

*Mae'r ddogfen yma ar gael yn Gymraeg*

Report to	<b>Audit Committee</b>
Report no	<b>AC/2017/09/07</b>
Date	<b>11 September 2017</b>
Lead Officer	<b>Dawn Docx, Deputy Chief Fire Officer</b>
Contact Officer	<b>Head of Finance</b>
Subject	<b>Annual Governance Statement</b>



## **PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 1 To present the final Annual Governance Statement to members, before being published as part of our Statement of Accounts which will be presented at the full Fire and Rescue Authority meeting in September.

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- 2 The Annual Governance Statement is a statutory document which explains the processes and procedures in place to enable North Wales Fire and Rescue Service (NWFRS) to carry out its functions effectively. The purpose of the Statement is to explain how NWFRS has complied with the Code of Corporate Governance.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 3 Members are requested to approve the content of the Annual Governance Statement for 2016/17.

## **BACKGROUND**

- 4 From 2010/11 all Local Government Authorities have been required to prepare an Annual Governance Statement which is to be published as part of the Statutory Accounts. This replaces the Statement of Internal Control (SIC) in the Statement of Accounts.
- 5 The purpose of the Annual Governance Statement is to report publicly, on an annual basis, the extent to which an Authority complies with its own Code of Corporate Governance. It includes an explanation as to how the Authority has monitored the effectiveness of its governance arrangements in that year and on any planned changes in the coming period.

## INFORMATION

- 6 Following the extensive preparatory work undertaken to compile the Annual Governance Statement 2016/17 the Service has subsequently worked with Wales Audit Office (WAO) to refine and summarise the statement.
- 7 The revised statement has been produced taking into account recommendations made by WAO.

## IMPLICATIONS

Wellbeing Objectives	Taken into consideration and incorporated within the plan.
Budget	No additional cost pressures, budget set for 17/18 incorporates training requirements; AGS ensures value for money considerations made to projects undertaken within the Service.
Legal	AGS complies with the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 which requires all relevant bodies to prepare an AGS. The content does not have any other legal implications.
Staffing	Improved working conditions for staff
Equalities/Human Rights/ Welsh Language	No implications
Risks	Risks highlighted and control measures put in place within the plan.

## **Annual Governance Statement 2016/17**

This Statement has been prepared in accordance with guidance produced by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) and the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Managers (SOLACE), the 'Delivering Good Governance in Local Governance Framework'. This Annual Governance Statement explains how the Authority has complied with the new framework and its seven core principles of good governance to ensure that resources are directed in accordance with agreed policy and agreed priorities.

### **1 Scope of Responsibility**

North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority (the Authority) is responsible for ensuring that its business is conducted in accordance with the law and to proper standards, and that public money is safeguarded and properly accounted for, and used economically, efficiently and effectively. 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, facilitating the effective exercise of its functions and which includes 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 and processes, and culture and values, by which the Authority is directed and controlled and its activities through which it accounts to, engages with and leads the community. 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 has been in place at the Authority for the year ended 31 March 2017 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 each of the principles from the *International Framework: Good Governance in the Public Sector* (CIPFA/IOFAC, 2014).

Each of these principles is an important part of the Authority's Code of Corporate Governance arrangements. By applying these principles we can demonstrate that we are delivering the services to our citizens and communities in a way that demonstrates accountability, transparency, effectiveness, integrity and inclusivity.

The Fire and Rescue Authority (FRA) is made up of Members of the 6 unitary authorities covered by the Fire and Rescue Service area as defined by the Fire Service (Combination Scheme) Order 1995. The role and conduct of the FRA is set out in the constitution.

Member's code of conduct individually signed when they join the FRA. Officers' code of conduct regularly reviewed and updated.

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.

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

Declarations of interests made at meetings - minutes confirm declarations of interest were sought and appropriate declarations made.

The Fire and Rescue Authority, comprising of the 28 members are responsible for strategic leadership, political interface and corporate challenge. Within the Service the Executive Group consisting of the Chief Fire Officer, Deputy Chief Fire Officer and Assistant Chief Fire Officers organisational leadership, functional challenge and service delivery.

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>

Constitutional Documents – The Authority 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.

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

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. These powers form an integral part of the Governance arrangements and were last reviewed in 2016.

The Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) covers the period 2017-2020 and forms the cornerstone of the detailed budget construction annually. It provides a view on potential funding both nationally and locally. 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>

Annual Combined Improvement Plan and Wellbeing Plan – The plan outlines the direction that the organisation taking and how we intend to meet the challenges over the period in order to continue to deliver high quality services that meet the needs of our communities. The organisation's performance against the Improvement and Wellbeing Plan is reported regularly to the Authority and Executive Panel together with an overall report on these reported annually to the Authority and on our website through the document "How we did".

