



BEDFORDSHIRE FIRE
& RESCUE SERVICE

STATEMENT OF ASSURANCE

2020-21



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STATEMENT OF ASSURANCE 20/21

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1.

The Government sets out the high level expectations and requirements for Fire and Rescue Authorities through the [Fire and Rescue National Framework \(England\) 2018](#).

The Framework is issued under Section 21 of the [Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004](#) with the stated purpose to give Fire and Rescue Authorities the freedom and flexibility to deliver services to their communities, moving accountability away from Central Government and placing responsibility with local communities.

Under the National Framework, Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Authority (BFRA) have a responsibility to publish an Annual Statement of Assurance which provides a report on the Service's performance in the previous year with regard to:

- 🔥 **Financial:** How BFRA ensures that public money is properly accounted for, managed, audited and reported along with management of financial assets and the production of the Annual Statement of Accounts which is produced in line with accounting codes of practice.
- 🔥 **Governance:** How BFRA ensures that it conducts its business lawfully and that public money is properly accounted for and managed economically, efficiently and effectively and that an Annual Governance Statement (AGS) is published.
- 🔥 **Operational:** How BFRA operates within a clear defined statutory framework including key documents such as National Framework and the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 etc.

INTRODUCTION

The Statement of Assurance is required to be published annually and where possible form part of the existing governance reporting arrangements. This Statement of Assurance is subject to normal scrutiny arrangements which comprise of:

- 🔥 Approval by the Audit and Standards Committee, who oversee the production of the Annual Statement of Assurance;
- 🔥 Presented to the Full Fire and Rescue Authority Meeting by the Chair of the Audit and Standards Committee; and,
- 🔥 Published on the Service's website.

In summary this Statement of Assurance aims to provide information to the Communities, Government, Local Authorities and Partners in an easy and accessible way, so a valid assessment can be made of their local Fire and Rescue Authority's performance during 2020/21.

2. FINANCIAL ASSURANCE

BFRA is a precepting authority; this means that its net cost, after receiving a Government Grant and a proportion of local business rates, is met by all council tax payers in Bedford Borough, Central Bedfordshire Borough and Luton as a proportion to the valuation band of their home. The precept accounts for 65% of BFRA income. A precept leaflet is published each year on [our website](#) detailing our revenue and expenditure for the year.

BFRA has the responsibility for ensuring that public money collected by way of grant and council tax is properly accounted for and managed appropriately in accordance with Section 3 of the Local Government Act 1999. This responsibility extends to securing the continuous improvement in which BFRA's functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness.

As part of managing the financial arrangements of the Authority, BFRA has robust control measures in place for protecting the public purse, which is supported by accurate budget monitoring processes and internal controls, which are subject to annual scrutiny and reporting.

The Treasurer to the BFRA has the responsibility for ensuring that the right measures are in place to manage the Authority's financial assets and that the financial reporting arrangements are sound and that the Annual Statement of Accounts is prepared in accordance with statutory requirements.

The [Statement of Accounts](#) for the year ending 31 March 2021 is a document that summarises BFRA's transactions for the previous financial year detailing how the funding was used to provide a Fire and Rescue Service to the communities of Bedfordshire and includes:

- a] The Statement of Responsibilities for the Statement of Accounts which sets out the responsibilities of the FRA and the Treasurer to the FRA;
- b] The Annual Governance Statement (AGS);
- c] The Movement in Reserves Statement which summarises the FRA's spending against the council tax it raised, taking into account the use of reserves during the year;
- d] The Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement which summarises the income and expenditure of the FRA;
- e] The Balance Sheet which displays the financial position of the FRA as at 31 March 2021;
- f] The Cash Flow Statement which summarises the changes in the FRAs funds; and,
- g] The Pension Fund Account for the year together with the Net Assets Statement at the year end.

The Accounts are supported by a Statement of Accounting Policy and Core Financial Statements and these are prepared by the Finance Team under the direction of the Assistant Chief Officer and Treasurer to the BFRA.

The Statement of Accounts is signed off by the Chairperson of the Audit and Standards Committee who oversees the audit activity, regulatory framework, accounts and standards of the Service and these are prepared in accordance with proper accounting practices that include:

- 🔥 [Accounts and Audit \(England\) Regulations 2015](#) ;
- 🔥 [The Local Authorities \(Capital Finance and Accounting\) \(England\) \(Amendment\) Regulations 2015](#); and,
- 🔥 [International Financial Reporting Standards](#) (IFRS).

