

North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority Annual Governance Statement 2020-21



Delivering Good Governance Framework

The CIPFA/Solace Delivering Good Governance in Local Government Framework (2016) (the Framework) requires the Fire and Rescue Authority to publish an Annual Governance Statement, and to be responsible for ensuring that:

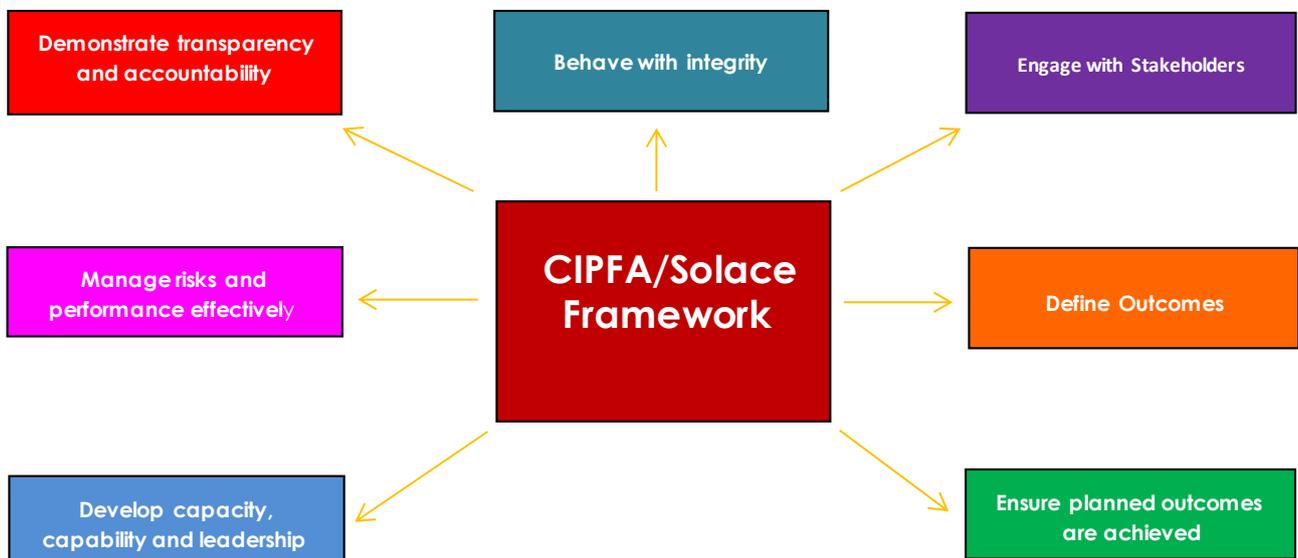
- business is conducted in accordance with all relevant laws and regulations;
- public money is safeguarded and properly accounted for ; and
- resources are used economically, efficiently and effectively to achieve agreed priorities which benefit local people.

To fulfil its wide range of functions, the Authority must satisfy a range of political, economic, social and environmental objectives over the short, medium and longer term. This subjects it to a different set of external and internal constraints and incentives from those found in the private sector, all of which affect its governance arrangements. A key piece of legislation in Wales is the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, which requires the Authority to consider the longer term in making its decisions and to work collaboratively with other public bodies to improve well-being in Wales.

Stakeholders are, therefore, interested in issues such as:

- whether the Authority's planned outputs have been delivered and outcomes achieved; and
- whether this has been done in an efficient, economic, effective and equitable manner.

The core principles underpinning the CIPFA/Solace Framework are set out below. The following pages detail how the Authority is meeting these principles.



Summary: Governance Arrangements

The Authority is required to review the effectiveness of its arrangements each year to ensure that there is a sound system of governance. The key contributors to this process are summarised on page 12 and include:

- Regularly reviewing the effectiveness of the Authority's Constitution.
- Having an Authority and committee structure that:
 - monitors the effectiveness of risk management arrangements;
 - regularly reviews the governance arrangements;
 - considers and reviews internal and external audit strategies, plans and reports; and
 - reviews, scrutinises and approves the annual statement of accounts.
- Having an Executive Group that:
 - provides leadership on governance;
 - contributes to the completion and review of the Annual Governance Statement; and
 - provides clear direction to the Service and senior managers.
- The use of information from various sources to inform the governance arrangements, for example:
 - performance reports;
 - risk management arrangements;
 - external regulator reports; and
 - the Internal Audit Annual Report.

Achievements against the core principles are set out within pages 5 – 11. The Authority's agreed improvement actions for 2020/21 are contained on page 13, which confirms the progress made.

