



Essex County
Fire & Rescue Service

Strategic Assessment of Risk

Political Risk

About

There is a continual national drive for reform within the fire sector, which focuses on increasing the diversity of the workforce, improving professionalism, accountability, productivity, delivering value for money, and increasing innovative working practices.

Key political factors to consider for the future of the fire sector include fire safety, the role of local fire and rescue services in the national resilience context and in the predicted increase in extreme weather events and UK security incidents.

Within this chapter of the Strategic Assessment of Risk, the following areas will be considered:

- National Political Context
- Local Political Context
- Representative Bodies
- Essex County Fire & Rescue Service Governance Model

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NATIONAL POLITICAL CONTEXT

The Conservatives have been in power since the coalition government with the Liberal Democrats in 2010, which became a single party Conservative government following the 2015 general elections.

Throughout their time in office the Conservatives have maintained a key theme of localism within their policies which directly affect the Fire and Rescue Service. An integral part of their manifesto since 2005 the Conservatives introduced the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011 which was aimed at strengthening local accountability and making forces more responsive to local needs through the role of the Police and Crime Commissioner. In 2015 the government extended this through consultation to introduce a Police Fire and Crime Commissioner which Essex adopted in 2017.

The Fire Reform White Paper (May 2022) has been developed to enable fire and rescue services to perform and fulfil their core functions of prevention, protection, response and resilience effectively in a way which responds to the local needs.

The vision for the reform seeks to drive change and improvement in three key areas:

- People
 - To introduce changes that will allow fire professionals to further develop their skills and thrive in their work.
- Professionalism
 - To modernise the fire and rescue service, to enable greater professionalism and to ensure that we are recruiting and training our fire and rescue services to be the best that they can be.
- Governance
 - To strengthen governance arrangements across the sector.

Following the last general election in December 2019, the Labour party leadership changed from Jeremy Corbyn to Keir Starmer who has campaigned to reconnect with the British public. In the lead up to the next general election (2024/2025) Labour have begun publishing their Stronger Together campaign which includes the priorities for Safe and Secure Communities, and Public Services that Work from the Start. The indication is that Community Safety will remain important to both Labour and Conservative parties.

FIRE SECTOR REPORTS

Following the cultural review into the London Fire Brigade, published November 2022, and the Casey Review of the Metropolitan Police Force, there has been strong public interest in seeing improvements in the Emergency Services.

Essex County Fire & Rescue Service has previously been the subject of a similar cultural review in 2015, since which the Service has made progress in incorporating improvements to the organisational culture and behaviours as recommended through the report.

His Majesties Inspectorate release a State of Fire Report each year with recommendations which influence government and public discussions and decisions. The most recent report (released in 2022) recognises that most recommendations are captured in the Fire Reform Paper, however the speed at which these recommendations will be acted upon could be held up by governmental processes.

The National Fire Chief's Council Fit for the Future (see chapter 8 Organisational Risk) incorporates recommendations for Local Government Association, the National Fire Chief's Council and the National Employers to work collaboratively to reform and improve the fire and rescue sector with centralised support, this could provide greater stability in realising the recommendations of the State of Fire Report and Fire Reform Paper.

The Service must also be cognisant of the impacts of Climate Change and the potential for future reports or recommendations to incorporate more elements in respect of this global agenda.

LOCAL POLITICAL CONTEXT

LOCAL GOVERNMENT STRUCTURE AND ELECTIONS

Essex is represented by 18 MPs, made up of a combination from 1 County Council, 2 Unitary Councils, 7 Districts, 3 Boroughs and 2 Cities which provides it with a strong lobbying position for progressing areas of importance to their constituents. Although the dominant political party as a county is Conservative, there are a lot of parties represented at a more local level. The political situation at a district, borough and city level is often finely balanced or formed through coalitions. Two areas which are worth more consideration are Uttlesford and Thurrock.

Uttlesford are currently governed by the relatively recently established Residents for Uttlesford party who won the 2019 local election. Residents for Uttlesford launched in 2014 promoting a local agenda with member representation at district, county, town and parish level. The relative inexperience of a newly formed political party can create challenges with Service engagement to deliver partnership working.

Thurrock has had a significant financial loss which will lead to the next administration considering ways in which they can absorb and recover costs. This may be through reduced services which could leave residents with less support and with the current cost of living exacerbate their risk taking. If this occurs, then there will be a significant impact on Prevention activities delivered by the Service.

Greater Essex (Essex County, Thurrock and Southend Unitary Authorities) have submitted an expression of interest to central government in relation to devolution, focusing on forming a combined county authority to deliver political direction as agreed at the local level through the principle of subsidiarity. This proposal presents some uncertainty for the future political makeup of Essex and the impacts this may have on the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner role.

