

HUMBERSIDE FIRE AUTHORITY

ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT 2023/24

Scope of Responsibility

1. The Humberside Fire Authority (HFA) is responsible for ensuring that its business is conducted in accordance with the law and proper standards and that public money is safeguarded and properly accounted for, and used economically, efficiently and effectively. The HFA also has a duty under the Local Government Act 1999 to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness.
2. In discharging this overall responsibility, the HFA is responsible for putting in place proper arrangements for the governance of its affairs, facilitating the effective exercise of its functions, which includes arrangements for the management of risk.
3. The HFA has approved and adopted a code of corporate governance applicable to Members, which is consistent with the principles of the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA)/ Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (Solace) Delivering Good Governance in Local Government Framework 2016 Edition. A copy of the code can be obtained from the Secretary to the Fire Authority.
4. The HFA has approved and adopted the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) Core Code of Ethics for Fire and Rescue Services for employees to abide by.
5. This statement explains how the HFA has complied with the code of corporate governance and also meets the requirements of regulation 4(3) of the Accounts and Audit (England) Regulations 2011 in relation to the publication of an Annual Governance Statement.

The Purpose of the Governance Framework

6. The governance framework comprises the systems and processes, culture and values, by which the HFA is directed and controlled. The framework demonstrates how the HFA accounts to, engages with and leads within the community. It enables the HFA to monitor the achievement of its strategic objectives and to consider whether those objectives have led to the delivery of appropriate, cost effective services.
7. The system of internal control is a significant part of the governance framework and is designed to manage risk to a reasonable level. It cannot eliminate all risk of failure to achieve policies, aims and objectives and can therefore only provide reasonable and not absolute assurance of effectiveness.
8. The system of internal control is based on an on-going process designed to identify and prioritise the risks to the achievement of the HFA's policies, aims and objectives, to evaluate the likelihood of those risks being realised and the impact should they be realised, and to manage them efficiently, effectively and economically.
9. The governance framework has been in place at the HFA for the year ending 31 March 2023 and up to the date of approval of the Statement of Accounts.

The Governance Framework 2023/24

10. The key elements of the HFA's governance framework included:
 - (a) The [Constitution](#) of the Authority which includes:
 - (1) Committee Membership and Terms of Reference;
 - (2) Scheme of Delegation to Officers;

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- (3) Financial Procedure Rules;
 - (4) Contract Procedure Rules;
 - (5) Members' Code of Conduct;
 - (6) Employees' Code of Conduct;
 - (7) Protocol for Member and Officer relationships;
 - (8) Code of Corporate Governance.
- (b) The Governance, Audit and Scrutiny (GAS) Committee, as well as the HFA itself, received regular reports on the Service's performance arrangements.
- (c) An approved [Corporate Risk and Opportunity Policy](#).
- (d) An approved 'Local Code of Corporate Governance' in accordance with the CIPFA/SOLACE Framework for Corporate Governance.
- (e) The designation of the Chief Fire Officer as Chief Executive responsible to the HFA for all aspects of operational management.
- (f) The designation of the Executive Director of Finance and S.151 Officer (Local Government Act 1972) in accordance with Section 112 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988 and conforming with the governance requirements of the CIPFA Statement on the role of the Chief Financial Officer in Local Government (2010).
- (g) The designation of the Secretary as Monitoring Officer with the requirement to report to the full HFA if it is considered that any proposal, decision or omission would give rise to unlawfulness or maladministration.
- (h) The Executive Board has considered a strategic overview of the HFA control environment, including the response to external audit, performance management, strategic planning and scrutiny of Risk and Opportunity Management.
- (i) The production of quarterly [Management Accounts](#) which are distributed to all Members of SLT and are considered at the GAS Committee meetings and the HFA.
- (j) The Service and Finance Planning process.
- (k) In accordance with the Service Business Planning Framework the Strategic Plan and Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) for 2021-25 ensure a three-year plan, linked to the [Medium Term Resource Strategy](#).
- (l) The Strategic Plan 2021/24 includes strategic objectives and Directorate responsibilities. The [Strategic Plan 2021-25](#) was approved by HFA in December 2020 following consultation.
- (m) The [Community Risk Management Plan \(CRMP\) 2021-25](#) takes account of the requirements of the 2018 Fire and Rescue National Framework for England, providing a detailed assessment of the risks facing our communities and personnel and the measures taken to mitigate those risks. .
- (n) Current [Anti-Fraud and Corruption, Anti-Bribery and Anti-Money Laundering Policies](#). We publish these and other such Policies, associated data and information on the HFRS Website under Data Transparency.

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- (o) The Authority is committed to the highest possible standards of integrity, openness, fairness, inclusivity, probity and accountability. HFA aims to provide a positive and supportive culture to enable employees to raise their concerns.