Covid-19 Governance Impact

Throughout the Coronavirus pandemic the Authority have maintained an emergency response across North Wales, whilst putting the necessary control measures in place to reduce the risks associated with Covid-19 and to maintain the health, safety and wellbeing of our staff and the communities that we serve.

Whilst we were still able to deliver our emergency response, this has impacted on our 'business as usual' for non-emergency service delivery. Where possible, alternative models are being used to continue the delivery of our services.

In addition staff have undergone training, in order to be seconded to the Welsh Ambulance Service, to assist with driving ambulances and have also helped Betsi Cadwaladr Health Board with the Covid-19 vaccine rollout.

Covid-19 will continue to have an impact on the Authority's governance arrangements as summarised below:

- Impact on business as usual delivery of services;
- New areas of activity as part of the national pandemic response and any governance issues arising;
- The funding of the financial implications and logistical consequences of delivering the local government response; and
- Assessment of the long-term implications arising from the pandemic and developing sustainable models of future working.

This continues to be closely monitored including a review of the actions taken to inform our ongoing response and readiness in the event of further spikes.

A number of meetings were cancelled during the lockdown period and arrangements were made for members' decisions to be made following an exchange of emails.

The Welsh Government has issued the Local Authorities (Coronavirus) (Meetings) (Wales) Regulations 2020. These regulations make temporary provision until 1 May 2021, in relation to fire and rescue authority meetings, and for public and press access to these meetings during the COVID-19 emergency. Moving forward remote meetings will be held during the period that social distancing arrangements are in place.

During the lockdown period temporary governance arrangements have been approved to enable essential decision making to continue, including:

- 1 The scheduled annual, business and committee meetings of NWFRA up to December 2020 were replaced by a single meeting of the full Authority conducted via videoconferencing on 9 November 2020;
- 2 Part of the agenda at the November meeting was dedicated to matters that would normally be dealt with at the Authority's annual meeting, including the election of Chairs and Deputy Chairs of the Authority and the Audit Committee for the period up to the next annual meeting in June 2021;
- 3 From September 2020 onwards, informal, closed sessions were held for all Members to receive information from officers and to discuss key issues ahead of the November 2020 meeting. These sessions focused primarily on shaping the Authority's improvement priorities and budget-setting for 2021/22; and
- 4 Online meetings have now commenced for the Executive Panel, Audit Committee and Authority meetings. These are likely to continue throughout 2021/22.

Actions for 2021/22 and monitoring arrangements

The action plan for 2021/22 is set out in Appendix A, which will be monitored, quarterly by the Executive Group.

Core Principles

Behaving with integrity, demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values, and respecting the rule of law

- The Constitution sets out the responsibilities of the Fire and Rescue Authority and its committees and includes the Scheme of Delegation to Officers.
- The Monitoring Officer ensures that decisions taken are within the law and comply with the provisions of the Constitution.
- The Constitution includes the Code of Conduct for Members and this is monitored by the Standards Committee.
- Where necessary legal advice is sought to inform decision making.
- Codes of Conduct for Members and Officers are in place, which requires the declaration of business interests and recording of the receipt of gifts and/or hospitality.
- The Authority has a procedure to receive and respond to any complaints received. A summary report of complaints and appreciations is provided to the Fire and Rescue Authority annually.
- Key policies are in place to prevent and minimise the risk of fraud. Policies include: Whistleblowing Policy, Anti-Fraud and Corruption Policy and Financial Regulations and Contract Procedure Rules. Where irregularity is suspected arrangements are in place to ensure that it is thoroughly investigated.
- The recruitment policy, induction and training processes incorporate personal behaviours with ethical values. The core values of the Service are fully embedded and include; service to the community, striving for excellence, people and diversity and inclusivity.
- Attainment of the Public Health Wales Corporate Health Bronze and Platinum awards.
- The Inclusive Fire Service Group (IFSG) considers matters relating to equality, diversity and cultural issues. The Group reviewed and updated the core values in 2019/20 to reflect our modern and professional ways of working - [core-values](#)
- Disciplinary cases and any allegations of wrongdoing are investigated in accordance with the Service's Discipline Handbook.
- A Strategic Equality Plan is published in compliance with the Equality Act 2010. Equality objectives are reviewed annually and monitored throughout the year.
- As part of our commitment to the Welsh language, all new members of staff are required to achieve a minimum of Level 2 Welsh language skills.
- The Improvement and Well-being Plan is published on the Authority's website. This details the improvement objectives as required by the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009, and well-being objectives in accordance with the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.
- Safeguarding policy and procedure is in place to refer vulnerable people the Service come into contact with, to other agencies.