The timeline for the proposal, public consultation and outcome runs from 2023 to 2024.

In addition to the bid for devolution, central government are in the final stages of the Periodic Review of Westminster constituencies with the final proposals due to be published in July 2023. Whilst the number of constituencies in Essex will remain the same, the boundaries of some may change to reflect electoral ward changes. This would have an impact on the overall party representation at a local level.

ESSEX POLICE, FIRE AND CRIME COMMISSIONER

In 2017 following a formal public consultation the Home Office approved the Joint Governance of Police and Fire & Rescue Services in Essex.

The Essex Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner provides overall governance responsibility for Essex County Fire and Rescue Service. Their roles and responsibilities at our Service are:

- Provide a connection between the Fire and Rescue Service and local communities.
- Set a budget and calculate the council tax requirement.
- Maintain an efficient and effective Fire and Rescue Service for the County.
- Approve a Community Risk Management Plan.
- Develop a Fire and Rescue Plan and Fire and Rescue Statement.
- Scrutinise, support and challenge performance against the Plan.
- Appoint a Chief Fire Officer / Chief Executive to lead and manage the Service.

REPRESENTATIVE BODIES

Building and maintaining a healthy working relationship with our recognised unions is crucial to us being able to deliver our service. We are committed to a relationship with our employee representative bodies that is built on trust and respect.

At Essex County Fire & Rescue Service we support union membership and have four recognised unions – Fire Brigades Union (FBU), Fire and Rescue Services Association (FRSA), Fire Officers' Association (FOA) and UNISON – with which we work closely. These are recognised for collective bargaining in different parts of our business.

FIRE BRIGADE UNION

The Fire Brigade Union was founded in 1918. Their aims are to:

- Provide a leading, independent voice for firefighters that helps improve fire and rescue services.
- Ensure the expertise and experience of their members is heard locally, nationally, and internationally within government and beyond.
- Protect the safety and interests of the public and their members, enabling them to enjoy a good quality of life, including by preventing cuts or damaging changes to fire and rescue services.
- Improve the working conditions of their members and protect them from discrimination and unfair or illegal treatment by representing them in the workplace.
- Help their members develop professionally by developing new and existing skills.

The Fire Brigade Union covers employees from Wholetime, On-Call and Control Room roles.

As detailed in the Fire Bridge Union Executive Council Report 2022 ([Executive Council's Annual Report 2022 | Fire Brigades Union \(fbu.org.uk\)](#)), Essex County Fire & Rescue Service has 589 members with a wholetime role, 134 members with an on call role and 24 members with a control room role (statistics as at 31st December 2021). This equates to 92% wholetime employees, 26.2% on call employees and 60% control room employees equivalent to December 2021 workforce numbers.

FIRE OFFICERS ASSOCIATION

The Fire Officers Association provides individual and collective representation to members locally. Their member's interests come first, and they believe that these are best served through constructive consultation and negotiation rather than traditional trade union muscle flexing. In this way they can play a constructive role in the changes that are inevitable taking place within the service.

The Fire Officers Association strives to ensure that:

- Members are directly consulted on matters that affect them.
- Real openness and accountability is seen in all fire and rescue service affairs.
- Inclusion is promoted in all areas of the fire and rescue service.
- Concerns about pressures and stressors placed upon managers in the workplace are addressed.
- The role managers in delivering service objectives are fully recognised and will fight for this to be reflected by appropriate rewards.
- The Association has an agenda focused solely on fire and rescue service matters.
- The Association is non-judgemental so that all members receive equal representation.

The Fire Officers Association covers employees from Wholetime, On-Call, Dual Role, Support and Control Room roles.

FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE ASSOCIATION

The Fire and Rescue Service Association is a certified and independent trade union not under the control of an employer(s) and free from outside interference. They have no political affiliation and prefer to use the power of argument rather than the argument of strike action.

They are led by the views of their members not by a political ideology. They always seek to create policy that is representative of the majority of their membership. They are an outward-looking organisation that seeks to create innovative ways of working to the benefit of their members.

The Fire and Rescue Service Association cover employees from Wholetime, On-Call, Dual Role, Support and Control Room roles.

UNISON

UNISON represents and acts for members working in a range of public services and utilities. They represent members, negotiate and bargain on their behalf, campaign for better working conditions and pay and for public services.

UNISON cover employees from Support roles.

INDUSTRIAL ACTION

To date Essex County Fire & Rescue Service has previously received ballots to take Industrial Action from UNISON and the Fire Brigade Union.

