

Annual Governance Statement 2017/18

This Annual Governance Statement has been prepared in accordance with the principles set out in guidance document *Delivering Good Governance in Local Government: Framework (CIPFA/SOLACE 2016)*. This Statement explains how the North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority has complied with the framework to ensure that resources are directed in accordance with agreed policy and priorities.

1 Scope of Responsibility

The Authority is responsible for ensuring that its business is conducted in accordance with the law, to proper standards, that public money is safeguarded and properly accounted for. The Authority 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.

In discharging this overall responsibility, the Authority is responsible for putting in place proper arrangements for the governance of its affairs and facilitating the effective exercise of its functions, including arrangements for the management of risk.

This statement explains how the Authority has complied with the code and also meets the requirements of the Accounts and Audit (Wales) Regulations 2014, in relation to the publication of a statement in internal control.

2 The Purpose of the Governance Framework

The governance framework comprises the systems, processes, culture and values, by which the Authority is directed and controlled to demonstrate proper accountability, leadership and engagement. It enables the Authority to monitor the achievement of its strategic objectives and to consider whether those objectives have led to the delivery of appropriate, cost effective services and continuous improvement.

The system of internal control is a significant part of that 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. The system of internal control is based on an on-going process designed to identify and prioritise the risks to the achievement of the Service'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.

The governance framework described within this report has been in place for the year ended 31 March 2018 and up to the date of approval of the statement of accounts.

3 The Governance Framework

This statement describes the key elements of the Authority's Governance Framework and our self-assessment of the compliance with the Authority's Code of Corporate Governance. The governance assurances contained in this statement are structured around the principles established within *Delivering Good Governance in Local Government: Framework (CIPFA/SOLACE 2016)*.

Each of these principles is an important part of the Authority's governance arrangements. Through the application of these principles we can have confidence that we are delivering the services to our citizens and communities in a way that shows accountability, transparency, effectiveness, integrity and inclusivity.

The Fire and Rescue Authority (FRA) comprises 28 Members from the six unitary authorities covered by the Fire and Rescue Service area as defined by the Fire Service (Combination Scheme) Order 1995. The role of the FRA is set out in the constitution and includes responsibility for strategic leadership, political interface and corporate challenge. Members individually sign the code of conduct when they join the FRA. The FRA has a suite of constitutional documents that can be found on its website. These include Contract Standing Orders, Scheme of Delegations and Financial Regulations. These documents are regularly reviewed by the Monitoring Officer and Treasurer, and any identified changes needed are reported to the Authority for their approval. The Standards Committee has also adopted a programme of rolling review of key documents within the Authority's Constitution to ensure that they remain relevant and up to date.

<http://www.nwales-fireservice.org.uk/media/4195/constitution-june-2017.pdf>

The Authority is organised into committees and working groups which are appointed at the annual meeting. Each committee and working group has a comprehensive set of terms of reference which, together with details of their membership, can be found on the website. Members are required to make any declarations of interest when attending each meeting which are formally recorded in the minutes. The Authority has the facility to set-up time-limited task groups to undertake reviews and the discretion to co-opt Executive members with relevant expertise onto these groups. The Improvement Planning Working Group met twice in February and March 2017 – prior to the council elections in 2017; this has been re-named to the Planning Working Group and it has met on five occasions between January and March 2018.

<http://www.nwales-fireservice.org.uk/fire-and-rescue-authority/?lang=en-gb>

In order to provide a practical method of operational and financial management throughout the organisation, officers have been given certain powers by the Authority in the form of Chief Fire Officer's Delegations. Under the Local Government Act 1972, a list of these powers must be maintained and this is done by the Monitoring Officer who regularly reviews their effectiveness, and reports and agrees any changes with the Fire and Rescue Authority.

The Executive Group is responsible for organisational leadership, functional management and service delivery. All Officers are required to comply with the FRA's policies and procedures including the Code of Conduct which is regularly reviewed and updated.