Core Principles

Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement

- All meetings are advertised and open to the public and full Authority meetings are webcast. Agendas and papers are available on the Authority's website.
- Information is published on the Authority's website as part of the publication scheme. Easy read/read speak/Welsh versions of documents are provided.
- Public consultation arrangements are in place to invite the views of stakeholders prior to developing and implementing key changes. This includes consultation on the Improvement and Well-being Plan
- The commitment to openness is also shown through:
 - completion of impact assessments for all key decisions;
 - the Complaints and Compliments Procedure which includes Authority reporting arrangements;
 - the Public Engagement and Consultation Strategy (presented to the July 2018 meeting of the Executive Panel);
 - engagement with Employee Representative Bodies;
 - membership of the North Wales Equality Group.
- A variety of engagement methods are used including:
 - directed communication using social media, with accounts on Facebook and Twitter. Ability to sign up for email updates on specific issues via the website;
 - engagement with young people via the Phoenix programme, Fire cadets and school visits;
 - community safety engagement with householders and businesses;
 - Positive Action events and attendance at park runs for firefighter recruitment (currently on hold due to the Covid 19 pandemic);
 - attendance at open days/events (currently on hold due to the Covid 19 pandemic) – for example the Eisteddfod;
 - internal communications include the Weekly Brief and Y Fflam newsletter;
 - participation in the Local Resilience Forum's Warning and Informing Group including an agreement to retweet messages to reach a wider audience;
 - public media campaigns, led by the Community Safety Managers.
- Partnership arrangements are in place to deliver certain outcomes. For example, Principal Officers attend the four local Public Services Boards and the Regional Partnership Board.
- Participation in the Emergency Services Collaboration Board and joint training and exercises undertaken.

Core Principles

Defining outcomes in terms of sustainable economic, social and environmental benefits

- The Improvement and Well-being Plan sets the strategic direction for the Authority and details the improvement objectives in accordance with the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009, and well-being objectives in accordance with the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.
- The Service has four core values – People, Diversity and Inclusivity, Striving For Excellence and Service to the Community. These summarise the principles and personal values that staff are encouraged to adopt and demonstrate.
- The Service has gained White Ribbon accreditation which demonstrates a commitment to stop violence against women.
- The Service has a statutory duty to put in place business continuity arrangements. Plans across the Service have been updated. There is ongoing collaboration with the other fire and rescue services in Wales to improve planning and consider current risks. The National Issues Committee includes a business continuity work stream.
- The Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) and annual budget process ensures that financial resources are directed to the Authority's priorities.
- Partnership working is undertaken where there are shared objectives and advantages from working together - for example, the Strategic Arson Reduction Board and Public Services Boards.
- The Strategic Risk Management Policy sets out the process used to identify and control exposure to uncertainty, which may impact on the achievement of the objectives or activities. This is reviewed throughout the year to ensure that risks are identified and appropriately assessed. The Corporate Risk Register records these risks, and they are regularly monitored, by the Corporate Planning Department and reported to the Executive Panel.
- Key decisions are subject to an integrated impact assessment, which takes account of equality, protection, health, safety and wellbeing, Welsh language, finance, sustainability and staffing, Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.
- Safeguarding policy and procedure is in place to refer vulnerable people the Service come into contact with, to other agencies.

Core Principles

Determining the interventions necessary to optimise the achievement of the intended outcomes

- Public consultation is carried out as part of setting the Authority's objectives which are set out in the Improvement and Well-being Plan. This outlines how the Authority intends to work together with other public bodies to tackle the complex issues that affect people's lives. An assessment of the Authority's performance is produced in October each year and published.
- The Authority's Strategic Risk Management Policy sets out the process used to identify and control exposure to uncertainty, which may impact on the achievement of the objectives or activities. This is reviewed throughout the year to ensure that risks are appropriately managed.
- Following scrutiny from the Executive Group, performance and financial reports are presented to the Authority and its committees.
- Monitoring of availability, incidents, the workforce and budgets ensures that issues are identified and appropriate interventions agreed.
- National Operational Guidance available and an operational learning forum manages and implements any changes
- There is a significant amount of partnership working across Wales to respond to issues facing the fire sector and other more general public sector issues. Collaboration with multiple agencies is an important aspect of the Authority's work including prevention and protection, responding to incidents and use of resources.
- The budget planning processes ensure budgets are prepared in accordance with objectives, strategies and the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS). This involves input from both Service leads and Authority Members. It shows how the resources will be deployed over the next few years to deliver agreed outcomes and agreed priorities.