Most recently the Fire Brigade Union undertook a ballot to their members in relation to a national pay award. The ballot ran from 5th December 2022 to 30th January 2023 with a recommendation by the Fire Brigade Union to vote Yes to Industrial Action. The outcome of this vote was 88% voting Yes on a 73% turnout.

A revised pay offer was received, and the Fire Brigade Union put this out to their members in a new ballot which ran from 20th February to 6th March 2023. The outcome of this vote was 96% voting to accept the revised pay offer on an 84% turnout.

Prior to this, UNISON undertook a ballot to their members in relation to a national pay award. The ballot ran from 1st December 2021 to 14th January 2022 with the results collated on an aggregated basis, meaning at least 50% of the national membership was required to vote. The outcome of this vote was 70.2% voting Yes on a 14.5% turnout. As this did not meet the 50% threshold requirement for Industrial Action to be legally taken UNISON returned to negotiations and did not issue a further ballot to their members.

Between 2012 and 2015 The Fire Brigade Union were successful in returning a Yes vote for Industrial Action three times, both at a local and a national dispute level. Over the course of these disputes a total of 788.5 hours were active periods of Industrial Action. The main impacts upon the Service and its ability to deliver its critical activities were:

- Reduction in standard operational cover across the county.
- Reduction in specialisms and specialist appliances across the county.
- Disruption to critical training.
- Disruption to implementation of systems i.e., Control.
- Disruption to Prevention and Protection activities.
- Reduction in National Resilience Assets availability.

ESSEX COUNTY FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE GOVERNANCE MODEL

SERVICE LEADERSHIP TEAM

The Service Leadership Team is charged with the leadership of Essex County Fire & Rescue Service under the direction of the Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive. The corporate management of the Service is vested in the members of the Service Leadership Team.

The Service Leadership Team assists the Essex Police and Fire Crime Commissioner to meet their responsibilities to establish and oversee the corporate governance arrangements of the Service.

The Service Leadership Team itself is a core element of the Essex Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner Fire and Rescue Authority's corporate governance arrangements.

The Service Leadership Team is formed through the combination of the following roles:

- Chief Fire Officer
 - The Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive has delegated authority and ultimate responsibility for the running of the Fire and Rescue Service in Essex.
- Deputy Chief Fire Officer
 - To lead organisational learning and continuous improvement in policy and practice; derived from reviewing performance.
- Assistant Chief Fire Officer Director of Operations
 - To deliver activities against organisational policy which support our core mission of making Essex a safer place to work, live and travel.
- Director of People Services
 - To lead people and organisational strategy, enabling a diverse competent and motivated workforce while managing best in class HR and workforce development.
- Director of Corporate Services
 - To enable the organisation in its public duties by providing the infrastructure which supports activities and to ensure the organisation complies with statutory responsibilities.
- Chief Finance Officer

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- To ensure the appropriate financial administration of the Authority and prudent financial management across the organisation. To balance service needs with corporate interests whilst ensuring compliance with all statutory requirements.
- Assistant Director Corporate Communications and Marketing
 - To lead the organisation to deliver effective internal and external communication strategies and plans that promote our core values and mission and enhance the brand of the Service.

EXTENDED LEADERSHIP TEAM

Our Extended Leadership Team is responsible for the day-to-day running of our Service and the delivery of our Annual Plan. They work alongside our Service Leadership Team who set the strategic direction of our Service and the vision around our future state.

The Extended Leadership Team is formed through the combination of the following roles:

- Deputy Finance Director
- Area Manager Assurance
- Area Manager / Assistant Director Prevention and Protection
- Assistant Director of Human Resources
- Area Manager / Assistant Director Response
- Head of Estates
- Area Manager / Assistant Director Operational Change
- Head of Fleet and Equipment
- Head of ICT
- Assistant Director for Performance and Improvement

ESSEX COUNTY FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE

The governance structure within the Service is the responsibility of the Chief Fire Officer / Chief Executive. This is discharged through the Service Leadership Team and a series of governance boards including:

- Continuous Improvement Board

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- Which provides oversight and management of continual improvement identified within the Service’s Annual Plan.
- Portfolio Management Board
 - Which initiates and oversees changes programmes.
- Asset Management Board
 - Which provides oversight and management of capital spend against the budget.

Each of these boards is chaired by a member of the Service Leadership Team and attended by a representative of the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner.



Figure 1

The Community Risk Management Plan sets out the activities that the Service needs to undertake to deliver against the priorities within the Fire and Rescue Plan to ensure the continued safety of communities following a comprehensive understanding of risk as outlined in this document.