BFRA are subject to independent external audit and scrutiny to ensure that appropriate and effective financial arrangements are in place. The external audit on the 2019/20 accounts was completed in December 2020 and are available on our website. It is the opinion of the external auditors that 'Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Authority put in place proper arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources for the year ended 31 March 2020.' The draft accounts for 2020/21 are also available on our [website](#) and were presented to the Audit and Standards Committee in July 2021. They are due to be audited in late 2021.



3. GOVERNANCE FRAMEWORK

BFRA is made up of twelve elected members who are appointed in proportion to the number of local government electors in each constituent Authority area with Members from the three Local Authorities of Bedford Borough Council, Central Bedfordshire Council and Luton Borough Council comprising:



Three members from **Bedford Borough Council**



Five members from **Central Bedfordshire Council**; and,



Four members from **Luton Borough Council**

The responsibility for ensuring proper governance arrangements and controls rests with BFRA who enable the effective exercise of the Authority's functions and the management of risk. The Governance Framework includes systems, processes, culture and values to enable BFRA to monitor the achievement of strategic objectives and consider whether the objectives have led to the delivery of appropriate, cost effective services to the communities of Bedfordshire and stakeholders.

BFRA's governance framework derives from seven core principles identified in the International Framework: Delivering Good Governance in Local Government: Delivering Good Governance in Local Government: [Framework \(CIPFA/SOLACE\) Review of Annual Governance Statements.](#)

3.1. ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT

The Annual Governance Statement (AGS) for 2020/21 explains how the BFRA manages its governance arrangements and internal control measures. It is an open and transparent account of how the BFRA ensures its financial management systems are adequate and effective, as well as ensuring there is a robust and sound system of internal control.

The AGS also explains how BFRA has complied with the Code and meets the requirements of the Accounts and Audit (England) Regulations 2015 in relation to the publication of an Annual Governance Statement. BFRA's financial arrangements conform to the governance requirements of the CIPFA – Statement on the Role of the Chief Financial Officer in Local Government. The Treasurer to the BFRA reports in this role directly to the Chief Fire Officer.

3.2. INTERNAL AUDIT

The role of internal audit is to review the internal control framework that governs the operations of the BFRA and, in so doing, provide an independent opinion to both Management and Members of the BFRA on the robustness of the Authority's internal control environment. Each year an Internal Audit Plan is produced and developed by the auditors, in conjunction with the Assistant Chief Officer – Finance and Corporate Services and Treasurer to the BFRA and is based on a risk assessment of all the services/systems of the Authority. Members and Service Managers are directly involved in the development of the plan and it is subject to input and review by the Corporate Management Team (CMT), prior to being approved by the Audit and Standards Committee. In summary, the plan identifies the audits to be completed each year, including core fundamental systems and other operational systems.

The appointed Internal Auditors also work with both Essex and Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Services (FRS) as part of a joint contract and where possible are able to audit on areas of commonality and shared service areas across all three FRAs. The work of the audit team complies fully with the requirements of CIPFA's Code of Practice for Internal Audit in Local Government in the UK.

For the 12 months ended 31 March 2021, the Head of Internal Audit's opinion for the Authority was as follows:

"The organisation has an adequate and effective framework for risk management, governance and internal control.

However, our work has identified further enhancements to the framework of risk management, governance and internal control to ensure that it remains adequate and effective."

3.3. EXTERNAL AUDIT

BFRA remains committed to continuing to improve its performance towards achieving excellence in all areas. Value for Money (VFM) is still part of an annual review carried out by the Service's external auditors with an opinion whether the BFRA is delivering VFM as part of the external auditor's annual report and whether the BFRA has proper arrangements for:

- 🔥 Securing financial resilience; and,
- 🔥 Challenging how it secures economy, efficiency and effectiveness.

An integral part of this assurance is the role of the external auditor in the annual review report which complies with the statutory requirements governing audit and inspection work, in particular:

- 🔥 National Audit Office's 2015 Code of Practice, International Standards on Auditing (UK & Ireland);
- 🔥 The 2020/21 Code of Practice; and
- 🔥 Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015.

