

KENT AND MEDWAY FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

Meeting of the Authority

Thursday 16th October 2025

10.30am

AGENDA

KENT AND MEDWAY FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

Thursday 16th October 2025 10.30 am

Ask for: **Kirsty Driver**

Kent Fire and Rescue Service HQ Telephone: (01622) 692121

The Godlands, Straw Mill Hill, Tovil, Maidstone ME15 6XB

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

(During these items the meeting is likely to be open to the public)

A Routine Business

- A1. Chair's Announcements
- A2. Membership Changes and Apologies for Absence
- A3. Declarations of Interest in Items on this Agenda
- A4. Minutes of the Meeting of the Authority held on 7th July 2025 (for approval) (pg5)
- B For Decision
- B1. Community Risk Management Plan Consultation on relocation of a Water Safety Unit and the introduction of the new Rural Plan (pg15)
- B2. Financial Update for 2025/26 (pg55)
- B3. Development of the Medium-Term Financial Plan 2026-2030 (PowerPoint presentation) (pg77)
- B4. 2026-27 Council Tax Consultation (pg79)
- B5. Governance and Policy Updates (pg87)
- B6. Protective Security Charter (pg161)
- B7. Calendar of Meetings 2026/27 (pg169)
- C For Information
- C1. Chair of the Audit and Governance Committee's Annual Report to the Authority (pg173)
- C2. Mid-year Treasury Management and Investment Update for 2025/26 (pg179)
- C3. Information Update. (available online)
- **D Urgent Business** (Other items which the Chairman decides are urgent)
- E Exempt Items

Kirsty Driver - Clerk to the Authority 24 September 2025

Please note that any background papers referred to in the accompanying reports may be inspected by arrangement with the Lead/Contact Officer named on each report.

KENT AND MEDWAY FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

MINUTES of the Annual Meeting of the Kent and Medway Fire and Rescue Authority held on Monday 7th July 2025 at Kent Fire and Rescue Service HQ, The Godlands, Straw Mill Hill, Tovil Maidstone ME15 6XB.

PRESENT:- Mr B Black, Mr V Maple, Mr B Kemp, Mr M Prenter, Mrs Z Van-Dyke, Mr P. Webb, Mr P Thomas, Mr P Osborne, Mr M Mulvihill, Miss I Kemp, Mr J Henderson, Mr S Dixon, Mr M Brown, Mr O Bradshaw, Mr R Ford, Mr D Burns, Mr M Sole, Mr T Prater, Mr M Munday, Mr N Williams, Mr A Brady, Mrs J Waterman.

APOLOGIES: - Mrs S Roots, Mr N Wibberly, Mr W Chapman, Mr S Heaver, Mr M Scott.

OFFICERS:- The Chief Executive, Miss A Millington; Director of Finance, Mr B Fullbrook; Director, Response and Resilience, Mr M Deadman; Director Protection, Prevention and Customer Engagement, Mr J Quinn; Assistant Director, Response, Mr N Griffiths; Assistant Director Customer & Building Safety, Mrs L McMahon; Head of Finance Treasury & Pensions, Mrs N Walker; Head of Policy, Dr O Thompson and the Clerk to the Authority, Mrs K Driver.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: - Ms C Valmond, Monitoring Officer, Ms H Ward, Deputy Monitoring Officer

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

1. Election of Chair for 2025/26

(Item A1)

- (1) Mr Bradshaw moved, Mr Dixon seconded, that Mr Black be elected Chair of the Authority.
- (2) There being no other nominations Mr B Black was declared the elected Chair of the Authority for 2025/26.

2. Election of Vice-Chair for 2025/26

(Item A2)

- (1) Mr Burns moved, Mr Mulvihill seconded, that Miss Kemp be elected Vice-Chair of the Authority.
- (2) There being no other nominations Miss I Kemp was declared the elected Vice-Chair of the Authority for 2025/26.

3. Chair's Announcements

(Item A3)

- (1) The Chair welcomed all the new KCC members and a thank you to those returning members who have served the Authority for some time now.
- (2) The Chair asked members to hold a 1-minute silence in honour of firefighters Jennie Logan and Martyn Sadler of Oxfordshire Fire & Rescue Service, and member of the public Dave Chester who tragically lost their lives at an incident in May.
- (3) The Chair also acknowledged the 20th Anniversary of the 7/7 London Bombings.

4. Membership

(Item A4)

(1) Apologies received from Sharon Roots, Wayne Chapman, Stuart Heaver and Nick Wibberly.

5. Declarations of interest in items on the agenda

(Item A5)

- (1) No notifications have been sent to the Clerk in advance of this meeting.
- (2) Chair asked for any declarations to be declared. No declarations made.
- (3) Mr Maple later declared an interest with regards to B8 due to his position on the NJC.

6. Minutes of the Authority – 18th February 2025

(Item A6)

- (1) RESOLVED that: -
 - (a) the Minutes of the Authority meeting held on 18th February be approved and signed as a true record.

7. Minutes of Audit & Governance Committee – 24th April 2025 (*Item A7*)

- (1) RESOLVED that: -
 - (a) the minutes of the Audit & Governance Committee held on 24th April 2025, be noted.

8. Appointment to Committees and Outside Bodies for 2024/25

(Item B1 - Report by Clerk to the Authority)

- (1) The Authority reviewed its scheme of proportionality as required by the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 and then considered various matters relating to the appointment of Members to Committees and outside bodies for 2025/26.
- (2) RESOLVED that: -
 - (a) for the purposes of the statutory annual review of proportionality, and without any Member voting against, the allocation of places to the political groups on the Senior Officer Appointment, Conditions and Conduct Committee, Audit and Governance Committee and Hearings Panel be approved for 2025/26.

9. Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP)

(Item B2 – Report by Director of Response & Resilience)

(1) Members were presented with the Authority's Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) Strategy Update and Next Steps report. This included detailed information on

the public consultation. The Consultation includes a proposal to relocate one of the water rescue assets and the new Rural Plan.

- (2) Mr Sole wished to know if, given the current situation in Whitstable where residents have gone several days with no water, has the Authority lobbied water companies on the issue? Director of Response & Resilience responded that Tactical Coordinating groups are set up, which include members of the water industry to consider the impact and actions needed. The KFRS Resilience Manager has a background in the water industry which has helped foster a good working relationship with the water companies.
- (3) Mr Thomas raised concerns regarding the solar farms/BESS sites and the issues they cause in all areas, not just rural. Director of Response & Resilience responded that this is an issue he has been working on for 4-5 years now as the national lead for NFCC. While KFRS has no statutory powers with regards to the planning and approval of these sites (HSE are the regulator), our Fire Engineering team will always endeavour to provide advice and consultation in line with NFCC guidance. KFRS are also supporting some amendments to the Environmental Planning Regulations.
- (4) Mr Thomas also wanted to know whether there have been any pinch points identified on the roads which can be taken back to highways. The Assistant Director Customer & Building Safety responded. KFRS have spent time looking at the impact of accidents, locations, distances travelled to better understand the causes along with working with other partner agencies when issues are highlighted. We have a variety of different vehicle types. There are also powers granted to Fire Services to aid in attending scenes, such as being able to travel the opposite way.
- (5) Mr Brady raised concerns regarding whether inefficiencies by water companies are causing additional costs to the Authority and what can be done about this? Director for Response and Resilience confirmed that hydrants are the responsibility of the Authority in terms of maintenance costs. The water companies have been repairing them faster, which is good, however the more repairs are made, the bigger the cost appears to be. With regards to regulatory issues, we have been lobbying to ensure accountability when our response is impacted.
- (6) Mr Brady requested additional signposting in the public consultation, to ensure the public fully understand the reasons why the Authority wishes to move the water rescue unit. He feels this would help prevent people answering based only on where they live in relation to the changes. Director Protection, Prevention and Customer Engagement confirmed this can be done.
- (7) Mr Brady wanted to know how we are working with different parishes regarding the rural plan. Director Protection, Prevention and Customer Engagement responded that we will be utilising social media, including sending social media posts and information to members for them to share with constituents. We will also work with Kent Association of Local Councils (KALC) and various rural partners.
- (8) Mr Brady questioned whether the Authority are lobbying to get max speed limits reduced in line with KCCs 'Vision Zero' strategy. The Assistant Director Customer & Building Safety responded that while road safety is always a challenge, we are seeing a difference being made. The risks tend to be associated more with age rather than

speed. There are however more 20 mile per hour zones appearing, particularly around schools which will help bring the numbers down further. There has also been a change to regular campaigns, for example instead of running drink driving campaigns at Christmas, these are now planned to run more frequently throughout the year to enforce the message.

- (9) Mr Maple wondered whether the MP for Sittingbourne & Sheppey as well as Swale Borough Council should be contacted before the consultation starts. He made note at the addition of a free text box option in the consultation which allows for a better, more rounded response. He also noted the importance of getting the consultation out to younger people, so they also have a say. He suggested we could contact Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) to get their input. Finally, he pointed out the importance of CRMP and how the Authority has never been complacent and always taken it seriously.
- (10) Mr Munday raised a concern that some Parishes are concerned about the time that would need to be committed to creating a resilience plan. The Chief Executive noted that that is a requirement, however, to help ensure all risks are caught while also not spending excessive time on details which aren't required, Parish Councils should contact KALC. They are very helpful in aiding the creation these plans and know what does and does not need to be included. KFRS are also always happy to attend Parish Council meetings if requested.

(11) RESOLVED that: -

- (a) the proposal to consult with our customers on moving our water rescue assets from Sheppey fire station to Rochester fire station be approved.
- (b) the proposal to consult with our customers on our Rural Plan be approved.
- (c) the questions in the consultation be approved.
- (d) the improvements to service provision aimed at addressing risks outlined within our CRMP be noted.

10. Governance and Policy Update

(Item B3 – Report by Head of Policy)

- (1) The Authority considered a report on the following governance issues:
 - A. Overview of policy reform and policy governance
 - B. Update on two policies; The Procurement Policy and The Modern Slavery Policy.
- (2) In response to a comment by Mr Maple when discussing item B4, Modern Slavery and Transparency in Supply Chains Statement 2024/25, an additional statement will be added to the Modern Slavery Policy more explicitly stating that any concerns relating to modern slavery raised during Safe & Well visits will be reported to dedicated safeguarding teams.

(3) RESOLVED that: -

- (a) the Revisions to both the Procurement Policy and Modern Slavery Policy be approved.
- (b) The remaining contents of the report be noted.

11. Modern Slavery and Transparency in Supply Chains Statement 2024/25

(Item B4 – Report by Head of Procurement)

- (1) The Authority considered a report on modern slavery in supply chains, KMFRA procurement regulations and the legislative update to the procurement Act 2023.
- (2) Mr Brady commented on the positive changes for Kent and Medway businesses and stated he is glad to see things moving in the right direction. The Chief Executive commented that where it is reasonably possible, we will try to spend in Kent. We will also be utilising soft supplier engagement, which helps save expenses of going to market and gives us an opportunity to better engage with local businesses.
- (3) Mr Maple noted the report hints at the service dealing with modern slavery during Safe & Well visits but would like to see it more explicitly stated in the policy. The Chief Executive Officer agreed that this can be done.
- (4) Mr Maple also wanted it noted that Medway is a Fair Tax Authority, although he doesn't believe KCC is. Through our processes we should be ensuring our money is spent on people who pay their taxes and play by the rules.
- (5) RESOLVED that: -
 - (a) the Modern Slavery & Transparency in Supply Chains Statement for 2024-25 be approved,
 - (b) the KMFRA Procurement Regulations be approved,
 - (c) the remaining contents of the report be noted.

12. Amendment of Carbon Neutral Target

(Item B5 – Report by Head of Property and Head of Fleet & Equipment Services)

- (1) The Authority considered a report seeking approval to amend the Authority's target to become carbon neutral to 2050 from the previous self-imposed target date of 2030.
- (2) The report detailed the work undertaken to understand the scope and scale of the work and investment needed to reduce our carbon impact, including a carbon roadmap report. The work undertaken has highlighted the scale of the issue and the spending required makes it unrealistic to meet our initial target of 2030. The report notes the commitment to achieving carbon neutrality and that continued improvements will be made as part of the planned maintenance programme, including ongoing updates to LED lighting during refurbishments and upgrading the estate infrastructure to support future electric vehicle fleet. The plan outlines targets and actions to continually reduce carbon emissions towards 2050.
- (3) Mr Sole noted the phasing out table shows smaller vehicles will be zero emissions by 2035. If it's assumed the life of a vehicle is 5 years, can members be assured that the Authority will not be buying diesel vehicles in 2034, that then need scrapping to meet zero emissions targets? Director of Response and Resilience commented that the move to zero emission vehicles will be done as and when practical. While we are mindful of the issue, we cannot commit to only buy zero emission vehicles.

- (4) Mr Sole asked if there is a plan for reporting regularly to the authority. The Chief Executive Officer agreed a regular report can be bought in to update Members.
- (5) Mr Thomas asked if we have allowed scope to look at other technologies besides electric vehicles. The Director of Response & Resilience confirmed that yes, we are looking at various options. Biodiesel is one option, Hydrogen is another possibility, but the technology is not where it needs to be yet.
- (6) Mr Munday asked if the Authority has contacted other services regarding the possibility of combined bio-diesel fuel storage. The Director of Response and Resilience commented that we have bunker fuel sites which could be utilised. We are also in contact with other services to consider the issues and processes around changing.
- (7) Mr Prater commented that while 2050 is the backstop, if we can get there earlier then we should. He felt the report is clear, it reflects the journey is already underway but would like an annual review added to show it is a journey and will be efficiently run with progress noted along the way. The Chief Executive Officer commented that a new recommendation will be added to confirm an annual report will be presented to the Authority.

(8) RESOLVED that: -

- (a) the recommendation that an annual report will be presented to the Authority at the AGM each year with an update on progress toward carbon neutrality be approved
- (b) the proposal to amend the Authority's target to become carbon neutral from 2030 to 2050, which will align us with the UK Government and the majority of local authorities in Kent and Medway be approved.

13. Provisional Revenue and Capital Budget Outturn for 2024/25 (Item B6 - Report by Director of Finance)

- (1) The Authority considered the report which presented the provisional outturn position against the 2024/25 Revenue and Capital budgets and included details on the proposed resultant year-end balances held in earmarked reserves
- (2) The report detailed the provisional outturn on revenue expenditure is £93.951m which represents an underspend of £762k against the revenue budget of £94.713m. The provisional outturn on capital spend is £5.852m against the revised capital budget of £7.712m. There may be minor variations to these figures during the final stages of the year-end process and the external audit of the Authority's 2024/25 Financial Statements.
- (3) Mr Maple expressed his thanks to the Finance team, especially in regard to recognising the work going into managing the investment of surplus cash balances. While we should never become complacent, other councils and services are having to make very difficult decisions so we a very fortunate.
- (4) Mr Brady asked if the vacancies within Building Safety and Customer Safety are having an impact on service delivery. Director Protection, Prevention and Customer Engagement explained that these teams tend to bring in cohorts in order to reduce the training costs. These teams are also often used as gateways and colleagues often move

on to other roles within the Service. They are currently exceeding their performance targets.

(5) Mr Brady asked for an update on the Ashford build. Director Protection, Prevention and Customer Engagement updated Members that there has been good progress with the build. They are currently two weeks behind schedule due to some issues on site; however, he hoped the project would meet the target to be complete by March 2026, with crews able to use the facility from September 2026. There are other works planned for Ashford fire station later in the year.

(6) RESOLVED that: -

- (a) The position on both the revenue and capital budget outturns for 2024/25 be noted.
- (b) that £500k of the final revenue budget underspend is transferred to the Service Transformation and Productivity Reserve be approved,
- (c) that the remaining revenue budget underspend (provisionally £262k) is transferred to the Infrastructure Reserve be approved,
- (d) the remaining contents of the report be noted.

14. Treasury Management Year End Report for 2024/25

(Item B7 – Report by Head of Finance Treasury & Pensions)

- (1) The Authority considered a report reviewing the treasury management activities and the estimated / actual prudential and treasury indicators for the year as required by the Local Government Act 2003. The report meets the requirements of both the CIPFA Code of Practice on Treasury Management and the CIPFA Prudential Code for Capital Finance in Local Authorities. The report confirms the final 2024/25 outturn position, reflecting some minor updates since the indicative outturn was presented to the Audit & Governance Committee in April 2025.
- (2) Mr Brady wanted to know what the policy on borrowing is. The Chief Executive Officer replied that while we want to remain as debt free as possible, there will likely be a need to borrow in the future to address issues with the current fleet workshop.
- (3) Mr Brady also asked if the capital receipts are planned to be spent. The Director of Finance stated that the use of capital receipts was included within the financial strategy to fund planned capital spend over the next 10 years and that the current balance is forecast to be fully spent within that time period. The Director of Finance also commented that although the Authority currently has no external debt, surplus cash balances are currently being used to fund the Ashford Live Fire project and that this internal borrowing may need to be externalised in the future.
- (4) Mr Mulvihill queried whether, given the Authority is currently out of debt, would the purchase of electric fire engines not put us back into debt. The Director for Response & Resilience responded that we are not looking to purchase these at the as they are too cost prohibitive.

(5) RESOLVED that: -

(a) this year-end report on Treasury Management activity for 2024/25 be approved.

15. Financial Summary Update for 2025/26

(Item B8 – Report by Director of Finance)

- (1) At the February 2025 meeting of the Authority, Members approved a net revenue budget totalling £98.232m and a capital budget of £13.677m for the 2025/26 financial year.
- (2) The Authority considered a report presenting the first financial update for 2025/26, which included a summary update on the key issues in relation to the revenue and capital budgets and an update on the Authority's treasury management activities.
- (3) Mr Maple declared an interest in this item due to his position on NJC.

(4) RESOLVED that: -

- (a) In principle, the proposed drawdown from the Insurance and Resource Reserve to fund the additional cost of the nationally agreed pay awards for 2025/26, should there be a requirement to balance the budget from reserves at the end of the financial year be approved,
- (b) the remaining contents of the report be noted.

16. Appointment of Monitoring Officer July 2025

(Item B9 – Report by Monitoring Officer)

- (1) It is a statutory requirement for the Kent and Medway Fire and Rescue Authority to appoint a Monitoring Officer to carry out the responsibilities set out in legislation
- (2) Claudette Valmond is the current Monitoring Officer, as agreed in the Authority meeting that took place in July 2024. She wishes to step down to the role of Deputy Monitoring Officer.
- (3) Members considered the appointment of Helen Ward, current Deputy Monitoring Officer, to the role of Monitoring Officer.

(4) RESOLVED that: -

(a) The appointment of Helen Ward as the Authority's Monitoring Officer under the conditions defined within the Service Level Agreement be approved.

17. Activity Update

(Item C1 – Presentation from Director Response and Resilience and Director Prevention, Protection, Customer Engagement and Safety)

- (1) The Authority received a presentation on noteworthy operational incidents which covered the firefighting and rescue techniques that were employed, the equipment and resources used, and any lessons learned.
- (2) As part of the presentation there was also an overview on the building safety activities in relation to a premises in Maidstone.

- (3) Mrs Waterman asked if the foam used in the incidents shown is bad for the environment. The Director of Response & Resilience explained that it is kinder to the environment than older versions and has been signed off by the Environment Agency.
- (4) Mr Henderson asked if there are mechanisms to claim back costs to the Service for incidents caused by negligence. The Chief Executive Officer responded that while there are some options to recoup costs in specific situations, we tend not to use these as customers have already paid for our service.
- (5) RESOLVED that: -
 - (a) The contents of the presentation be noted.

18. Information Update

(Item C1 – Report by Chief Executive)

- (1) The Authority considered information updates on: -
 - A. Inspection Update
 - B. Performance Update
 - C. Response and Resilience Update
 - D. Protection, Prevention and Customer Engagement Update
 - E. Freedom of Information Update
 - F. Pensions and Pension Board Update
- (2) RESOLVED that: -
 - (a) The contents of the report be noted.

18. Annual Report of the Monitoring Officer

(Item C1 – Report by Chief Executive)

- (1) The Service Level Agreement dated 4 June 2024 between the Authority and Swale Borough Council requires the Monitoring Officer to provide an annual report which sets out the current governance arrangements along with an update on activities undertaken pursuant to that agreement. This provides Members, the Authority and the community with valuable information to promote confidence in the high ethical standards of the Authority.
- (2) The Authority considered the content of the report.
- (3) RESOLVED that: -
 - (b) The contents of the report be noted.

Meeting adjourned at 13:28.

By: Chief Executive

To: Kent and Medway Fire and Rescue Authority – 16 October 2025

Subject: CRMP CONSULTATION ON THE RELOCATION OF A WATER

SAFETY UNIT AND THE INTRODUCTION OF THE NEW RURAL

PLAN

Classification: Unrestricted

FOR DECISION

SUMMARY

This report covers the findings from the responses to the public consultation on the proposal to move one of our Water Safety Units from Sheppey fire station to Rochester fire station and replace the rigid boat currently located on the dock in Strood with a personal watercraft, and the introduction of our new Rural Plan.

This forms part of the programme of work of our CRMP (Community Risk Management Plan).

RECOMMENDATIONS

Members are requested to:

1. Approve the findings report from the public consultation on the proposal to move one of our Water Safety Units from Sheppey fire station to Rochester fire station and replace the rigid boat currently located on the dock in Strood with a personal watercraft, and the introduction of the new Rural Plan. The consultation responses report can be accessed via the following link:

https://www.kent.fire-uk.org/report/public-consultation-findings-summer-2025

- 2. Approve the move of one of our Water Safety Units from Sheppey fire station to Rochester fire station and replace the rigid boat currently located on the dock in Strood with a personal watercraft.
- 3. Approve the new Rural Plan

LEAD/CONTACT OFFICER: Chief Executive, Ann Millington

TELEPHONE NUMBER: 01622 692121
EMAIL: kmfraclerk@kent.fire-uk.org
BACKGROUND PAPERS: None

KENT AND MEDWAY FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

MINUTES of the Meeting of the Audit and Governance Committee held on Thursday 25th September, at Kent Fire and Rescue Service Headquarters, The Godlands, Tovil, Maidstone, Kent, ME15 6XB.