The Treasurer is responsible for the proper administration of the Authority's financial affairs as required by Section 112 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988, and the Authority's financial management arrangements are assessed against the governance requirements set out in the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy Statement on the Role of the Chief Finance Officer in Public Organisations (2015).

<http://www.cipfa.org/policy-and-guidance/reports/the-role-of-the-chief-financial-officer-in-public-service-organisations>

Flintshire County Council, under a service level agreement, provides Monitoring Officer services in accordance with the Local Government and Housing Act 1989, and ensures compliance with established policies, procedures, laws and regulations. This includes the maintenance of a Register of Members Personal and Business Interests, in accordance with the Code of Conduct. In addition, the Authority maintains a register of gifts and hospitality which is kept by the Finance department; the policy is included in the Authority's constitution document.

There are established arrangements for effective Financial Controls through the Authority's accounting procedures, key financial systems and the Financial Regulations. These include established budget planning and monitoring procedures including regular reporting of the financial performance to members of the Authority. The Authority's Treasury Management arrangements follow professional practice and are subject to annual review by Members. The Internal Audit plan for each financial year includes an Annual Statement of Assurance on the operation of the internal financial controls.

The Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) covers the period 2018-2021 and forms the cornerstone of the annual detailed budget, including national and local funding. The Strategy considers:

- intelligence from outturn for last financial year and current year's revenue budget as the base;
- a view on relevant indices to be applied to the base;
- a planned approach to reserves as a result of the MTFS projection;
- a view on potential funding gaps and planned approaches to these over the period in question.

<http://www.nwales-fireservice.org.uk/media/337355/7-medium-term-financial-strategy-fra-report-16-17.pdf>

The annual Improvement and Well-being Plan explains publicly the direction that the Authority is taking. It outlines how the Authority intends to work together with other public bodies more effectively to tackle the complex issues that affect people's lives that cannot be resolved by just one organisation through short term planning. The plan is compiled in accordance with specific duties arising from the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009 and the Fire and Rescue National Framework for Wales 2016.

The organisation's performance against the Improvement and Wellbeing Plan is reported regularly to the Authority and Executive Panel. An Assessment of the Authority's Performance against its Improvement and Well-being Plan is produced in October each year. The plan and the assessment document entitled 'How did we do?' are available using the link below;

<http://www.nwales-fireservice.org.uk/about-us/performance-and-improvement/improvement-planning/?lang=en>

The Authority has established a **Corporate Communications Strategy 2014-19: Putting People First**, which sets out the principles and approach to be followed to ensure continuous improvement in the work to communicate with key stakeholders. In addition the Authority is part of an **All Wales Memorandum of Understanding: Our Strategic Direction**, which has been produced by the All Wales Communications Group. Its purpose is to assist the three Welsh FRAs adopt a common and generic approach to public engagement and consultation.

The Strategic Planning Framework sets out that our vision is to make North Wales safer by reducing risk. We recognise that safer communities can only be achieved by challenging and improving the way we work through a safe and competent workforce and effectively managing our resources. We therefore set a strategic direction for the organisation through our Improvement and Wellbeing Plan giving due regard to the Well-being of Future Generations Act together with the requirements of the Wales Fire and Rescue Services National Framework Document 2016 produced by the Welsh Government. Each department formulates their own plans in support of the strategic objectives which are monitored quarterly.

The Authority's Strategic Risk Management Policy sets out the process we use to identify and control exposure to uncertainty, which may impact on the achievement of our objectives or activities. This is reviewed throughout the year to ensure that risks are identified and appropriately assessed. Corporate Risks are scored in terms of likelihood and impact which takes into account actions being taken and identifies further actions required to prevent the likelihood of risk occurring. The Corporate Risk Register records these risks, and they are regularly monitored and reported to the Executive Panel.

The Service has signed up to the all Wales Fire and Rescue Services' Procurement Strategy which makes the best of opportunities to deliver efficiencies and other improvements in the acquisition of goods, services and the awarding of contracts across the Fire and Rescue Services in Wales. This includes using the National Procurement Service frameworks where possible to ensure both value for money and compliance with procurement rules.