The annual Authority's **Combined Improvement and Wellbeing Plan** sets out its vision, mission statement and values. 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 2008-11. Three different purposes are covered within the plan:

- The provision of information about the Authority and Service, and the context within which they operate;
- Recording of the highest priorities of the Authority and tracing its progress towards achieving specific goals;
- Recording of historical performance spanning three financial years.

<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

Strategic Planning Framework – 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 which addresses the requirements of 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 reported on 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. The service Senior Management Team identify, review and score the Corporate Risks assessing them in terms of likelihood and impact; identifies any actions in place and any further actions required to prevent the likelihood of risk occurring or to mitigate the impact should they occur. The Corporate Risk Register records these risks, and they are regularly monitored.

<http://www.nwales-fireservice.org.uk/media/4119/12-strategic-risk-management.pdf>

The Audit Committee has four primary roles of governance audit and scrutiny, financial and resource management audit and scrutiny, risk management and assurance audit and scrutiny and performance audit and scrutiny.

The Committee's membership consists of all non-executive (panel) members 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.

The Committee 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.

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 procedures and regular reporting to Authority Members and comparing actual revenue and capital expenditure to annual budgets. The Authority's Treasury Management arrangements follow professional practice and are subject to annual review by Members.

The Service has signed up to the 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.

The Authority has agreed principles and processes to ensure that its objectives, priorities and values are promoted and safeguarded when working in partnership.

Collaboration and partnership working has been enhanced with participation on all four regional **Public Sector Boards (PSBs)**.

Flintshire County Council Chief Executive is currently designated the Monitoring Officer in accordance with the Local Government and Housing Act 1989, and ensures compliance with established policies, procedures, laws and regulations.

The Authority's Monitoring Officer maintains a Register of Members Personal and Business Interests, in accordance with the Code of Conduct.

The Authority maintains an annual register of gifts and hospitality.

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 and key personnel have recently received training in the application of these regulations.

Through its **Equality and Diversity Policy** and **Strategic Equality Plan** the Authority is committed to delivering equal opportunities in employment across the organisation. It is policy 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.

Strategic Equality Plan - forms part of regular budget/ departmental planning meetings

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

Internal Audit is outsourced to Conwy County Borough Council, who work to the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards which are applicable to all Internal Audit providers in Wales. 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.
- undertake studies to enable considered recommendations for improving economy, efficiency and effectiveness or for improving financial or other management arrangements.

The Auditor General and Wales Audit Officer present their audit plan to Members annually and regularly report progress and outcomes to them. The reports are available on the Authority's website..

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

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).

#### **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 2017, the Authority has satisfactory internal control and corporate governance processes to manage the achievement of the Authority's objectives'

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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 received annual reports from each of its committees and working groups outlining the work that had been undertaken throughout the year, giving Members the opportunity to challenge and scrutinise any area that they feel fit;
- ii) Regular monitoring of performance against the **Combined Improvement and Wellbeing Plan** and service plans and of key targets and reporting of this to Authority Members;
- iii) Regular reviews of policies carried out by the officer responsible and by the Professional Service Standards Team;
- iv) Regular review of the constitutional documents and ethical governance arrangements by the Monitoring Officer and Treasurer;
- v) 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.
- vi) Senior officers regularly review the organisational risks and regular report to Members.
- vii) The Internal Audit function performs regular reviews of the financial systems and controls to provide assurance to the Authority through its Audit Committee;
- viii) 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;
- ix) Internal Audit have to comply with the Public Sector internal audit standards (PSIAS). 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.
- x) The Standards have been revised from 1 April 2017 to incorporate new and revised international standards and consequent amendments to the additional public sector requirements and interpretations. The Internal Audit Annual Statement of Assurance confirms that the Internal Audit service operates in compliance with the PSIAS.

- xi) The opinions and recommendations of the Authority's external auditors and other inspection and review agencies;
- xii) The Auditor General issued an unqualified audit opinion on the Authority's 2015/16 financial statements, confirming that they presented a true and fair view of the Authority's and the Pension Funds' financial position and transactions.
- xiii) With regard to the audit of the Authority's 2015/16 financial statements the Auditor General reported a number of important recommendations to improve the Authority's processes. In response the Authority accepted the recommendations and has commenced work to strengthen a number of its procedures and records to rectify the weaknesses identified, this work is ongoing.
- xiv) Positive actions have taken place during the year to address the challenges outlined in the 2015/16 Annual Governance Statement.