PRESENT: - Mr V Maple, Mr Mr B Kemp, Mr W Chapman, Mr R Ford, Mr M Hood, Mr N Wibberley, Mr M Munday, Mr A Brady, Mr O Bradshaw, and Mrs J Waterman (Independent Member).

APOLOGIES: - Mr P Webb

OFFICERS:- The Chief Executive, Miss A Millington; Director of Finance, Mr B Fullbrook; Director, Response and Resilience, Mr M Deadman; Director Prevention, Protection and Customer Engagement, Mr J Quinn; Assistant Director, Response, Mr N Griffiths; Head of Finance, Treasury and Pensions, Mrs N Walker; Strategy and Risk Manager, Mr P Goodwin; Head of Policy, Dr O Thompson and the Clerk to the Authority, Mrs K Driver.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: - Interim Head of Internal Audit, Mr R Smith and Ms L Taylor Kent County Council (KCC) Internal Audit; Mr M Dean, External Auditor.

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

1. Election of Chair 2025/26

(Item A1)

- (1) Mr Kemp moved, Mr Hood seconded, that Mr Maple be elected Chair of the Audit & Governance Committee.
- (2) There being no other nominations, Mr V Maple was declared the elected Chair of the Audit & Governance Committee for 2025/26.

2. Election of Vice-Chair 2025/26

(Item A2)

- (1) Mr Bradshaw moved, Mr Chapman Seconded that Mr Ford be elected the Vice-Chair of the Audit & Governance Committee
- (2) There being no other nominations, Mr R Ford was declared the elected Chair of the Audit & Governance Committee for 2025/26.

3. Chair's Announcements

(Item A3)

- (1) Chair would like to give thanks to Mr Kemp for all his work as the previous Vice-Chair.
- (2) Chair welcomes all new Audit & Governance members and thanked those returning members who have previously served the Committee.

4. Membership/Apologies

(Item A4)

- (1) Following the last Kent County Council election, there has been a lot of change to their members. Chair listed new member names.
- (2) Chair confirmed those who had sent apologies.
- (3) Chair introduced Mrs J Waterman, the Independent Person and explained her roles on both Audit & Governance and Kent & Medway Fire & Rescue Authority

5. Declarations of interest in agenda items (item A5)

(1) No declarations made

6. Minutes of the Audit & Governance Committee – 24th April 2025 (*Item A6*)

- (1) RESOLVED that: -
 - (a) The minutes of the Authority meeting held on 24th April 2025 be approved and signed as a true record.

7. Annual Review of the Code of Corporate Governance 2025

(Item B1 – Report by Head of Policy)

- (1) The Committee considered the report on the Code of Corporate Governance following its annual review.
- (2) RESOLVED that: -
 - (a) The Annual Review of the Code of Corporate Governance 2025, be approved.

8. Corporate and Strategic Risk Update.

(Item B2 – Report by Strategy & Risk Manager)

- (1) The Committee received an update on the ongoing work to enhance our approach to corporate and strategic risks.
- (2) The Chief Executive Officer gave a brief introduction and explanation of the work the Strategy & Risk Manager does and gave thanks for the work so far.
- (3) Mrs Waterman noted that there are "regular" Business Continuity reviews and wanted to know how often these are? Strategy & Risk Manager stated that he has monthly meetings with the Head of Resilience to discuss business continuity and resilience, look at what changes or are needed and what risks need there are to a variety of areas. In addition to this, the Chief Executive Officer explained there is a wide range of ongoing work looking at a variety of risks and the potential consequences in a very detailed way in order to mitigate risk and prepare for all possible outcomes.
- (4) In relation to the paragraph stating: "Where alternative options prevent us from delivering an effective response, a moderate financial loss of up to £100,000 would be tolerated to pursue our objectives, as would minor concerns regarding confidentiality of information or use of data." Mr Hood wanted to know the kind of circumstances that may apply to. The Chief Executive Officer gave a hypothetical example of a CRMP consultation, where the Authority is considering fire station closures. Should a member of the public decide to take the Authority to court to stop the closure, while Judicial Reviews are rare, they are also expensive. The Authority must be able to tolerate a limit in order to move the Service forward.
- (5) Mrs Waterman questioned when the delivery of risk competence and capability training was expected to be delivered. The Chief Executive Officer responded that this is something that is continuously carried out, the most recent example being the health conferences that

- have just taken place. The next Fire Futures will include a Change Expert who will be going over Black Box Thinking and managing change.
- (6) Mr Maple wanted to draw members attention to the Corporate Risk Management Policy which notes the 10 parts of a Good Risk Culture, and while he feels that everywhere should adopt similar principles, he feels it's a good thing to have it clearly included in the policy itself.
- (7) RESOLVED that: -
 - (a) The refreshed Risk Appetite Statement be approved.
 - (b) The Risk Tolerance Matrix be approved.
 - (c) The Tier 2 Policy be approved.
 - (d) The Risk Diagnostic Tool to be used in 2026 be noted
- 9. Internal Audit Annual Report and Audit opinion 2024/25

(B3 – Report by R Smith – KCC Internal Audit)

- (1) The Interim Head of Internal Audit briefly presented the final Internal Audit Annual Report for 2024/25 for Members to review.
- (2) Mrs Waterman wanted clarification on Section 5 areas that are marked as "partial conformity", is this because there isn't adequate evidence to say "generally conforms" or is this that those areas do only partially conform? Interim Head of Internal Audit stated that it is due to evidence not being in place. That while these areas may actually conform, he is being prudent in ensuring there is evidence to show each point.
- (3) Mr Brady raised a number of questions relating to the issues noted in the Disaster (Cyber Security) Recovery & Back Up Arrangements. Firstly, is there a plan to review and document Recovery Time Objectives before the Auditors follow up. The Chief Executive officer stated there is. He also wanted to know when the Cyber Incident Response Plan will be developed. The Chief Executive Officer responded that this is underway however, we are looking for a Cyber Security expert and would ideally want them to assist with this, however the search for one is proving difficult. Mr Brady wanted to know how the Authority are ensuring 3rd parties are doing what they need to in order to conform with any measures we put in place. The Chief Executive Officer confirmed that we are in the process of redrawing all terms and conditions of supplier contracts and remapping the supply chain. We are making sure there are clear decisions on who owns what data, what cyber security measures are needed and that even smaller supplier contracts will go into further detail on this area. There are particular issues which affect Fire & Rescue Services, preventing them form getting the top level of certification. This is generally around equipment used in incident command, which is shared and can't be locked to one specific user because of the nature of the situation and how command works. Finally, Mr Brady wanted to know if the Al Policy is being rewritten to include 3rd parties and it was confirmed by the Chief Executive officer that it is.
- (4) Mr Hood considered whether we are using the correct metric for the Internal Audit Performance report. He wonders if it would be less complicated to use number of days late, rather than %'s as he isn't sure what the % means in terms of how late things are. The Interim Head of Internal Audit noted that he would be happy to work on the outcomes with the Director of Finance to ensure the Authority is getting the best out of the audit process.
- (5) RESOLVED that:
 - (a) the Internal Audit Annual Report, be approved.

10. The Provisional Revenue and Capital Budget Outturn for 2024/25 – Summary (Item B4)

- (1) The Committee reviewed the summary report which is aimed at providing members with the assurance needed to formally approve the 2024/25 Statement of Accounts.
- (2) Mr Wibberley wanted to know if the underspend would be taken into account in the following years and have an impact on funding. The Director of Finance confirmed that this is not how the funding works and that the underspend would not change the funding in upcoming years. This particular underspend was a one off as it came from the government grants for pensions which were invested while waiting to be paid out.
- (3) Mrs Waterman raised a query regarding the cost of written off fire engines and whether the accidents behind these being written off were avoidable? The Head of Finance confirmed that no, these were not avoidable. The appliances were at an incident on the motorway and were hit from behind. While one could be repaired the other could not. Given the amount of time clams take to go through insurance companies, it was not feasible to wait for the claim to be paid before replacing the appliance. The Director, Response and Resilience added that the police had investigated but did not prosecute in this case. As a result of the incident, additional lights have been added to the rear of the appliances, more than are required, in an attempt to further increase visibility. There is also a Driver Support Group which works to improve driving performance, reviews CCTV and ensures things such as the Driving at Work policy are updated. We have also been pushing the need to report every incident, no matter how minor, which means there has been an uptick in the number of reports.
- (4) Mr Maple noted the while the issues affecting external audits are not local and are affecting all public sector bodies, many to a much bigger extent than we have seen, can we be confident in the current December completion date? The Director of Finance confirmed that the next Audit & Governance meeting is January, with the report going to the Authority in February, making a December completion a necessity. The External Auditor confirmed the ves. we are on track for December completion.
- (5) RESOLVED that:
 - (a) The contents of the Provisional Revenue and Capital Budget Outturn summary be approved.

11. Annual Governance Statement for 2024/25

(Item B5)

- (1) Members reviewed the Annual Governance Statement 2024/25
- (2) Mr Maple noted that while these documents are very long and can be extremely complex, this one has been done in a way that it is manageable and clear which is beneficial to members.
- (3) RESOLVED that:
 - (a) The Annual Governance Statement 2024/25 be approved.

12. Annual Statement of Accounts 2024/25

(Item B6)

- (1) The Head of Finance gave a presentation explaining the key financial statements and what they show. Members received the Annual Statement of Accounts for approval.
- (2) Mrs Waterman wanted to know if there was slippage with the Ashford Live Fire project, which was the contractor's fault, are there contractual clauses and penalties to be levied? The Director Prevention, Protection and Customer Engagement confirmed there are penalty options if the contractors were to slip, but this was not currently the case. We are still on track for starting live training in September and handing the keys over in May. The delays with the start of the project were due to protracted negotiations to ensure we got the best value.
- (3) Mr Maple thanked Mrs Waterman for the question and noted this is something the Audit & Governance Committee have been monitoring closely and a keen to see the final outcome. He also thanked the Finance team for the clear presentation

(4) RESOLVED that: -

- (a) The draft 2024/25 Statement of Accounts be approved.
- (b) The remaining contents of the report are noted.

13. External Auditors Final Audit Plan for 2024/25

(Item B7)

- (1) Members were presented with the External Auditors Final Audit Plan which provided a summary of the key areas that the Auditors are required to assess.
- (2) Mr Maple raised a question over the substantial fee increase and wanted to know if there is any corporate view of why that's the case. He did note that while the increase is substantial, other councils have seen much higher. Mr Dean clarified that it's the first year of the IFRS 16 new leasing standard being applied, which has created uncertainty about the increased workload. The figure is a holding figure and represents the highest it should get, but it may come down.

(3) RESOLVED that:

- (a) The External Auditors Final Audit Plan be approved.
- (b) The External Auditors' Progress and Sector Update Report be noted.

14. Chair of Audit & Governance Committee's Annual Report to the Authority (Item B8)

(1) For the benefit of new members, Mr Maple explained that the Authority started Audit & Governance before it was obligatory to do so. It has also always had a Chair who is not from the same party as the Chair of the Authority which demonstrates good governance and scrutiny. The pre-meeting training has also been done for a long time and has proved to be an excellent way to ensure the Committee has a good understanding of the reports they are presented.

(2) RESOLVED that:

(a) The Chair of Audit & Governance Committee's Annual Report to the Authority be approved.

15. Mid-Year Treasury Management and Investment Update for 2025/26

(Item C1)

(1) Members considered the Mid-Year Management and Investment Update.

- (2) Mr Brady asked why it was decided to invest £5million in RBS Group and was that because the interest rate was low? The Head of Finance responded that this was one of our more recent deposits and while we like to diversify investments, where it is deposited will depend on the maturity of the investment. The days of 4% rates are coming to an end.
- (3) Mr Brady also wanted to know if we have considered investing in local communities. Have we looked at diversifying in that way? The Head of Finance confirmed that we do have that ability in the Treasury Management Strategy, but it does depend on who is looking to borrow. Mr Maple noted that this is an interesting question and one which has the potential for wider debate at a future meeting. The Director of Finance confirmed there is a possibility to include in the revised strategy in February.
- (4) RESOLVED that:
 - (a) The contents of the Mid-Year Treasury Management and Investment Update be noted.

16. Internal Audit Progress Update for 2025/26

(Item C2)

- (1) Members considered the Internal Audit Progress Update.
- (2) Mr Brady asked what we would be audited on with the available days. The Chief Executive Officer responded that available time would be used to take a deep dive into the Inspection points.
- (3) RESOLVED that:
 - (a) The contents of the Internal Audit Progress be noted.

10. Urgent/other business

- (1) Mr Brady raised a question about the possibility of members visiting local fire stations. Mr Chapman agreed that he felt this would be beneficial and was particularly keen to visit On-Call stations, making mention of the difficulties in recruiting for On-Call roles. While both the Chief Executive Officer and the Director of Response and Resilience understood the reasoning behind this, they also noted that there would be much more benefit in councillors attending exercises (as has been done in the past) rather than the stations. This is for a number of reasons however, but the main issue with attending wholetime/day crewed stations is that there is no way to prevent crews being called to an incident and the councillors wasting their time attending stations with no one available to talk to them. For On-Call crews, the only time they are in the stations together is for their weekly drill nights. These cannot be interrupted, given there is a minimum amount of training hours required per year to remain competent, and those hours are hard to accommodate.
- (2) RESOLVED that:
 - (a) A paper on the issues of On-Call recruitment would be added to the February Authority meeting agenda

By: Chief Executive

To: Kent and Medway Fire and Rescue Authority – 16 October 2025

Subject: CRMP CONSULTATION ON THE RELOCATION OF A WATER

SAFETY UNIT AND THE INTRODUCTION OF THE NEW RURAL

PLAN

Classification: Unrestricted

FOR DECISION

SUMMARY

This report covers the findings from the responses to the public consultation on the proposal to move one of our Water Safety Units from Sheppey fire station to Rochester fire station and replace the rigid boat currently located on the dock in Strood with a personal watercraft, and the introduction of our new Rural Plan.

This forms part of the programme of work of our CRMP (Community Risk Management Plan).

RECOMMENDATIONS

Members are requested to:

1. Approve the findings report from the public consultation on the proposal to move one of our Water Safety Units from Sheppey fire station to Rochester fire station and replace the rigid boat currently located on the dock in Strood with a personal watercraft, and the introduction of the new Rural Plan. The consultation responses report can be accessed via the following link:

https://www.kent.fire-uk.org/report/public-consultation-findings-summer-2025

- 2. Approve the move of one of our Water Safety Units from Sheppey fire station to Rochester fire station and replace the rigid boat currently located on the dock in Strood with a personal watercraft.
- 3. Approve the new Rural Plan

LEAD/CONTACT OFFICER: Chief Executive, Ann Millington

TELEPHONE NUMBER: 01622 692121
EMAIL: kmfraclerk@kent.fire-uk.org
BACKGROUND PAPERS: None

COMMENTS

Background

- 1. The Fire and Rescue National Framework for England requires every fire and rescue authority to assess all foreseeable fire and rescue related risks that could affect their communities, whether they are local, cross-border, multi-authority and/or national, and prepare an 'integrated risk management plan', or as it is now referred to within the sector, a 'Community Risk Management Plan' (CRMP).
- 2. In 2022 we consulted with our customers on a 10-year analysis of the key societal, economic, technological, and environmental changes that were emerging in Kent and Medway and could present risks to local communities.
- 3. The next stage of the CRMP process was a comprehensive risk analysis and assessment. Undertaken in line with the National Fire Chiefs' Council's "Community Risk Management Planning Strategic Framework", this risk assessment was presented to, and approved by, Members at the meeting of the Authority held on 19 October 2023.
- 4. Between 1 November 2023 and 1 February 2024, the Authority undertook public consultation on the "Creating a Safer Future Together" document. This also included consultation on the council tax options for 2024/25. There was overwhelming support for both the risks identified and the areas of focus set out in the CRMP document. This was then approved by Members in the February 2024 meeting of the Fire Authority.
- 5. In July 2024 Members approved the CRMP delivery plan along with the strategic priorities and enabling plans covering the next four-year strategy period. The plan is based on the responses to the public consultation on the risk analysis and assessment set out in the "Creating a Safer Future Together" document.
- 6. Following Members' approval in October 2024, we undertook further consultation on response time definitions, changes to our response time targets, and the council tax options for 2025/26. This ran from 21 October 2024 to 18 January 2025. As with the previous consultation, there was clear public support for the proposals, which were then approved by Members at the February 2025 meeting of the Fire Authority.
- 7. At the July 2025 meeting of the Authority the latest position on the implementation of the CRMP was presented. As part of the next phase of our CRMP programme of work Members approved consulting with the public on moving one of our water rescue assets from Sheppey fire station to Rochester fire station and our new Rural Plan.
- 8. In relation to our Water Safety Units (currently stationed at Sheppey [Sheerness], Larkfield, Tonbridge, Whitstable, and Folkestone), our analysis identified that moving the Water Safety Unit from Sheppey Fire Station to Rochester Fire Station and replacing the rigid boat currently located on the dock in Strood with a Personal Watercraft (similar in appearance to a Jet Ski), would reduce the time it takes to get

- the right water rescue resource to scene and into the water and improve the speed of response in the water. This addresses an action identified in the CRMP to ensure our water rescue resources are in the right area and have access to innovations in new equipment to conduct effective water rescues according to local risk profiles.
- 9. The Rural Plan proposes a package of actions to improve safety and resilience in rural communities, including more targeted prevention and fire safety support for residents and businesses, specialist wildfire teams and equipment, better collaboration with landowners and councils to manage green spaces, and enhanced operational response through investment in specialist vehicles, recruiting more on-call firefighters, and improved rural fire station capability. It also commits to strengthening water supply infrastructure, reviewing rural response time targets, supporting community preparedness and recovery planning, and minimising the environmental impact of its operations, all underpinned by annual review and transparent reporting.

Public consultation and findings

- 10. The consultation ran from 08 July 2025 to 01 October 2025 and generated a total of 1,337 responses. This continues the trend of active public involvement for our CRMP consultations and, considering the more specific nature of this consultation, compares favourably to the 1,833 responses received for the second consultation (October 2024 to January 2025 on response time standards) and the 1,859 responses received for the first public consultation of the current CRMP (November 2023 to February 2024on the "Creating a Safer Future Together" CRMP document). These high numbers reflect our carefully planned approach and the effort of our Engagement team to raise awareness of the CRMP with our stakeholders and customers.
- 11. In addition to the consultation survey, in-person feedback was gathered during several community events and through engagement with community groups. Through our Community Intelligence and Partnerships Team, the consultation successfully engaged individuals across a broad and diverse range of demographics. Feedback was obtained from a wide representation of community groups and demographics, including but not limited to: farmers and agricultural workers, religious groups, ethnic minority groups, disability groups, elderly groups, Pride events and support groups including parental, social and cost of living.
- 12. Within the survey a clear majority agreed with the proposal to move our water rescue assets from Sheppey fire station to Rochester fire station, and replace the rigid boat currently located on the dock in Strood with a personal watercraft (82.98%, 863 responses), and agreed with the contents of our Rural Plan (82.42%, 614 responses). This support gives us a basis to implement these proposals.
- 13. The report containing the analysis of the responses to the consultation is presented as an electronic attachment to these papers for Members' consideration and approval. This is published on our website in a format that is accessible and allows us to promote it to our customers and those who participated in the consultation.

14. Recognising the support expressed through the consultation responses for our Rural Plan and moving our water rescue assets from Sheppey fire station to Rochester fire station, the next step will be to enact these changes.

IMPACT ASSESSMENT

15. There are no direct impacts from the contents of this paper which cannot be contained within existing budgetary provision.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 16. Members are requested to:
- 16.1 Approve the findings report from the public consultation on the proposal to move one of our Water Safety Units from Sheppey fire station to Rochester fire station and replace the rigid boat currently located on the dock in Strood with a personal watercraft, and the introduction of the new Rural Plan (paragraphs 10 to 14 refer). The consultation responses report can be accessed via the following link:

https://www.kent.fire-uk.org/report/public-consultation-findings-summer-2025

- 16.2 Approve the move of one of our Water Safety Units from Sheppey fire station to Rochester fire station and replace the rigid boat currently located on the dock in Strood with a personal watercraft.
- 16.3 Members are requested to: Approve the new Rural Plan

Findings from KFRS consultation on moving the Water Safety Unit from Sheppey fire station to Rochester fire station and the new Rural Plan

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Introduction

The Fire and Rescue National Framework for England requires every fire and rescue authority to assess all foreseeable fire and rescue related risks that could affect their communities, whether they are local, cross-border, multi-authority and/or national, and prepare an 'integrated risk management plan', or as it is now referred to within the fire and rescue sector, a 'Community Risk Management Plan' (CRMP).

In July 2025, as part of the next phase of our CRMP programme of work, Members approved consulting with the public on the following:

- Moving one of our Water Safety Units from Sheppey fire station to Rochester fire station and replacing the rigid boat currently located on the dock in Strood with a personal watercraft.
- · Agreement with our new Rural Plan.

This report sets out the findings of this consultation.

Who we are and what we do

We are a forward thinking, modern fire and rescue service with a long and proud history. Every minute of every day, we are here to save lives and make our county even safer. Together with our customers, we are creating a safer future for Kent and Medway.

We provide four main services:

- Prevention we work with customers in their homes and in places of education to promote safer behaviours and messaging to help prevent fires, road crashes and drownings.
- Protection we are the regulator for fire safety in Kent and Medway. Our specialist teams
 work with businesses to ensure buildings are designed to be safe and then kept safe for
 occupants, as well as looking at firefighting facilities for firefighters.
- Response we respond to a wide range of incidents, including fires, road crashes, water rescues and working with other emergency services.
- Resilience we work with partner agencies to plan for major emergencies and events, such as large fires, flooding and pandemics, to help keep people safe.

