



Wiltshire Fire & Rescue Service

Wiltshire and Swindon Fire Authority

Local Code of Corporate Governance 2008



Your Safety: Our Priority

Wiltshire & Swindon Fire Authority

Local Code of Corporate Governance 2008

1. WHAT IS CORPORATE GOVERNANCE?

- 1.1 Wiltshire & Swindon Fire Authority has a key role alongside other local government partners in serving the communities of Wiltshire and Swindon. For all local government functions to be truly effective there must be public confidence in elected members and officials and in the systems of corporate governance within organisations that underpin the credibility of the services we provide.
- 1.2 Corporate governance is a phrase used to describe how organisations direct and control what they do and is helpful in ensuring that functions are carried out in a way that demonstrates accountability, transparency, effectiveness, integrity and inclusion. For fire authorities and other local authorities it also includes how the Fire Authority relates to the communities that it serves.
- 1.3 Wiltshire & Swindon Fire Authority is committed to being at the forefront of those fire authorities that are able to demonstrate that they have the necessary corporate governance to excel in the public sector.
- 1.4 This Code is a public statement that sets out the way in which Wiltshire & Swindon Fire Authority will meet that commitment.

2. WHY DO WE NEED A LOCAL CODE?

- 2.1 Corporate governance is important because it is crucial to:
- Providing high-quality fire and rescue services. Nationally governance weaknesses have led to service difficulties and critical situations. High-performing organisations, on the other hand, have effective governance arrangements. This is an important area in the Audit Commission's Corporate Assessment of our performance.

- Maintaining high levels of public trust. The public's trust is increased when the quality of services that they and their families experience is high, and when organisations are perceived to be open and honest in communicating their performance, and in learning from their mistakes.

2.2 The Code is based upon the following six principles developed by CIPFA, the professional public sector accountancy body, and SOLACE, the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Managers:

- Focusing on the Fire Authority's purpose, on outcomes for the community and assisting with the creation and implementation of a vision for the local area
- Members and officers working together to achieve a common purpose with clearly defined functions and roles
- Promoting values for the Fire Authority and demonstrating the values of good governance through upholding high standards of conduct and behaviour
- Taking informed and transparent decisions which are subject to effective scrutiny and managing risk
- Developing the capacity and capability of members and officers to be effective
- Engaging with local people and other stakeholders to ensure robust public accountability.

2.3 This Local Code of Corporate Governance sets out the means by which the Fire Authority will meet and demonstrate its commitment to good corporate governance in relation to these six principles.

3. THE PRINCIPLES OF CORPORATE GOVERNANCE

Focusing on the Fire Authority's purpose and on outcomes for the community and assisting with the creation and implementation of a vision for the local area

- 3.1 We are committed to maintaining the highest levels of operational service for our communities. We demonstrate this by publishing:
- Our Annual Plan and five strategic aims
 - Our Business Plan and vision for the forthcoming years
 - Our Integrated Risk Management Plan
- 3.2 We will regularly review the vision for our local communities, as it is set out in these documents, and its implications for the Fire Authority's governance arrangements.
- 3.3 The Fire Authority will aim to deliver all its services that make the best use of resources and are value for money by:
- Delivering services to meet the needs of the local community, and put in place processes to ensure that they operate effectively in practice.
 - Determining local needs and targeting resources according to the Integrated Risk Management Plan.
 - Developing effective relationships and partnerships with
 - ◇ other public sector agencies
 - ◇ voluntary and community organisations
 - ◇ the private sector, where appropriate.
 - Responding positively to the findings and recommendations of internal and external auditors and putting in place arrangements for the implementation of agreed actions.
 - Reviewing our services in line with CIPFA Value for Money Benchmarking arrangements to ensure best use is made of the resources available.
 - Delivering specific projects within an effective, planned programme management framework.

Members and officers working together to achieve a common purpose with clearly defined functions and roles

3.4 The Fire Authority will ensure that the necessary roles and responsibilities for its governance are identified and allocated so that it is clear who is accountable for decisions that are made. The Fire Authority will do this by:

- Appointing a Chairman, Vice Chairman, Lead members and Member Champions with defined responsibilities
- Agreeing a scheme of delegated executive responsibilities to Brigade Managers, and protocols that make clear the respective roles of members and officers and ensure effective communication between them
- Annually appointing Members to the Programme Board and other committees to discharge the Fire Authority's regulatory, overview and scrutiny responsibilities
- Setting clear role definitions for chairs of committees and councillors in their different roles
- Undertaking an annual review of the operation of the Fire Authority's constitution
- Making the Chief Fire Officer (the Head of Paid Service) responsible and accountable to the Fire Authority for all aspects of operational management
- Making a senior officer (the Monitoring Officer) responsible to the Fire Authority for ensuring the lawfulness and fairness of decision-making, and that agreed procedures are followed and that all applicable statutes and regulations are complied with
- Making a senior officer (the Section 151 officer) responsible to the Fire Authority for ensuring that appropriate advice is given on all financial matters, for keeping proper financial records and accounts, and for maintaining an effective system of internal financial control

- Ensuring partnerships and contracts with other public bodies, voluntary and community organisations, and the private sector have clear governance accountabilities, including effective and equitable equality, diversity and financial arrangements
- Having in place effective and comprehensive arrangements for the scrutiny of services.

