Procedure

Assurance
Pro/11/06 | Performance and Assurance
Next review due: 30/06/2024

Hampshire & Isle of Wight
FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE

Description

This procedure describes the framework that Hampshire & Isle of Wight Fire and Rescue Service uses to ensure gain assurance that the services delivered are effective. It outlines roles and responsibilities, for the Fire Authority, Chief Fire Officer and Executive Group, through to managers and all staff and the systems in place to support ongoing evidence-based assurance.

The document should be read in conjunction with the Performance Procedure and is supported further by the Risk Management Procedure, Operational Assurance Procedure, Change Management Procedure and Internal Audit Procedure.

Hampshire and Isle Wight Fire and Rescue Authority the 'Authority' throughout this document.

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Version 6.2

Purpose of the Procedure

This Procedure outlines the Organisation's framework for providing assurance on its business activities and sets out the monitoring and reporting responsibilities of the Authority, Executive Group, Directors, Managers and all individuals within the Organisation.

This Procedure outlines how business activities are facilitated, monitored and reviewed to provide assurance that they are delivering our core objectives and to identify areas of good practice and/or flag areas for improvement. This procedure is closely linked to the Organisation's Risk Management Procedure and to the Performance Procedure.

In the spirit of openness and transparency, and to provide clear accountability, this Procedure also supports the use of effective assurance systems and mechanisms across the Organisation as described further in the Operational Assurance Procedure, Change Management Procedure, Internal Audit Procedure and Impact Assessments procedure.

Understanding Assurance

> **The Organisation's definition of assurance is an independent and objective assessment that provides credible information to attain confidence in the delivery of its objectives, and to identify areas for improvement or good practice to disseminate across the Organisation**

In the context of Hampshire & Isle of Wight Fire and Rescue Service (HIWFRS), the term **assurance** is used to mean the ways that the Organisations can ensure that the services it delivers to our communities and partners, and internally, are effective and efficient (in line with the budget and policies set by the Authorities on behalf of the public), are legislatively compliant and deliver improved outcomes.

In other words, the Organisation has an overall framework of controls that provides a verifiable evidence base of compliance with policy and procedures across the Organisation, within teams and Directorates, in every activity that the Organisation carries out to ensure that Together We Make Life Safer.

Assurance is a fundamental aspect of any public sector organisation that operates with transparency and accountability. For HIWFRS, the framework of controls that creates our assurance systems enables us to demonstrate to the Authorities that its policies are being delivered effectively and efficiently. It

also enables the Organisation to carry out its activities by carefully managing risks in delivery to maximise public safety outcomes within communities.

Whilst assurance itself does not deliver outcomes, effective assurance is a critical component of good governance. Good governance helps to build trust and confidence in internal and community-based service delivery.

High-quality assurance information enables better conversations about risks to successful delivery and helps the Organisations to focus on actions that will 'make the difference' – either by identifying areas for improvement or good practice to disseminate across the Organisation.

Principles of Assurance

The following principles underpin the Organisation's approach to creating and managing assurance:

Assurance by design
Assurance is not a one-off exercise, it is crucial and sustained activity – that is a core part of the Organisation's priorities, for example to be high-performing and learning and improving. Key aspects of assurance by design are to:

- Plan for assurance from the outset of activity and continue to monitor and iterate throughout the lifecycle of delivery and performance review.
- Make sure assurance is integrated and operating effectively across all '3 lines of defence', which is explained further later in this procedure.
- Incorporate lessons learned from relevant initiatives or activity (both within and outside the Organisation) into your assurance approach.
- Undertake risk and impact assessments when designing new systems, processes and policy, including for core delivery partner activities.

Flexible
Assurance is adaptable, and both proactive and reactive, to manage (potential or materialised) changes in scope, approach, delivery or risk profile.

Informs key decisions
Assurance activity provides timely and credible information to inform key decisions and evidence-based risk management across the Organisation.