Raising awareness of the consultation

Stakeholders

To ensure that our consultation was as broad-based and inclusive as possible, it was advertised in the following ways:

External:

- a) Promoted on the front page of our website.
- b) Promoted via the news section of our website.
- c) News release sent to local media outlets and followed up with a further email/call.
- d) Interviews with BBC Radio Kent (x2), KMFM, Global (Heart) and Radio Ashford.
- e) Promoted via social media through organic posts, stories and paid adverts and boosts.
- f) Posts published regularly in local community groups on social media.
- g) Featured in print and online publications, including Kent Online and Farmers Weekly.
- h) Promoted using real-life case studies featuring Kent farmers sharing their stories.
- i) Marketing emails were sent to people signed up to receive KFRS news bulletins. This included residents and businesses in Kent and Medway.
- j) The plan was shared via other community newsletters and organisations, such as KALC, housing associations, village groups and clubs, and local authorities.
- k) Promoted via recently launched KFRS newsletter for rural businesses and farmers.
- I) Shared with building safety colleagues and businesses.
- m) Promoted at community engagement events using banners, business cards and giveaways, including Kent County Show, Biddenden Tractor Festival and East Kent Ploughing Match.
- n) Promoted at underrepresented community group events.
- o) Shared with all stakeholders, including MPs and neighbouring FRS.

Internal:

- a) Organisational newsletter (monthly update), July to October.
- b) Corporate digital noticeboards at SHQ, July to October.
- c) News items on intranet, July to October.
- d) Promotion in seminars, July to October.
- e) Email prompt in September to colleagues to complete the form.
- f) Promotion on intranet homepage, July to October.

Social media and email engagement

Organic (non-paid) social media activity conducted through channels including Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), LinkedIn, Instagram, and Nextdoor, have delivered significant results in terms of audience reach.

The count of individuals who viewed the posts is 103,108, reached is 77,038, with a total of 1,039 likes, comments, and shares and clicks directly to the survey.

Paid social media posts and adverts, on LinkedIn, Facebook, and Instagram, have so far reached 129,049 individuals.

Using the email marketing platform, Gov Delivery, targeted emails have been sent to recipients who are subscribed to the 'all Kent and Medway news' topic, and those subscribed to the 'business and responsible persons' topic.

The number of individuals emails reached through these emails is 21,639, with 7,778 unique opens and 676 unique clicks directed towards the survey.

Survey - results and analysis

The consultation ran from 08 July 2025 to 01 October 2025 and generated a total of 1,337 responses.

This continues the trend of active public involvement for our CRMP consultations and, considering the more specific nature of this consultation, compares favourably to the 1,833 responses received for the second consultation (October 2024 to January 2025 on response time standards) and the 1,859 responses received for the first public consultation of the current CRMP (November 2023 to February 2024on the "Creating a Safer Future – Together" CRMP document). These high numbers reflect our carefully planned approach and the effort of our Engagement team to raise awareness of the CRMP with our stakeholders and customers.

Looking back over several years, the number of responses received to the three consultations we have run for the current CRMP (starting 2023/24) are the highest of any recent CRMP consultation (see Table 1).

Table 1. Total number of CRMP consultation responses received 2018 to 2025

						Current CRMP		
Year	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	Nov 2023 to Feb 2024	Oct 2024 to Jan 2025	July to Oct 2025
Number of respondents	437	215	298	34	440	1,859	1,833	1,337

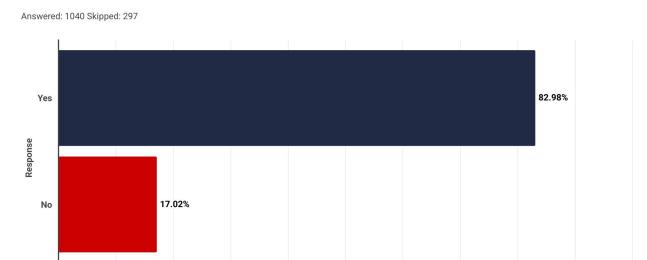
Agreement with the proposal to move one of our Water Safety Units

Most incidents requiring a water safety unit now take place in and around the Strood and Rochester stretch of the River Medway. Between 2019 and 2024 we saw a 235% increase in the number of incidents in the River Medway between Maidstone and Chatham. In relation to our Water Safety Units (currently stationed at Sheppey [Sheerness], Larkfield, Tonbridge, Whitstable, and Folkestone), our analysis identified that moving the Water Safety Unit from Sheppey Fire Station to Rochester Fire Station and replacing the rigid boat currently located on the dock in Strood with a Personal Watercraft (similar in appearance to a Jet Ski), would reduce the time it takes to get the right water rescue resource to scene and into the water and improve the speed of response in the water. This addresses an action identified in the CRMP to ensure our water rescue resources are in the right area and have access to innovations in new equipment to conduct effective water rescues according to local risk profiles.

The first question asked respondents whether they agreed with the proposal to move the Water Safety Units currently located at Sheppey fire station to Rochester fire station and replace the rigid boat located on the dock in Strood with a personal watercraft. Of the responses received, 82.98% of respondents stated "yes" (out of a total of 1,040), which indicates a strong level of agreement with this proposal (see Graph 1).

A total of 17.02% of respondents disagreed with the proposal. This question generated a considerable degree of interest and there were over 230 comments received. The majority of these were expressions in support of the proposals. Among those who expressed disagreement, the comments focussed on maintaining the Water Safety Unit at Sheppey fire station and creating a new one based at Rochester fire station. Unfortunately, with the finance and resources available to us, this is not possible. Some comments were left questioning the necessity of having Water Safety Units and proposing that KFRS focus solely on fires. However, as a fire and rescue service, we provide emergency response to fires, road traffic collisions and rescues from height, mud or water.

Graph 1. Do you agree with these proposals?



Answer choices	Percentage of total responses (%)	Number of responses
Yes	82.98%	863
No	17.02%	177
Total	100%	1040

50

Percentage of total responses (%)

80

100

Agreement with the contents of our Rural Plan

10

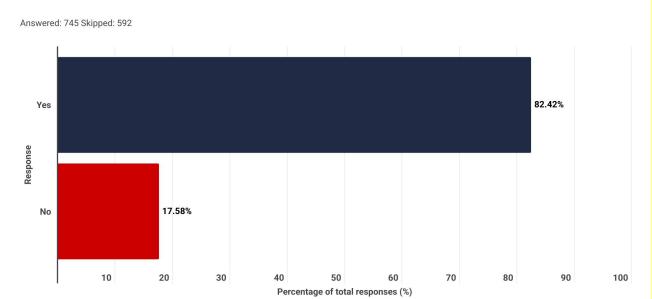
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The Rural Plan proposes a package of actions to improve safety and resilience in rural communities, including more targeted prevention and fire safety support for residents and businesses, specialist wildfire teams and equipment, better collaboration with landowners and councils to manage green spaces, and enhanced operational response through investment in specialist vehicles, recruiting more on-call firefighters, and improved rural fire station capability. It also commits to strengthening water supply infrastructure, reviewing rural response time targets, supporting community preparedness and recovery planning, and minimising the environmental impact of its operations, all underpinned by annual review and transparent reporting.

The next question asked people whether they agreed with the contents of our Rural Plan. Again, there was a high level of agreement with this proposal, with 82.42% of respondents (out of a total of 745) supporting this (see Graph 2).

Graph 2. Do you agree with the contents of our Rural Plan 2025–2029?



Answer choices	Percentage of total responses (%)	Number of responses
Yes	82.42%	614
No	17.58%	131
Total	100%	745

Responses to each of the sections of the Rural Plan

The next set of questions invited respondents to comment on each of the constituent sections of the Rural Plan. These sections are as follows:

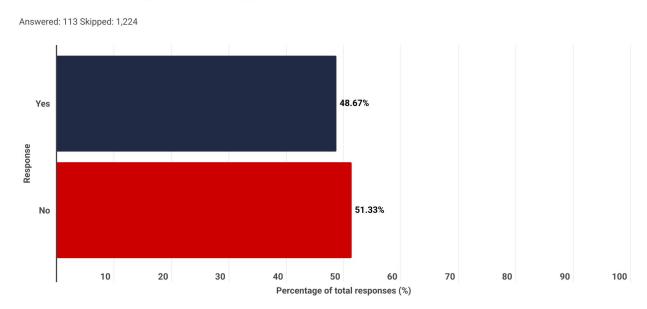
- Responding to Emergencies in Rural Areas
- Loss of public water for firefighting
- Building community resilience and engagement
- Fires in rural homes
- Effective fire safety regulation and support to rural businesses
- Supporting Farmers and Agricultural Businesses and Workers
- Flooding (Water safety)
- Road traffic collisions (RTCs)
- Wildfires
- Supporting medical emergencies in villages and smaller towns
- A workforce to serve rural areas
- Evaluation, review, and continuous improvement

For each of these sections the total number of people who answered the question and breakdown of those who did and did not choose to leave a response is presented along with some of the key themes that were raised in the responses.

Responding to Emergencies in Rural Areas

In relation to Responding to Emergencies in Rural Areas, of those who selected an answer, 48.67% (55 respondents) chose to make comments (Graph 3). Whilst some expressed concern about the resources available to KFRS in the current funding climate, most of the comments were centred on the view that a key area is recruitment of more on-call firefighters. This is an aspect that we fully agree with as on-call firefighters are essential to our emergency response provision. As set out within the Rural Plan, this is an area that is currently being addressed through a dedicated piece of work.

Graph 3. Would you like to make any comments on "Responding to Emergencies in Rural Areas"?



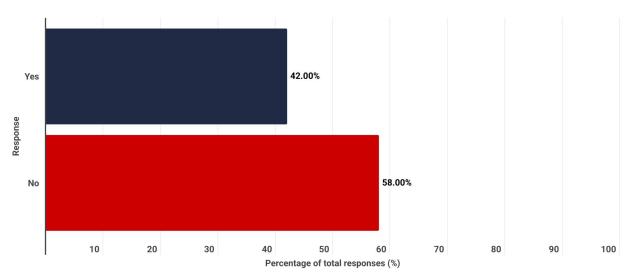
Answer choices	Percentage of total responses (%)	Number of responses
Yes	48.67%	55
No	51.33%	58
Total	100%	113

Loss of public water for firefighting

Among those selecting an answer, 42.00% (42 respondents) commented on this question (Graph 4). In this area responses focussed on concerns over water supply not keeping up with the pressure of new housing development and the need to ensure that KFRS is always given priority access to adequate water supplies whenever needed. We recognise these concerns, and we will continue to work with water companies to ensure there is enough water for us to use in emergencies. We will also look at other ways of ensuring we have a reliable means of accessing water.

Graph 4. Would you to comment on "Loss of public water for firefighting"?



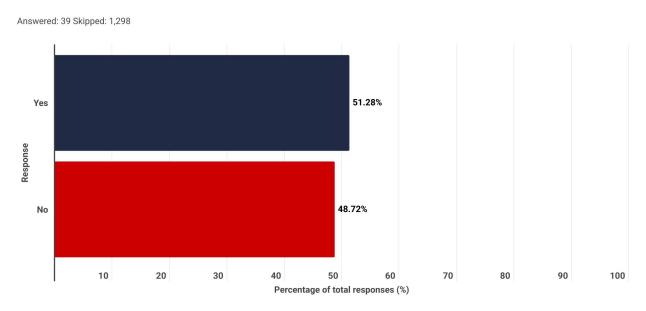


Answer choices	Percentage of total responses (%)	Number of responses
Yes	42.00%	42
No	58.00%	58
Total	100%	100

Building community resilience and engagement

This part of the Rural Plan contained fewer comments, with 39 choosing to answer (Graph 5). The comments that were received expressed people's view of the importance of ensuring that KFRS can adequately respond to incidents in rural areas. This important point is being addressed through KFRS continuing to improve it understanding of the risks facing people living and working in villages and small towns and helping to put plans in place to address the risks.

Graph 5. Would you to comment on "Building community resilience and engagement"?

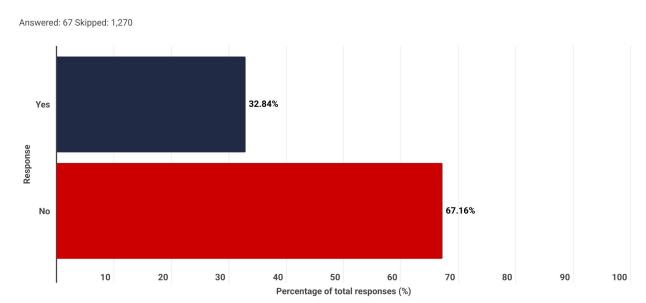


Answer choices	Percentage of total responses (%)	Number of responses
Yes	51.28%	20
No	48.72%	19
Total	100%	39

Fires in rural homes

At 67.16%, a clear majority stated they had no wish to comment on this section (Graph 6). Of those who did (32.84% of respondents, 22 people) again commented on the importance of crewing and availability of on-call fire stations. As with the section 'Responding to Emergencies in Rural Areas', improving on-call availability through increased recruitment is identified in the Rural Plan and is an area that is currently being addressed through a dedicated piece of work.

Graph 6. Would you to comment on "Fires in rural homes"?

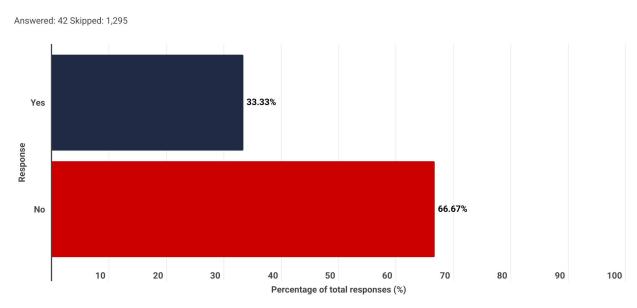


Answer choices	Percentage of total responses (%)	Number of responses
Yes	32.84%	22
No	67.16%	45
Total	100%	67

Effective fire safety regulation and support to rural businesses

From the comments received (33.33% of those answering this question chose to leave a response), there was recognition here of the value of KFRS using a process that flags buildings with a higher chance of a serious fire, making sure that businesses in small towns and villages will be priority areas for our help (Graph 7). This importance of this kind of support was also highlighted as a factor in encouraging rural businesses to set up.

Graph 7. Would you to comment on "Effective fire safety regulation and support to rural businesses"?

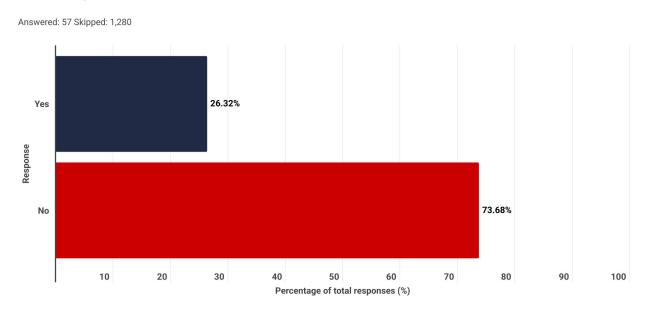


Answer choices	Percentage of total responses (%)	Number of responses
Yes	33.33%	14
No	66.67%	28
Total	100%	42

Supporting Farmers and Agricultural Businesses and Workers

Responses received to this part of the consultation (26.32% of those who answered) expressed widespread agreement with the need to provide support for farmers and the associated work currently being undertaken by KFRS plus the new actions set out within the Rural Plan (Graph 8).

Graph 8. Would you to comment on "Supporting Farmers and Agricultural Businesses and Workers"?



Answer choices	Percentage of total responses (%)	Number of responses
Yes	26.32%	15
No	73.68%	42
Total	100%	57

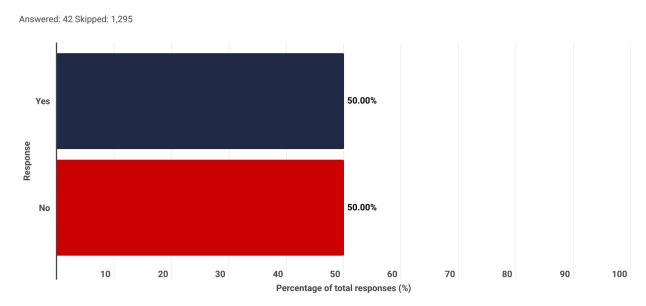
Flooding (Water safety)

Flooding can have a devastating and long- term impact on people's lives, businesses and infrastructure. Our Rural Plan builds upon the work we currently do be able to rescue people and reduce the impact of flooding.

Whilst the number of responses was relatively small (Graph 9) among the comments received some asked whether it was the responsibility of KFRS to respond to flooding emergencies and why the RNLI (Royal National Lifeboat Institution) could respond instead.

This is a good question and from a safety perspective it is worth providing some information about this. The reason is because fire and rescue services have a statutory (i.e. legal) requirement to respond to flooding emergencies and inland water rescue (whilst the Fire and Rescue Service's Act 2004 did not explicitly list flooding as a statutory duty, since 2007 secondary legislation has added this requirement). The RNLI on the other hand operates as a charity that works with HM Coastguard to respond to emergencies at sea and on the coast. This is why in our safety messaging for water rescue we tell people to call 999, and ask for the coastguard if the person is in the sea, or ask for the fire service if it is any other area of water.

Graph 9. Would you to comment on "Flooding (Water Safety)"?

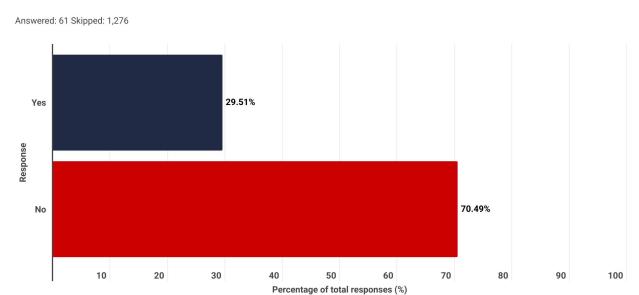


Answer choices	Percentage of total responses (%)	Number of responses
Yes	50.00%	21
No	50.00%	21
Total	100%	42

Road traffic collisions (RTCs)

Whilst this section generated a lower proportion of responses (29.51% versus 70.49%, Graph 10), comments received agreed with our stated focus on enhanced training for RTCs on rural roads. A number of comments also expressed concern at risks from inconsiderately parked cars and use of mobile phones whilst driving. These are issues that we have highlighted and in our safety campaigns and messaging.

Graph 10. Would you to comment on "Road traffic collisions (RTCs)"?



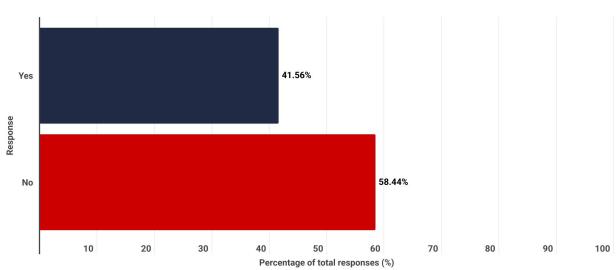
Answer choices	Percentage of total responses (%)	Number of responses
Yes	29.51%	18
No	70.49%	43
Total	100%	61

Wildfires

The most frequently cited issue here was the concern around disposable barbecues not being properly extinguished and removed when finished with. This is an important point and this specific issue was addressed in our June 'Stay safe this summer' campaign, in which we asked people to use disposable barbecues only in authorised areas, and to make sure they are fully cool before disposing of them.

Graph 11. Would you to comment on "Wildfires"?





Answer choices	Percentage of total responses (%)	Number of responses
Yes	41.56%	32
No	58.44%	45
Total	100%	77

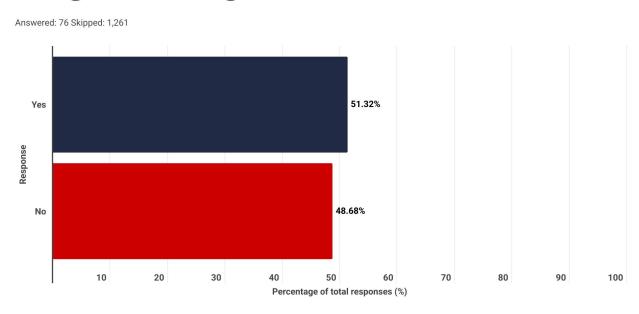
Supporting medical emergencies in villages and smaller towns

A total of 51.32% of people who answered this question chose to comment (Graph 12). Most comments received agreed with KFRS supporting the health sector by responding to life-threatening medical emergencies, with the view being that these should be treated in the same way as any other emergency.

Among those who disagreed, a concern was expressed that this might divert precious KFRS resources from other areas. We recognise this is a legitimate concern, so it is worth stating that our response is limited to the most serious medical emergencies and only when resources are available and can arrive more quickly than the ambulance service.

Our focus is on saving lives, be it in a fire, an RTC or a cardiac arrest. We've been doing this successfully for the past twenty years and the evidence clearly shows it is an approach that has directly saved lives.

Graph 12. Would you to comment on "Supporting medical emergencies in villages and smaller towns"?



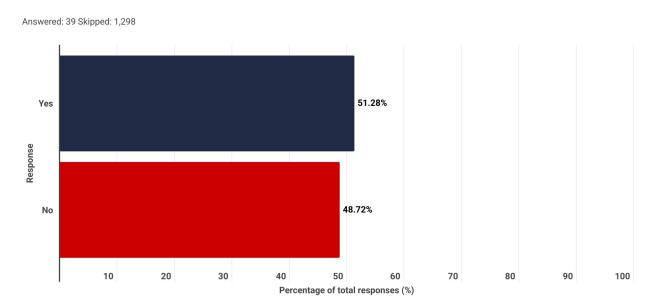
Answer choices	Percentage of total responses (%)	Number of responses
Yes	51.32%	39
No	48.68%	37
Total	100%	76

A workforce to serve rural areas

Of the comments received (51.28% of those who answered this question chose to comment, Graph 13), in relation to increasing the number of on-call firefighters, some respondents suggested looking at increasing the pay offered and increasing the current requirement to able to travel to their designated fire station and be operationally ready within five minutes.

Like other fire services across the country, in recent years it has become increasingly difficult to recruit and keep on-call firefighters. It's especially hard to find on-call firefighters who can work during the day. We've started a project to look at how to get more on-call firefighters available during the day.

Graph 13. Would you to comment on "A workforce to serve rural areas"?



