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RECOMMENDATIONS

The Performance and Resource Board (P&R) is asked to review the steps taken in progressing the Assurance Strategy and agree future actions necessary to support its full implementation:

1. Acknowledge the current journey that Assurance has taken within Essex County Fire and Rescue Service (ECFRS) and opportunities for positive change.
2. Examine case studies which demonstrate the expansion of Assurance across business and operational functions.
3. Accept the proposed workstreams that will continue to widen the scope of Assurance within ECFRS and support delivery of the Assurance Strategy.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Assurance Strategy describes the method that ECFRS uses to offer assurance and ensure that the services delivered are effective and efficient. Progress has been made to formalise processes to enable evidence-based assurance. This paper will articulate the current successes and plans for the expansion of Operational Assurance into Organisational Assurance, including a framework for future alignment and continued integration within ECFRS. For the purpose of this paper, Organisational Assurance will be termed 'Assurance'.

BACKGROUND

Historically, assurance within ECFRS has been operationally focused, mainly reporting against station audits, debriefs and thematic reviews. Through quarterly Operational Assurance Group (OAG) meetings, departmental stakeholders meet to consider current data, review progress and coordinate assurance activities across the operational environment to remedy shortfalls and advance performance.

These established processes have provided the Service Leadership Team (SLT) with assurance that operational policies and procedures are applied effectively thus evidencing compliance with statutory and legislative requirements through the application of Health and Safety Guidance 65 (HSG65).

Since the appointment of the current Deputy Chief Fire Officer (DCFO) who has a clear remit for Organisational assurance, there is a focus on assuring all elements within ECFRS. The appetite to assure departmental processes prior to inspection has accelerated the inception, and agreement, of a new Assurance Strategy.

The Assurance Strategy sets out roles and responsibilities relating to overall risk management and assurance. Furthermore, it outlines a 'three lines of defence' model, which links to a holistic assurance methodology to ensure a framework of control:

- The First line of defence:** Operational teams that directly own and deliver activities and their associated risks.
- The Second line of defence:** Oversight of management activity, separate from those responsible for delivery but not independent of the organisation's management chain.
- The Third line of defence:** Functions that provide independent and objective assurance regarding the integrity and effectiveness of risk management and related controls in the organisation.

Given the requirement to broaden the scope of Assurance to encompass most, if not all, business and operational functions, the guiding principle of the Assurance Strategy is to make assurance central to everything we do. By requesting that each Directorate designs and embeds their own first and second line assurance arrangements, through an effective, mapping process, it is expected that the reporting of assurance activities will be simplified, objective and robust.

As part of ECFRS' assurance journey, good progress has been made to expand the role of Assurance in validating important workstreams and initiatives. The ability to communicate the role and benefits of Assurance is paramount to build on our successes. In addition, technology and resources are necessary to further embed and ensure continued progress in adapting to the growing needs of ECFRS whilst providing internal reassurance prior to HMICFRS inspections.

CASE STUDIES / ASSURANCE SUCCESSES

Grenfell and Manchester Arena

Assurance is a key element around ECFRS being compliant in an evidenced and sustainable way against recommendations from Inquiries such Grenfell and Manchester Arena.

The role of Assurance regarding Inquiry recommendations is to provide an independent objective scrutiny of the evidence provided by those delivering against the recommendations. This process has been highlighted by the Chief Fire Officer (CFO) as being robust and resilient and therefore providing the necessary assurance to SLT that ECFRS are meeting the compliance required.

The Project team have developed an assurance framework for the Grenfell Thematic Inquiry, which has been duplicated for the Manchester Arena Inquiry. This ensures a

clear criterion to assure that the actions have been completed in a sustainable and evidenced way, meaning ECFRS will be compliant with the recommendation(s). Completion is based on the concept of having a 'definition of done', which is a definition of the 'desired state' for ECFRS to be sustainably compliant and ensure that changes are embedded.

Checklists and evidence requirements are used by each agency to cover the 'Show Me', 'Tell Me', and 'Prove it' needed for the assurance process. Through three defined stages, Assurance check for suitable, sufficient, and sustainable evidence that is accessible and auditable. Updates are communicated through the Board to ensure agreement and oversight.

Station Audits

Station audits are undertaken by Assurance on behalf of ECFRS and provide a second line of assurance through an internal review of our operational preparedness. The purpose is to identify good practice and areas for improvement, working with relevant departments and individuals to progress.