Risk- and outcomes-based
Risks to successful delivery and their impact on outcomes should lead the decision for how assurance is assessed, and confidence is obtained:

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- Make sure assurance is risk-based – in other words, there is a clear link between the planned assurance activities and the risks to achieving the outcomes, to ensure assurance activity is proportionate to risk.
- Make sure assurance is forward-looking and assesses delivery confidence rather than focusing solely on adherence to process or methodology.

Independent and impartial

Where appropriate, assurance is performed by competent people outside of the delivery team who are not unduly influenced by key stakeholders.

On occasions, this may require (either voluntarily or statutory) assurance activity to be carried out by people outside of the organisation – such as technical or project management consultants, internal auditors or Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS).

Accountability

Assurance roles and responsibilities at the governance level are understood, partly through, but not limited to, current Policy, Procedure and Guidance (within the Organisation's Policy, Procedure and Guidance (PPG) framework.

Assurance activities

To ensure assurance activities are independent and objective, it is crucial to create and embed a '*three lines of defence*'[1] model which is essential to the overall framework of control:

- The **first line of defence** can be described as the day-to-day management processes and controls that teams or Directorates have in place, including performance management.
- The **second line of defence** is the governance and oversight arrangements that exist and are specified within clear and signed-off terms of reference for decision-making bodies, such as the Directorate Boards and the Executive Group and the Fire and Rescue Authority (FRA).

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[1] The '3 **Lines of Defence**' combined assurance **model** was **developed** in the 1990s. It was later adopted by the Basel Committee on Banking Supervision as a good **model** for internal control management and has been adopted across various organisations that focus on governance, i.e. the Institute of Directors (IoD), Chartered Institute of Internal Auditors (IIA) and others.

- The **third line of defence** is the independent assurance you obtain from Internal Audit and third-party assurance providers, such as HMICFRS.
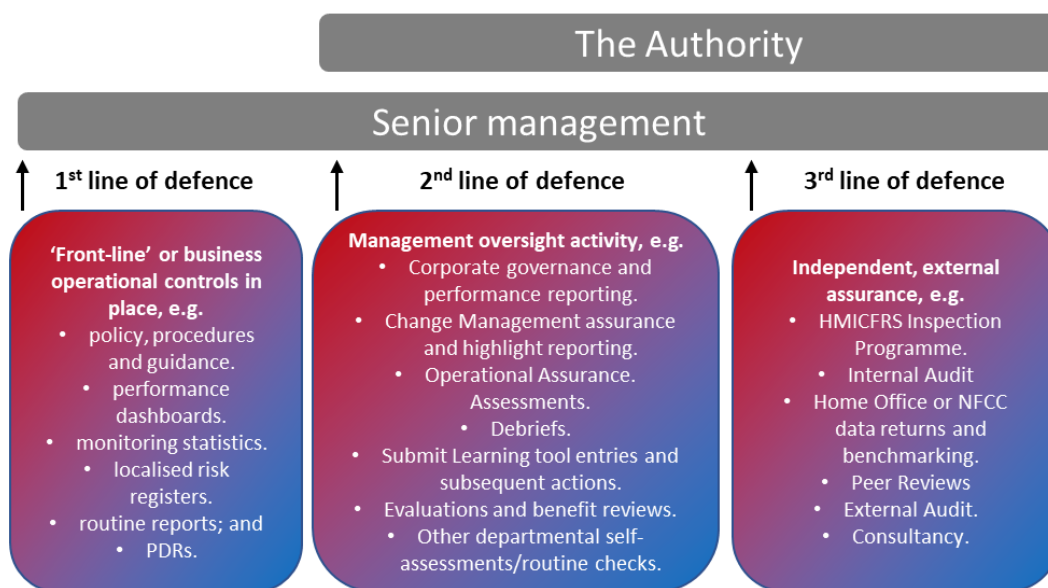
For a specific (health and safety) example of the application of the three lines of defence, please refer to the assurance mapping section of this procedure.