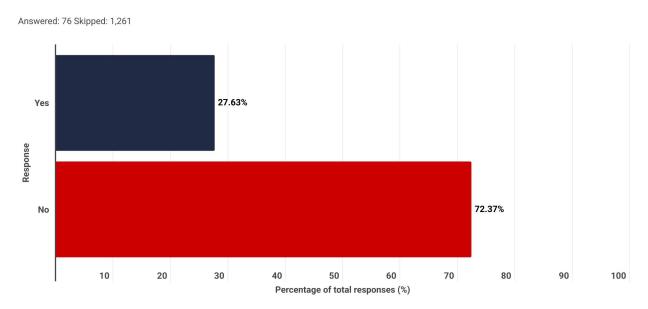
Answer choices	Percentage of total responses (%)	Number of responses
Yes	51.28%	20
No	48.72%	19
Total	100%	39

Evaluation, review, and continuous improvement

The final question sought respondents' views on our commitment to constantly improve our service to the community by using information from our incident records and other tools, and continuing to build a culture where our prevention, building safety, and operational teams work together to stay updated on the latest technologies and ways of working.

Overall, the comments received underscored the importance for this area the need for KFRS to continually look to improve all aspects of its service.

Graph 14. Would you to comment on "Evaluation, review, and continuous improvement"?



Answer choices	Percentage of total responses (%)	Number of responses
Yes	27.63%	21
No	72.37%	55
Total	100%	76

Equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) questions

EDI information is important because it allows us to meet our Public Sector Equality Duty as set out in Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010. As part of this we actively seek to remove barriers in order to improve access to our services, of which consultation on our future direction is a key part. In order to assist us in this, we look to understand the protected characteristics of our customers and those who take the time to engage with us.

Having this information then allows us to understand areas where we can focus our efforts to engage with underrepresented groups in order to ensure that we being as inclusive as possible and truly representative of all the communities that we serve across Kent and Medway.

Respondents' age profile

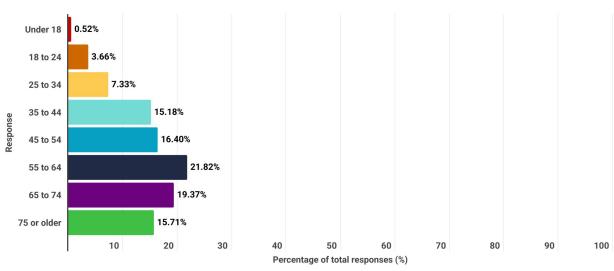
The age profile of this latest consultation was very similar to the previous CRMP consultation (run in 2024/25 on response time standards) and again showed a more balanced aged profile (see Graph 15). Those aged 55 and older comprised 56.90% of the total, which compares to the 55.70% of the last consultation and which is again down on the 70.00% in the first CRMP consultation

This is again more in line with the age profile across Kent and Medway, where 33% of the population are aged 55 and over (33.1% in Kent and 28.7% in Medway, source: Kent Analytics Statistical Bulletin July 2022).

The fact that participation among younger groups followed the pattern of the previous consultation and remained higher (3.66% for 18 to 24 year olds and 7.33% for 25 to 34 year olds), compared to the first consultation, reflects the lessons learned and effort made by our Engagement Team to focus on, and engage with, younger groups.

Graph 15. What's your age?





Answer choices	Percentage of total responses (%)	Amount of responses
Under 18	0.52%	3
18 to 24	3.66%	21
25 to 34	7.33%	42
35 to 44	15.18%	87
45 to 54	16.40%	94
55 to 64	21.82%	125
65 to 74	19.37%	111
75 or older	15.71%	90
Total	100%	573

Respondents' ethnicity

With ethnicity, 93.90% of respondents described themselves as 'White – English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish or British'. Among the remaining respondents, the next three largest groups were 'Any other White background' (1.97%), 'Irish', 'African', 'Any other Mixed or multiple ethnic background', and 'Any other ethnic group' (all at 0.72%)

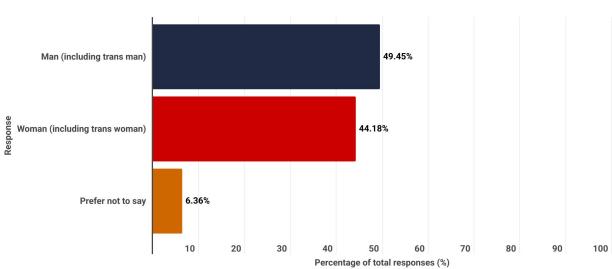
The proportion of white British respondents is somewhat higher than the proportion of 82.4% Kent and Medway residents in this group (Kent 83.2% and Medway 78.3%) Source: <u>2021 Census table:</u> Ethnic group. As with age, the fact that minority groups are underrepresented among respondents highlights that future consultations must always continue to consider how we engage as effectively as possible with minority ethic groups.

Respondents' gender

Removing 'Prefer not to say' from the total, means that, at 52.82%, the gender breakdown was skewed towards males (see Graph 16). This is broadly in line with the profile within Kent and Medway, where the male-female split is 49% to 51%. Source: Kent Analytics Statistical Bulletin July 2022

Graph 16. What is your gender identity?





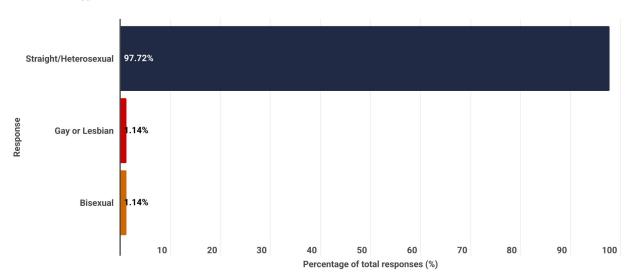
Answer choices	Percentage of total responses (%)	Number of responses
Man (including trans man)	49.45%	272
Woman (including trans woman)	44.18%	243
Prefer not to say	6.36%	35
Total	100%	550

Respondents' sexual orientation

A total of 97.72% of respondents described themselves as 'straight/heterosexual' (see Graph 17). This is slightly higher than the proportion for Kent and Medway, which stands at 90.6%, indicating that LGBTQ+ respondents are under-represented in the survey results. The separate figures are 90.6% for Kent and 90.5% for Medway. Source: 2021 Census table: Gender identity and sexual orientation

Graph 17. Which of the following best describes your sexual orientation?

Answered: 527 Skipped: 810



Answer choices	Percentage of total responses (%)	Number of responses
Straight/Heterosexual	97.72%	515
Gay or Lesbian	1.14%	6
Bisexual	1.14%	6
Total	100%	527

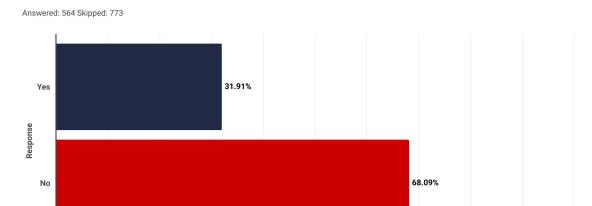
Respondents' health

When asked about their health condition, at 31.91%, nearly a third of respondents reported having a condition that has lasted or is expected to last longer than a year (see Graph 18).

Respondents were then asked a follow up question about whether their conditions reduce their ability to undertake day-to-day activities. Of this 9.06% stated it had a significant negative effect, 23.80% reported a small negative effect, with the remainder stating it had no effect (see Graph 19).

These are very similar to the responses received for the last consultation.

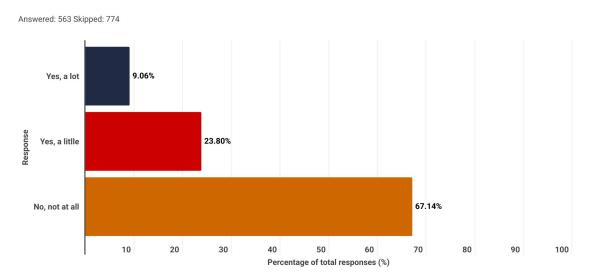
Graph 18. Do you have any physical or mental health conditions or illnesses lasting or expected to last 12 months or more?



Answer choices	Percentage of total responses (%)	Number of responses
Yes	31.91%	180
No	68.09%	384
Total	100%	564

Percentage of total responses (%)

Graph 19. Do any of your conditions or illnesses reduce your ability to carry out day-to-day activities?



Answer choices	Percentage of total responses (%)	Number of responses
Yes, a lot	9.06%	51
Yes, a litlle	23.80%	134
No, not at all	67.14%	378
Total	100%	563

Focus groups - results and analysis

In addition to the consultation survey, in-person feedback was gathered during several events and through engagement with community groups on both the relocation of the Water Safety Unit from Sheppey to Rochester and the new Rural Plan. Feedback was collected using feedback frames, a physical resource where individuals read the question on a piece of paper and anonymously vote for their preferred multiple-choice answer displayed in the frame using a counter. The feedback frames focused on capturing the level of agreement to the movement of water rescue assets proposal and the rural plan areas. Members within the Community Intelligence and Partnerships (CIPS) Team facilitated the data collection and were on hand to answer questions or provide further explanation.

Since the data collection was conducted in-person, the approach involved breaking down the Rural Plan into its titled sections, to make discussions more manageable. Presenting the full plan during in-person sessions was impractical due to its length and often fast-paced nature of the events attended. Therefore, posters were created for each section of the Rural Plan. At least one to two areas of the Rural Plan were covered during each event or community group visit. Participants were asked to read the Rural Plan section and then specify their agreement or disagreement using the feedback frame. Members within the CIPS team used their local and community knowledge to decide on the most relevant sections to discuss at a given event, ensuring all areas of the Rural Plan were covered by the end of the consultation. Participants were also informed of the online survey, to provide them with the opportunity to read and provide comment on the proposal to move one of the Water Safety Units and the full Rural Plan.

In total, fourteen separate events were attended or community groups visited. In addition to attending events, a survey was created using the same questions as the feedback frames, focusing on the 'Supporting farmers, agricultural businesses and workers' part of the Rural Plan. This survey was sent to the East Kent Ploughing Match contacts and local East Kent Farmers WhatsApp group between 16 September and 18 September. This survey was created to increase representation of farmers and those who work or have an interest in agriculture and ensure this section of the rural plan was addressed by the end of the consultation.

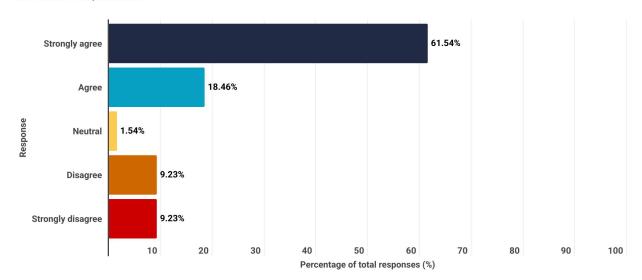
Just over 270 people participated in providing their views. Feedback was obtained from a wide representation of community groups and demographics, including but not limited to: religious groups, ethnic minority groups, disability groups, elderly groups, Pride events and support groups including parental, social and cost of living.

Agreement with the proposal to move one of our Water Safety Units

This proposal was presented at three separate events: two in Swale and one in Medway. A total of 65 participants provided their thoughts. The majority (80.00%) agreed with the proposal, with some commenting that the evidence was clear to justify the movement (Graph 20). This aligns closely with the 82.98% who agreed through the consultation survey.

Graph 20. Level of agreement to the Water Safety Unit and personal watercraft proposal

Total number of respondents: 65



Answer choices	Percentage of total responses (%)	Amount of responses
Strongly agree	61.54%	40
Agree	18.46%	12
Neutral	1.54%	1
Disagree	9.23%	6
Strongly disagree	9.23%	6
Total	100%	65

Agreement with the contents of our Rural Plan

Table 2 shows the number of times each section of the rural plan was covered at an event or with a community group, along with the number of people who provided feedback. The number of responses varied depending on the type of event and the number of attendees The section of the rural plan that received the highest number of responses was 'A workforce to serve rural communities', while the section with the fewest responses was 'Fires in rural homes'.

Table 2. Number of events and number of people who gave their views for each section

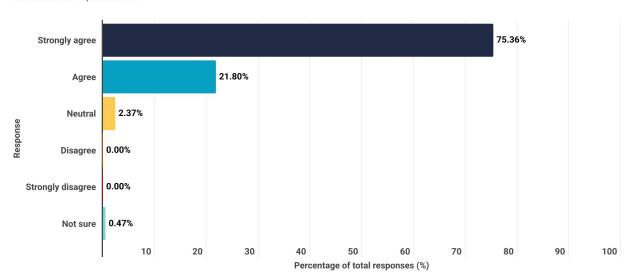
Rural Plan Section	Number of engagement activities	Number of people who gave their views
Building community resilience and engagement	1	12
Fires in rural homes	1	6
Supporting farmers, agricultural businesses and workers	1	14
Wildfires	2	19
Flooding (water safety)	2	22
Road traffic accidents	2	38
Water supplies for firefighting	1	35
Supporting medical emergencies in villages and smaller towns	2	20
A workforce to serve rural communities	1	45

Upon combining the feedback across all rural plan sections, 97.16% of participants agreed with the Rural Plan (Graph 21). A small number of participants voiced confusion about what was being asked, as the plan was a statement and focused on positive future improvements to the service. Therefore, people were unsure why they would disagree, especially as the plan had been developed by KFRS, who people thought were best positioned and informed to make these decisions.

Overall, there was near universal agreement with the Rural Plan, a set of findings that align with the strong support expressed in the consultation survey responses.

Graph 21. Level of agreement to the rural plan





Answer choices	Percentage of total responses (%)	Amount of responses
Strongly agree	75.36%	159
Agree	21.80%	46
Neutral	2.37%	5
Disagree	0.00%	0
Strongly disagree	0.00%	0
Not sure	0.47%	1
Total	100%	211

Summary of key findings

There finding from this consultation can be summarised into four key points. These are as follows:

- 1. High number of responses. The number of responses continued the pattern of the two previous CRMP consultations (see Table 1). This is a reflection of the careful planning and preparation that went into promoting the survey and engaging with stakeholders and customers across Kent and Medway.
- 2. Agreement with the proposal to move one of our Water Safety Units from Sheppey fire station to Rochester fire station and replace the rigid boat currently located on the dock in Strood with a personal watercraft (82.98% for the survey and 80.0% for the focus groups).
- 3. Agreement with the contents of our Rural Plan (82.42% for the survey and 97.0% for the focus groups).
- 4. Representation and participation. Younger age groups (under 55 years) showed a greater level of participation compared to the previous consultation. However, ethnic minorities, and LGBTQ+ groups continue to be under-represented in the survey results. This information will be used to continue inform how we more effectively engage through surveys with different customer groups. To counter this we held targeted focus groups with those underrepresented in the survey sample, successfully engaging individuals across a broad and diverse range of demographics.

Item Number: B2

By: Director of Finance

To: Kent and Medway Fire and Rescue Authority – 16 October 2025

Subject: FINANCIAL UPDATE FOR 2025/26

Classification: Unrestricted

FOR DECISION

SUMMARY

This report provides a mid-year financial update for the current financial year and includes an update on the latest forecast outturn position on the Authority's revenue and capital budgets for 2025/26. The Authority's revenue budget is currently forecast to underspend by £1.166m but highlighted within the report are a number of key risks and assumptions that may impact on the final outturn for 2025/26.

The report includes several other key updates in relation to; significant projects, treasury management activities, and the Firefighters' Pension Fund.

RECOMMENDATION

Members are requested to:

- 1. Agree, in principle, to transfer the final underspend on the 2025/26 revenue budget (currently forecast at £1.166m) to the Insurance and Resource Reserve (paragraphs 9, 9 (a) and 9 (b) refer).
- 2. Note the contents of the report.

COMMENTS

Revenue and Capital Budgets

- 1. **Revenue Budget Adjustments** Since the budget was approved by Members in February it has been necessary to action some adjustments to the budget (virements). These virements do not change the overall net revenue budget but will appear as movements between budget headings and will often be due to identified slippage between financial years so, where this is the case, will be offset by a corresponding transfer to or from earmarked reserves. Details of all budget adjustments (virements) are shown in **Appendices 1** and **2**.
- 2. **Revenue Budget Summary** The revenue budget for the current financial year is £98.232m. Current forecasts are indicating that the anticipated outturn is likely to be an underspend in the region of £1.166m. This includes a forecast net overspend of £186k on pay-related budgets, a forecast net underspend of £510k on non-pay expenditure budgets and a net forecast increase in income of £842k. Detailed explanations for all significant forecast variances are provided in **Appendices 3** and **4** but a summary of the most noteworthy forecast variances has been provided in paragraphs 3 and 4 below.
- 3. Pay-related Variances In July, Members were notified of a 3.2% annual uplift in firefighter pay following agreement between the National Employers Side of the National Joint Council (NJC) for Local Authority Fire and Rescue Services and the Fire Brigades Union. It has since been confirmed that agreement has now been reached on a 3.2% increase for corporate colleagues. The 2025/26 budget included provision for a 2% uplift for all pay groups, so an increase of 3.2% has resulted in a pressure of around £820k for this financial year. As the pay award for firefighters is applicable from July, the full year impact equates to around £1m, so a £1m pressure will be built into budget proposals for 2026/27 and the Medium-Term Financial Plan for 2026 2030. It is currently forecast that the pressure resulting from the higher than budgeted pay awards can largely be contained within the overall budget for pay in 2025/26, primarily because of a freeze on recruitment to some vacancies whilst they are evaluated to determine if a budget saving can be taken by deleting the post.
- 4. **Non-pay and Income Variances** As reported to Members in July, the largest forecast underspend on non-pay budgets is due to confirmation of a 51% reduction in the Airwave (dedicated radio network for the Emergency Services) costs, resulting in an underspend of around £520k against the budget allocated for 2025/26. This is partly offset by a reduction in grant income of £118k whereby the grant previously provided by the government, to contribute towards the costs of the Airwave contract, has ended a year earlier than previously notified. Investment income is currently forecast to exceed budget (£1.594m) by around £973k, primarily due to unexpected government grants in relation to the Matthews (£13.600m) and McCloud (£2.152m) pensions cases, as these grants

are not expected to be spent in 2025/26. The Authority is in a strong position due to the significant work undertaken by the Payroll and Pensions team enabling these costs to be accounted for in the Authority's 2024/25 Pension Fund Account outturn position. Therefore, the unexpected pension grants will now be available for investment until they are required to be repaid to central Government on completion of the 2025/26 Pension Fund Account top-up process in July 2026.

- 5. **Budget Volatility and Risks** There are still several areas of uncertainty within the current forecast position, so the issues and key assumptions, set out below for Members consideration, could impact on the final outturn position for this financial year:
 - a) Operational pay The budget for operational pay represents around 60% of the Authority's overall net revenue budget for 2025/26. As a proportion of this budget is allocated to fund variable pay, such as overtime (for whole-time colleagues) and activity pay (for on-call colleagues) several assumptions have been made using historic data and trends to project unknown future costs. In addition, recent changes to pension scheme regulations mean that predicting the retirement profile of operational colleagues is much less predictable than in the past so where historic data has become less informative the current forecast has been generated using several updated assumptions. A variation to the estimates used when generating the current forecast will impact on the final outturn.
 - b) Recruitment into vacancies An assumption has been made regarding start dates against some vacant posts; however, the actual position may differ to the assumptions made and will therefore have an impact on the final outturn. Similarly, if a post becomes vacant and a decision is taken to delete the post from the establishment, then additional underspends may arise during the year.
 - c) **Energy costs** The budgets for gas and electricity are currently forecast to underspend by £237k, and although some costs are fixed the variable element can be volatile and changes in usage as a result of unusual weather conditions over the winter may result in a variance to the current forecast.
 - d) Insurance claims and legal costs Costs in this area can be volatile as they are dependent on the level of insurance claims and the number of prosecutions for non-compliance with fire safety standards in the year. If costs incurred during the year are higher than the allocated base budgets, there may be a requirement to draw funds down from the Insurance and Resource Reserve to fund the additional costs. Some costs in relation to successful prosecutions for non-compliance with fire safety standards may be recovered through the courts.

- e) Investment Returns The Bank of England's Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) cut interest rates from 4.25% to 4.00% at its August meeting and subsequently voted to hold the interest rate at 4% at its September meeting. Expectations are that the Base rate will remain at 4.00% to the end of 2025. The current forecast is based on various assumptions on timing of future base rate changes and levels of cash balances available for investment purposes. If the actual experience differs to these assumptions, there may be a change in the amount of investment returns achieved in comparison to the current forecast.
- f) Slippage of planned spend Although a proportion of infrastructure spend has already been slipped to 2026/27, it is possible that further supply chain issues may arise during the year and there may also be delays in other areas of planned work meaning that additional expenditure is slipped to 2026/27 later in the year.
- 6. Infrastructure Plan and Capital Budgets The Infrastructure Plan contains all planned capital expenditure and some large one-off revenue expenditure, such as investment in IT projects. Since the budget was approved by Members in February the capital budget has been increased by £1.533m from £13.677m, to a revised £15.210m. This is largely due to capital expenditure that was slipped from 2024/25 into 2025/26 and relates to the Ashford Fire Station and Live Fire Training Facility project (£1.074m slippage). The revenue infrastructure budget has also been increased, from £6.950m to £7.708m. This is also primarily due to slippage of budgets from 2024/25 into 2025/26 and relates to operational equipment purchases and IT systems and hardware upgrades. More detailed explanations regarding adjustments to the infrastructure budgets are provided at Appendices 5 and 6.
- 7. **Capital Receipts Reserve** The opening balance of the capital receipts reserve, on 1 April 2025, was £8.647m. It is forecast that £1.624m of capital receipts will be used to part-fund capital spend in 2025/26. A day crewed house in Whitstable has been sold and achieved a capital receipt of £217k (net of the cost of sale) and a further capital receipt of £214k (net of the cost of sale) has been achieved from the sale of a day crewed house in Sittingbourne, giving a forecast year-end balance of £7.454m.
- 8. **Revenue Reserves** The Authority maintains a general reserve balance, representing approximately 5% (£4.890m for 2025/26) of the base revenue budget. In addition, there are a small number of earmarked reserves, the largest of which is the Infrastructure Reserve (opening balance on 1 April 2025 of £27.621m), which funds a significant proportion of the capital and revenue spend on infrastructure assets. The details and forecast closing balances on these reserves are attached at **Appendix 7**.