Core Principles

Developing the entity's capacity, including the capability of its leadership and the individuals within it

- The Authority's Constitution outlines the roles of elected members and designated officers to enable shared understanding of roles and objectives. The designated posts include the Chief Fire Officer, Treasurer and Monitoring Officer.
- Collaborative and partnership working is in place regionally and nationally. For example, the three fire and rescue services in Wales are part of the all Wales Fire Investigation Training Forum. This supports shared learning and promotes a consistent approach across Wales.
- The All Wales People and Organisational Development Strategy 2018-2021 underpins the commitment to lifelong learning and workplace competence.
- Induction processes are in place for Members and employees. These include an introduction to the organisation's core values, the standards of conduct and the role requirements.
- The development needs of employees are identified through one to one, supervision and appraisal meetings. The Service operates a future leaders programme for staff already employed and has developed a future leader apprenticeship programme, which commences in April 2021, in conjunction with Coleg Llandrillo.
- The health and wellbeing of the workforce is key to the organisation and support is provided to maintain physical and mental wellbeing. This is achieved through a range of measures including HR policies and guidance documents, flexible working approach, the occupational health service and the employee assistance programme.
- The Service has a dedicated training department, with competency frameworks for operational staff. Training is delivered using a variety of methods including e-learning modules which are mandatory for certain subjects e.g. Data Protection.
- Arrangements are in place for internal reviews of compliance with Service standards and health and safety requirements.
- Staff are members of relevant professional bodies and undertake the required continual professional development.

Core Principles

Managing risks and performance through robust internal control and strong public financial management

- The Treasurer is responsible for the proper administration of the Authority's financial affairs as required by S151 Local Government Finance Act 1992.
- The Monitoring Officer ensures compliance with established policies, procedures, laws and regulations.
- The Strategic Risk Management Policy details the process for the identification and control of risks. A corporate risk register is maintained by the Corporate Planning Department and is monitored throughout the year.
- Reports to the Authority and its committees include an integrated impact assessment to inform and support decisions.
- Business continuity arrangements are in place to ensure that critical services can continue to be delivered at all times.
- Management arrangements ensure that recommendations for improvement made by the Internal Auditor are agreed and monitored.
- Members and senior management are provided with regular reports on Service performance against key performance indicators and milestones.
- The Authority has arrangements to maintain registers of Members' personal and business interests and a register of gifts and hospitality.
- Policies for Anti-Fraud and Corruption and Whistle-blowing are in place which confirms the Authority's commitment to operating in a fair and transparent manner.
- Policies and arrangements are in place to manage the handling of data. These are the Data Protection Policy, Freedom of Information Policy, Data Retention Policy and Communications and Information Security Policy. These policies are supplemented with training and the e-learning module on data protection is mandatory for all staff.
- Information sharing protocols have been developed and agreed with partners.
- Financial management supports the delivery of services and transformational change as well as securing good stewardship. A financial update is presented to each Authority meeting, with reports available to the public on the website.
- The Treasury Management arrangements follow professional practices and are reviewed annually by members.
- The Authority's Statements of Accounts are subject to scrutiny by external audit.

Core Principles

Implementing good practices in transparency, reporting and audit to deliver effective accountability

- The Authority, with assistance from the Monitoring Officer, oversees and reviews the adequacy and effectiveness of the governance arrangements and internal control environment.
- Agendas and minutes of meetings are publicly available on the internet along with webcasts of the Authority meetings (when available).
- Authority reports follow a structured format which ensures that key information is presented in a clear and consistent manner to aid decision making.
- The Authority has a publication scheme and complies with the requirements of the Information Commissioner in relation to Freedom of Information requests which ensures the public have access to information held.
- The Improvement and Well-being Plan documents the objectives of the Authority.
- The Annual Statement of Accounts are produced in a user friendly format. This provides clear information on income and expenditure and demonstrates the stewardship of public money for the year. The accounts are submitted for audit by the statutory deadline of 31 May.
- The Annual Pay Policy Statement is approved and published in accordance with the Localism Act 2011. Members' salaries are paid in accordance with the Independent Remuneration Panel decisions and reported on the internet.
- Members and senior officers declare relevant interests in accordance with the Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in the UK. These declarations enable the Authority to identify and report any related party transactions.
- The Annual Governance Statement provides transparency on the governance arrangements and the planned improvements for the coming year.
- The Annual Statement of Accounts and Annual Governance Statement are subject to scrutiny and approval in accordance with the Authority's Constitution.
- Audit Wales is the appointed external auditor and provides an opinion on the Statement of Accounts, which is published on the Authority's website. The Authority acts on recommendations and, where necessary, takes corrective action.
- The Internal Audit arrangements include a risk based approach, which provides assurance that key risks are being managed. The Authority acts on recommendations and where necessary, takes corrective action.
- Processes are in place to ensure that recommendations from inspection and regulatory bodies are actioned.