On the 23 December 2020, our external auditors Ernst & Young LLP (E&Y) issued an unqualified opinion on the 2019/20 Statement of Accounts. In the auditor's opinion, the Statement of Accounts provided a true and fair view of the financial position of the Authority and have been prepared properly in accordance with the CIPFA/LASAAC Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in the United Kingdom 2019/20.

Additionally E&Y confirmed that in their opinion, in all significant respects the Authority has put in place proper arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources for the year ending 31 March 2020. As noted above, the audit of the 2020/21 accounts will be in late 2021 due to the availability of E&Y's audit team.

In July 2017 Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) gained the statutory responsibility of the inspection of Fire and Rescue Services in England and Wales and became Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS). In 2020/21 HMICFRS inspected Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Service were inspected twice. The first inspection was in October 2020 and looked specifically at how the Service had responded and adapted to the COVID pandemic. HMICFRS published their findings from this inspection in the form of a narrative judgement in [a letter to the Chief Fire Officer in January 2021](#).

The letter from HMICFRS states that '*the service reacted quickly and proactively to give additional support to partners and the community during the initial phases of the pandemic. It continued to provide the level of activity expected in its response and prevention functions.*' As well as recognising the work undertaken in response to the pandemic. HMICFRS identified four areas for the Service to focus on as it continues to respond to the pandemic.

HMICFRS returned in February 2021 to conduct a full inspection covering the areas of Effectiveness, Efficiency and People. A report will be published in December 2021 with graded judgements against the inspection criteria.

3.4. COMMITTEE & GROUPS

BFRA has adopted a Constitution which sets out how the Authority operates, how decisions are made and the procedures which are followed to ensure these are efficient, transparent and accountable to local people and stakeholders.

All areas of the Service are covered to ensure that the Service is functioning efficiently and effectively. This is achieved by providing checks and challenges, monitoring performance and approving associated policy and activity. The Executive and Audit and Standards Committees make recommendations on matters within their terms of reference to the Authority according to their area of concern.

The Chairs of these Committees report any recommendations arising from these meetings to the meeting of the full FRA. Reporting will also include on-going policy and decision making, which is facilitated by a clear framework of delegation set out in the Authority's Constitution, including details of delegated authorities to officers.

All reports are reviewed for legal, human resource, financial and risk considerations prior to being presented to Members of the BFRA for formal decision-making. This, together with an appropriate level of delegation to both the Authority Executive and Senior Managers, enables prompt decision making.

In 2020/21 the BFRA appointed each member of the Executive Committee with a special responsibility for the following portfolios:

- 🔥 Prevention and Protection;
- 🔥 Operational Performance and Preparedness;
- 🔥 Corporate Risk, Health and Safety;
- 🔥 People Board, Staffing and Diversity; and,
- 🔥 Collaboration.

3.5. REVIEW OF AUTHORITY EFFECTIVENESS

In 2010, the Authority agreed a recommendation of the Audit Committee that it publishes an Annual Review of the Fire Authority's Effectiveness and Record of Member Attendance. A Form of Review Questionnaire was thereafter prepared and annually sent out to all Members for consideration and completion. In prior years, this was discussed in each Policy and Challenge Group and the Audit and Standards Committee. It was agreed for 2018/19, in light of a new authority commencing in June 2019 and that the process had been repeated over a number of years, that the review would not take place during 2019/20. During 2021/22 it was agreed that a Fire and Rescue Authority Governance structure review will take place in 2021/22.

3.6 INTERNAL CONTROL FRAMEWORK

BFRA has responsibility for conducting, at least annually, a review of the effectiveness of the system of internal control and is informed by the work of the internal auditors and the Corporate Management Team (CMT).

The Internal Auditors provide an annual opinion on the internal control framework and operate to standards set out in the Code of Practice for Internal Audit in Local Government in the UK. The key features of the Authority's internal control framework, which directly contribute to the review of effectiveness are:

- 🔥 The Fire and Rescue Authority;
- 🔥 The Audit and Standards Committee;
- 🔥 Internal Audit;
- 🔥 External Audit;
- 🔥 Assurance Statements; and,
- 🔥 Internal Performance Management Framework.

BFRA has a robust Performance Management Framework in place for securing continuous improvement in its services and where the quality of service to the communities can be measured using local performance indicators.