The Portfolio of Change is designed to ensure the Service has a clear view of what projects and programmes it is investing in. It is aligned to the key themes defined in the Fire and Rescue Plan and the Community Risk Management Plan.

The Capital Programme aligns to the Community Risk Management Plan. In support of longer-term planning there are a number of associated plans in place (e.g., Property, ICT, Fleet).

The Annual Plan sets out the key activities that need to be delivered within any financial year aligned to our in-year budget. This includes responses to any

recommendations deriving from audits and inspections, together with activities required to deliver core objectives and priorities.

POLICE FIRE AND CRIME COMMISSIONER GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE

To ensure the effective administration of Essex County Fire & Rescue Service, several boards have been created to provide advice and recommendations to the Commissioner including:

- Performance and Resources Board
 - Which reports on Service performance.
- Fire and Rescue Strategic Board
 - Which establishes the policy and direction of the Service.
- Independent Audit Committee
 - Which provides independent assurance to the Service in accordance with the Financial Management Code of Practice.

These boards have no decision-making powers, a relevant decision report as signed by the Commissioner, or their Deputy is required before any action may be taken. Each decision, unless subject to security restrictions, is published for transparency on the Commissioner's website.

The decisions and actions of the Commissioner are scrutinised by the Essex Police, Fire and Crime Panel which is made up of elected representatives from each district, borough, city, and unitary authority in Essex plus two independent members.

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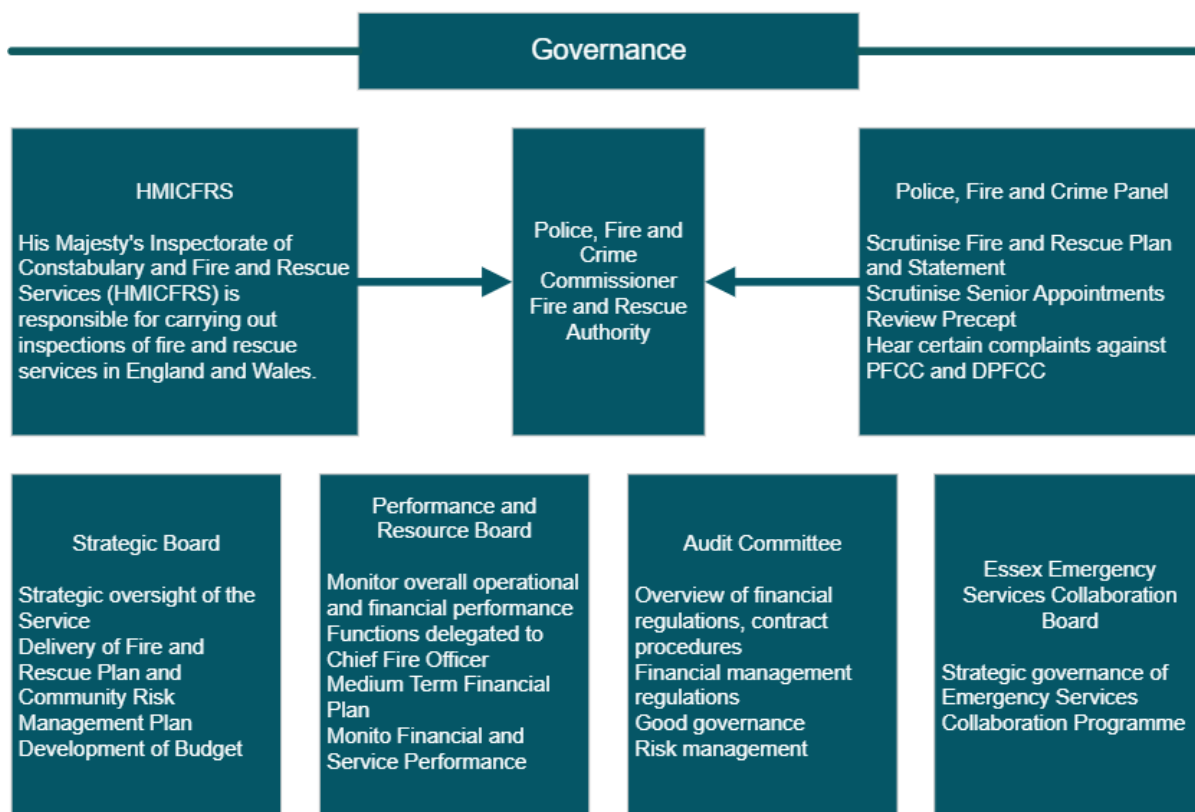


Figure 2

Essex County Fire & Rescue Service is required to comply with the CIPFA / SOLACE Delivering Good Governance in Local Government Framework which recommends the following principals of good governance:

- Principle A – Behaving with integrity, demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values, and respecting the rule of law.
- Principle B – Ensuring the openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement.
- Principle C – Defining outcomes in terms of sustainable economic, social, and environmental benefits.
- Principle D – Determining the interventions necessary to optimise the achievement of the intended outcomes.
- Principle E – Developing the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner's capacity, including the capability of its leadership and the individuals within it.
- Principle F – Managing risks and performance through robust internal control and strong public financial management.
- Principle G – Implementing good practices in transparency, reporting, and audit to deliver effective accountability.