The Authority has agreed principles and processes to ensure that its objectives, priorities and values are promoted and safeguarded when working in partnership. In particular, partnership working has been enhanced through our statutory membership of the **Public Services Boards (PSBs)**. These Boards have been established through the Well-being of Future Generations Act with the purpose of improving the economic, social, environmental and cultural wellbeing through joint working across the Public Sector. Boards are established on a regional basis and aligned to Local Authority boundaries.

The Authority has in place counter fraud arrangements and whistleblowing arrangements which are regularly reviewed by officers. There are agreed procedures to meet the requirements of the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 which have been agreed by the Office of Surveillance Commissioner (now the Investigatory Powers Commissioner's Office (IPCO)).

Through its **Equality and Diversity Policy** and **Strategic Equality Plan** the Authority is committed to delivering equal opportunities in employment across the organisation. The aim is to ensure that all applicants and employees are treated fairly and with care and promote a harmonious working environment for all staff, free from harassment and victimisation. The Strategic Equality Plan is included in departmental budget and planning meetings.

<http://www.nwales-fireservice.org.uk/about-us/equality-and-diversity/strategic-equality-plan-2016-2020/>

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 recommendations.

Related party transactions forms are completed in accordance with the Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in the UK. These returns help to establish transactions and balances as required by the relevant accounting standard (International Accounting Standard 24, Related Party Disclosures).

The Audit Committee is responsible for strategic oversight and scrutiny in relation to four key areas; governance, assurance, risk management and performance.

http://www.nwales-fireservice.org.uk/media/1247/audit_terms_of_ref.pdf

The Audit Committee has fourteen members derived from membership of the Fire and Rescue Authority and meets a minimum of twice per year. The Chair and Deputy Chair are appointed from different constituent authorities in the interests of representations of the communities of North Wales.

Internal Audit services are purchased from Conwy County Borough Council, who work to the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS) which are applicable to all Internal Audit providers in Wales. These standards, which are based on the mandatory elements of the Institute of Internal Auditors (IIA) International Professional Practices Framework (IPPF), are intended to promote further improvement in the professionalism, quality, consistency and effectiveness of internal audit across the public sector.

The Annual Audit Plan is agreed by the Audit Committee which receives regular reports on the audits undertaken together with a comprehensive annual report.

The Auditor General for Wales is the Authority's statutory auditor, with the Audit provided by the Wales Audit Office. They provide challenge under the Public Audit (Wales) Act 2004, The Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009, the Local Government Act 1999 and the Code of Audit Practice. They issue annual reports/statements on the performance of the Authority namely to:

- examine and certify if the financial statements are true and fair;
- assess if proper arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in the use of resources have been made;
- audit and assess if the duties and requirements of the Measure have been met and
- undertake studies to enable considered recommendations for improving economy, efficiency and effectiveness or for improving financial or other management arrangements.

The Auditor General for Wales from the Wales Audit Office is the appointed external auditor of the Authority. Work is undertaken in accordance with an annually agreed audit plan and the findings and progress is reported to the Audit Committee. The reports are available on the Authority's website..

<http://www.nwales-fireservice.org.uk/media/337759/6i-audit-plan-2017.pdf>

The Authority has established Standards Committee that consists of 2 members of the Authority and 4 independent members who are recruited by public advert. The Committee has replaced 2 of those members this year. It has taken the innovative step of jointly appointing an independent member with Flintshire County Council in order to share recruitment and development costs as well as to share best practice. The Committee meets twice a year and will review the constituent elements of the Constitution on a rolling basis.

4.0 Review of Effectiveness

The Authority 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 Group and other senior officers 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 other reviews undertaken.

The Head of Internal Audit was satisfied that internal audit work undertaken, together with Audit's maintained knowledge of the Authority and its procedures enabled them to draw a reasonable conclusion as to the adequacy and effectiveness of the NWFRA risk management, control and governance processes. In their opinion, for the 12 months ended 31st March 2018, the Authority has satisfactory internal control and corporate governance processes to manage the achievement of the Authority's objectives.