- 9. Allocation of Revenue Budget Underspend The Insurance and Resource Reserve is one of five Earmarked Reserves held by the Authority and its main purpose is to meet exceptional one-off costs or to be used as a resource to temporarily address unexpected funding shortfalls. Members are asked to agree in principle that any underspend that arises at the end of the 2025/26 financial year, will be transferred to the Insurance and Resource Reserve for the following reason:
 - a) On 20 June 2025, the Government released The Fair Funding Review 2.0 consultation, setting out the government's proposed approach to reforming the way local authority funding is allocated from the 2026/27 financial year onwards. An assessment of the impact of the proposals set out in the consultation has highlighted that the Authority's funding from Government Grants and Business Rates is likely to reduce by several million pounds over the Spending Review period (2026/27 to 2028/29). The Authority's actual funding allocations for 2026/27 to 2028/29 will not be confirmed until the Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement 2026/27 is released in November or December 2025. As well as confirming the level of funding it should also be confirmed at this point if any funding cuts will be front-loaded in 2026/27 or spread more evenly over the Spending Review period (2026/27 to 2028/29).
 - b) As a result of the proposals set out in the Fair Funding Review 2.0 consultation it would be prudent to set aside additional resource to strengthen the Authority's financial preparedness for core funding reductions from 2026/27 onwards. This will provide crucial financial support, should it be necessary to, for example, balance the budget as a one-off whilst plans are implemented to deliver base budget savings. A presentation will be given to Members later on this agenda, in relation to our early thoughts and assumptions on the Authority's Medium-Term Financial Plan 2026 2030.

Other Financial Matters and Updates

- 10. Ashford Fire Station and Live Fire Training Facility The development of the live fire training facility at Ashford Fire Station has hit the midway point with the main structural frame now erected. This will provide firefighters with a new training facility, which offers a multitude of training scenarios (high rise, office, flats, lift, basement). The building is fully scaffolded, and good progress has been made on internal and external walls to close the structure and form internal layouts. The new mains power supply has been installed by UKPN, and associated electrical works are underway to distribute the supply out to the new live fire training building and the contamination management building.
- 11. The next phase of works will see the construction of the main roof, the erection of steel gantries, secondary staircase and the stair training tower and the delivery and installation of the Specialist Smoke Capture and Filtration Plant. Our

- contractor, Morgan Sindall, is due to achieve practical completion in early April 2026, followed by a period of hot commissioning and training. The live fire facility is due to be fully operational from September 2026.
- 12. **Fleet Maintenance Workshop** As highlighted to Members previously, the 10-year Capital Strategy approved at the Authority meeting in February 2025 included an indicative budget allocation of £10m for an Asset Resource Centre (ARC). A new fit-for-purpose premises is required to facilitate the inhouse maintenance and repair services for the Authority's fleet of operational vehicles, and additional operational equipment. As such, provision has previously been made within the Authority's financial plans to progress with this project.
- 13. Historically, the Authority had been outsourcing this function to Kent County Council's commercial arm Commercial Services Trading Limited, but in April 2022 Commercial Services provided notice of its intention to withdraw from providing these services with effect from March 2023. As an interim measure, work was undertaken to transfer this function inhouse by transferring the employees of Commercial Services to the Authority under the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 2006 (TUPE) and to take on and extend the existing premises lease until 2028. At the time it was accepted that the existing premises lease was not the best long-term solution, but it was determined as the only viable option with only 12-months' notice before Commercial Services were due to stop providing this service. The current facility that the Authority has inherited from Commercial Services has limited capacity for the number of vehicles that are required to be maintained in our fleet, creating a potential risk when it comes to meeting legal obligations around vehicle standards. Furthermore, the layout and size of the site does not allow for efficient working practices. Working conditions are also not to the standard that we strive to achieve for our colleagues. A move to a new fit-for-purpose facility offers a real opportunity to secure the proper maintenance and operation of our fleet now and into the future.
- 14. We have undertaken detailed work to assess the potential for other options such as outsourcing and partner collaboration. This highlighted a lack of specialist companies capable of doing the work, as well as demonstrating that outsourcing came with greater costs and reduced resilience over the longer-term. Therefore, since February 2025 more work has been undertaken to assess the potential options for continuing to deliver this function inhouse going forward. As such, a detailed and costed business case is currently being developed. A final proposal, including, details of any requested amendment to the indicative £10m budget which has already been earmarked for this project will be brought to the Authority meeting in February 2026, alongside draft budget proposals for 2026/27 and the Authority's Medium-Term Financial Plan for 2026-2030.
- 15. **Disposal of Vacant Day Crewed Houses** Members have previously approved the disposal of day crewed houses at specific locations when they become

available. A review of the appropriateness of each location was carried out and reconfirmed as current at the Authority meeting in February 2021. Consequently, a house in Whitstable was sold on 12 June 2025 and completed on 7 August 2025 and a house in Sittingbourne was sold on 26 March 2025 and is currently expected to complete on 17 October 2025. The disposal of both houses was undertaken via auction and in accordance with the Authority's Disposal Policy. Details of the amounts received have been provided in paragraph 7.

16. **External Audit** - The External Auditor presented their Indicative Audit Plan to the Audit and Governance Committee in April 2025, setting out their intention for the audit of the Authority's 2024/25 Financial Statements to start in September 2025 and likely to conclude early December 2025. Recent communications with the Auditor have advised that the audit is now not likely to commence until 1 October 2025 and a revised Final Audit Plan for 2024/25 was presented to the Audit and Governance Committee by the External Auditor in September 2025. It is still anticipated that the audit will conclude in early December and, if there are any material adjustments required to the Accounts following the audit a revised set of Accounts will be presented to the Audit and Governance Committee on 29 January 2026 for approval.

Firefighters' Pension Fund Account 2025/26

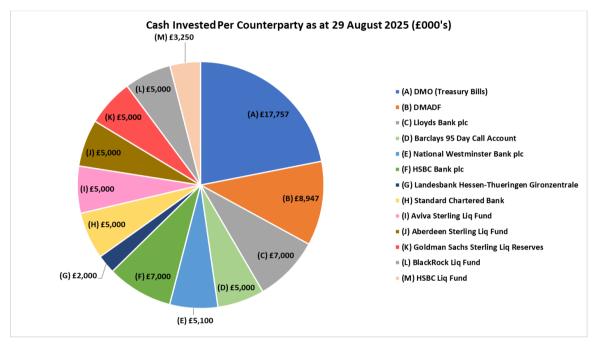
17. Firefighter pension costs that are related to injury whilst on duty are met by the Authority's revenue budget (c. £2m), whereas most other firefighter pension costs are funded by Government so are therefore charged to the Firefighters' Pension Fund Account. Whilst the Authority is responsible for paying all pensions and collecting all contributions, the resultant net deficit on the Firefighters' Pension Fund Account is funded by top-up grant which is paid by the Government in July each year. Details of the latest forecast outturn for the Firefighters' Pension Fund Account for 2025/26 are attached at **Appendix 8**.

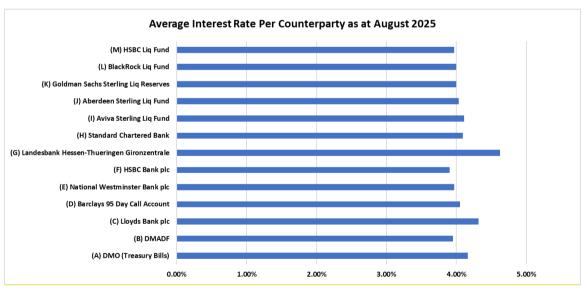
Medium-Term Financial Plan 2026-30

18. On 11 June 2025, the Chancellor published a multi-year Spending Review setting out departmental budgets for 2026/27 to 2028/29 and later, on 20 June 2025 the Fair Funding Review 2.0 consultation was released. The Autumn Budget is expected to take place on 26 November 2025, setting out the Government's taxation and spending plans. Confirmation of the specific funding allocations for the Authority are not expected until late November or December 2025 when it is anticipated that the Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement for 2026/27 will be published. It is expected that the Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement will be a multi-year settlement confirming the Authority's funding allocations for 2026/27 to 2028/29. A presentation will be given to Members later on this agenda, in relation to our early thoughts and assumptions on the Authority's Medium-Term Financial Plan 2026 – 2030.

Cash Invested and Average Interest Rates per Counterparty 2025/26

19. **Cash Invested** - Between 1 April 2025 and 29 August 2025 the Authority invested an average cash balance of £64.99m. The pie chart below shows the balance invested as of 29 August 2025 (£81.054m) which has a forecast investment income for the year of £2.567m. The bar chart details current interest rate levels paid on these deposits.





IMPACT ASSESSMENT

20. There are no implications arising from this report that cannot be managed within the overall budget.

RECOMMENDATION

- 21. Members are requested to:
 - 21.1 Agree in principle to transfer any final underspend on the 2025/26 revenue budget to the Insurance and Resource Reserve (paragraphs 9, 9 (a) and 9 (b) refer).
 - 21.2 Note the contents of the report.

2025/26 Revenue Budget Adjustments

1. FUNCTIONAL ANALYSIS

Virements

			Non-	
Figures shown are in £'000	Original Budget	Infrastr -ucture	Infrastr -ucture	Revised Budget
Operational Response and Resilience (R&R)	63,267	564	112	63,943
Prevention and Protection (P&P)	8,845	0	99	8,944
Customer Services (CS)	26,954	194	112	27,260
Pensions, Financing and Other Costs (PF)	-834	-758	-323	-1,915
Net Revenue Budget	98,232	0	0	98,232

2. SUBJECTIVE ANALYSIS

Virements

	Original	Infrastr					Revised
Figures shown are in £'000	Budget	-ucture	R&R	P&P	CS	PF	Budget
Salaries and on-costs	80,675	-1	184	99	-76	0	80,881
Training expenses	561	0	0	0	0	0	561
Other employee costs	769	0	0	0	0	0	769
Direct pension costs	2,176	0	0	0	0	0	2,176
Total Employee Costs	84,181	-1	184	99	-76	0	84,387
Repairs and maintenance	2,908	175	0	0	42	0	3,125
Utility costs	3,112	0	0	0	0	0	3,112
Total Premises Costs	6,020	175	0	0	42	0	6,237
	•						•
Vehicle running costs	2,453	0	0	0	0	0	2,453
Travel expenses	83	0	1	0	1	0	85
Total Transport Costs	2,536	0	1	0	1	0	2,538
	,						,
Equipment and supplies	5,494	393	273	0	5	0	6,165
Fees and services	1,782	2	9	0	-104	0	1,689
Comms and computing	6,928	132	3	0	0	0	7,063
Other supplies and services	1,252	57	0	0	195	0	1,504
Total Supplies and Services	15,456	584	285	0	96	0	16,421
Capital financing costs	1,295	0	0	0	0	0	1,295
Contributions to Capital	2,722	459	0	0	0	0	3,181
Total Capital Financing	4,017	459	0	0	0	0	4,476
	•						·
Grants and contributions	-4,601	0	-3	0	-100	0	-4,704
Investment income	-1,594	0	0	0	0	0	-1,594
Other income	-199	0	0	0	0	0	-199
Transfers to/-from reserves	-7,584	-1,217	-355	0	149	-323	-9,330
Total Income	-13,978	-1,217	-358	0	49	-323	-15,827
Net Revenue Budget	98,232	0	112	99	112	-323	98,232

2025/26 Revenue Budget (Non-infrastructure) Adjustments – Explanations

Individual virements (budget transfers) that exceed £50k are required to be reported to Members. Any individual virements that are not technical budget adjustments that exceed £500k require Member approval. There are no virements that require Member approval in this report. Infrastructure virements are explained in Appendix 6.

(a) Salaries and On-costs (+£207k) -

- i) Operational Response and Resilience (R&R) The net £184k increase in this budget is primarily due to the transfer of the pay budget for wholetime firefighter recruits (£452k) from the Customer Services (CS) heading. This is partly offset with a reduction (£191k) to the budget to fund the pay of colleagues who have remained within the service following termination of the Channel Tunnel contract, as they are now expected to fill vacancies quicker than originally estimated. This is offset by a reduction to the budgeted transfer from the Insurance and Resource Reserve. Other minor budget realignments total a net reduction of £77k against this heading.
- ii) **Prevention and Protection (P&P)** The £99k increase in this budget heading includes a £31k increase to fund a two-month hand over within the team and a temporary contract for a team lead. This is offset by an increase to the budgeted transfer from the Service Transformation and Productivity Reserve. Other minor budget realignments total a net increase of £68k against this heading.
- iii) Customer Services (CS) The net £76k decrease in this budget is primarily due to the transfer of the pay budget for wholetime firefighter recruits (£452k) to the Operational Response and Resilience (R&R) heading. This is partly offset by an increase of £292k to fund temporary posts across various support functions, such as Business Intelligence, Finance, and IT. This is offset by an increase to the budgeted transfer from the Service Transformation and Productivity Reserve. Examples of the temporary posts that have been funded include; a Data and Intelligence Analyst, an HR Systems Data and Process Manager, a Lead Finance Business Partner and two IT Trainers. The intention is that this will provide external expertise, skills, and knowledge in specific areas where learning can then be retained inhouse without the need to add additional posts permanently to the establishment. Other minor budget realignments total a net increase of £84k against this heading.
- (b) **Equipment and Supplies (+£278k)** This budget has been increased by £200k to fund the Operational Contaminants project which slipped from 2024/25. In addition, the budget has been increased by a further £70k to fund Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) whereby the budget was also slipped from 2024/25. These budget

- increases are therefore offset by an increase in the budgeted transfer from the Rolling Budget Reserve. Other minor budget realignments total a net increase of £8k against this heading.
- (c) Fees and Services (-£95k) This budget has been reduced by £188k due to the realignment of the Network Fire Service Partnership (NFSP) budget to the Other Supplies and Services heading (see (d)). This is partly offset by an increase of £98k in relation to the National Specialist PPE Project, which is offset by an increase in the Grants and Contributions heading (see (e)) as these costs are fully recoverable. Other minor budget realignments total a net decrease of £5k against this heading.
- (d) Other Supplies and Services (+£195k) See (c) regarding the re-alignment of Network Fire Service Partnership (NFSP) budget (£188k). Other minor budget realignments total a net increase of £7k against this heading.
- (e) **Grants and Contributions (+£103k income)** See (c) regarding the recoverable costs in relation to the National Specialist PPE project (£98k). Other minor budget adjustments total a net increase in income of £5k against this heading.
- (f) Transfers to/-from Reserves (an increased transfer from reserves of £529k) See (a) (i) regarding a reduction in the budgeted transfer from the Insurance and Resource Reserve (£191k). See (a) (ii) and (iii) regarding increased budgeted transfers from the Service Transformation and Productivity Reserve (£323k). See (b) regarding increased budgeted transfers from the Rolling Budget Reserve (£270k). Other individually minor net increases in budgeted transfers from reserves total £127k.

2025/26 Revenue Budget Forecast

1. FUNCTIONAL ANALYSIS **Variances** Infrastr -Under Revised ucture / Over Forecast Figures shown are in £'000 **Budget** Var. spend Outturn Operational Response and Resilience (R&R) 64,889 63,943 0 946 Prevention and Protection (P&P) 8,944 0 -66 8,878 Customer Services (CS) 0 -1,075 27,260 26,185 Pensions, Financing and Other Costs (PF) -1,915 0 -971 -2,886 **Net Revenue Budget** 98,232 0 -1,166 97,066

2. SUBJECTIVE ANALYSIS		-Underspend / Overspend				
	Revised		•	•		Forecast
Figures shown are in £'000	Budget	R&R	P&P	CS	PF	Outturn
Salaries and on-costs	80,881	662	-29	-447	0	81,067
Training expenses	561	0	0	-16	0	545
Other employee costs	769	15	0	-68	0	716
Direct pension costs	2,176	0	0	0	0	2,176
Total Employee Costs	84,387	677	-29	-531	0	84,504
Repairs and maintenance	3,125	0	-1	11	0	3,135
Utility costs	3,112	0	0	-237	0	2,875
Total Premises Costs	6,237	0	-1	-226	0	6,010
Vehicle running costs	2,453	15	0	0	0	2,468
Travel expenses	85	0	0	0	0	85
Total Transport Costs	2,538	15	0	0	0	2,553
				_		
Equipment and supplies	6,165	172	3	4	0	6,344
Fees and services	1,689	-29	-24	147	0	1,783
Comms and computing	7,063	2	1	-496	0	6,570
Other supplies and services	1,504	91	3	-10	2	1,590
Total Supplies and Services	16,421	236	-17	-355	2	16,287
Capital financing costs	1,295	0	0	0	0	1,295
Contributions to Capital	3,181	0	0	0	0	3,181
Total Capital Financing	4,476	0	0	0	0	4,476
Grants and contributions	-4,704	53	-17	118	0	-4,550
Investment income	-1,594	0	0	0	-973	-2,567
Other income	-199	0	-2	-21	0	-222
Transfers to/-from reserves	-9,330	-35	0	-60	0	-9,425
Total Income	-15,827	18	-19	37	-973	-16,764
Net Revenue Budget	98,232	946	-66	-1,075	-971	97,066

Appendix 4 to Item No: B2

2025/26 Revenue Budget Forecast - Underspend / Overspend Explanations

The forecast net underspend of £1.166m includes a variety of underspends and overspends, and the reasons for the most significant variances are commented on below:-

- a) Salaries and On-costs (£186k forecast overspend)
 - i) Operational Response and Resilience (R&R) The £662k forecast overspend is primarily due to the nationally agreed pay awards for 2025/26 settling at 3.2% when the budget provided for only a 2% increase (see paragraph 3 in the main report). This has resulted in a budget pressure of around £530k against this heading. Variable pay on overtime and activity payments is currently forecast to overspend by £91k (7.7% of budget) but this is based assumptions around future activity levels and the type and severity of incidents attended. Other minor forecast net pay overspends total £41k.
 - ii) Customer Services (CS) The £447k forecast underspend is primarily due to vacancies being held pending the outcome of the Fair Funding Review. This includes two vacancies on Corporate Management Board (£153k), vacancies within the Customer Support and Ordering teams (£260k), vacancies for cleaning operatives (£102k) and vacancies within the Procurement team (£48k). This is partly offset by an increase in costs (£150k) due to the nationally agreed pay awards for 2025/26 settling at 3.2% when the budget provided for only a 2% increase (see paragraph 3 in the main report). Other minor forecast net pay underspends total £34k.
- b) Other Employee Costs (£53k forecast underspend) An underspend is forecast on this budget primarily due to a reduction in physiotherapy requirements this year.
- c) Utility Costs (£237k forecast underspend) Due to a prolonged period of milder weather and a lower price-cap the latest forecast is for an underspend (20% of budget) on gas and electricity costs. This forecast may change if we have a more sustained period of colder weather over the winter period.
- d) **Equipment and Supplies (£179k forecast overspend)** A significant proportion of this forecast overspend (£103k) relates to the roll out of additional safe working at height equipment to on-call colleagues and additional equipment for the Technical Rescue team. The laundry of firefighter PPE is forecast to overspend

by £60k due to the Flame Pro initiative. Othe minor forecast net overspends total £16k.

- e) Fees and Services (£94k forecast overspend) Much of this forecast overspend (£81k) relates to the additional charges from the Pensions Administrator regarding the McCloud and Matthews pensions cases and is therefore offset by a forecast transfer from the Government Grants Reserve. Other minor forecast net overspends total £13k.
- f) Comms and Computing (£493k forecast underspend) This underspend primarily relates to the reduction in the Airwave contract costs (see paragraph 4 in the main report). Other minor forecast net overspends total £27k.
- g) Other Supplies and Services (£86k forecast overspend) Based on activity in the first part of the financial year, cross-border charges from London Fire Brigade are forecast to be around £25k higher than budgeted. The contribution to the Kent Resilience Forum is also expected to be £65k higher than budgeted, partly due to higher than budgeted pay awards. Other minor forecast net underspends total £4k.
- h) **Grants and Contributions (£154k reduced income)** See paragraph 4 in the main report in relation to the reduction in the Firelink grant (£118k). Other minor forecast net reductions to income total £36k.
- Investment Income (£973k increased income) See paragraph 4 in the main report regarding the additional pensions grants received for the Matthews and McCloud pension cases and details of the assumptions regarding the Bank of England Base Rate.
- j) Transfer to/-from Reserves (£95k increased transfer from reserves) See (e) regarding the additional charges from the Pensions Administrator (£81k). Other minor forecast net increased transfers from reserves total £14k.

2025/26 Infrastructure Plan (including Capital) Budget Adjustments

Figures shown are in £'000	Original Budget	Budget Changes	Revised Budget
Infrastructure Revenue Budget			
Premises projects	710	130	840
Information and comms. systems projects	4,165	250	4,415
Operational equipment projects	2,075	378	2,453
Total Infrastructure Revenue Budget	6,950	758	7,708
Capital Budget			
Ashford Fire Station redevelopment	9,281	1,074	10,355
Estate changes and development	800	-33	767
Total Estate Development	10,081	1,041	11,122
Roofing works	200	198	398
Bay doors	30	0	30
Boilers and fuel tanks	77	0	77
Total Other Premises	307	198	505
Total Other Fremises	307	130	303
Mobile data terminals	600	0	600
Total Information and Comms Systems	600	0	600
Appliances	340	0	340
Appliances Cars and vans	283	-	354
		71 223	
Specialist vehicles	2,066		2,289
Total Vehicles and Equipment	2,689	294	2,983
Total Infrastructure Capital Budget	13,677	1,533	15,210
Total Infrastructure Revenue and Capital	20,627	2,291	22,918
Funded from:			
Infrastructure Reserve	-5,635	-1,217	-6,852
Base Revenue Contributions	-5,635 -4,037	-1,217	-0,652 -4,037
Internal Borrowing	-4,03 <i>1</i> -9,281	-1,074	-4,03 <i>7</i> -10,355
Capital Receipts Applied	-9,261 -1,624	-1,074	-1,624
External Borrowing	-1,024	0	-1,024
-			
Total Infrastructure Funding	-20,627	-2,291	-22,918

2025/26 Infrastructure Plan (including Capital budget) Budget Adjustments - Explanations

Infrastructure Revenue Budget

- a) **Premises Projects (+£130k)** This budget increase relates to slippage from 2024/25 in relation to; estate change works (£60k) and UPS battery replacements (£63k). The contract for the UPS battery replacements was finalised at the end of the 2024/25 financial year and, as such, the previously estimated budget has now been increased by £7k.
- b) Information and Comms. Systems Projects (+£250k) This budget has increased due to slippage from 2024/25 in relation to; operational equipment tagging (£128k), upgrade of audio-visual equipment (£105k), implementation of Microsoft Teams (£80k), the Control Programme (£59k) and other minor net increases totalling £23k. These increases to the budget are partly offset by a reduction of £145k earmarked for the Dynamics system (Customer and Premises Risk Information) project, as a saving will be achieved by using internal resources to deliver the later stages of this project.
- c) Operational Equipment Projects (+£378k) This budget increase relates to slippage from 2024/25 on the following equipment purchases; gas monitors (£122k), lightweight PPE (£116k), battery operated hand tools (£67k), life jackets (£30k), and other minor net increases totalling £40k.