Key Contributors to Developing and Maintaining the Governance Framework

Fire and Rescue Authority	The Authority provides the strategic leadership, political interface and corporate challenge in relation to the provision of fire and rescue services across North Wales, encouraging public participation and conducting its affairs in an open and transparent manner. It agrees the Improvement and Wellbeing Plan, and the revenue and capital budgets.
Executive Panel	Monitors the performance of the Service and makes recommendations to the Authority on its key policies including the Improvement and Wellbeing Plan. The Panel reviews the strategic risk register.
Planning Working Group	Undertakes detailed work associated with the Authority's planning and budget-setting process. It submits its observations to the Executive Panel which in turn makes recommendations for improvement/risk reduction/well-being objectives to the Authority.
Audit Committee	Provides independent review of the governance, risk management and control frameworks and oversees the financial reporting, including the Treasury Management Strategy and annual accounts.
Standards Committee	Promotes and maintains high standards of conduct by Members of the Authority and oversees the whistle-blowing policy for complaints against Members of the Authority. Also, where statute permits, to receive reports and complaints about Members and to conduct or oversee investigations and make recommendations to the Authority.
Executive Group	Sets and leads the implementation of the governance standards across the Service. Receives the annual improvement plan and feeds into the annual self-assessment.
Internal Audit	Provides an annual independent and objective opinion on the adequacy and effectiveness of internal control, risk management and governance arrangements. Investigates fraud and irregularity.

How has the Authority Addressed the Governance Improvement Actions from 2020/21?

The Annual Governance and Improvement Assessment 2019/20 contained the following improvement actions. Here is how they have been addressed:

Improvement Action	Responsibility	Progress as at March 2021
Financial Regulations and Finance Policies to be reviewed in line with the CIPFA model to ensure they reflect the requirements of the Authority.	ACFO (Finance and Resources) Head of Finance	First draft completed. Scheme of Financial Delegation circulated to senior managers in October 2020. Financial Reserves Strategy approved by the Authority in March 2021.
Standards of Conduct for staff to be reviewed.	ACFO (Operations & Training) ACFO (Finance and Resources) Head of HR	The Standards of Conduct are currently being redrafted and will be submitted to the Executive Group for approval.
Complete Cyber Essentials Plus to guard against cyber threats.	ACFO (Fire Safety) Senior Control and ICT Manager	A baseline assessment has been undertaken by the ICT Department with action plans in place to address risks and ensure compliance. Work is currently ongoing to meet specific requirements, in particular the migration to Microsoft 365. Regular updates are provided to the Information Strategy Group.
Embed a co-ordinated corporate planning and financial planning cycle. To assist with the future planning and financing of the service objectives, a co-ordinated corporate planning and financial	Head of Finance Corporate Planning Manager	Session held with senior officers, to explain the integrated planning approach and timeline. Departmental objectives for 2020/21 and 2021/22 have been formulated and are being kept under review. 3 year departmental plans submitted to provide information for 2021/22 budget setting and development of the MTFs.