An integral part of the performance framework includes the setting of organisational key performance indicators. These are agreed and monitored on a quarterly basis by senior managers of the Service with performance being reported through the Corporate Management Team, the Authority's Policy and Challenge Groups, and to full FRA Meetings.

Corporate indicators are established annually by the FRA alongside local indicators set by the Service. These are monitored continuously using a data toolkit and reported and scrutinized quarterly by senior managers of the Service with performance being reported through the Corporate Management Team and to full FRA Meetings.

For the year ending 2020/21 the Annual Internal Audit report advised that the Auditors were satisfied that sufficient internal audit work had been undertaken to allow them to draw a reasonable conclusion on the adequacy and effectiveness of the Authority's arrangements.

3.7 DATA TRANSPARENCY

In accordance with the *Code of Recommended Practice for Local Authorities on Data Transparency*, BFRA is committed to greater openness and financial transparency through the publication, on the [Authority's website](#), of information regarding how public money is spent. This includes payments for goods and services to external bodies and suppliers above £500, and details of salaries and allowances paid to staff and Members.

In doing so, BFRA utilise a number of information sources and data sets to improve the delivery of service to the communities and reports its performance accordingly. The performance data and information is published in the form of reports against targets and outcomes showing the performance of BFRA.

4. OPERATIONAL ASSURANCE

The National Framework does not prescribe operational firefighting matters; this is determined locally by respective FRAs.

However, it does set out the government's priorities and objectives for Fire and Rescue Authorities in England that include:

- 🔥 Identifying and assessing the full range of foreseeable fire and rescue related risks in the respective areas;
- 🔥 Making provision for prevention and protection activities and responding to incidents appropriately;
- 🔥 Working with partners within the communities both locally and nationally to deliver their services; and,
- 🔥 Being accountable to communities for the service they provide through the 'Statement of Assurance'.

FRAs operate within a defined boundary of a statutory framework that has a number of key documents that outline responsibilities, these include:

- 🔥 [The Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004](#);
- 🔥 [The Civil Contingencies Act 2004](#);
- 🔥 [The Regulatory Reform \(Fire Safety\) Order 2005](#);
- 🔥 [The Fire and Rescue Services \(Emergencies\) \(England\) Order 2007](#);
- 🔥 [The Localism Act 2011](#);
- 🔥 [The Fire and Rescue National Framework](#);
- 🔥 [Local Government Act 2010](#); and,
- 🔥 [Health and Safety & Work Act 1974](#).

In addition to the statutory framework and assurance detailed above, BFRA has a range of key performance indicators and measures reported throughout the year. An integral part of operational assurance includes prevention and protection services and emergency response standards; these are regularly monitored and reviewed by the Service and the FRA by:

- 🔥 Internal audits of service delivery functions;
- 🔥 Quarterly performance reporting against station-based targets;
- 🔥 Formal evaluation of prevention and protection activities; and,
- 🔥 Full summary report of performance for the previous financial year.

Further Operational Assurance is provided externally by HMICFRS who found BFRS in 2018 to be 'Good' at responding to fires and other emergencies and also periodically by National Resilience Assurance Team (NRAT) for our National Resilience assets.

4.1. PERFORMANCE SUMMARY

BFRA oversees the performance of the Service throughout the year by the monitoring of robust and challenging Performance Indicators (PIs) and associated targets, aimed to maximise the effort and resources of the Service. The implementation of the Service Corporate Performance Dashboard provides all staff with easy access to these PI's.

The FRA scrutinises the performance data and provides challenge to Officers on the Service performance. The Service continues to develop its KPI Dashboard that enables officers to easily access our performance data and actively manage the service an informed way. The end of year Service performance report is available [here](#).

Full details of the Service's performance for 2020/21 and comparison against performance for 2019/20 is reported within the [Annual Overarching Performance Report 2020/21](#).

4.2. COMMUNITY RISK MANAGEMENT PLAN

In April 2020/21 BFRS launched a refreshed version of the Community Risk Management Plan 2019 - 2023 (CRMP). This document is the Authority's programme for securing continuous improvement in its services and outlines the Authority's vision, objectives and priorities for the future, sets performance targets and outlines the Authority's accountability to its stakeholders and the communities in line with the requirements of the National Framework for Fire and Rescue Services in England.