**5.0 Recommendations for Improvement- Annual Governance Action Plan 16/17**

In respect of those 'significant control issues' included in the Statement on Internal Control for the previous financial year (2015/16), progress in 2016/17 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	16/17 outturn in line with budget and forecasts. Action plan yet to be determined by the FRA to address the budget gap for future years.	Deputy Chief Fire Officer	To be determined by the new Fire and Rescue Authority post June 2017
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 has migrated its Control onto a new software package which will enable NWFRS to concentrate on developing a shared communication platform with North Wales Police in the Autumn 2017.	Head of Control	March 2018
A requirement to enhance project management in order to enhance the effective delivery of service objectives.  Improve Programme Management	WASPI – create central register of Information Sharing Protocols (ISPs) and Data Disclosure Agreements (DDAs).	WASPI has been used as a tool in order to improve data exchange between partners. In addition, a project management system has been implemented which reports into the Executive Group as the overall programme board for the programme of transformation.	DCFO	Completed.

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<p>WFGAct 2015 - Ensure appropriate arrangements for introduction of the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act 2015.</p>	<p>Interpret the guidance and make recommendations.</p>	<p>This has been successfully completed and informed our work on the public service boards.</p>	<p>Corporate Planning Manager</p>	<p>Completed</p>
<p>Improve knowledge, conduct and behaviour within the organisation in relation to Health, Safety and Wellbeing.</p>	<p>Develop and publish guidance documents and H&amp;S plan on the intranet.</p>	<p>This has been undertaken through the Health Safety and Wellbeing Group and is now considered business as usual.</p>	<p>Senior Professional and Service Standards Manager</p>	<p>Completed</p>

The Authority has effective controls and governance but is not complacent. This Annual Governance Statement as well as a recent audit carried out on the Authority's governance arrangements has identified areas where further improvements need to be made.

## 6.0 Significant Governance Issues and Challenges for 2017/18

The Auditor General identified a number of issues and areas for improvement relating to the asset register. The asset register does not hold sufficiently detailed information on the individual assets classified as operational and IT equipment, nor is the process to account for disposals sufficiently robust.

Public sector funding continues to be a challenge. The impact of spending reductions in the public sector is a key issue for the Authority and the position that local authorities face is always taken into account when the Authority sets its annual budget, and the implications are always considered when determining the Medium Term Financial Strategy.

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 published a document noting how it intends to comply at a corporate level with the Standards and what its internal processes are for oversight and monitoring implementation.

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 Service Boards, we took these requirements into account early in our planning cycle. Each Public Service Board will be required to produce a local Well-being Plan, 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 Service Board's objectives without impacting on the day-to-day service delivery of the organisation.

Following the Local Government Elections sixteen new members were appointed to the Authority for the municipal year. A comprehensive Members' induction process took place in June, not only 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.

Potential changes to pension and tax legislation continue to provide a challenge to the organisation and the capacity to deal with the complex issues with existing resources continues to be of concern with various options being explored.

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 Fire and Rescue Services in Wales have a track record of delivery. They have reduced fires and fire casualties by over 50% since responsibility was devolved in 2004. They also have a long history of regional working, having operated on that basis since 1996. In that sense they already represent an example of the broad approach which this White Paper proposes for other Local Authority services.*

*However, the Authority's governance and funding arrangements do not generate sufficient accountability, for instance, Council leaders and cabinet members are not generally members. There is also no separation between executive and scrutiny functions, and budgets set without any formal external challenge or control.*

*To correct this and to ensure that fire and rescue services are properly integrated with other regionalised services, it is proposed that Fire and Rescue Authorities will change their governance arrangements.*

*As part of the new Bill it is proposed that the 2009 Local Government Measure will no longer apply to Fire and Rescue Authorities from the same date as Local Authorities. They will not be subject to the new improvement and performance regime set out for Local Authorities. A full consultation will be undertaken in due course as to the new governance, funding and performance management arrangements for Fire and Rescue Authorities."*

Given the above we expect a consultation document to be published later this year which will explore the issues and which is likely to bring considerable changes in the way that Fire and Rescue Authorities are run.

**7.0 Annual Governance Statement 2016/17 Action Plan - New Actions for 2017/18:**

Objective	Aim	Outcome	Who Responsible	Expected completion date
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.	DCFO	March 2018
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 – this will be repeated as necessary and there will be an expectation that members will attend	Effective transition of Leadership from the old administration to the new	Chief Fire Officer assisted by Clerk and Treasurer	September 2017
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
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	March 2018

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Enhance post implementation review of projects	To enhance learning	Improved delivery of projects	DCFO	March 2018
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	October 2017
Welsh Language Standards	To ensure compliance with the relevant standards and guidance	Improved service delivery and wider engagement with communities	Corporate Communications Manager	March 2018

## **7.0 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 2016/17, 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)**

**2017**

**Signed:**  
**(Chair NWFRA)**

**2017**