The statement of assurance was discussed and approved by the Audit Committee as to the effectiveness of the governance arrangements for which it is responsible, including the system of internal control.

In maintaining and reviewing the effectiveness of the Authority's governance arrangements the following have been considered:-

- i) The work of the Authority's committees. The Authority receives annual reports from both the Standards committee and Local Pension Board outlining the work that had been undertaken throughout the year, providing Members with the opportunity to scrutinise and seek assurance as appropriate.
- ii) Regular reviews of policies carried out by the officer responsible and by the Professional Service Standards Team.
- iii) Regular review of the constitutional documents and ethical governance arrangements by the Monitoring Officer and Treasurer.
- iv) The Executive Panel regularly scrutinises the revenue and capital expenditure against the allocated budget together with regular scrutiny of the performance of the Service against the Improvement Plan.
- v) Senior officers regularly review the organisational risks and regularly report to Members.
- vi) The Internal Audit function performs regular reviews of the financial systems and controls to provide assurance to the Authority through its Audit Committee.
- vii) The Internal Audit function, whose work takes account of identified risks through regular audits of the major systems, establishments and major projects in accordance with the annual internal audit plan, and which includes 'follow-up' work to ensure that Principal Officers implement agreed recommendations.
- viii) Internal Audit also performed the following reviews:
 - a review of retained stations (Conwy and Denbighshire) demonstrated that key controls are in place to ensure the achievement of objectives and to protect against significant foreseeable risks and are applied consistently and effectively resulting in a satisfactory assurance rating.

- a review of cyber security technologies, processes and measures demonstrated that key controls are in place but there are gaps, which leave NWFRS exposed to what could be significant risks, which results in a Limited assurance rating. The implementation of the 18 recommendations made will improve the internal controls in operation and give management the assurance that robust systems are in place and appropriate measures have been taken to mitigate the major risks identified. A follow-up audit will be carried out in six months to verify compliance with the recommendations made. Issues are covered within the actions section of the Annual Governance Statement for 2018/19.
 - the Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblowing) and Bribery policy was approved in October 2014. A review of this Policy demonstrated that key controls are in place to ensure the achievement of objectives and to protect against significant foreseeable risks and are applied consistently and effectively resulting in a Satisfactory assurance rating. The implementation of the 12 recommendations made will improve the internal controls in operation and give management the assurance that robust systems are in place and appropriate measures have been taken to mitigate the minor risks identified.
- ix) The Internal Audit Strategy 2018-21 was submitted and approved by the Audit Committee in January 2018, in compliance with the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards.
- x) The opinions and recommendations of the Authority's external auditors and other inspection and review agencies; recommendations made following the 2016-17 annual accounts completion are being addressed. Work continues around the main recommendation regarding improvement of the Corporate Asset Register.
- xi) The Auditor General issued an unqualified audit opinion on the Authority's 2016/17 financial statements, confirming that they presented a true and fair view of the Authority's and the Pension Funds' financial position and transactions.
- xii) The Auditor General also certified that the Authority had discharged its duties under section 15(6) to (9) of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009 and had acted in accordance with Welsh Government guidance sufficiently to discharge its duties with respect to the Improvement Plan published during March 2018.
- xiii) Positive actions have taken place during the year to address to further strengthen the Governance arrangements and these are outlined within Section 5.

5.0 Recommendations for Improvement- implementation of actions during 2017/2018

In respect of those issues identified within in the Statement on Internal Control for the previous financial year (2016/17), progress in 2017/18 was as follows:

Issue	Action	Outcome	Lead officer	Completion Date
There is a budget gap as identified in the Medium Term Financial Plan	Effective process used for managing budgets and monitoring and achieving identified savings	The Planning Working Group (previously named (Improvement Planning Working Group) met on five occasions between January and April 2018 to consider various options in order to address the budget deficit for 2018-19 and beyond; a public consultation will be held in the summer months of 2018.	Assistant Chief Officer (Corporate Planning and Performance)	To be determined by the Fire and Rescue Authority post June 2018
Improved collaboration required between Emergency Service partners.	To reduce the risk of injury and death by fire by ensuring improved collaboration between Emergency Service partners by sharing common information technology platforms (initially Frequentis LifeX) to allow a more timely exchange of information to more ably manage resources to provide a more effective response to the communities of North Wales.	NWFRS will be migrating its Control onto a new communications software package, Frequentis Lifex, which is a shared platform with North Wales Police (NWP). Due to delays for NWP, the Fire and Rescue Service are not expected to join Police colleagues on this system until Q3 2018/19.	Head of Control	Ongoing
Review of the asset register and ensure robust systems in place to ensure all relevant information is recorded.	To improve financial reporting and the financial control environment. Departmental Managers impacted to be fully briefed on requirements. Ensure correct classification of assets.	Ensure qualitative and quantitative aspects of the Code of Practice on Local authority accounting and financial reporting are met.	Deputy Chief Fire Officer/Assistant Chief Officer	Ongoing improvements; completion date 31 March 2019

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Issue	Action	Outcome	Lead officer	Completion Date
To develop the knowledge of the new administration	Authority members to be fully briefed on relevant issues. Officers and members to be aware of, and conform to the member/officer protocol. There will be a full members' induction which will be repeated as necessary and there will be an expectation that members will attend.	The transition of leadership from the old administration to the new has been fully actioned. Member induction was held in June 2017 for new and returning members following the local authority elections. All members have been invited to attend training sessions on various topics which are held prior to Authority meetings. Specific, ongoing training is provided for members of the Local Pension Board.	Chief Fire Officer assisted by Clerk and Treasurer	Completed
Potential of a significant number of new members	Effective training delivered to all members; clarity of roles and responsibilities to be provided	As above	Chief Fire Officer	From September 2017 to April 2022 - ongoing
Revising the format of Authority papers	To improve clarity and the process of impact assessing policy	Improved presentation and consistent Authority papers	Corporate Planning Manager	Completed
Enhance post implementation review of projects	To enhance learning	Improved delivery of projects	DCFO	Completed
Identify savings/projects for Medium Term Financial Strategy	Review revenue budget to identify savings and monitor impact of projects on future savings	Improved financial resilience to mitigate future funding reductions	Improvement Working Group	Completed
Welsh Language Standards	To ensure compliance with the relevant standards and guidance	Improved service delivery and wider engagement with communities	Corporate Communications Manager	Completed

The Authority has effective controls and governance but is not complacent; tThis Annual Governance Statement as well as internal audits carried out have identified areas where further improvements need to be made.

6.0 Significant Governance Issues and Challenges

Following the Local Government Elections in 2017, seventeen new members were appointed to the Authority for the municipal year. A comprehensive Members' induction process took place in June 2017, not only to inform Members of the work and statutory duties of the Authority and the Service but also to inform them of the challenges likely to occur in the future.

In February 2017, the Welsh Government published for consultation a White Paper "Reforming Local Government: Resilient and Renewed". Whilst its main focus was on Councils, reference was made to Fire and Rescue Authorities. The Welsh Government is currently reviewing the Governance and Funding arrangements of Welsh Fire and Rescue Authorities and the Authority will fully engage in this process.

Public sector funding continues to be a key challenge across the Public Sector. The impact of funding uncertainties, cost increases and service pressures is a key issue for the Authority. The Authority will continue to work to embed its medium term financial strategy with a focus on ensuring the effective use of resources and the development of a balanced budget for 2019/2020.

The Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011 replaced the Welsh Language Act 1993 and as part of the new legislation, in Wales the Welsh language has equal legal status with English and must not be treated less favourably. Public bodies no longer need to develop and implement Welsh Language schemes but instead now must comply with a set of national Welsh Language Standards. The Welsh Language Commissioner has issued a Compliance Notice which sets out which Standards apply to the Authority, along with any exemptions and their implementation dates. The Authority has published an implementation plan which sets out how it intends to comply at a corporate level with the Standards and what its internal processes are for oversight and monitoring implementation and is available on the North Wales Fire and Rescue Service website.