Capital Budget

- d) **Ashford Fire Station Redevelopment (+£1.074m)** As the main building works were delayed and did not start until late January 2025 some of the budget allocated for this project has slipped from 2024/25 to 2025/26. The total budget allocated to this project remains at £16m.
- e) **Estate Changes and Development (-£33k)** This budget has been reduced to offset additional costs in relation to roofing works (see (f) below).
- f) Roofing Works (+£198k) Some roofing works were delayed from 2024/25 whilst requirements were assessed, so £165k of this budget increase is due to slippage. An additional £33k has been transferred from the Estate Changes and Development budget (see (e) above) to cover the costs of critical works are Herne Bay, Faversham, and Ashford Fire Stations.
- g) Cars and Vans (+£71k) This budget has been increased to provide additional funding for the replacement of three vehicles that have been written off by the Authority's insurers.

h) **Specialist Units and Vehicles (+£223k)** - This budget increase is due to slippage and the reprofiling of the purchase of replacement Ford Rangers, the Animal Rescue Unit and Driver Training Appliances. The budget to replace the two Community Safety Display Vehicles (£220k) has been removed as some other vehicles will be refurbished and repurposed for this use.

2025/26 General and Earmarked Reserves Balances

Figures shown are in £'000		Opening Balance 01-Apr-25	Forecast Transfer 2025/26	Forecast Closing Balance 31-Mar-26
General Reserve	(A)	4,680	210	4,890
Earmarked Reserves:				
Government Grants	(B)	448	-238	210
Infrastructure	(C)	27,621	-6,852	20,769
Insurance and Resource	(C)	5,888	-1,657	4,231
Rolling Budgets	(C)	1,798	-530	1,268
Service Transformation and Productivity	(C)	900	-358	542
Total Earmarked Reserves		36,655	-9,635	27,020
Total Revenue Reserves		41,335	-9,425	31,910
Capital Receipts Reserve	(D)	8,647	-1,193	7,454
Total Usable Reserves		49,982	-10,618	39,364

Figures presented in the table above do not include any year-end reserve transfers that may take place as result of the forecast underspend on the 2025/26 revenue budget.

Notes:

- A. Reserve held to provide a contingency to cushion the impact of unexpected costs.
- B. Resource provided by Government with any unspent amounts rolled forward.
- C. Reserve held to smooth the impact of expenditure on the revenue budget.
- D. Reserve available to fund capital expenditure.

2025/26 Firefighters' Pension Fund Account

Figures shown are in £'000	2025/26 Home Office Return (Sept 2024)	2025/26 Home Office Return (Aug 2025)	2025/26 Current Forecast Outturn	Variance Sept 2024 to Current Forecast
Pension Outgoings:				
Pension payments	31,711	31,809	31,809	98
Total Pension Fund Expenditure	31,711	31,809	31,809	98
Pension Income:				
Employee contributions	-4,358	-4,391	-4,391	-33
Employer contributions	-12,127	-12,369	-12,369	-242
In-year ill-health charge income	-315	-227	-227	88
Non-abated pension income	-204	-100	-100	104
Transfer values received	0	0	0	0
*McCloud Grant	0	0	-2,152	-2,152
*Matthews Grant	0	0	-13,600	-13,600
*Government top-up grant	-14,707	-14,722	1,030	15,737
Total Pension Fund Income	-31,711	-31,809	-31,809	-98
Pension Fund Account Balance	0	0	0	0

^{*} As expected, in July 2025 the Authority received 80% of the Government top-up grant forecast in September 2024 for 2025/26 (£11.766m) less the top-up grant surplus received for 2024/25 (£2.706m). In addition, the Authority unexpectedly received the McCloud and Matthews pensions grants detailed in the table above (see paragraph 4 in the main report).

Item Number: B3

By: Director of Finance

To: Kent and Medway Fire and Rescue Authority – 16 October 2025

Subject: DEVELOPMENT OF THE MEDIUM-TERM FINANCIAL PLAN

2026 - 2030

Classification: Unrestricted

FOR DECISION

SUMMARY

A presentation will be given to Members on the development of the Authority's Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) for 2026 – 2030 at the meeting.

RECOMMENDATION

Members are requested to:

1. Approve the recommendations contained within the presentation.

Item Number: B4

By: Chief Executive

To: Kent and Medway Fire and Rescue Authority – 16 October 2025

Subject: 2026/27 COUNCIL TAX CONSULTATION

Classification: Unrestricted

FOR DECISION

SUMMARY

The Kent and Medway Fire and Rescue Authority has a revenue budget of £98.232m for 2025/26, which is funded two-thirds (£64.792m) from Council Tax receipts and the remaining one-third (£33.440m) from Government grants and Business Rates.

As part of the Authority's requirement to consult with the public on Council Tax proposals, this report presents the draft Council Tax consultation for the 2026/27 financial year. The consultation outlines the proposed options for the Council Tax charge for 2026/27, allowing the public to provide their feedback on the level of Council Tax charge they are willing to support.

RECOMMENDATION

Members are requested to:

1. Approve the 2026/27 Council Tax consultation attached at **Appendix 1**.

COMMENTS

Background

- 1. Kent and Medway Fire and Rescue Authority currently receives two-thirds (66p in every £1) of its total funding from Council Tax receipts. The annual charge for a Band D property for 2025/26 was set at £94.86. This equates to just over £1.80 per week.
- 2. The Government expects local authorities (including Fire Authorities) to fund more of their services from local taxation and, therefore, expects Council Tax to increase each year to help fund vital services.
- 3. Central Government set the maximum amount by which the Authority can increase Council Tax each year. Should the Authority wish to increase Council Tax above this amount it would need to hold a local referendum to ask the public whether they approve or reject the higher Council Tax increase. Although the referendum limit for Fire Authorities for 2026/27 has not yet been confirmed, the Spending Review, announced on 11 June 2025, strongly indicates that the same principles will apply as 2025/26. This would mean that the Fire Authority could agree to increase the Band D Council Tax charge by up to £5 (the equivalent of just over 9 pence per week) without the need to hold a referendum.
- 4. Members are asked to consider and approve the draft 2026/27 Council Tax consultation attached at **Appendix 1**. The consultation outlines the proposed options for the Council Tax charge for 2026/27, allowing the public to provide feedback on the level of Council Tax charge they are willing to support.
- 5. Feedback from the public consultation will be presented to Members at the Authority's budget setting meeting in February 2026.

IMPACT ASSESSMENT

6. There are no direct impacts from the contents of this paper.

CONCLUSION

- 7. Members are requested to:
 - 7.1 Approve the 2026/27 Council Tax consultation attached at **Appendix 1**.

Appendix 1 to Item: B4

Council Tax: An update report to the public

Introduction

As a public service, we are committed to being both efficient and effective in our duty to help keep you safe. We are proud to have consistently achieved high inspection ratings, but we also face a new and evolving set of risks that require long-term strategic investment.

Council Tax is a significant source of funding for the services we provide. It currently funds around **66p in every £1** of our total day-to-day spending budget. The Government has stated it now expects local authorities to fund more of their services from local taxation and, therefore, expects Council Tax to increase each year to help fund vital services.

The amount you pay for Council Tax is split between different organisations that provide services in your area. The proportion of your Council Tax that goes to Kent Fire and Rescue Service is called a precept. Your local council collects money for all the services (Parish Council, District or Borough Council, Kent County Council, Kent Police, Kent Fire and Rescue Service) and then passes it on to them. You can see a breakdown of what you pay for on your Council Tax bill, which lists the amounts going to each organisation, including Kent Fire and Rescue Service.

Currently, a Band D property pays a precept of £94.86 per year (around £1.82 per week) for Kent Fire and Rescue Service, which is around 4% of your overall Council Tax bill.

This document will explain how your contribution through Council Tax will not only enable a continuation of this high-performing service but will provide essential funding for vital investment in our shared future safety.

Our commitment to efficiency and effectiveness

Our recent HMICFRS* inspections gave us an "outstanding" rating for "making the Fire and Rescue Service affordable now and in the future". Among the positive feedback, HMICFRS cited our "good use of public money", our "plans to use reserves sustainably", and our use of "transformation programmes to improve effectiveness".

These scores are a testament to the dedication of our teams and the strength of our strategic planning. Our effectiveness is measured by our ability to protect people and

property, from rapid response times to our proactive prevention work in our local communities. Our efficiency is judged on how well we manage our resources to deliver these services, ensuring that we provide the best possible value for your money.

This high performance is a result of continuous training, research and development, robust community risk assessments, and a relentless focus on improving our operational capabilities. Our remit is now broader and more complex than ever before, such as attending to wildfires, water rescues and flooding emergencies.

A changing landscape

We consulted with you on the risks facing Kent and Medway and created a four year strategy – <u>our Community Risk Management Plan</u>. We summarise below some of the first-year actions we have been doing to deliver that plan for you.

The risks facing our communities are changing, and so must our approach. While traditional fires remain a core part of our work, new and emerging threats are placing significant demands on our service.

Below are some of the highlights where we have been investing your money:

Climate change: The increasing frequency and severity of extreme weather events, such as wildfires and widespread flooding, require specialist equipment and intensive, prolonged operational deployments.

What we have done:

- > New lightweight workwear for our firefighters to reduce fatigue in long hours with wildfires.
- ➤ New vehicles for accessing and dealing with fires in remote areas.
- New wildfire firefighting equipment.
- ➤ We recently consulted with you on a rural plan, which outlines actions we are taking with farmers, rural businesses and isolated homes to help with flooding and wildfires.

Modern construction: The use of new building materials and modern construction methods presents new challenges for people in their homes, and for our firefighters, which means continuous training and investment in advanced technologies.

What we have done:

Our Building Safety team is working with businesses to make sure they have appropriate fire precautions in place through campaigns, fire safety talks and an inspection programme. When needed, our specialist officers will require businesses to make changes to their safety arrangements, or in the most serious cases, prohibit the business from using part or all the building.

- ➤ Our Risk Information Team develops detailed plans for larger or more complex buildings, ensuring our firefighters have essential information such as the location of hydrants and firefighting equipment readily available in the event of a fire.
- We have started a training programme, delivering an enhanced level of awareness for our operational colleagues on fire safety issues, including new, modern methods of construction.
- Invested in a firefighting "robot" that allows us to continue to firefight inside buildings that, due to their construction, may be too dangerous to send firefighters in to.

Alternative fuels and energy systems: The increase in numbers of electric vehicles and large-scale energy storage systems, such as lithium-ion batteries, introduces novel and complex fire risks that require specialised knowledge and equipment to manage safely.

What we have done:

- ➤ We have carried out research into our customer's awareness of how they use products containing lithium-ion batteries and what the level of awareness is on safe use of these products.
- ➤ We have worked with the National Fire Chiefs Council to develop national guidance on the requirements for safe installation and operation of Battery Energy Storage Systems.
- ➤ We have produced guidance and training materials on how to fight fires involving electric vehicles.

Increased demand: Our services are increasingly called upon for a wide range of non-fire incidents, from road traffic collisions to medical emergencies, often in collaboration with other blue-light services.

What we have done:

- Assessed our current arrangements for responding to water rescue incidents, which we have been consulting with our customers on.
- Continue to respond to life risk medical calls when fire crews can get there quicker than an ambulance. This allows us to get life saving treatment underway as soon as possible. We then handover to an ambulance when one arrives.

Invested in equipment for lifting casualties from the floor. Helping the ambulance service in this way means they do not have to tie up multiple ambulances at a scene.

Fires in the home: In 2024/25, we saw a 13% increase in the number of accidental fires in the home, when compared to the previous year. Reducing these fires remains one of our top priorities.

What we have done:

- We have carried out more than 27,000 home fire safety visits in the last year, giving tailored safety advice and fitting free smoke alarms to help people stay safe.
- ➤ Promoted fire safety messages to thousands of customers at community events; at 395 school visits; and online to 1.9 million people.

Investing in new, fit for purpose, buildings to replace those that are at end of life. We will be building a new workshop facility to maintain and repair our fire engines and specialist vehicles. This will allow us to increase the rate at which we conduct these tasks and reduce the amount of time our fire engines are not operationally available. The result will be increased availability of fire engines to respond to emergencies, as well as reducing waste because of inefficient processes.

What we have done:

- We have developed a set of requirements for the new workshops.
- We have started to identify available sites around the county where a new workshop could be located.

Why your Council Tax is an essential investment

The reality is that central government funding for Fire and Rescue Services has faced significant reductions in recent years. As a result, Council Tax has become a more crucial part of our funding, providing us with the stable and predictable income required to plan for the future.

The funds generated by your Council Tax contribution are used to run a modern, resilient, professional and effective fire and rescue service. Your money will directly enable us to:

• **Invest in new equipment:** To respond to the emerging risks of wildfires, floods, and new energy technologies.

- Maintain training standards: To ensure our crews are equipped with the skills needed to tackle the complexities of modern incidents.
- **Fund prevention programmes:** Our community safety work, including home fire safety visits and educational campaigns, are a crucial part of our strategy to stop incidents from taking place.
- **Ensure our workforce:** We need to attract and retain the best talent, providing them with the resources they need to keep you safe.

Conclusion

We are incredibly proud of our team and our high standards of service. The Council Tax precept that funds Kent Fire and Rescue Service is vital to ensure we can not only maintain our high performance but also adapt to the significant challenges of an evolving world. It is a direct investment in your safety and the resilience of our entire community. Thank you for your continued support.

If you have any questions or would like to learn more about our work, please contact us

Council Tax options

Each option has different implications. A freeze or lower increase would mean a larger budget gap, requiring more savings or reductions in services. A higher increase would raise more funding, therefore, reducing the amount of cost savings or reductions in services that would be required to balance the budget.

Option 1

Freeze Council Tax for one year. (This option would result in a larger budget gap and require significant cuts to services, including the front line).

Option 2

Increase Council Tax by an amount just under the referendum limit (for the Fire Authority this limit is expected to be £5 for a Band D household). A £5 increase for a Band D household equates to an increase of just over 9p per week. (This option would reduce the level of cuts that would be required to balance the budget).

Option 3

As an alternative option, having read about the significant challenges we face over the medium-term, what Council Tax increase would you be prepared to pay in 2026/27? (To give you some context, every 1% increase in the Council Tax charge equates to just under 2p per week for a Band D household).

Item Number: B5

By: Chief Executive

To: Kent and Medway Fire and Rescue Authority – 16 October 2025

Subject: GOVERNANCE AND POLICY UPDATES

Classification: Unrestricted

FOR DECISION

SUMMARY

This report covers the following governance issues:

- **A.** Statement of Assurance 2024/25 (Fire and Rescue National Framework)
- B. Annual Review of Compliance with the Local Government Transparency Code 2015 and the Trade Union (Facility Time Publication Requirements) Regulations 2017
- C. Policy Update

RECOMMENDATIONS

Members are requested to:

- 1. Approve the Statement of Assurance 2024/25, paragraphs 1 to 4 and **Appendix 1** refer.
- Approve the Annual Review of Compliance with the Local Government Transparency Code 2015 and the Trade Union (Facility Time Publication Requirements)
 Regulations 2017, paragraphs 5 to 7 and Appendix 2 refer.
- 3. Approve the AI (Artificial Intelligence) Policy and the Community Right to Challenge Policy, paragraph 8 and **Appendices 3 and 4** refer.
- 4. Note the remaining contents of the report.

LEAD/CONTACT OFFICER: Head of Policy - Owain Thompson

TELEPHONE NUMBER: 01622 692121 EMAIL: kmfraclerk@kent.fire-uk.org BACKGROUND PAPERS: None

COMMENTS

A. Statement of Assurance 2023/24 (Fire and Rescue National Framework)

Lead/contact officer: Owain Thompson, Head of Policy

- 1. The Statement of Assurance sets out the Authority's compliance with the requirements of the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England. The publication of an annual statement of assurance of compliance with the Framework is a requirement set out within section 1.4 of the National Framework itself. In previous years the Statement of Assurance was combined with the Annual Governance Statement and taken to the Authority as a single document. However, because these two documents are written to meet the needs of two entirely different sets of legislative requirements (the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 for the Annual Governance Statement, and the Fire and Rescue National Framework 2018 for the Statement of Assurance), in 2022 they were separated into two separate, stand-alone documents. The Annual Governance Statement was brought to Members for approval at the meeting of the Audit and Governance Committee on 25 September 2025. The Statement of Assurance is attached at Appendix 1 for Members' approval.
- 2. The reason the Statement of Assurance year is dated for the previous financial year (i.e. 2024/25) is because it provides an assessment based on evidence from the preceding financial year.
- 3. There is no standard measure of assessment for fire and rescue authorities' degree of compliance with the National Framework. Consequently, to be as robust as possible, for the Statement of Assurance the Authority employs a level of assessment assessed against a five-tier rating. The criteria that inform this rating are drawn from the definitions in the assurance levels used by Kent County Council's Internal Audit Team. This ensures consistency with the reporting methodology used during these other assessments of the Authority's effectiveness.
- 4. Based on our self-assessment of operational performance against the requirements of the National Framework for the 2024/25 financial year has been assessed as HIGH. This indicates that arrangements against each of the seven sections are extremely well designed and applied effectively. Processes are robust and well-established; there is a sound system of control operating effectively and consistently applied to achieve service/system objectives and there are examples of best practice. No significant weaknesses have been identified.

B. Annual review of compliance with the Local Government Transparency Code 2015 and the Trade Union (Facility Time Publication Requirements) Regulations 2017

Lead/contact officer: Owain Thompson, Head of Policy

- 5. This Local Government Transparency Code 2015 applies to all local authorities and sets out a series of requirements to publish open data. The Code comprises 15 separate categories for which there is a mandatory requirement to publish certain types of information. Of these 15 mandatory categories, 11 contain additional information that is recommended for publication. As part of ensuring good governance the Authority undertakes an annual review of its compliance with the Code. The Authority is fully compliant with all but one of the 11 relevant mandatory categories (4 of the 15 categories are not applicable to this Authority). Within the 'Senior salaries' category, the Authority deliberately chooses not to publish some of the information as it of the view that to do so would breach principle 1(a) of Article 5 of the UK GDPR. To that end, the Authority has a clear position statement on this.
- 6. Among the categories for which information is recommended for publication, seven are relevant to the Authority and the Authority is fully compliant with five of these. Of the two recommended categories that remain outstanding (4. Local Authority Land and 7. Organisation Chart), work is underway to meet compliance standards with the 'Local Authority Land' category. Within the 'Organisation Chart' category, the Authority deliberately chooses not to publish some of the recommended information as it of the view that to do so would breach the principles set out in Article 51(a)(b) and (c) of the UK GDPR. To that end, the Authority has a clear position statement on this.
- 7. The annual transparency review also considers the requirements of the Trade Union (Facility Time) Regulations 2017, of which the Authority is fully compliant. The end part of the document provides a summary overview of compliance with each category. This year's transparency review is attached at **Appendix 2** for Members' approval.

C. Policy Update

Lead/contact officer: Owain Thompson, Head of Policy

Policies that require Members' approval

8. Since the last meeting of the Authority in July, two policies have been updated; these are the AI (Artificial Intelligence) Policy and the Community Right to Challenge Policy. These have passed through the appropriate governance processes (including scrutiny through the Policy Steering Group and approval from the Corporate Management Board) and it has been determined that they meet the threshold for requiring Members' approval. The table below summarises the policies, the reason for their development/update and the reason for them being brought to Members for

approval. A copy of each policy is attached at **Appendices 3 and 4** for Members' approval.

Policy	Summary of why developed or key updates if existing policy	Reason for KMFRA approval	Team
Artificial intelligence (AI) Policy (V3)	Reviewed and updated to specify the importance of colleagues behaving with honesty and integrity and avoid plagiarism when using Al platforms and link this to the behaviours in the Code of Ethical Conduct.	Oversight Agreed at KMFRA on 17/10/2024 this would be brought for a scheduled annual review due to the fast moving nature of the area. Relates to an area	Policy and Governance
		that has significant societal and technological impact.	
Community Right to Challenge Policy (V5)	V5 (16/10/2025) revised and updated in line with new Tier 2 policy and Tier 3 guidance format. Policy and underlying Procedure and Guidance significantly revised to clarity eligible groups and services and processes around expressions of interest (EOI) including template structure for any EOIs. PIA undertaken.	Oversight Relates to EOIs for running a local authority service.	Policy and Governance

Policies for Members' information

9. To ensure that they remain up-to-date and effective, the Authority's policies are revised as required based on a variety of factors, which may include changes to legislation, changes to procedures and practices, and the scheduled policy review dates. This may also include the development of new policies. The table below summarises new policies, or policies that have been revised or undergone review since the last meeting of the Authority. Copies of these policies can be made available to Members upon request.