First line of defence

The first line of defence is the 'front-line' or business operational controls in place. First line of defence activities can be, for example, policy, procedures and guidance documents, performance dashboards, monitoring statistics, localised risk registers, routine reports and personal development reviews that enable our teams to deliver their personal objectives against an overarching Safety Plan.

These mechanisms provide assurance that performance is monitored, risks are identified and addressed, and objectives are being achieved at a local level.

Below are some examples of our first line assurance activities, but there will be many more specific to activities based on the level of risk and impact to our Organisation's objectives:

- Safety Plan and Integrated Risk Management Planning
- Directorate Planning
- Assurance activity to ascertain how embedded organisational values and behaviours are
- Policy, Procedures and Guidance Framework and associated documents

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- Organisational performance dashboards and reporting (both within and outside of the Service's Power BI reporting). Please also refer to the Performance Procedure and Data Quality Procedure
- Monitoring of data (and data quality) and information within the IBC Portal.
- Monitoring of data (and data quality) and information within Gartan
- Personal Development Reviews (number carried out and thematic issues raised within them)
- Monitoring of data (and data quality) and information within other bespoke IT systems
- Monitoring of, and implementing mitigatory activity from, risk registers (Organisational Risk Register, Directorate Risk Registers, project or programme risk registers, and team risk registers). Please refer to the Risk Management Procedure for further information.

Second line of defence

The second line of defence is the management oversight activity. This will include for example, governance arrangements, performance reporting and internal routine checks and self-assessments to ensure activity is being properly managed and delivering on its objectives. The Fire Authority hold the Executive Group to account, on behalf of the communities they represent and scrutinise how the Executive Group manage the various systems of assurance.

This assurance provides important management insight into how well work is being carried out in line with the Safety Plan deliverables and our values and behaviours. It enables management to provide narrative and understanding to performance information.

Below are some examples of our second line assurance activities, but there will be more, specific to activities based on their level of risk and impact to our Organisations' objectives:

- Corporate Governance (eg. Committees, FRA reports and associated risk registers and action logs)
- Performance reporting, including, but not limited to, the mid-year and end-of-year performance reports into the Authority
- Change Management assurance and highlight reporting. Please see the Change Management Procedure for more information
- Operational Assurance Assessments
- Debriefs
- Submit Learning tool entries and subsequent actions
- Staff surveys, focus groups and other internal engagement activity

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- Public consultation and engagement
- Compliments and complaints.
- Evaluations and benefit reviews
- Analysis and research
- Workplace risk assessments
- Generic risk assessments
- Other departmental self-assessments/routine checks.

Third line of defence
The third line of defence relates to independent and more objective assurance and features mechanisms such as internal and external audit, external accreditation and inspections. This type of assurance is provided from outside of line management structures and is used to verify our performance often against an established framework.

Below are some examples of our third line assurance activities, but there may be more, specific to activities, based on their level of risk and impact to our Organisation's' objectives:

- Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) Inspection Programme
- Home Office or National Fire Chief's Council (NFCC) data returns (and subsequent benchmarking)
- Peer Reviews, for example via the NFCC
- ISO 27001 – Information Security Management System Certification
- Investors in People review activity
- Stonewall Diversity Champion activity
- Via the Child Safety Education Coalition (CSEC)
- Via Mindful Employer
- Internal Audit
- External Audit
- Audit of Accounts
- Consultancy

Assurance mapping

Assurance mapping is a technique that enables us to review the systems of control through the assessment of the three lines of defences. This exercise is dependent upon and led by the assessment of risks which in turn determines the amount of assurance required. For example, a high-risk area such as our financial management will require significant assurance to provide confidence

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that it is controlled effectively and is therefore subject to rigorous internal checks and external auditing.

The cost and effort of such levels of scrutiny needs to be considered against the level of risk it has to our Organisation's objectives before determining what assurance mechanisms need to be deployed. Therefore, the Organisational Risk Register is critical to determine the assurance framework of our Organisation (and compliance against it).