Gaps in the current policy and process have been addressed through the development of a new station audit process, due for implementation in May 2023. As such, a new reporting tool has been devised to enable clearer and easier interrogation of station audit intelligence. This will identify non-compliance and trends to facilitate earlier intervention and direct next steps.

A scoring matrix change to reflect the HMICFRS scoring of 1 (inadequate) to 5 (outstanding) has been introduced to address the unofficial and intermediate score of 3.5, providing relevancy and alignment to recognised external gradings.

The station audit process is being expanded to include information not previously accessible. For example, a new Home Fire Safety Information Dashboard on Power BI has been designed to overview central information about Home Fire Safety Checks (HFSC) and risk-based revisits, in real time. This will enable activity to be reviewed by local management (first line of defence) with completion assured by Assurance.

Furthermore, the new process will look to expand into other areas to include an awareness around the Service Values and Code of Ethics.

The inception of the new station audit process has led to several departmental requests to include the assurance of other business processes on station. It is proposed that quarter one will enable embedment and addressing of unpredicted challenges. In quarter two, other areas will be introduced. Overall, it is an exciting period for station audit reporting, and this will evolve throughout the eighteen-month cycle.

Fit for the Future

Fit for the Future seeks to establish a collective vision for the future of Fire and Rescue Services in England. It identifies three key themes and twelve corresponding improvement objectives. The primary focus is to recognise ECFRS' current position against each theme. By doing so, this will support, inform, and influence future changes by advocating an evidenced-based approach at both local and national level.

In February 2023, work began to progress this workstream by using the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) Fit for the Future guidance to centralise all three themes, twelve improvement objectives and associated information.

By undertaking this initial evaluation, a clear overview of each workstream was defined, with relevant leads identified for approach. Over a period of eight weeks, multiple and varied engagements took place with workstream leads. Specific questions were asked about the respective improvement objective and its central aims.

Feedback and evidence were recorded about current workstream statuses, future aspirations, and opportunities for improvement over the next five years. Through a high-level gap analysis process, twelve individual improvement objective position statements and high-level action plans were drafted.

Following SLT approval, it is proposed that engagement with workstream leads will recommence to agree their action plans, reporting processes and frequency in relation to each improvement objective.

By working collectively to set clear expectations, it is expected that Fit for the Future will be progressed and fully embedded within ECFRS. Progress against the plan will be captured and escalated, with Assurance monitoring and updating the relevant Board around completion.

Heatwave Task and Finish Group

During July and August 2022, ECFRS encountered a challenging period of dry and hot weather conditions. By working pragmatically, an effective response was maintained, which highlighted many examples of positive working. Through the debrief process, aggregated feedback created an insight and subsequent opportunity for organisational learning and change, resulting in twenty-six recommendations to consider.

An initial meeting with relevant department leads took place to discuss findings from the debrief. With SLT approval, it was agreed to coordinate a monthly task and finish group to review identified heatwave considerations and progress before Summer 2023, based on operational need and value for money. Funding was made available to expediate decisions and make purchases prior to further spate events.

In relation to Assurance, task and finish group meetings are currently tracked by the quarterly OAG and reported/assured via Continuous Improvement Board (CIB). From a wider perspective, heatwave debrief outcomes and the inception of a task and finish group illustrate positive, joint working across ECFRS and the assurance of recommendations made through the debrief process. Moreover, communications are ongoing, these will showcase the successes gained in a limited time whilst highlighting the benefits of debrief reporting and the role of Assurance.

Prevention

Assurance to the Prevention Standard has been built at the earliest stage, with a strategic delivery plan for Prevention and four operational delivery plans for each of the Prevention pillars. The delivery plans cover live safe, road safety, water safety and education and specialist intervention. Each of the Prevention operational delivery plans contain detailed key performance indicators (KPIs) to assure against delivery.

Each operational delivery plan is reviewed on a quarterly basis and reported through the Prevention and Operational Community Risk Monthly Group team meeting and the quarterly Prevention and Protection governance board chaired by an Area Manager.

Throughout 2022, Prevention performance and the targeting of resources to address community risk have been developed. The following dashboards provide reporting and

assurance to ECFRS including the monitoring and delivery of operational and support functions to implement Prevention interventions.

Prevention dashboards include:

- Accidental Dwelling Fire (ADF) risk profiling.
- Impacts of HFSC on ADF.
- Station Performance Management.
- HFSC Dashboard.
- Prevention and Protection Management Dashboard.
- Water Incident Dashboard.
- PFCC Dashboard.
- Financial Management Dashboard.
- Deliberate Fires Dashboard.

