommendations from the Grenfell Tower Inquiry: Phase 1 report.

Modification of Day Crewing Duty System at Castleford, Normanton and South Kirkby Fire Stations

Implementation of a new duty system at Castleford, Normanton and South Kirkby Fire Stations.

Redevelopment of Fire Service Headquarters and Training Centre and Relocation of Cleckheaton Fire Station

Replace existing outdated Headquarters and Training centre buildings on our existing site at Birkenshaw and relocate Cleckheaton Fire station to the Fire Service headquarters site at Birkenshaw.

The annual planning cycle encourages teams to plan and consider activities and initiatives a year in advance of implementation. This means that stakeholder engagement is carried out earlier, involving those who are impacted and enabling change within the organisation. This assists with capacity planning and benefits realisation from the programme of change.

We are developing a new programme of change which will be finalised once our budget for 2022/23 is approved. This new programme of change will be consulted upon within our Community Risk Management Plan and reported to the Authority for approval in June 2022.

Following the major incidents below, a review of foreseeable risks has taken place and is captured within the Community Risk Management Plan. As the risk from fire has reduced, an increase in other types of emergencies is evident. Work is being carried out to assess these risks to plan for them accordingly. Lessons are learnt from incidents that have occurred, such as:

- The Grenfell Tower tragedy in 2017 and the inquiry into fire safety, building regulations and emergency response arrangements to fires in high rise buildings.
- The terror attack at Manchester Arena in 2017 and the review of the fire and rescue service role at such incidents.

- The heatwave of 2018 and the ability of the fire and rescue service to respond to multiple large moorland fires.
- COVID 19 Pandemic 2020/21 which has a huge impact on our service and resulted in significant changes in how large numbers of our employees are working.

In recent years the dedication and commitment of WYFRS staff has saved many lives within West Yorkshire. Working with our communities as part of an intelligence led approach, we aim to stop fires before they happen. This approach has reduced the number of incidents attended and we wish to continue this trend.

We model the risk of fire across our communities, utilising the very strong correlation between the likelihood of fire and deprivation. We have embedded this over the last three years and building on this, we will introduce new ways of identifying individuals who are at the greatest risk of fire and being injured by fire, wherever they live within West Yorkshire. This will allow us to target assistance to those at greatest risk to ensure our valuable resources are having the greatest impact on community safety.

Reducing the impact of climate related incidents such as flooding, and wildfire continues to be a priority for the service. We have worked collaboratively with local partners to proactively challenge irresponsible behaviour, provide safety advice and where necessary responded quickly and effectively to mitigate the impacts on our communities.

Within the building safety environment, the Authority continues to respond to the needs of business and strives to ensure the safety of relevant persons is maintained. Where we have evidence that this is not the case, we utilise our powers of enforcement to bring about a safe environment. This enforcement can also include prosecution and earlier this year the Authority successfully prosecuted a business for failing to safeguard residents in student accommodation, in this case the defendants received the highest fine for Fire Safety breaches in the UK since the introduction of the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005.

Since the tragic events of Grenfell, WYFRS has played a significant role in supporting the Government and the National Fire Chiefs Council in assessing and developing new ways of working and bringing about much needed changes in legislation through work we have carried out with the Protection Board.

This work has led to the development of the Building Risk Review programme which set the priorities of Fire and Rescue Service's inspection plans. WYFRS completed this programme of inspections in December 2021 having delivered just under 500 inspections. The Government funding to deliver this work was allocated across both fire protection and operational staff.

The future of Fire Protection is changing, WYFRS are committed to ensuring that our team is ready, willing, and able to pick up the challenges we face. Our commitment is demonstrated within our CRMP and to ensure we achieve this; we are currently investing and recruiting in our fire protection teams structure. This will ensure we have the right people and number in the teams to continue to successfully deliver our statutory duties.

Working with other organisations brings value to the service WYFRS provides. This has been proven during the multi-agency response to COVID 19. There is an ongoing programme of collaboration to improve how we work with the police and ambulance service and evaluation is being carried out on a wide range of opportunities to make more efficient use of resources. This includes sharing buildings, training, and staff to provide community safety work, improve planning

for emergencies and supporting emergency response. Working with local authorities, health teams, community groups and voluntary organisations to support the most vulnerable people in our communities continues. The focus of Tri-Service collaboration moving forwards will be reducing risk and demand through data sharing.

At the time of producing this report the service continues to operate in the context provided by the COVID 19 Pandemic, and at what has been a restricted level in terms of what has previously been considered as 'normal'. Whilst a recovery group has been established to learn from the pandemic and embed new ways of working, there will be further impacts yet to be felt and additional lessons yet to be learnt.

WYFRS are also working more closely than ever with fire and rescue service partners in the region on projects such as the joint procurement of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for Firefighters.

We are investing heavily in the health and safety of our firefighters by providing new PPE, appliances, and station upgrades to reduce the risks of contaminants from smoke on their health.

The importance of good health and wellbeing, as opposed to just safety can sometimes be overlooked, but plays a significant role in service delivery. The emphasis on improving mental health and wellbeing by improving our procedures and training, whilst developing a more robust framework of welfare support, continues to be a priority. This was a priority before COVID 19 and is evermore so now, given the impact this pandemic has had on our workforce.

As incident numbers have reduced so has experiential learning. The training priority continues to be to ensure that realistic training and shared learning continues to be developed to bridge this gap. The Authority has a risk-based training strategy and continues to invest in a central training programme to make sure firefighter skills are kept at the highest level. We are planning to invest in training facilities at our Headquarters as well training our firefighters at the Fire Service College to provide realistic training opportunities. The Firefighter Safety Team work to reduce the risk to firefighters and improve knowledge and understanding of tactical options and National Operational Guidance.

The Information and Communication Technology Strategy delivered an ambitious programme of change. The Strategy maximised the use of electronic ways of working, simplifies systems and produces a consistent user experience reducing repetition and exploiting the value of the information held within a secure and resilient infrastructure. We have developed a new Digital and Data Strategy to meet our service ambitions. This will require financial investment and resource allocation. This strategy will be key to supporting our focus on performance management and smarter working for the year ahead.

This Statement of Assurance is signed on 24 February 2022 on behalf of West Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Authority.



Councillor Darren O'Donovan
Chair of West Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Authority