Policy	Summary of why developed or key updates if existing policy	Team
Driving at Work Policy (V4)	Existing policy. Restructured in accordance with new Tier 2 and Tier 3 structure for policy and procedure.	Fleet and Equipment Services

Drug and Alcohol Policy (V4)	Existing policy. Significant amendment. Policy reviewed and restructured, including incorporation of T3 procedure into the T2 policy, to improve clarity and effectiveness.	HR
Flag Flying Policy (V14)	Existing policy. Updates for introduction of new KFRS flag and removal of rainbow/pride flag.	Policy and Governance
Gifts and Hospitality Policy (V2)	Existing policy. Restructured in accordance with new Tier 2 and Tier 3 structure for policy and procedure. Policy clarified and expanded.	Policy and Governance
IT (Information Technology) Policy (V7)	Existing policy. Significantly revised, re-written and moved into Tier 2 format.	IT
Purchasing Card Policy (V4)	Existing policy. Restructured in accordance with new Tier 2 and Tier 3 structure for policy and procedure. wording revised to align to the updated Procurement Policy.	Finance
Transparency Policy (V7)	Existing policy. Restructured in accordance with new Tier 2 and Tier 3 structure for policy and procedure. Updated and restructured to reflect current practices and improve clarity.	Policy and Governance

The Data (Use and Access) Act 2015

- 10. The Data (Use and Access) Act, previously known as the Data Protection and Digital Information (DPDI) Bill, was introduced in October 2024 and became law, receiving Royal Assent, on 19 June 2025. It is being introduced in stages between now and mid 2026. It amends, but does not replace, the UK GDPR, the Data Protection Act 2018, and PECR (the Privacy and Electronic Communications Regulations.
- 11. Work is currently underway to ensure that the Authority aligns with the requirements (e.g. updating privacy notices and our approach to subject access requests) and our data protection training package (mandatory for all colleagues) will also be updated accordingly. The aspects of the new legislation that relate directly to KFRS are set out below with an overview of each area.
- 12. **Additional lawful basis**. Article 6 of the UK GDPR sets out six lawful bases for processing personal data, this adds a seventh: Recognised Legitimate Interests. This new processing basis under UK GDPR Article 6 for public interest scenarios; covering national security, emergencies, law enforcement, safeguarding vulnerable groups, without requiring a balancing test or "Legitimate Interests".
- 13. **Subject Access Request (SAR) handling**. Clarifies that response can be paused for up to two months if the controller requests additional clarification for large or

- unclear requests. Defines SAR scope as requiring only reasonable and proportionate searches
- 14. **International data transfers Data Protection Test**. Replaces the strict adequacy model with a more flexible data protection test, assessing whether another country's protections are not materially lower than UK's.
- 15. **ICO reforms and governance**. ICO to be restructured as a body with a Chair, CEO, and non-executive board.

IMPACT ASSESSMENT

11. There are no direct impacts from the contents of this paper which cannot be contained within existing budgetary provision. A people impact assessment has been completed for each policy referenced in this report. There are a range of data associated with each policy which, if falling within the scope of the Equality Act 2010 will be appropriately protected by the Authority. It is important that the Authority has strong processes in place to protect customers, and colleagues have confidence in using these policies.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 12. Members are requested to:
- 12.1 Approve the Statement of Assurance 2023/24, paragraphs 1 to 4 and **Appendix 1** refer.
- 12.2 Approve the Annual Review of Compliance with the Local Government Transparency Code 2015 and the Trade Union (Facility Time Publication Requirements)

 Regulations 2017, paragraphs 5 to 7 and **Appendix 2** refer.
- 12.3 Approve the Al policy, paragraph 8 and **Appendices 3 and 4** refer.
- 12.4 Note the remaining contents of the report.

Statement of Assurance 2024/25 for the Kent and Medway Fire and Rescue Authority (Prepared August 2025)

Government guidance requires the Authority to undertake a separate self-assessment of operational performance (known as the Statement of Assurance). Section 21 of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 requires the Secretary of State to prepare a Fire and Rescue National Framework which sets priorities and objectives for fire and rescue authorities (FRAs) in England. FRAs have a statutory duty to have regard to the National Framework. The Statement of Assurance is the assessment of the position of this Authority against the National Framework. The revised Fire and Rescue National Framework for England came into effect on 1 June 2018 and is organised around the following seven sections:

Section 1. Introduction

This highlights five priorities for all FRAs in England. These are to:

- Make appropriate provision for fire prevention and protection activities and response to fire and rescue related incidents.
- Identify and assess the full range of foreseeable fire and rescue related risks their areas face.
- Collaborate with emergency services and other local and national partners to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the service they provide.
- Be accountable to communities for the service they provide.
- Develop and maintain a workforce that is professional, resilient, skilled, flexible and diverse.

Section 2. Delivery of functions

This section deals with risk assessment and countywide resilience, and how the FRA plans to mitigate these risks through either operational response, or prevention activities, something that FRAs are required to set out within their 'integrated risk management plan', or as it is referred to now within the sector, a 'community risk management plan' (CRMP). The Framework also sets several expectations of what a CRMP should contain.

Section 3. National Resilience

This section requires FRAs to make arrangements to support national resilience, including working across borders and responding to terrorist incidents.

Section 4. Governance

Fire and rescue authorities operate with a range of different locally determined governance arrangements including an individual – either a police, fire and crime commissioner (PFCC) or a mayor – having sole responsibility for being the fire and rescue authority for an area. Each fire and rescue authority has a statutory duty to ensure provision of their core functions as required by the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004.

Section 5. Achieving value for money

This section contains several recommendations regarding reserves. It also makes engagement in national procurement schemes mandatory, but only where appropriate. For example, if a national procurement of goods or services has been recently undertaken, FRAs will be expected to use any framework contract that results. If they choose not to, there is an expectation they will need to account for that decision.

Section 6. Workforce

All FRAs are expected to have a workforce strategy which aligns with the national workforce strategy. Following a consultation early in 2017, the Government has included wording in the draft Framework which limits the practice of re-engaging retired employees at senior levels of the workforce, except in absolutely exceptional circumstances. Enhancing professionalism within the fire sector, applying principles of fitness that account for the physically demanding nature of the role. Ensuring FRAs comply with the fitness principles within Annex C of the Fire and Rescue Service National framework. This section also states the FRAs are to implement the new professional standards that are now being developed and published by the Fire Standards Board.

Section 7. Inspection, intervention and accountability

This section sets out the responsibilities on FRAs to cooperate with the inspection process that is delivered by HMICFRS (His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services) and requests from the inspectorate for information and data. It also requires FRAs to give due regard to the reports published by HMICFRS. This section restates the powers of intervention into a failing (or at risk of failing) FRA which are available to the Secretary of State under Section 22 of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004. This edition of the framework makes meeting the transparency code relevant to each FRA mandatory (for this Authority this is the Local Government Transparency Code 2015).

The level of assurance for 2024/25

There is no standard measure of assessment for FRAs' degree of compliance with the National Framework. Consequently, to be as robust as possible, the Authority employs a level of assessment assessed against a five-tier rating and provides an assessment based on evidence from the preceding financial year. The criteria that inform this rating are drawn from the definitions in the assurance levels used by Internal Audit – this ensures consistency with the reporting methodology used during these other assessments of the Authority's effectiveness. These are displayed on page 37 of this statement.

Based on our self-assessment of operational performance against the requirements of the National Framework for the 2024/25 financial year has been assessed as **HIGH**. This indicates that arrangements against each of the seven sections are extremely well designed and applied effectively. Processes are robust and well-established; there is a sound system of control operating effectively and consistently applied to achieve service/system objectives and there are examples of best practice. No significant weaknesses have been identified.

Section 1. Introduction

1.1 Powers

Under section 21 of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 ("the 2004 Act"), the Secretary of State must prepare a Fire and Rescue National Framework. The Framework:

- a) must set out priorities and objectives for fire and rescue authorities in connection with the discharge of their functions.
- b) may contain guidance to fire and rescue authorities in connection with the discharge of any of their functions; and
- c) may contain any other matter relating to fire and rescue authorities or their functions that the Secretary of State considers appropriate.

1.2 Priorities

The priorities in this Framework are for fire and rescue authorities to:

- make appropriate provision for fire prevention and protection activities and response to fire and rescue related incidents.
- identify and assess the full range of foreseeable fire and rescue related risks their areas face.
- collaborate with emergency services and other local and national partners to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the service they
 provide.
- be accountable to communities for the service they provide; and
- develop and maintain a workforce that is professional, resilient, skilled, flexible and diverse.

How do we meet these requirements and get assurance?

The Fire and Rescue National Framework for England requires every fire and rescue authority to assess all foreseeable fire and rescue related risks that could affect their communities, whether they are local, cross-border, multi-authority and/or national, and prepare an 'integrated risk management plan', or as it is now referred to within the sector, a 'Community Risk Management Plan' (CRMP). In 2022 we consulted with our customers on a 10-year analysis of the key societal, economic, technological, and environmental changes that were emerging in Kent and Medway and could present risks to local communities.

The next stage of our CRMP process was a comprehensive risk analysis and assessment. Undertaken in line with the National Fire Chiefs' Council's "Community Risk Management Planning Strategic Framework", this risk assessment utilised a robust, evidence-based methodology. The results were published in our <u>CRMP risk analysis and assessment document</u>. We called this document "Creating a Safer Future – Together". This was approved by the <u>Fire Authority at the meeting on 19 October 2023</u>.

Between 01 November 2023 and 01 February 2024, we undertook public consultation on the "Creating a Safer Future – Together" document. This also included consultation on the council tax options for 2024/25. The consultation generated a total of 1,859 responses. This is the highest number of responses of any recent CRMP consultation undertaken by the Authority and reflects our carefully planned approach and the effort of our Engagement Team to raise awareness of the CRMP with our stakeholders and customers. There was overwhelming support for both the risks identified and the areas of focus set out in the CRMP document. This was approved by the Fire Authority at the meeting on 20 February 2024.

In addition, over 120 members of the public have participated in our CRMP feedback sessions, focusing on response times and council tax, we engaged with groups in urban and rural areas, ensuring under-represented perspectives are incorporated in this key process

Recognising the clear support expressed through the consultation responses for the identified risks and areas of focus, we moved forward to the next stage and formed actions under each strategic area. In the strategy period 2025 to 2029, we are ensuring effective integration of actions from our Building Safety, Prevention, and Response and Resilience teams. Our CRMP consultation identified seven areas of focus: Climate change and environment; Health and society; Rescues; Major industry; Buildings and places; and Transport, Utilities fuel and Power.

Following this, we put together our <u>CRMP delivery plan for 2025 to 2029</u>, which sets out the strategic priorities and actions required to address the risks and strategic challenges. To enable delivery of our customer facing strategic priorities we have also defined the enabling internal plans for every area. There are clear long-term priorities and measures which will help us evaluate progress. Each team has an annual plan which details their roles in delivering against the main priorities. This allows for clear alignment of activities and our medium-term financial plan. This was approved by the <u>Fire Authority at the meeting on 05 July 2024</u>.

In October 2024 we then consulted the public on changes to our response time definitions, changes to our response time targets, and the council tax options for 2025/26. The consultation generated a total of 1,833 responses, which compares favourably with the number received for the November 2024 to February 20204 public consultation. This was approved by the <u>Fire Authority at the meeting on 18 February 2025</u>.

We have made progress against the actions within our delivery plan, and in July 2025 we undertook further consultation to seek the views and feedback on some important proposals relating to water rescue and our Rural Plan (closing at the end of September 2025, this consultation was still underway at the time of writing).

In addition to all of the above, we have conducted an <u>extensive evaluation of the last strategic period</u>, <u>2021 to 2024</u> which considered the effectiveness of the outgoing <u>Customer Safety Plan 2021-2031</u> (the term we previously used to describe the CRMP).

When it comes to collaborating with partners, we are key organisation within the Kent Resilience Forum (KRF) and host it at our headquarters. The KRF is a local resilience forum which has been set up to ensure that agencies and organisations plan and work together, to ensure a co-ordinated response to emergencies that could have a significant impact on communities in Kent. For example, it was fundamental to coordinating the response to both the coronavirus pandemic and the UK's departure from the EU.

Partnership working is a key feature of how the Authority operates, and we continue to develop strong and lasting working relationships with Kent Police, SECAmb, other fire and rescue services, local authorities, NHS clinical commissioning groups, and many other agencies.

Section 2. Delivery of functions

2.1 Identify and Assess

Every fire and rescue authority must assess all foreseeable fire and rescue related risks that could affect their communities, whether they are local, cross-border, multi-authority and/or national in nature from fires to terrorist attacks. Regard must be had to Community Risk Registers produced by Local Resilience Forums and any other local risk analyses as appropriate.

Fire and rescue authorities must put in place arrangements to prevent and mitigate these risks, either through adjusting existing provision, effective collaboration and partnership working, or building new capability. Fire and rescue authorities should work through the Strategic Resilience Board where appropriate when determining what arrangements to put in place.

How do we meet these requirements and get assurance?

Between 01 November 2023 and 01 February 2024, we undertook public consultation on the "Creating a Safer Future – Together" document. This also included consultation on the council tax options for 2024/25. The consultation generated a total of 1,859 responses. This is the highest number of responses of any recent CRMP consultation undertaken by the Authority and reflects our carefully planned approach and the effort of our Engagement Team to raise awareness of the CRMP with our stakeholders and customers. There was overwhelming support for both the risks identified and the areas of focus set out in the CRMP document. This was approved by the Fire Authority at the meeting on 20 February 2024.

Proposals for changes to the Authority are drawn up and consulted upon with employees, members of the public, businesses and community groups. We also provide a summary of what the public receive for the money they pay in council tax to help run the fire and rescue service across Kent and Medway. Responses to the proposals in the plan are analysed and then presented to the Fire Authority, most recently with changes to our response time definitions, changes to our response time targets, and the council tax options for 2025/26, which following consultation, was approved by the Fire Authority at the meeting on 18 February 2025.

Once agreed by Members, the outcomes of the CRMP consultation are used to inform the development of actions against each identified strategic area. We monitor the delivery of the strategic priorities and actions required to address the risks and strategic challenges and report updates to the meetings of the Fire Authority. Over and above that, we have a suite of performance indicators which form the basis of a 'balanced scorecard', drawing from all the strategies and other measures we use. This is used to give assurance to all that we are delivering what we promise in this plan.

To further improve our ability to use the data we collect and, form that, improve performance reporting, we worked with a specialised data consultancy to assist us in undertaking comprehensive data mapping.

The Authority maintains a <u>corporate risk register</u>. Twice yearly updates about the corporate risk register are taken to the Authority's Audit and Governance Committee in January and September. The corporate risk register is kept under regular review, updated as required and key stakeholders kept informed.

In relation to operational (as opposed to corporate) risk, the Authority undertakes and has published a comprehensive <u>CRMP risk analysis</u>, which is an analysis of risk Kent and Medway and how this relates to demand for the Authority's services. We have a mature risk assessment process which draws in data from a variety of internal databases and external sources, including the <u>Kent Community Risk Register</u>.

Last year, we undertook a significant refresh of our approach to risk management, enhancing our approach to strategic and corporate risks. This included researching approaches in other organisations, consulting with the Institute of Risk Management and liaising with our external auditors on our updated approach. The key components of our revised approach to integrated risk management are as follows:

- A detailed document outlining our approach to both internal risks and the Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) risks
- A refreshed Risk Management Policy
- A Risk Appetite Statement and a Risk Tolerance Matrix. The Authority's Corporate Management Board determine and continuously assess the
 nature and extent of the principal risks that the Authority is exposed to, and is willing to take, to achieve its objectives (risk appetite) and ensure
 that planning and decision-making reflects this assessment. The Audit and Governance Committee provide a scrutiny role in relation to
 highlighted risks and as such monitor the delivery of the action plans.
- Following advice from the Institute of Risk Management, the separation of risks into the top strategic risks and other significant corporate risks. The two full risk registers are available on request for public scrutiny.
- Setting the plan of work for internal audit reviews so that it is based on the necessary controls set out in the strategic and corporate risk registers. This will allow our internal audit to provide an independent evaluation of the effectiveness of risk management and our internal control arrangements.
- This approach also ensures the Authority is in line with best practice as set out in the Institute of Internal Auditors' 'Three Lines Model'.
- The establishment of a dedicated Corporate Risk manager, which gives the Authority the capacity to fully assess, evaluate, and manage the enhanced risk management approach.

This revised and enhanced approach was approved by Members at the meeting of the Audit and Governance Committee on 25 April 2024.

2.2 Prevent and Protect

Fire and rescue authorities must make provision for promoting fire safety, including fire prevention, and have a locally determined risk-based inspection programme in place for enforcing compliance with the provisions of the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 in premises to which it applies.

How do we meet these requirements and get assurance?

Our <u>CRMP delivery plan for 2025 to 2029</u> sets out the strategic priorities and actions required to address the risks and strategic challenges. To enable delivery of our customer facing strategic priorities we have also defined the enabling internal plans for every area. There are clear long-term priorities and measures which will help us evaluate progress. The areas of focus are grouped under the following seven themes:

- 1. Climate change and environment
- 2. Health and society
- 3. Rescues
- 4. Major industry
- 5. Buildings and places
- 6. Transport
- 7. Utilities, fuel, and power

These act as a focus for change and innovation across the organisation. Our actions are integrated across our Building Safety, prevention, operational response, resilience, and internal customer teams. This ensures that the investments we make and activities we undertake are complementary, and directly contribute to risk reduction for customers and the communities they live in.

Over the past ten years we have seen a steady reduction in the number of fires across Kent and Medway – albeit with spikes in the summers of 2020 and 2022 due to the exceptionally hot, dry weather. We are also working to reduce the number of deaths on the roads. We will remain proactive in this as we work towards a future where no one is killed or seriously injured by a fire or other emergency. For the first time, we have brought together our protection, prevention, customer experience, collaboration, equality of access to services and engagement work into one strategy. This is because we recognise that by having these areas work more closely, we can be more effective and efficient.

The Authority has a specialist team of <u>Safe and Well Officers</u> working across Kent and Medway. We deliver approximately 20,000 Safe and Well visits and Home Fire Safety visits annually, using referrals from other agencies and direct mail to help recruit and target those at most risk. Our Customer Safety teams and stations are now using Dynamics 365 for recording Home Fire Safety Visits, with training provided before the launch in November 2024. This means we now have one single system to store and share risk information and replaces several legacy platforms and systems. This means KFRS is one of the only FRS in the country sharing all customer and risk information across one system. To meet the needs of the NFCC person-centred framework competency for home fire safety visits, we are sharing e-learning alongside face-to-face training for new firefighters

Our Education Intervention and Life Skills teams engaged with 81,000 children and young people during 2024. Our Education Team were recognised at the NFCC Prevention Awards as a Finalist in the Safeguarding category for their work with fire cadets. In relation to fire cadets, 40 young people joined the Fire Cadets programme in 2024. This programme aims to build confidence, resilience and inspire aspirations. Young people are given the opportunity to continue their learning as Crew and Watch Manager Cadets.

We have a Community Intelligence and Partnerships Team. This team has two main areas of focus: Gathering Intelligence from under-represented communities; and working closely with community partners across Kent and Medway at strategic, operational and tactical levels. We know that one size doesn't fit all, so by learning from our communities, we aim to ensure our services are tailored to meet everyone's needs. This allows us to be more effective at gathering information from underrepresented groups and supporting communities through partnership working. Though our work

on behaviour change we developed a framework and methodology for embedding behaviour change practices into our Customer Safety and Business Safety strategies. Also included in this is the ability to evaluate the programme of Safe and Well visits.

We operate a team called the Risk Information Team who are responsible for collating and assessing information from special risk sites and ensuring site specific risk information is consistent, accurate and available to crews. In conjunction with this, the Risk Information Team also use Microsoft Dynamics to collect, store and share risk information. As with our Customer Safety teams, this means there is now a single solution for the storing and sharing of risk information relating to customers and premises across the organisation, which is leading to an increased visibility of risk data. Dynamics replaces the three separate Microsoft CRM systems that were previously in use; one each for Building Safety, Customer Safety and Operational Response. Information was not easily or routinely shared amongst these systems or teams and in some instances the same premises or site would be in all three systems.

Dynamics has allowed us to address these issues, to provide an even more effective means of accessing and disseminating critical information, changing the way the Authority approaches risk information. With this new system a premises only needs to be added once, all activities are then processed from this one place. For example, if Building Safety issue a prohibition notice for a premises this is then made available to all employees including operational colleagues. Dynamics also stores plans, images and evacuation information, which the Risk Information team collect as part of their inspection, to support crews in planning for and responding to an incident.

2.3 Respond

Fire and rescue authorities must make provision to respond to incidents such as fires, road traffic collisions and other emergencies within their area and in other areas in line with their mutual aid agreements. Fire and rescue authorities must have effective business continuity arrangements in place in accordance with their duties under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004.

How do we meet these requirements and get assurance?

As set out in section 2.2, our <u>CRMP delivery plan for 2025 to 2029</u> sets out the strategic priorities and actions required to address the risks and strategic challenges. It outlines how we will prepare for emergencies and how we will respond to them.

Business continuity plans (including recovery plans) are in place for all reasonably foreseeable risks to the Authority. Our plans are designed to enable us to respond effectively to emergencies which may affect the delivery of our core functions.

All business continuity plans are validated through exercises (both live and table-top) to ensure they are comprehensive, fit for purpose and realistic. These exercises allow us to test our procedures and responses to a variety of events, ensuring a cohesive response whilst being able to maintain our front-line emergency response and Service critical support functions.

As part of this, in 2024 the legacy 'Emergency Planning and Contingencies Policy' and series of framework documents were replaced by four new emergency planning and resilience policies. Collectively they ensure the key resilience-related areas are adequately covered at a policy level and that KFRS meets its statutory responsibilities under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004.

The Authority also participates in a national annual exercise on Business Continuity Awareness Week.

As part of our commitment to continually seek to improve our response capability, we introduced new water rescue vehicles to our fleet of emergency vehicles in order to provide quicker and more effective rescue response when someone is struggling in water or mud, Two of the specialist vans are already in use across Kent and Medway, with an additional three soon to be available. The 4×4 vehicles are strategically based at fire stations where crews are trained in flood, water and mud rescues and include a variety of improved features to help firefighters respond to those types of emergencies. One of the key changes is the units can transport inflatable motorised boats on-board, rather than towing them, which means they can leave the station quickly and travel at blue light speed. The inflatable boats, which can be used with or without a motor, can also be easily transported and inflated anywhere, enabling the crew to enter the water as close as possible to the person in need of help.

As outlined in section 2.2, we operate a team called the Risk Information Team who are responsible for collating and assessing information from special risk sites and ensuring site specific risk information is consistent, accurate and available to crews. The risk data is also shared with partners across boarders enhancing risk data awareness for neighbouring services. In conjunction with this, the Authority has moved to one single system called Microsoft Dynamics to collect, store and share risk information across teams and services.