Promoting values for the authority and demonstrating the values of good governance through upholding high standards of conduct and behaviour

- 3.5 The Fire Authority promotes and maintains high standards of ethical conduct of members and officers through the work of its Standards Committee.
- 3.6 The Fire Authority will foster a culture of behaviour based on shared values, ethical principles and good conduct.
- 3.7 The Fire Authority will do this by establishing and keeping under review:
- The Constitution
 - A Code of Conduct for Members
 - A Code of Conduct for Officers
 - A protocol governing Member/Officer Relations
 - A Code of Good Practice for Members
 - Monitoring Officer Protocol
 - Media Guidelines
 - Contract Standing Orders and Financial Regulations
 - A strategy for combating fraud and corruption
 - A whistle blowing policy

Taking informed and transparent decisions which are subject to effective scrutiny and managing risk

3.8 The Fire Authority will ensure that the decision-making process includes a rigorous risk assessment including:

- Financial, legal and staffing implications
- Environmental and sustainability implications
- Value for Money
- Implications for partnerships
- Equality and diversity impact assessments
- Risks, mitigations, opportunities and performance management implications

3.9 The Fire Authority will be rigorous and transparent about how decisions are taken and recorded and will:

- Ensure Members make decisions in an open and transparent way and that information relating to those decisions is made available to the public, unless statutory rules allow otherwise
- Ensure that all decisions of regulatory committees of the Fire Authority are made in public and that information relating to those decisions is made available to the public, unless statutory rules allow otherwise
- Ensure that legal and financial implications are recognised in all reports on which decisions are based
- Record all relevant debate and decisions that are made by committees and key decisions made by officers (where applicable)
- Have rules and procedures, which govern how decisions are made

- Develop and maintain an effective overview and scrutiny function which encourages constructive challenge
- Maintain effective arrangements to discharge Standards and Audit functions.

3.10 The Fire Authority will continue to develop its risk management strategy that enables it to manage and control risks in order to maximise the quality of its service provision and uphold its reputation, making a powerful contribution to continuous service improvement and the achievement of best value.

3.11 The Fire Authority will ensure that the risk management system:

- Formally identifies and manages risks
- Involves Members in the risk management process
- Includes the undertaking of a risk assessment of every decision
- Maps risks to financial and other key internal controls
- Incorporates business continuity planning; and
- Reviews and, if necessary, updates its risk management processes at least annually.

Developing the capacity and capability of Members and officers to be effective

3.12 The Fire Authority will ensure that those charged with the governance of the Fire Authority have the skills, knowledge and experience they need to perform well. The Fire Authority will do this by:

- Maintaining member training and development
- Developing leadership skills and capacity across the Fire Authority
- Developing our approach to workforce planning
- Encouraging quality mark accreditation

- Maintaining and developing our personal development and performance review systems
- Cascading regular information to Members and staff by paper and electronic means

Engaging with local people and other stakeholders to ensure robust public accountability

3.13 The Fire Authority is committed to increasing public involvement in decision-making and empowering individuals and local organisations. We will seek and respond to the views of stakeholders and the community. The fire authority will do this by:

- Forming and maintaining relationships with the leaders of other organisations
- Ensuring openness and accessibility to citizens, service users and staff, including partner organisations
- Implementing the Consultation Strategy and utilising an appropriate range of consultation methods
- Making use of local forums to maintain communication with all communities and other stakeholders
- Encouraging and supporting the public in submitting requests for Scrutiny
- Maintaining and reviewing an effective complaints procedure

4. MONITORING AND REVIEW

4.1 Good corporate governance requires the active participation of Members and employees across the authority. The Programme Board has responsibility at Member level for reviewing the arrangements set out in this code. The Deputy Chief Fire Officer will chair the Local Code of Corporate Governance Working Group, comprising Director, Finance and Director, Corporate Planning. The Working Group has

responsibility for monitoring and reviewing this Code and reporting to Members on its operation and on any proposed changes.

4.2 The Fire Authority has three committees that have responsibilities for monitoring and reviewing the Fire Authority's corporate governance arrangements including audit – the Finance Review Committee, the Standards Committee, and the Programme Board.

4.3 The Audit responsibilities are currently divided between the Finance Review Committee and the Programme Board and provide assurance to the fire authority on the following responsibilities:

- the effectiveness of the fire authority's risk management
- internal control and its overall assurance framework
- the effectiveness of the fire authority's financial performance
- the effectiveness of the fire authority's non-financial performance
- the performance of the fire authority's Internal Audit section
- the receipt and review of external audit reports and liaison with external auditors on significant financial matters
- the receipt and review of external audit reports and liaison with external auditors on significant performance matters

4.4 The Standards Committee has responsibility to Fire Authority for:

- the promoting and maintaining high standards of conduct
- approving, and providing an overview of the implementation of, Member and officer codes and protocols relating to probity and conduct
- approval of the anti-fraud and corruption strategy and whistle-blowing procedures

Through these committees the Fire Authority will ensure that these arrangements are kept under continual review by:

- The work of Internal Audit
- Reports prepared by managers with responsibility for aspects of this Code
- External Audit opinion
- Other review agencies
- Opinion from the Fire Authority's Statutory Officers

The Annual Governance Statement

- 4.5 Each year the Fire Authority will publish an Annual Governance Statement. This will provide an overall assessment of the Fire Authority's Corporate Governance arrangements and an appraisal of the key controls in place to manage the Fire Authority's principal governance risks. The Statement will also provide details of where improvements need to be made.
- 4.6 The Annual Governance Statement will be reviewed and agreed by the Fire Authority, for signing by the Chairman of the Fire Authority and the Chief Fire Officer.
- 4.7 The Statement will be published as part of the Fire Authority's Annual Statement of Accounts and will be audited by our external auditors.