

Decision Record – Response to Department for Communities and Local Government consultation on 'Guidance on statements of assurance for Fire and Rescue Authorities in England'

Cabinet Portfolio Holder taking decision

Councillor Richard Hobbs – Community Safety

Date of Decision:
(NOT BEFORE – 26th October 2012)

29 OCTOBER 2012

Decision taken

That I, as Portfolio Holder of Community Safety, approves the County Council's response to the consultation, as outlined at below.

Reasons for Decisions / Decision

In terms of the Department for Communities and Local Government's proposals, Warwickshire County Council's response is set out below:

Questions:

Does the draft guidance set out sufficiently clearly what is expected of Fire and Rescue Authorities to complete their statements of assurance?

If not, how could it be improved?

Specifically, what would you change and what would you add?

Response:

- The draft guidance is clear enough to allow Fire and rescue authorities the flexibility whilst avoiding duplication with the Annual Governance Statement and accompanying Statement of Accounts also provides scope for more detailed attention to be given to specific Fire and rescue issues. Existing reporting mechanisms can be used to provide transparency assurance and accountability to the public in relation to the delivery and performance of fire and rescue services.
- The use of the fire and rescue service integrated risk management plans and the operational assurance toolkit would also improve the focus on service delivery issues that really matter to the local communities.

- There is however a question around the availability of adequate benchmarking data as individual authorities may not all have access to accurate and independently verified information for publication on their websites.
- As regional and national resilience is a key contribution to operational assurance, further thought should be given to how these dependencies are captured within the statement of assurance guidance. This issue also needs to be considered across other agencies within a fire authority area. With this in mind, it would be helpful to provide linkage to the assurance regimes of other community safety partners.
- We question the timeframe outline in paragraph 8 of the guidance and the need to link the timescale with Statement of Accounts. We believe that there should be prompt publication of the statement after the year end to add value to communities.
- The guidance appears to be written more for the benefit of independent Fire & Rescue Authorities with their own performance finance and governance systems than for County Council based Fire and rescue services who utilise corporate systems. The guidance needs to recognise and reflect this difference.

Background Information/ factors considered in arriving at these decisions - (set out below and in the officer report):

Background:

The Fire and Rescue National Framework for England (the Framework) sets out the requirement for all Fire and Rescue Authorities to provide annual assurance on financial, governance and operational matters and to show how they have due regard to the requirements included in the Framework and the expectations set out in Authorities' own Integrated Risk Management plans. To demonstrate this, the Framework requires that each authority must publish an annual statement of assurance.

The consultation document provides draft guidance on the content of these annual statements of assurance, and indicates how Fire and Rescue Authorities' existing assessment processes might feed into the statements. The guidance sets out the requirements for the contents of statements of assurance Fire and Rescue Authorities will be responsible for determining the format of their statements.

The Fire and Rescue Minister has indicated that statements of assurance should be seen as "a proportionate requirement for an important public service with no specific inspectorate." However, the Minister is clear that these statements should not duplicate existing arrangements. Therefore, in producing statements of assurance, authorities may wish to consider how they can be aligned with other regular publications, perhaps providing a link to appropriate documents or other relevant material, in order to avoid duplication.

For clarification, the statement of assurance proposed in this guidance is, in addition to and must therefore complement this Council's production of an Annual Governance Statement covering the whole organisation.

Financial Implications:

None listed

Report Author:	Graeme Smith
Head of Service:	Graeme Smith
Strategic Director:	Graeme Smith
Portfolio Holder	Councillor Richard Hobbs

Checklist

Urgent matter: yes/no*

No

Confidential or Exempt (state category of exempt information)

No

Is the decision contrary to the budget and policy framework?

No

List of Reports considered [please attach or forward a copy]

Report from author

List of Background Papers [please include directorate contact names and numbers for access to background papers]

Department for Communities and Local Government Guidance on Statements of Assurance for Fire and rescue Authorities in England Consultation document (September 2012).

Any members and officers consulted or informed and any comments given.

Portfolio Holder – Cllr Hobbs

Deputy Chief Fire Officer – Gary Phillips
Assistant Chief Fire officer – Jim Onions

Finance – Helen Murphy
Legal – Ian Marriott
HR – Judith Coote
Performance – Vanessa Belton
WCC-Corporate Board
Equality and Diversity – Minakshee Patel

Democratic Services – Georgina Atkinson

Communities O&S:

Cllr John Whitehouse (LD Chair)

Cllr Chris Saint (C Vice Chair)

Cllr Richard Chattaway (L Spokes Community Safety)

Cllr Sarah Boad (LD Spokes Community Safety)