The table below is a simplistic example of how this looks against a potential organisational risk:

Risk	First line	Second line	Third line
Workplace injury	• Health and Safety Policy • Training • Injury reporting • Near miss reporting • Leading and lagging key performance indicators • Health and Safety Plan	• Health and Safety Committee • Health and Safety Committee performance reports • Workplace risk assessments • Generic risk assessments • Reporting into the Authority on Health and Safety performance	• Health and Safety Peer review • Internal Audit • External Audit • HMICFRS focus on data and PPG in this area • Health and Safety Executive reviews • Litigation/tribunal

Assurance reporting and statements

On an annual basis the Organisations are required to demonstrate and publish its overall levels of assurance in respect of specific legislation. The most significant being the Annual Statement of Assurance, which is a requirement set out in the National Framework for Fire and Rescue Services by the Home Office. This statement is designed specifically to provide assurance that we are meeting our obligations as Fire and Rescue Services across a number of different regulations but primarily to the Fire Service Act 2004 and the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005.

In addition to the Annual Statement of Assurance, there are other more specific requirements for such statements that are set out in different legislations such as the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 and the Equalities Act 2010. These statements must be made publicly available to enable proper scrutiny so that we may be held accountable.

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To ensure our assurance activities provide an appropriate coverage of the Services and to enable effective management of organisational risks, the Integrated Performance and Assurance Group regularly reviews our performance and assurance activities across the Organisation. This Group has representation of Chief Officer Group members to enable open discussion, to provide narrative to performance and assurance information, and identify any performance- or assurance-related actions.

In addition to this, Directors are responsible for ensuring that they incorporate their own assurance mechanisms to cover their respective areas. Using these mechanisms, they are then required to provide assurance to the Executive Group around the performance of, and management of risk in, their areas.

The Planning, Performance & Assurance Directorate and Operational Assurance Team also independently report to the Executive Group and the respective Fire Authorities to highlight any areas of good performance and flag any areas of concern.

Responsibilities

Hampshire & Isle of Wight Fire and Rescue Authority
The Authority are responsible for ensuring efficient and effective fire and rescue services across Hampshire and the Isle of Wight.

The Authority own and approve the Annual Statement of Assurance and receive and scrutinise regular reports on performance and assurance covering significant areas of risk to the Organisation.

Chief Fire Officer
The Chief Fire Officer is the Annual Statement of Assurance owner and has oversight of the assurance activities and audit opinions for the Organisation through regular reports received at Executive Group meetings. The Chief Fire Officer holds the Executive Group to account on the management of community and internal risks.

The Executive Group
The Executive Group (EG) is responsible for reviewing and scrutinising the Organisation's performance and determining the confidence in delivering against our Safety Plan objectives. The EG review and approve the Annual Statement of Assurance on an annual basis and hold each other to account of the performance and assurance of their respective areas through each meeting.

Directors

Each Director, supported by their respective management teams, has responsibility for ensuring they have effective controls in place to provide assurance on their areas of the Organisation.

Each Director will do this through:

- ensuring they have considered the risks to achieving their purpose and to meeting the objectives set out in the Safety Plan;
- ensuring they have mapped out, and monitoring compliance against, the effective controls across the three lines of deference;
- routine reporting on their performance; and
- regular review of risks and the adequacy of their current controls.

Policy, Planning & Assurance Directorate

The Policy, Planning and Assurance Directorate will be responsible for providing some impartial assurance to the EG through various systems of assurance. This includes, but not limited to:

- the facilitation of the HMICFRS inspection programme;
- the internal audit plan:
- the Change Management framework;
- Performance reporting, including, but not limited to, the mid-year and end-of-year performance reports into the Authority;
- Organisational Performance dashboards and insights reports (both within and beyond Power BI reporting);
- Wider analysis and research; and
- Commissioned evaluations.

The Directorate will act as the organisational lead for the commissioning and scoping of activities seeking to provide assurance such as the rolling internal audit programme, HMICFRS related activities, peer reviews and other independent reviews. Following the delivery of assurance activities as described above, the Directorate will also ensure that through the Organisation's Forward Plan, action plans resulting from reviews are tracked and improvements fully embedded within the Organisation.