The CRMP contains a Service Action Plan (see Appendix A) which is an ambitious programme of 30 actions to drive improvement across the Service. 21 (70%) of the actions have been fully completed. Each action is split into several tasks with 70 individual tasks out of 87 being completed (80%).

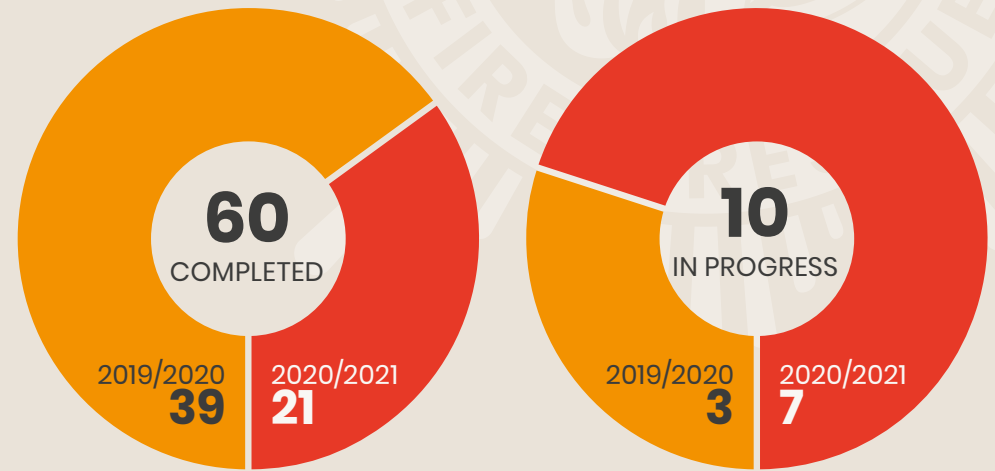


Table 1: Progress on Community Risk Management Plan Actions

Year	Completed	Deferred	In Progress	Not started	Total
2019 - 2020	39	0	3	0	42
2020 - 2021	21	1	7	1	30
Total	60	1	10	1	72

4.3. MUTUAL AID AND REINFORCEMENT SCHEMES

Sections [13](#) and [16](#) of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 place a requirement on all FRAs to enter in to Mutual Aid agreements with neighbouring FRs. The purpose of these agreements is to enable the summoning of assistance to provide and utilise resources such as fire engines when required to attend a range of incidents. In addition to Mutual Aid, FRAs, as far as is practicable, should enter into Reinforcement Schemes, for securing mutual assistance between authorities and for the purpose of discharging their functions. BFRA has in place mutual agreements with neighbouring FRAs. In addition, the Service, through National Resilience, provides specialist appliances and crews for mass decontamination. See 4.6.

4.4. BUSINESS CONTINUITY ARRANGEMENTS

The [Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004](#) and the [Civil Contingencies Act 2004](#) places a legal duty for all FRAs to write and maintain plans for the purpose of ensuring, so far as reasonably practicable, that if an emergency occurs the Authority is able to continue its functions.

In response to these duties BFRA has robust Business Continuity Management (BCM) plans in place which are integral in managing corporate risk and provides, in the event of a major disruption, a Fire and Rescue Service to the community. The BCM plans cover a broad range of interruptions for specific events such as wide spreading Pandemics through to individual functional disruptions within the Service. These plans provide resilience arrangements across the entire Service.

In summary our BCM plans provide clear and defined strategies to be adapted to aid achievement of the following objectives:

- 🔥 Provide a response to events that threaten the delivery of services to the community of Bedfordshire;
- 🔥 Protect the Service from business interruptions;
- 🔥 In the event of business interruptions to provide a coordinated recovery; and,
- 🔥 Facilitate a risk management culture embedded into the Service to enable risks to be identified and managed effectively.

The Service Pandemic Business Continuity Plan was utilised in March 2020 to formulate the Service response to the COVID pandemic. The plan focused our planning and delivery of services with our response to COVID creating opportunities to swiftly review, develop and deliver new ways of working for our staff, partners and communities. The Service response to COVID was inspected by HMICFRS in October 2020. HMICFRS reported that: *'In line with good governance, the service had a pandemic flu plan and business continuity plans in place which were in date. These plans were activated.'* HMICFRS also stated that: *'The plans were detailed enough to enable the service to make an effective initial response, but, understandably, they didn't anticipate and mitigate all the risks presented by COVID.'*

The Service is a member of the NFCC Business Continuity Group. This gives the Service access to information on best BCM practice for the Fire and Rescue Sector.