All aspects of Prevention activity are evaluated to ensure effective use of resources, benefits, and financials.

From May 2023, HFSC completion rates will be assured via the Station Audit process, enabling the quantity, quality, and effectiveness of the process to be reviewed at both station level and centrally. This approach to assure the quantitative and qualitative elements of the system is necessary to refine and advance delivery.

ASSURANCE FRAMEWORK - OVERVIEW

The Assurance Framework provides extended areas of focus that will bring the Assurance Strategy to life. Ongoing discussions are taking place with department leads, including Information Communication Technology (ICT) to support the automation and centralisation of information.

In addition, through the requirement that each Directorate designs their own assurance mapping process, it is expected that reporting, and therefore assurance against activity can be established and maintained. This will promote best practice whilst identifying areas of challenge to overcome.

Potential areas of Assurance

Through 2023 to 2024, work will commence to develop an assurance system in relation to the internal ECFRS processes listed below:

Response	Prevention / Protection / Safeguarding
Operational preparedness – Station audits / debriefs. Delivery of HFSC. Delivery of Fire Safety Order (FSO) 40. Operational competence. Operational risk information. Cross border exercising and risk. Station exercising. Control performance. Attendance at Community Safety Partnerships (CSPs). Delivery against Prevention, Protection and Response Strategy (PP&R).	Delivery of HFSC. Delivery of FSO 40. Delivery of risk-based inspection programme. Delivery of Safe and Well visits. Generation of Safe and Well / HFSC visits. Business engagement strategy. Level 3 / Level 4 enforcement training and quality assurance. Understanding Water and Road Traffic Collisions (RTC). Safeguarding referrals and quality assurance.

Organisational Assurance	Miscellaneous
Risk management. Strategic assessment of risk. Business continuity.	HMICFRS inspections – identified areas.

BENEFITS AND RISKS

Benefits in widening Assurance	Risks if Assurance not advanced
Improved benefits realisation and control culture across the Service by enhancing the understanding of risks and controls.	Reduces opportunity to share information with others and learn collectively.
Improved reporting to the appropriate Board through a coordinated approach to providing timely reporting avoiding potentially duplicate and irrelevant information.	There are various methods in recording and storing information. Assurance reporting to highlight these areas and facilitate solutions would be limited.
Implementing an effective model will improve the ability to demonstrate assurance upon request from external organisations e.g. HMICFRS.	Processes and information may not be obtained and ratified prior to HMICFRS inspections.
A process that is clear, transparent and will enable growth.	Organisational systems and approaches may be unclear and not linked, limiting growth.
Will ensure that risk is mitigated and that enable Service improvements.	Risks will be observed and addressed but not collectively through a robust assurance process.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

It is likely that an improved assurance process may lead to changes that require financial assistance. It is not possible to predict until undertaken and these will be reported through the appropriate Board.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

There are legislative documents that require ECFRS to respond to emergencies within a broad spectrum of type and size in an effective and safe manner. Support to expand Assurance will further evidence that ECFRS are delivering upon its legislative responsibilities. These include but are not limited to:

The Fire and Rescue Services Act (2004).
 Fire and Rescue Service (Emergencies) (England) Order (2007).
 The FRS National Framework for England (2018).
 Civil Contingencies Act 2004.

EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

The actions being taken will not have a disproportionate impact on individuals with protected characteristics (as defined within the Equality Act 2010), when compared to all other individuals and will not disadvantage people with protected characteristics.

Race	N	Religion or belief	N
Sex	N	Gender reassignment	N
Age	N	Pregnancy & maternity	N
Disability	N	Marriage and Civil Partnership	N
Sexual orientation	N		

The Core Code of Ethics Fire Standard has been fully considered and incorporated into the proposals outlined in this paper.

HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

The Health and Safety at Work Act (HSWA) 1974 sets out the statutory duties of employers and employees in relation to health and safety in the workplace.

The nature of the work carried out as part of an operational response is recognised to have an increased amount of risk. Support to expand Assurance will further ensure that actions align to ECFRS health and safety policies in the discharge of its responsibilities.

CONSULTATION AND ENGAGEMENT

The expansion of Assurance within ECFRS requires full consultation with departmental leads and this is currently ongoing.

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS AND APPENDICES

The Assurance Strategy