Integrated Performance and Assurance Group

The role of the Group is to enable continual improvements in service delivery and outcomes for our people and communities, and to provide assurance to stakeholders on organisational performance.

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As outlined in its Terms of Reference, IPAG has delegating authority from Executive Group (EG) to act in a monitoring capacity and set formal standards for managing and thereby improving the performance and assurance of all organisational activity undertaken. The Board will oversee, report upon and review the performance and assurance matters, including reports submitted to EG and the Authority. It will act as service 'critical friend' thereby supporting the Organisation to develop effective improvement planning and resultant benefit realisation.

To provide visibility of any performance and assurance issues (from across the Organisation) to escalate to, or provide a challenge function within, the Executive Group, there will be standing discussion item of 'organisational learning'. Rather than to duplicate other Boards and mechanisms to explore, this will allow IPAG members to raise assurance issues or concerns from their respective directorates.

IPAG will also:

- be a role model and promote a positive and open performance management culture; and
- support and monitor performance and assurance activity across Service to drive performance improvement.

Organisational Assurance Team

The Organisational Assurance (OA) team will administer the coordination and evaluation of recommendations arising from internal audits and HMICFRS inspections and the process for disseminating and managing the implementation of actions arising from the recommendations and providing assurance against them.

The OA team will also be heavily involved, in consultation and collaboration with other teams and, where applicable, organisations, to produce internal evaluations of areas for review, which may be identified my risk management activities as requiring additional assurance. The team will again be responsible for the process for disseminating and managing the implementation of actions arising from the recommendations and providing assurance against them.

Some other assurance activities, such as external peer reviews on the activities of specific organisation areas or team, may be coordinated by Directorate's themselves rather than the OA team. The OA team will, however, maintain oversight of these activities – to ensure they feed into assurance mapping and reporting within the Annual Statements of Assurance.

The OA team is responsible for producing the Annual Statement of Assurance for Hampshire Isle Wight Fire and Rescue Service.

Operational Assurance Team
The Operational Assurance Team (OAT) are responsible for the overall delivery of Operational Assurance for the Organisation. They will act as the conduit for the Organisation's operational assurance activities and ensure any learning gained from those activities is shared appropriately and timely.

This includes, but is not restricted to the following:

- Collection, analysis and distribution of performance data
- Provide feedback to influence organisational learning locally and nationally
- Provide feedback to inform organisational decision-making
- Deliver operational performance audits and review programmes
- Support officers undertaking planned audit and monitoring activities
- Maintain the Submit Learning database

Managers
All managers have responsibility for maintaining transparent and effective controls to ensure their business activities are delivering against their purpose and in line with the Safety Plan objectives.

Each manager will do this through:

- regular review of risks and performance with their respective Directorates; and
- well-considered, open and honest reporting, highlighting any areas of good performance and flagging any areas of concern.

General responsibilities
Every staff member of the Organisation contributes to assurance activities through compliance with Policy, Procedures and Guidance documents and through delivering their work in line with the Organisation's values and behaviours.

All staff members must provide open, honest and well-balanced feedback through a number of feedback mechanisms to highlight any areas of good performance and flag any areas of concern. These mechanisms include, but are not limited to, personal development reviews, internal audit, the Submit Learning tool, input into periodic peer review or inspections, staff surveys and other engagement activity such as dedicated user or focus groups.

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Conclusion

Through following this procedure, the Organisation will enable a robust system of assurance to ensure that the services it delivers are economical, effective and efficient, and are achieving the overarching organisational purpose of **"Together we make life safer".**

Updates

Section	What's been updated and why	Date updated	Who updated
All	Initial production	10/06/2020	Director, Performance & Assurance
All	Further development	25/06/2020	Organisational Assurance Manager
All	Detailed review of entire procedure	26/06/2020	Head of Performance
	New CFA Badge added	08/02/2021	E Snow
	Minor amendments	25/02/2021	Head of Performance
	Name change Firewatch to Gartan	07.03.2022	P&P

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