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The Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner (the Authority) uses the framework below to review the effectiveness of the governance framework:

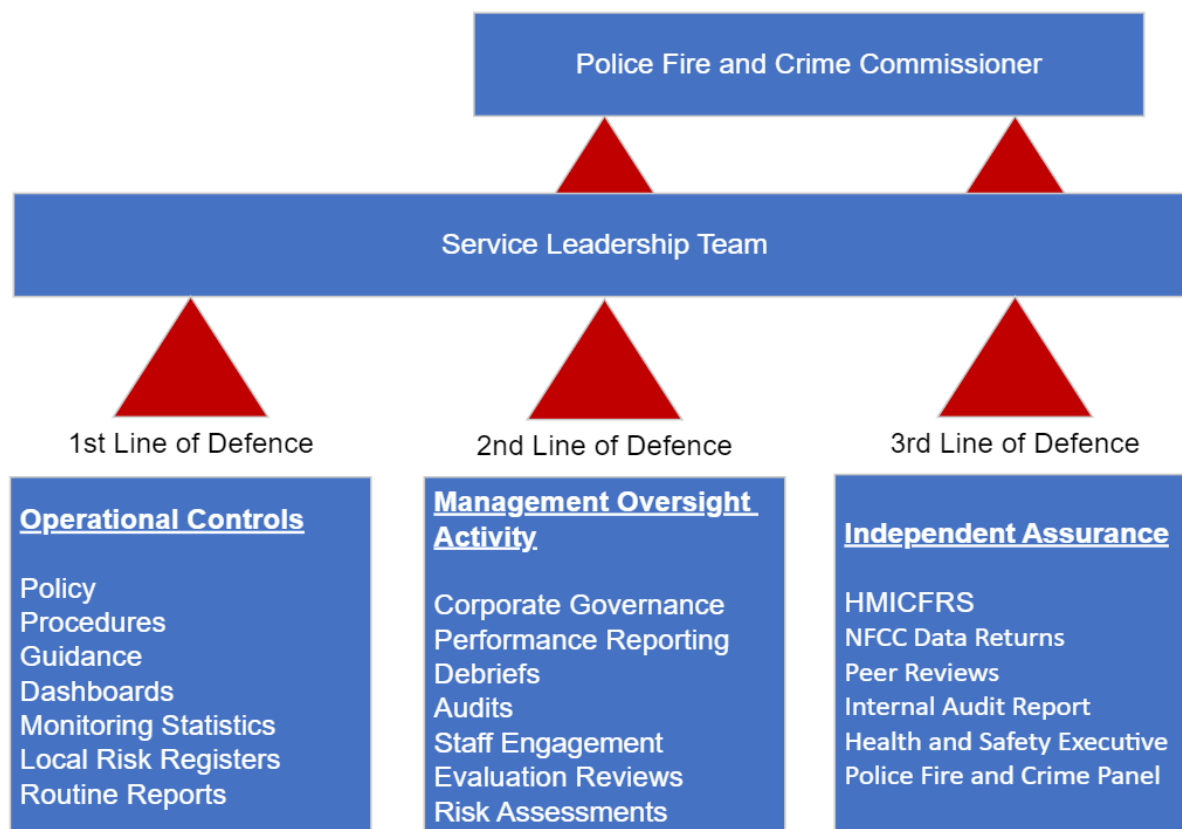


Figure 3

The Police Fire and Crime Commissioner has responsibility for conducting, at least annually, a review of the effectiveness of their governance framework including the system of internal control. The findings of this review are set out in the Annual Governance Statement.

In addition, the Internal Auditor (see Chapter 8 Organisational Risk) has a responsibility to review and report to the independent Audit Committee annually, to provide assurance on the adequacy and effectiveness of the Authority's arrangements for governance, risk management and control.

REFERENCES

[Consultation document \(accessible\) - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

Governance Annual Plan Portfolio of Change SLT Report 2022

Governance Statement 2022-2023

[Police and crime commissioners | Institute for Government](#)