Improvement Action	Responsibility	Progress as at March 2021
<p>planning cycle will be introduced to ensure the Authority and officers are engaged in forward planning in line with the corporate objectives and Medium Term Financial Strategy.</p>		<p>Work will continue into 2021/22 to further embed this process, within the Service.</p>
<p>Following on from the environmental and energy policy statements adopted previously, the Planning Working Group will consider a new environmental strategy.</p>	<p>ACO (Planning and Performance) Corporate Planning Manager</p>	<p>Initial meeting held, by officers, to look at the various areas involved, but work has been delayed due to Covid 19.</p>
<p>Support a regional and national response to the Grenfell incident and implement any procedural changes resulting from the independent review.</p>	<p>ACFO (Fire Safety) Senior Fire Safety Manager</p>	<p>During 2020 NWFRS has responded to a number of consultations including the Fire Safety Bill, Fire Safety Order, Building Safety Bill, Welsh Government planning consultation and to a WG position paper on Building Safety. WG published the white paper on Building Safety in Wales in January 2021, with a 12 week consultation period. This has been considered, by the Fire Safety Department and a response issued.</p>
<p>Following the implementation of business continuity plans, in March 2020, a review will be completed to ensure lessons learned and where applicable arrangements updated.</p>	<p>Principal Officers</p>	<p>A review of the Covid-19 response has been undertaken across the Service and a report setting out opportunities for learning drafted. This will be monitored by the Executive Group during 2021/22.</p>
<p>Ensure government guidance in relation to transitional pension arrangements is actioned. Complete all actions and requirements arising from the Scheme Advisory Board for Wales.</p>	<p>ACFO (Finance and Resources) Pensions Manager</p>	<p>The government consulted across the public sector between July – October 2020. The detailed proposals have not been issued by government but are expected during 2021/22. The position is reported to each meeting of the Local Pension Board and the Scheme Advisory Board and updates provided to the Authority.</p>

Governance Opinion and Conclusion

The Authority recognises that good governance provides the foundation for the delivery of good quality services that meet the needs of stakeholders and ensures that public money is well spent. This review confirms the governance systems and monitoring in place for 2020/21 and the steps taken to ensure that they are working effectively.

The Authority is satisfied that appropriate governance arrangements are in place and remains committed to enhancing these through the implementation of the action plan for 2021/22.

Signed: (Chair) 2021

Signed:(Chief Fire Officer).....2021

Appendix A - Governance Improvement Action Plan 2021/22

Improvement Action	Action	Responsibility	Timescale
Standing Financial Instructions	The Financial Regulations will be reviewed to ensure they reflect the requirements of the Fire and Rescue Authority.	ACFO (Finance and Resources) Head of Finance	September 2021
Cyber Security	Continuation of 2019/2020 action by the ICT Department, in relation to Cyber Essentials Plus to guard against cyber threats,	ACFO (Fire Safety) Senior Control and ICT Manager	March 2022
Environmental Strategy	Following on from the environmental and energy policy statements adopted previously, the Planning Working Group will consider a new environmental strategy.	ACO (Planning and Performance) Corporate Planning Manager	March 2022
Fire Safety regulatory environment	Support a regional and national response to the Grenfell incident and implement any procedural changes resulting from the independent review.	ACFO (Fire Safety) Senior Fire Safety Manager	March 2022

Improvement Action	Action	Responsibility	Timescale
Review of Business Continuity Arrangements	Ensure the recommendations from the Covid-19 response report are progressed during 2021/22.	ACFO (Operations and Training) Senior Operations and Training Managers	September 2021
Ensure government guidance in relation to transitional pension arrangements is actioned	Complete all actions and requirements arising from the updated government advice and Scheme Advisory Board for Wales.	ACFO (Finance & Resources) Pensions Manager	March 2022

Appendix B - Summary of the Authority's Governance Framework

Principles of Good Governance

Behaving with integrity, demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values, and respecting the rule of law
Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement
Defining outcomes in terms of sustainable economic, social and environmental benefits
Determining the interventions necessary to optimise the achievement of the intended outcomes
Developing the Authority's capacity, including the capability of its leadership and employees
Managing risks and performance through robust internal control and strong financial management
Implementing good practices in transparency, reporting and audit to deliver effective accountability

Evidence Sources

- Medium Term Financial Strategy
- Financial planning
- Partnership arrangements
- HR strategy & policies
- Procurement Strategy
- Constitution
- Job descriptions
- Chief Fire Officer
- Treasurer
- Monitoring Officer
- Published reports
- Community Engagement Plan
- Communication Strategy
- Improvement and Well-being Plan
- Integrated Impact Assessments

Assurance Sources

- Performance reports
- Financial reports
- Democratic arrangements
- Reports from external audit and regulators
- Internal Audit reports
- Partnership boards
- Customer feedback
- Consultations

Members

- Fire and Rescue Authority and its committees

Executive

- Executive Group

Evidence Sources

- Leadership
- Core Values
- Equalities arrangements
- FOI arrangements
- Codes of Conduct
- Anti-fraud and Corruption Policy
- Whistle-blowing Policy
- Audit and Standards Committees
- Expert advice and guidance
- Risk management
- Internal controls
- Internal Audit service
- Information management
- Staff and elected member development
- Complaints processes



Annual Governance and Improvement Assessment signed by Chair and Chief Fire Officer



Governance Improvement Action Plan reviewed quarterly by Executive Group