4.5. NATIONAL RESILIENCE

The UK Fire and Rescue Service forms an integral part of the Governments National Resilience capability as Category 1 Responders.

Category 1 Responders include Blue-light emergency services as well Local Authorities and NHS hospitals etc. where the capacity and capability of FRs work together with Category 1, and Category 2 Responders (Utilities/Transport infrastructure providers etc.) to deliver a sustained and effective response to major incidents, emergencies and disruptive challenges.

In addition to working with other FRAs, BFRA work closely with and are members of the [Bedfordshire Local Resilience Forum](#) (BLRF) which is a statutory body covering a police force area, designed to bring together Category 1 and Category 2 Responders for multi-agency co-operation and information sharing. This is in line with the Civil Contingencies Act (2004) which states every area of the United Kingdom is required to establish a Local Resilience Forum.

BFRA is a major contributor to national and regional resilience with the capability to respond to major disasters and terrorist attacks, where some types of incident that are larger in scale may require a Fire and Rescue Service response.

BFRA are actively involved in National Resilience arrangements and hold a Module for Mass Decontamination. The Service also has Water Rescue national assets which have been mobilised to assist other Fire and Rescue Services on several occasions, this would be following requests from the National Resilience Fire Control based in Merseyside.

BFRS, one of several FRs in the UK have a Special Response Team (SRT) to support Police and Ambulance operations. This team is exercised on a regular basis with other Category 1 Responders ensuring that the team is ready for operational deployment. As part of the assurance process to the Service, the Specialist Response Team were audited in 2016 as part of the National Audit Programme and a number of areas were highlighted as notable practice.

In August 2020 we launched a new Technical Support Unit, based at Dunstable Fire Station. This was the first of its kind in the country, where emergency removal of a Bariatric or complex patient is required to support EEAST.

Specially trained firefighters have responded to more than 300 calls. Instead of the four-step resource-intensive approach, previously involving up to three ambulances and several ambulance staff, a two-step response has proved successful. This new vehicle will respond to Bariatric and complex patient incidents where emergency removal of a patient is required to support the East of England Ambulance Service (EEAST). This dedicated vehicle carries specialist equipment including a bariatric stretcher provided by EEAST which, will enable crews to provide the best possible care to the patient. This was part of our joint Blue Light Collaborations with various response vehicles being co-located at fire stations across the County. With a bariatric stretcher on the unit, the process is quicker, easier and more dignified for the individual and frees up ambulance capacity. It also ensures those vulnerable and at risk of fire are identified. This is an additional part of our collaboration with EEAST who have ambulances based at Dunstable Fire Station.

OUR COVID RESPONSE IN NUMBERS APR '20 - MAR '21

 **600+**

extra ambulances in Bedfordshire crewed by staff since Apr '20

 **20,300+**

frontline patient hours spent supporting EEAST

 **1700+**

BFRS shifts completed with EEAST

 **500+**

food parcels delivered

 **50+**

BFRS staff trained as ambulance drivers

 **77%**

patients safely left at home by our **Falls Team**

 **15,500**

patients reached by our joint (BFRS & EEAST) teams

 **awards**

Gold Award received for our EEAST collaboration and a number of individual recognitions.

5.

CONCLUSION

This Statement of Assurance provides an accurate account of Bedfordshire Fire Authority's Financial, Governance and Operational Assurance arrangements secured from the 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021.

I am satisfied that Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Authority conducted its business practices within the appropriate legal framework and standards and that public money was properly accounted for and used economically, efficiently and effectively. This Statement of Assurance was approved by the Audit and Standards Committee on 21st September 2021.



Signed

Chief Fire Officer



Signed

Chair Audit and Standards Committee
on behalf of the Bedfordshire Fire and
Rescue Authority



Signed

Chair of the Bedfordshire Fire and
Rescue Authority



WE'VE GOT
YOUR BACK



WE ARE
ACCOUNTABLE



EVERY CONTACT
COUNTS



WE DARE TO BE
DIFFERENT

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