A [Whistleblowing Policy](#) and subscription to the services of the whistleblowing charity, Protect, were in place. Staff are informed of this service via Siren and the Whistleblowing Policy which is published on the external website.

The Authority has also introduced a 'Freedom to Speak up Guardian' role through the new Wellbeing Manager in Occupational Health, providing another independent reporting route for staff to raise concerns.

- (p) A Service Improvement Plan has been developed to ensure that improvement areas across the Service, including any actions arising from His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) Inspection, are documented, evidenced and regularly reviewed.
- (q) Member and Officer Development Programmes. During 2023/24 Officers undertook facilitated supportive leadership development. Access to the T2Hub of Management and Leadership Self Development resources, Continual Professional Development through the Leadership Forum and Guest Speakers and Officers completing the Executive Leadership Programme.
- (r) Scheduled Member Days throughout the year support Member development and awareness of developing agenda for the Service and across the Sector as a whole.
- (s) An approved Treasury Management Policy and Prudential Indicators.
- (t) A Protective Marking Scheme (based upon the His Majesty's Government Security Framework).
- (u) Implementation of a [Public Sector Equality Duty \(PSED\) action plan](#) to implement its priorities. Actions within this plan have been fully integrated within the LGA FRS Equality Framework Self-assessment/action planning process and Priorities following consultation.
- (v) Aligned service delivery with our four Local Authorities (Hull, East Riding, North Lincolnshire and North East Lincolnshire) through District management teams, is helping partnership work and assists us to be closer and more accountable to local communities.
- (w) Bi-Annual Performance Reports to HFA are published on our [website](#).
- (x) A Pension Board, as required under The Firefighters' Pension Scheme (Amendment) (Governance) Regulations 2015, was formed in 2015 to oversee compliance in the operation of the Firefighters' Pension Scheme (FPS). The Pension Board met twice during 2023/24.
- (y) The Executive Director of People and Development chairs a Joint Consultative Committee attended by all Representative Bodies to discuss any matters relating to staff terms and conditions.
- (z) Member Champions continue to support functional areas and are invited to attend local District performance meetings and to meet with Area Managers and Executive Directors.

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- (aa) Consultation on our Council Tax Precept for 2023/24 drew many responses (1356) from our community. This allowed Fire Authority Members to make an informed decision on the setting of the precept.
- (bb) In line with legislative requirements HFRS published its [Gender, Ethnicity and Disability Pay Gap Report](#) by the end of March 2024. Any arising actions are included within the report to HFA.
- (cc) Emergency Preparedness for significant events is assured through provision of a fulltime team, established and tested Business Continuity Plans and a lead role within the Humber Local Resilience Forum (LRF).
- (dd) Policies relating to compliance, management and administration of information governance, under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) are published on the [website](#).

Review of Effectiveness

- 10. The HFA has responsibility for conducting, at least annually, a review of the effectiveness of its governance framework including the system of internal control. The review of effectiveness is informed by the work of the executive managers within the Authority who have responsibility for the development and maintenance of the governance environment, the head of internal audit's annual report, and also by comments made by the external auditors and other review agencies and inspectorates.
- 11. The GAS Committee has continued its scrutiny programme during 2023/24, including the scrutiny of:
 - Fire Standards
 - Procurement
 - Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) - Equality Impact Analysis
 - General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) Compliance
 - EDI Staff Forums.

The induction of new Members and continuing training of all Members (via Member Days and Member Champion meetings) during 2023/24 has further enabled Members to discharge the functions of the HFA.

- 12. During the 2023/24 financial year, the HFA and its committees met as follows:
 - HFA - nine occasions
 - GAS Committee - seven occasions
 - Pension Board - two occasions
- 13. Members of the Pension Board receive reports against a number of key workstreams designed to ensure that the Board operates in compliance with the Pension Regulator's Code of Practice for Pension Boards, this encompasses three broad areas: Governance, Administration and Communication.
- 14. The review of the effectiveness of the system of internal control is informed by:
 - The work of Senior Officers
 - The work of Internal Audit
 - Corporate Risk and Opportunity
 - Performance information

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- The Authority's External Auditor, in their Auditor's Annual Report, Audit Completion Report, Annual Audit Letter and other reports.
15. Internal Audit has undertaken a number of reviews during 2023/24. The following areas were covered:
- Bullying, Harassment and Discrimination
 - Enforcement Powers and Priorities
 - Effectiveness of Systems (used to learn from operational Incidents)
 - National Operational Guidance (NOG)
 - Service Absolutes Process
 - Staff Development
 - Mobile Data Terminals (MDT) performance
 - ICT Management Controls
 - Key Financial Controls
16. The Authority is fully compliant against the CIPFA Financial Management Code. Full compliance against the code became mandatory from 1 April 2022.
17. The Head of Internal Audit annual opinion for the period 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024 was satisfied that, for the areas reviewed during the year, the Service has reasonable and effective risk management, control and governance processes in place. The Authority proactively utilises Internal Audit as an effective tool to receive independent assessment and assurance in targeted areas of work as identified by the Service Improvement Framework.
18. The effectiveness of the governance framework is considered throughout the year by SLT, the GAS Committee and HFA. Much of this is discharged through internal reports such as Management Accounts and Performance Reports as well as the work of Internal and External Audit. Any significant issues are captured via the risk management system and considered by the Fire Authority where appropriate.