The aim of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 is to improve the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales. As one of the statutory partners on the Public Services Boards, we took these requirements into account early in our planning cycle. Each Public Services Board will be required to publish a local Well-being Plan by May 2018, and will be required to evidence through annual review how the goals are being achieved. We will therefore need to ensure that we are able to deliver against the needs and expectations of each Public Services Board's objectives without impacting on the day-to-day service delivery of the organisation.

The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) was approved in 2016 and become effective on the 25th May 2018. These regulations replace and build on the existing data protection directive which was established in 1995. The aim of GDPR is to further enhance and strengthen the arrangements to reduce the risk of privacy and data breaches of individuals. Underpinning the new arrangements are improved arrangements for individuals to consent to the holding and use of their personal data. Organisations are required to have a Data Protection Officer who is responsible for compliance. The new Regulation includes more stringent arrangements for reporting breaches and increased fines for non-compliance.

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7.0 Annual Governance Statement 2017/18 Action Plan - Actions for 2018/19:

Objective	Aim	Outcome	Who Responsible	Expected completion date
Work with the Cabinet Secretary on the Governance and Funding Arrangements of Welsh Fire and Rescue Authorities	To fully engage and participate in any proposals for change	Clarity on any proposed changes and an effective transition to ensure that the long term sustainability of the Authority is not compromised.	CFO and Chair	This is beyond the control of the Authority and will be determined by the Cabinet Secretary
Ensure the ongoing training and development of Members of the North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority.	Effective training delivered to all members; clarity of roles and responsibilities to be provided	Effective transition of Leadership from the old administration to the new	Chief Fire Officer	From September 2017 to April 2022
Compliance with the requirements of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)	To ensure that the Authority understands the requirements of GDPR and has taken appropriate action to provide assurance on compliance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appointment of a Data Protection Officer (DPO) • Assurance report including action plan for full implementation 	Assistant Chief Officer, (Corporate Planning and Performance)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 25th May 2018 (confirmation of DPO appointment) • 30th September 2018 assurance statement
Appointment of the Clerk to the Authority/Monitoring Officer	To appoint a Clerk to the Authority/Monitoring Officer in accordance with the Authority's Constitution	Appointment in place by the end of the Financial year	CFO	31 st March 2019
Terms of Reference of all Committees	To review the Terms of Reference for all Committees and update as necessary to ensure that they fully meet the Governance requirements of the Authority	Assurance that the Committees are established and operating in accordance with the requirements of the Authority's Constitution	Clerk to the Authority	31 st March 2019

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Update Contract Standing Orders	To review and update the Authority's Contract Standing Orders to ensure that they provide a framework of Governance and Control in relation to the procurement of goods and services including capital expenditure	Updated Contract Standing Orders which are fully compliant with Public Sector Procurement Rules.	Assistant Chief Officer (Finance and Resources)	31 st March 2019
Local Pension Board	To review and update the work of the Local Pension Board	To provide assurance to those charged with governance that the Firefighters' Pension Scheme is operated and accounted for in accordance with the regulations	Assistant Chief Officer (Finance and Resources)	31 st March 2019

8.0 Assurance Summary

Good governance is the foundation for the delivery of good quality services that meet all stakeholders' needs and it is fundamental to showing that public money is well spent. Based on the review, assessment and on-going monitoring work undertaken during 2017/18, we have reached the opinion that good governance arrangements are in place, key systems are operating soundly and that there are no fundamental control weaknesses in evidence. However, no system of control can provide absolute assurance against misstatement or loss. Based on the various assurances given, this statement is intended to provide reasonable assurance that satisfactory corporate governance arrangements are in place and working effectively.

We propose over the coming year to take steps to address the above matters to further enhance our governance arrangements. We are satisfied that these steps will address the need for improvements that were identified in our review of effectiveness and will monitor their implementation and operation as part of our next annual review.

Signed:
(Chief Fire Officer) 2018

Signed:
(Chair NWFRA) 2018