

Report to Cabinet

24 June 2024

West Sussex Fire & Rescue Service Annual Statement of Assurance 2023/24

Report by Chief Fire Officer

Electoral divisions: All

Summary

Fire and rescue authorities must provide assurance on financial, governance and operational matters and show how they have had due regard to the expectations set out in their Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) for 2023/2024. Statements of assurance should be open and transparent, demonstrating accountability to communities who expect to know how these services are being provided. This document outlines the way in which the West Sussex Fire & Rescue Authority and its fire and rescue service delivered the requirements contained in the National Fire and Rescue Framework and the authority's CRMP during 2023/2024.

Recommendations

Cabinet is requested to approve the West Sussex Fire and Rescue Service Annual Statement of Assurance 2023-24

Proposal

1 Background and context

- 1.1 Guidance on statements of assurance for fire and rescue authorities in England published 2013. [Guidance May 2013](#)
- 1.2 The Fire and Rescue National Framework for England, published May 2018, sets out that: "Fire and rescue authorities must provide assurance on financial, governance and operational matters and show how they have had due regard to the expectations set out in their integrated risk management plan and the requirements included in this Framework. To provide assurance, fire and rescue authorities must publish an annual statement of assurance."
- 1.3 As reported in a high-level overview the West Sussex County Council Annual Governance Statement 2020-21, it references actions to reinforce service improvement in Fire and Rescue and Children's Services and contribution to its overall assurance of improved corporate capability and capacity.

- 1.4 This statement of assurance highlights the areas that have been delivered to address that as well as the Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) objectives that feed into that assured position.
- 1.5 Fire and rescue authorities are accountable for their performance and should be open to evaluation by the communities they serve. Information on their performance should be accessible, robust, fit-for-purpose and accurately report on effectiveness and value for money and this report provides that to the organisation with supporting data reviewed at the Fire and Rescue Service Scrutiny Committee.
- 1.6 Fire and rescue authorities are responsible for ensuring that their business is conducted in accordance with the law and proper standards, and that public money is properly accounted for and used economically, efficiently and effectively.
- 1.7 As some information has been presented throughout the year this has been highlighted to ensure that it is clear, accessible, and user-friendly within existing documents. There have been extracts, or links to these documents embedded into the statement of assurance.
- 1.8 The statement of assurance will be used as a source of information on which to base the Secretary of State's biennial report under section 25 of the Fire and Rescue Act 2004.
- 1.9 Fire and rescue authorities may wish to include a section in their statements of assurance on any potential improvements they have identified across their accounting, governance or operational responsibilities to communities, particularly where plans are underway.
- 1.10 This report includes the annual report and details the progress within the CRMP, reviewing financial position, governance, progress against the five strategic priorities, as well as the overall performance for the year. It should be noted, that when the next firefighter recruitment is undertaken, the statement of assurance will include more granular data on the diversity of staff which has been added in the people section. This is supported by a six-monthly update on the CRMP programme at the Fire & Rescue Service Scrutiny Committee.
- 1.11 The Statement of Assurance should be signed off by an elected member of the relevant authority who is able to take responsibility for its contents, this has been entered into the Forward Plan of Key Decisions for a decision on 25 June 2024 by Cabinet.

2 Proposal details

- 2.1 West Sussex County Council is the Fire Authority for West Sussex Fire and Rescue Service (WSFRS) and is responsible for:
 - Firefighting and rescue
 - Protecting people and property from fire
 - Promoting fire safety in the home
 - Providing special services for emergencies

- 2.2 Under the direction of the Cabinet Member for Community Support, Fire and Rescue, West Sussex Fire and Rescue Service, within West Sussex County Council, has prepared an Annual Statement of Assurance for 2023-24.
- 2.3 In the case of county council fire and rescue services the close working relationships that exist with other county council areas of responsibility such as adult care, children’s services and public health are significant. This enables a holistic approach to keeping residents safe.

3 Other options considered (and reasons for not proposing)

- 3.1 The Fire Authority is statutorily required under the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England to produce an annual statement of assurance therefore no other options can be considered.

4 Consultation, engagement and advice

- 4.1 The document will be presented to the Fire and Rescue Scrutiny Committee on 17 June 2024 with any comments or outcomes being provided to the Cabinet for consideration.

5 Finance

- 5.1 There are no financial implications to the Council.

6 Risk implications and mitigations

- 6.1 The Fire Authority and members of the Fire and Rescue Service Scrutiny Committee will continue to monitor the performance of the fire and rescue service to ensure that any risk from ceasing this process is mitigated through effective planning through the subsequent years of the CRMP. The CRMP runs until April 2026.

Risk	Mitigating Action (in place or planned)
Not adopting an Annual Statement of Assurance (SOA)	All information supporting this informs the Council’s Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) to ensure the SOA is accurate and timely to support the service.
Not recording information accurately	West Sussex Fire and Rescue Service records information about every emergency call received. We analyse where, why and how incidents have occurred to help us understand where incidents might happen in the future and how we are best placed to prevent them. We also use the latest modelling software, demographic profiling, census data and information from our partner agencies. This information informs a critical fire risk map, which is updated every year based on rolling data from the previous three years.
Not mapping critical risk	The critical fire risk map is part of our local Risk Management Plans facilitates the targeting of prevention activity to prioritise resources to the most vulnerable residents and those communities at highest risk. This

Risk	Mitigating Action (in place or planned)
	ensures resources are used efficiently to achieve the best possible outcomes for our communities. The critical fire risk map is part of our local Risk Management Plans and is used to assist in the targeting of prevention activity allowing WSFRS to focus on the most vulnerable residents and those communities at highest risk, thereby ensuring its resources are used efficiently to achieve the best possible outcomes for our local communities. They are also used as the basis for our Emergency Response Standards.

7 Policy alignment and compliance

- 7.1 This report has positive implications for the community as it supports the continued improvement journey of the Fire and Rescue Service to all residents in West Sussex.
- 7.2 In terms of environmental sustainability, the CRMP makes clear the Authority's commitment to reducing the environmental impact of its operations and provides an indication of work done to date.
- 7.3 There are no equality implications associated with the content of this report. One of the principal aims of the Statement of Assurance is to provide an accessible way in which communities, public sector authorities and partners may make a valid assessment of our performance. The information presented in the report will be reviewed continuously to ensure that it reflects and adheres to any changes or developments in equalities legislation.

Sabrina Cohen-Hatton
Chief Fire Officer

E-mail: organisationalassurance@westsussex.gov.uk

Background papers - None