Governance Update 2023/24

19. There were no significant governance issues during 2023/24.
20. Members are assured that the Service has appropriate arrangements in place should use of the powers under the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act (RIPA) 2000 be necessary. There was no use of RIPA or requests for covert surveillance during 2023/24.
21. The Police & Crime Act 2017 places a statutory duty upon Fire and Rescue, Police and Ambulance services to collaborate.
22. We continue to proactively identify collaborative opportunities with the Police, Ambulance services and other bodies. This has included:
- A joint Emergency Service Fleet Management workshop with the Humberside Police.
 - A joint Estates (Operational and Strategic) function with Humberside Police.
 - Provision of a medical First Responder scheme in partnership with Yorkshire Ambulance (YAS), East Midlands Ambulance Service (EMAS).
 - A Falls, Intervention Response, Safety Team (F.I.R.S.T) in partnership with NHS partners, Hull City Council and East Riding of Yorkshire Council.
 - An agreement with Yorkshire Ambulance Service (YAS) for them to provide Service wide Clinical Governance.

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- Memorandums of Understanding with Humberside Police and Ambulance Trusts to support response activities including:
 - Fire Investigation
 - Forced Entry for Medical Rescues
 - Drone
 - Bariatric
- An Integrated Health Centre incorporating a Full-Time fire station, in partnership with Humber, Coast and Vale ICS.
- A Fire and Police Transformation Board continues to review collaboration opportunities where they are beneficial and practicable.
- Shared provision of a Health and Safety function with Humberside Police, managed by HFRS.
- HFRS providing Financial Management support to Humberside PCC.
- 'Don't Cross the Line' campaign to support stopping attacks on Emergency Service Workers.

23. The Service was last inspected by HMICFRS at the end of 2021 into 2022 which rated the Service as 'Good' across all three pillars (Effectiveness, Efficiency and People). The Service Improvement Plan addresses any findings from the inspection and is used to prepare the Service for its next inspection, due to take place later in 2024. Performance monitoring against the Service Improvement Plan is undertaken through a Strategic Leadership Team performance meeting held every other month.

The Service was chosen as one of the 10 fire services to undergo a Thematic Inspection into the handling of misconduct. The inspection took place over a three week period in November 2023 and will culminate in a report which is set to be published in the summer of 2024. The report will include outcomes from all 10 Services involved in the inspection.

24. The Appointments Committee met once during 2023/24 to appoint to the following Executive post:
- Executive Director of Finance & Section 151 Officer
25. One Whistleblowing complaint was received during 2023/24 and was dealt with in accordance with the Whistleblowing Policy. No case was found to be answered.
26. In its response to its consultation on the White Paper *Reforming our Fire and Rescue Service* on 12 December 2023, the Government committed to the following areas:
- Introducing a professional College of Fire and Rescue to oversee standards and strengthen leadership.
 - Developing the provision for Chief Fire Officers (CFOs) to have operational independence.
 - Tasking the National Joint Council to review pay negotiation mechanisms.
 - Addressing issues around integrity and culture through improved training, more open recruitment practices, and working towards a statutory code of ethics for FRS employees.

Proposals for mandatory transfers to the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner (PFCC) model, boundary changes to make areas between different public services match geographically, and for a Fire and Rescue Service (FRS) oath were dropped. The Service will continue to monitor national progress against the agreed reforms, providing updates on their evolving status as required.

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Strategic Risk and Opportunity Register

27. The Service has in place a Strategic Risk and Opportunity Register which enables it to understand, monitor and mitigate against the Service's overall risk profile. The Service can use a range of techniques for identifying specific risks that may potentially impact on one or more objectives. The top critical Strategic Risks for 2023/24 were as follows:

- Public Confidence in Working Culture
- Financial Constraints Around National Grant Funding

Conclusions

28. This Annual Governance Statement for 2023/24 provides Members with a high level of assurance for the Authority's governance arrangements.

Signed



Councillor Nigel Sherwood
Chair of the Fire Authority



Phil Shillito
Chief Fire Officer & Chief Executive



Martyn Ransom
Section 151 Officer



Lisa Nicholson
Secretary & Monitoring Officer to the
Fire Authority