To further improve the relevance and quality of our risk information, in 2022 we introduced 'Response Assessment Intelligence Visits' (RAV-Int). This is an intelligence gathering process whereby operational colleagues record Building Safety, firefighter or Customer Safety concerns and send them to the relevant team for action. These are carried out at non-domestic premises that meet a risk threshold within the Building Safety Risk Based Inspection Programme, or because of local knowledge, or when attending premises because of an incident. Since 2022, over 14,000 RAV-Int visits have been completed; the breakdown of these is 6,400 proactive visits (as a result of intelligence held) and 7,800 reactive visits (as a result of attending a premises). This programme has been recognised nationally and by HMICFRS for its innovation and effectiveness.

We continue to be committed to learning from the experiences of our customers, partners, and colleagues. We will continue to embed a culture of learning that allows us to deal with new situations and problems. We used the concept of 'Black Box thinking' - no blame to support people owning issues and mistakes without fear. This drives innovation and allows us to become more skilled and experienced. We proactively seek out feedback and use our operational learning activities to understand and measure the effectiveness of changes we make. To this end, we play an active role in the National Operational Learning process and had adopted the National Operational Learning. and comply with the Fire Standard for Operational Learning.

In February 2024, the Authority made the decision to withdraw from the contract with Eurotunnel to provide the first line of response (FLOR) to any emergency inside the Channel Tunnel. This was a contractual arrangement that was sperate to the Authority's day-to-day services, however it was no longer viable for the Authority to continue. However, we continue to work closely with Eurotunnel and Falck, who have been appointed to take over the FLOR arrangements. The Authority will continue to deliver the second line of response (SLOR) role as we still have the statutory responsibility to attend incidents at the tunnel, and firefighters at stations nearest to the crossing, such as Dover, Folkestone and Ashford, will continue to respond to emergencies at the site when called out via 999.

2.4 Collaboration

The Policing and Crime Act 2017 created a statutory duty on fire and rescue authorities, police forces, and ambulance trusts to:

- keep collaboration opportunities under review.
- notify other emergency services of proposed collaborations that could be in the interests of their mutual efficiency or effectiveness; and
- give effect to a proposed collaboration where the proposed parties agree that it would be in the interests of their efficiency or effectiveness and that it does not have an adverse effect on public safety.

Fire and rescue authorities must collaborate with other fire and rescue authorities to deliver interoperability (between fire and rescue authorities) and interoperability (with other responders such as other emergency services, wider Category 1 and 2 responders and Local Resilience Forums) in line with the Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Principles (JESIP). Fire and rescue authorities must collaborate with the National Resilience Lead Authority to ensure interoperability is maintained for National Resilience assets.

How do we meet these requirements and get assurance?

Collaboration and partnership working is a key feature of how the Authority operates, and we continue to develop strong and lasting working relationships with Kent Police, SECAmb, other fire and rescue services, local authorities, NHS clinical commissioning groups, and many other agencies. Updates on collaboration with partners are taken to the meetings of the <u>Fire Authority</u>.

In 2023, the Collaboration Team and Behaviour Team were merged to form a new Community Intelligence and Partnerships Team to increase efficiency and effectiveness of partnership working. This allows us to be more effective at gathering information from underrepresented groups and supporting communities through partnership working. Wherever possible we consider collaboration with our partner organisations, such as Kent Police and SECAmb and progress any other possible collaboration opportunities that may present themselves to enable greater efficiencies and improvements to the service.

We are key organisation within the Kent Resilience Forum (KRF). The KRF is a local resilience forum which has been set up to ensure that agencies and organisations plan and work together, to ensure a co-ordinated response to emergencies that could have a significant impact on communities in Kent. It was fundamental to coordinating the response to both the coronavirus pandemic and the UK's departure from the EU.

The Authority also hosts and manages the Kent Resilience Team (KRT). The KRT is part of the KRF and is a multi-agency initiative to transform the delivery of emergency planning services in order to achieve better outcomes for the people of Kent. It does so by improving the effectiveness of the planning, response and recovery from emergencies.

To ensure we develop better inter-agency working and to help save public money, we have proactively opened our premises for use by other agencies, particularly SECAmb and Kent Police. SECAmb mobilise resources from several KFRS owned premises and we support them by responding to life-threatening medical emergencies when our crews or officers are available to do so.

We are part of the <u>Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Programme (JESIP)</u> with Kent Police and SECAmb. The JESIP programme sets out a standard approach at incidents to multi-agency working between emergency services and other response organisations.

We operate a shared 999 control room with Kent Police. Working in partnership with Kent Police, we implemented the UK's first inter-agency command and control solution. In 2024 we moved into a brand-new purpose-built fire and police control room at Coldharbour, just outside of Maidstone.

In addition, mutual assistance and incident support agreements have been signed with all our neighbouring fire and rescue authorities (these are often referred to as Section 13 and 16 Agreements after the powers granted to FRA by these sections in the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004). To ensure our effectiveness, we also undertake familiarisation and training with our neighbouring FRAs.

Following approval from our fire Authority in October 2022, we formally applied and were accepted as a member of the Networked Fire Service Partnership (NFSP). The NFSP is a partnership between Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service, Dorset and Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service, and Hampshire and Isle of Wight Fire and Rescue Service, which gives them the capability to handle each other's 999 calls during periods of high operational activity. Having this capability was one of the outcomes from the Grenfell Tower Inquiry, which identified the importance of fire and rescue services being able to work closely from a fire command and control perspective.

In practical terms, this will mean that once a new mobilising system is procured, calls that are not answered within six seconds will be passed to another specialist fire control room, if the call is then not answered in ten seconds it is transferred to two further specialist fire control rooms. This means that during a major incident we will have access to a minimum of 16 specialist fire control operators who can give lifesaving fire survival guidance advice to our customers.

We actively consider opportunities for collaboration with other services and ensure arrangements are in place to effectively evaluate opportunities and to review and monitor collaboration activities to ensure continued benefits and cost-effectiveness. The Authority has been at the forefront of collaboration and leads the fire service national collaboration project for procurement.

Section 3. National Resilience

3.1 Gap Analysis

Fire and rescue authorities' risk assessments must include an analysis of any gaps between their existing capability and that needed to ensure national resilience. Fire and rescue authorities are required to assess the risk of emergencies occurring and use this to inform contingency planning. To do this effectively, fire and rescue authorities are expected to assess their existing capability and identify any gaps as part of the integrated risk management planning process.

How do we meet these requirements and get assurance?

The Authority undertakes and has published a comprehensive <u>CRMP risk analysis</u>, which is an analysis of risk Kent and Medway and how this relates to demand for the Authority's services. We have a mature risk assessment process which draws in data from a variety of internal databases and external sources, including the <u>Kent Community Risk Register</u>.

Under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004, partner agencies in the Kent Resilience Forum (KRF) are required to assess the risks in their area. KRF partners achieve this by working together to develop the 'Kent Community Risk Register'. The risk register is informed by national guidance and developed locally with partners and subject matter experts to list hazards and threats identified by government departments and local agencies. Prior to approval the risk register is then endorsed by the strategic representatives of all KRF partners.

We are a key organisation within the <u>Kent Resilience Forum</u>. The KRF is a local resilience forum, one of a number across England, which has been set up to ensure that agencies and organisations plan and work together, to ensure a co-ordinated response to emergencies that could have a significant impact on communities in Kent.

The Authority also works with partners in Southeast England and nationally on a number of projects to support national resilience. Issues regarding this are reported to Members of the Fire Authority, however, due to the sensitive nature of this area, limited information is detailed in the public domain.

The Authority plans and undertakes regular operational exercises against the current risks and threats in Kent and Medway. These test the efficacy of our emergency planning and the use of joint emergency services interoperability principles (JESIP). The scenarios and location of the service level exercises are determined by considering risks in the National Risk Register, our multi-agency Kent Community Risk Register and the information the Authority holds relating to specific premises within its risk management system.

We undertake numerous exercises, which are made up of practical and tabletop exercises as well as professional discussions following RAV-Int (Response Assessment Intelligence) visits. In 2022 we established an Exercise Planning Group to ensure that we are conforming to the legislative requirements for exercising and training. As part of this RAV-Int visits and exercise processes are incorporated into one streamlined process to ensure that all high and very high-risk sites in Kent and Medway are visited and exercised against. In addition, there were several National Resilience led exercises, plus some held outside of Kent and Medway.

3.2 National Co-ordination and Advisory Framework (NCAF)

The NCAF has been designed to provide robust and flexible response arrangements to major emergencies that can be adapted to the nature, scale and requirements of the incident. Fire and rescue authorities must proactively engage with, and support, the NCAF arrangements including the NFCC's (National Fire Chiefs Council) lead operational role.

How do we meet these requirements and get assurance?

Kent Fire and Rescue Service maintains a critical incident framework that ensures we can respond to critical and major incidents and continue to maintain essential services. The framework ensures that KFRS has suitable management and coordination arrangements in place to respond to such incidents. These include arrangements for categorising and escalating incidents. Within this the links to local, regional, and national coordination processes are set out.

This includes identifying the need to report trigger incidents into the <u>National Coordination and Advisory Framework (NCAF) Electronic Support System.</u>

The KFRS procedure for reporting trigger incidents is managed through the KFRS control room. A Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) is held on the control system. This SOP lists the trigger incident types that require reporting to NCAF. A prompt to consider activation of this SOP is also listed against the incident type within the mobilising system, ensuring that NCAF reporting is carried out at the point at which the incident type is defined and confirmed.

The critical incident framework arrangements are tested annually as part of the KFRS Strategic Exercise. This includes consideration of NCAF reporting. These exercises are subject to a full and robust debrief and operational learning process.

We can offer resources via the National Resilience Fire Control. This includes our range of national resilience assets.

3.3 Response to Terrorist Attacks or MTFA

Fire and rescue services must be able to respond to the threat of terrorism and be ready to respond to incidents within their areas and across England. Fire and rescue services should also be interoperable to provide operational support across the UK to terrorist events as required.

How do we meet these requirements and get assurance?

The Authority plans and undertakes regular operational exercises throughout the year. These test the efficacy of our emergency planning, the use of joint emergency services interoperability principles (JESIP).

The issues raised in the recommendations of the Kerslake Report and the government inquiry into the terrorist attack at Manchester Arena on May 2017, are supported by the Authority's plans and activities. For example, we have amended talkgroups on airwaves radios in line with the recommendations of the Kerslake Report.

We hold live and tabletop exercises based on scenarios related to marauding terrorist attacks. These have included on board Eurotunnel passenger trains, in the Bluewater shopping centre and at other significant sites across Kent and Medway. Doing so allows us to test the multi-agency binational emergency plan, as well as individual organisational plans for a major terrorist incident in significant locations.

Further commentary and information relating to this section is withheld due to the sensitivity of the area.

3.4 National Resilience Assurance

Fire and rescue authorities must continue to work collectively and with the Fire and Rescue Strategic Resilience Board and the national resilience lead authority to provide assurance to government that:

- existing national resilience capabilities are fit for purpose and robust; and
- risks and plans are assessed and any gaps in capability that are needed to ensure national resilience are identified.

Fire and rescue authorities with MTFA teams must work with police forces and ambulance trusts to provide tri-service assurance of this capability.

How do we meet these requirements and get assurance?

As part of the Fire and Rescue Marine Response Group the Authority has entered into an agreement with counterparts in France, the Netherlands and Belgium for an agreed response and procedures to incidents in the English Channel.

We have a variety of National Resilience Assets that are exercised both locally and nationally. Assets include: Urban Search and Rescue; National Inter-Agency Liaison Officers; Enhanced Logistics Support; High Volume Pump; Detection; Identification and Monitoring; and Tactical Advisors specialising in a variety of areas.

Because of the responsibilities related to the Channel Tunnel, exercises are undertaken with the Authority's counterparts in France, Belgium and the Netherlands. As set out in section 2.3, since Falck taking over the FLOR arrangements from February 2025, we will continue to work closely with them and Eurotunnel.

We are key organisation within the Kent Resilience Forum (KRF). The KRF is a local resilience forum which has been set up to ensure that agencies and organisations plan and work together, to ensure a co-ordinated response to emergencies that could have a significant impact on communities in Kent. It was fundamental to coordinating the response to both the coronavirus pandemic and the UK's departure from the EU.

The Authority also hosts and manages the Kent Resilience Team (KRT). Part of the KRF, the KRT is a multi-agency initiative to transform the delivery of emergency planning services to achieve better outcomes for the people of Kent. It does so by improving the effectiveness of the planning, response and recovery from emergencies. This is in line with both the <u>National Resilience Standards for Local Resilience Forums</u> and the <u>National Coordination and Advisory Framework for England</u>.

Section 4. Governance

4.1 Managing the Fire and Rescue Service/Chief Fire Officer

Each fire and rescue authority will appoint an individual – commonly known as a Chief Fire Officer – who has responsibility for managing the fire and rescue service. Each fire and rescue authority must hold this person to account for the exercise of their functions and the functions of persons under their direction and control.

How do we meet these requirements and get assurance?

Kent Fire and Rescue Service is overseen and run by a dedicated local authority called the <u>Kent and Medway Fire and Rescue Authority</u> ('the Authority'). The Authority is the governing body of Kent Fire and Rescue Service (KFRS) and responsible for the provision of the service.

KMFRA took over responsibility for Kent Fire Brigade (as it was formerly known) from Kent County Council on 1 April 1998. KMFRA was established as a local authority covering the Kent County Council and Medway Council area, whose sole purpose is the provision of the Kent Fire and Rescue Service.

As per the Fire Authority Members Guide published by the Local Government Association, the primary aim of the Authority is '...to provide a good service to communities that is built on a thorough understanding of local risks and tailored to community needs'.

The Authority meets three times a year (normally February, June, October) and comprises 25 elected councillors appointed by Kent County Council (21 councillors) and Medway Council (4 councillors) as well as the Kent Police and Crime Commissioner and an Independent Person for Standards.

The Authority also has an Audit and Governance Committee. Comprising 10 elected councillors from the Authority who serve as members, The purpose of this committee is to provide independent assurance to the Authority of the adequacy of the risk management framework and the internal control environment. It is also chaired by an opposition Member, which demonstrates good governance around scrutiny.

Meeting three times per year (normally January, April, September), it provides an independent review of the Authority's governance, risk management and control frameworks and oversees the financial reporting and annual governance processes. Additionally, it oversees internal audit and external audit, helping to ensure efficient and effective assurance arrangements are in place. It also has responsibility for signing off the final accounts and the annual governance statement.

Meetings of the Fire Authority and Audit and Governance Committee are open to the public and agenda packs, <u>reports and minutes are made publicly available on our website</u>.

The Chief Executive has management responsibility for ensuring that effective controls and processes are implemented across the Authority in compliance with the Code of Corporate Governance. Our controls are regularly reviewed and updated with reports submitted to the Fire Authority. The Director of Finance and Internal Services is responsible for ensuring the efficient financial management of Kent Fire and Rescue Service and acts as the principal financial adviser and chief financial officer to the Authority (this role is also known as a Section 151 Officer pursuant to section 151 of the Local Government Act 1972), providing specialist advice where necessary, ensuring the authority's financial affairs meet all legal and financial obligations. In addition, the corporate leadership team has collective responsibility for setting the strategic direction and management of the finances.

Our <u>constitutional and governance documents</u> set out how the Authority operates, how decisions are made, and the rules and procedures governing Authority meetings and decision-taking. These comprise the following:

- The Kent Fire Services (Combination Scheme) Order 1997. This is the Order made by Parliament which first established the Authority. It contains the Constitution of the Authority and prescribes the arrangements for the Authority to take over responsibility for Kent Fire Brigade from Kent County Council on 1 April 1998.
- Kent and Medway Fire and Rescue Authority Standing Orders. These are rules for the operation of Authority and Committee meetings.
- Committee Terms of Reference for the Audit and Governance Committee; Hearings Panel; and Senior Officer Appointments, Conditions and Conduct Committee.
- Scheme of delegation of powers to the Chief Executive. This sets out those decisions which can only be taken by the Authority or one of its committees (i.e. by Members of the Authority), and those which can be taken by the Chief Executive or other officers.
- Convention on Member and Officer relationships. This deals with the working relationships between Members (both as individuals and collectively within their political groups) and the officers (i.e. the paid employees) of the Authority.
- Code of Corporate Governance. This is the means through which the Authority applies the CIPFA principles of good governance and sets out how the Authority meets each of these principles in its day-to-day activities.
- The Statement of Assurance against the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England 2018.

We publish an <u>annual governance statement</u>. This is the report of the review of the Authority's governance and systems of internal control, along with an assessment of their effectiveness. The legal requirement to undertake this annual review is set out in <u>Section 6 of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015</u> and each year this is taken to the September meeting of the Authority's Audit and Governance Committee.

In relation to our governance of meetings, all the scheduled meetings that take place across KFRS (including those of the Fire Authority and the Audit and Governance Committee) are mapped out and accompanied by up-to-date terms of reference. These are set out within the Service's Meetings Policy and its accompanying Tier 3 procedure.

All local authorities are required by the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 to appoint a Monitoring Officer whose statutory duty is to report to the Authority on any proposed actions which may contravene the law or constitute maladministration. Following the decision by the previous Monitoring Officer to stand down from the role, in July 2025 the Authority approved the proposal for the appointment of a new Monitoring Officer from Mid Kent Legal Services (a partnership which was formed in 2008 by Maidstone Borough Council, Tunbridge Wells Borough Council and Swale Borough Council).

Each year the Authority's external auditors (Grant Thornton) undertake an assessment and provide opinion on the Authority's 'Value for Money' arrangements that are in place. This covers the key criteria of financial sustainability, governance and how we have improved economy, efficiency and effectiveness. The most recent annual audit report (2023/24) was approved at the meeting of the Fire Authority in February 2025. Having

reviewed the Authority's arrangements, no significant weakness identified in any of the three reporting criteria. Alongside this assessment, they issued an opinion of the financial statements for the year ending 2023/24 and our auditors issued an unqualified opinion on the financial statements.

4.2 Documents to be prepared

Each FRA is expected to produce an Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP), Annual statement of assurance, financial plans (a medium-term financial strategy, an efficiency plan and a reserves strategy).

How do we meet these requirements and get assurance?

The Fire and Rescue National Framework for England requires every fire and rescue authority to assess all foreseeable fire and rescue related risks that could affect their communities, whether they are local, cross-border, multi-authority and/or national, and prepare an 'integrated risk management plan', or as it is now referred to within the sector, a 'Community Risk Management Plan' (CRMP). In 2022 we consulted with our customers on a 10-year analysis of the key societal, economic, technological, and environmental changes that were emerging in Kent and Medway and could present risks to local communities.

The next stage of our CRMP process was a comprehensive risk analysis and assessment. Undertaken in line with the National Fire Chiefs' Council's "Community Risk Management Planning Strategic Framework", this risk assessment utilised a robust, evidence-based methodology. The results were published in our <u>CRMP risk analysis and assessment document</u>. We called this document "Creating a Safer Future – Together". This was approved by the Fire Authority at the meeting on 19 October 2023.

Between 01 November 2023 and 01 February 2024, we undertook public consultation on the "Creating a Safer Future – Together" document. This also included consultation on the council tax options for 2024/25. The consultation generated a total of 1,859 responses. This is the highest number of responses of any recent CRMP consultation undertaken by the Authority and reflects our carefully planned approach and the effort of our Engagement Team to raise awareness of the CRMP with our stakeholders and customers. There was overwhelming support for both the risks identified and the areas of focus set out in the CRMP document. This was approved by the Fire Authority at the meeting on 20 February 2024.

Recognising the clear support expressed through the consultation responses for the identified risks and areas of focus, we moved forward to the next stage and formed actions under each strategic area. In the strategy period 2025 to 2029, we are ensuring effective integration of actions from our Building Safety, Prevention, and Response and Resilience teams. Our CRMP consultation identified seven areas of focus: Climate change and environment; Health and society; Rescues; Major industry; Buildings and places; and Transport, Utilities fuel and Power.

Following this, we put together our <u>CRMP delivery plan for 2025 to 2029</u>, which sets out the strategic priorities and actions required to address the risks and strategic challenges. To enable delivery of our customer facing strategic priorities we have also defined the enabling internal plans for every area. There are clear long-term priorities and measures which will help us evaluate progress. Each team has an annual plan which details their roles in delivering against the main priorities. This allows for clear alignment of activities and our medium-term financial plan. This was approved by the <u>Fire Authority at the meeting on 05 July 2024</u>.

In October 2024 we then consulted the public on changes to our response time definitions, changes to our response time targets, and the council tax options for 2025/26. The consultation generated a total of 1,833 responses, which compares favourably with the number received for the November 2024 to February 20204 public consultation. This was approved by the <u>Fire Authority at the meeting on 18 February 2025</u>.

We have made progress against the actions within our delivery plan, and in July 2025 we undertook further consultation to seek the views and feedback on some important proposals relating to water rescue and our Rural Plan (closing at the end of September 2025, this consultation was still underway at the time of writing).

In addition to all the above, we have conducted an <u>extensive evaluation of the last strategic period</u>, <u>2021 to 2024</u> which considered the effectiveness of the outgoing <u>Customer Safety Plan 2021-2031</u> (the term we previously used to describe the CRMP).

In relation to financial plans, we publish the following documents:

Medium Term Financial Plan. Our approach to budgeting is sustainable and business-led and is detailed in a document called the Medium-Term Financial Plan. The latest document covers the four-year period from 2025/26 to 2028/29 and provides an update on the work of the service and our future plans. Our Budget Book and Medium-Term Financial Plan 2025/26 to 2028/29 was approved at the meeting of the Fire Authority in February 2025.

<u>Treasury Management and Investment Strategy</u>. The CIPFA Code of Practice on Treasury Management and the CIPFA Prudential Code require the Authority to determine and set the Treasury Management and Investment Strategy for the financial year ahead as part of the annual budget papers in February of each year. Our Treasury Management and Investment Strategy 2025/26 was approved at the <u>meeting of the Fire Authority in February 2025</u>.

Reserves Strategy. Every year the Authority's Reserves Strategy is reviewed and updated to ensure that it remains relevant and appropriate. There are five earmarked reserves, with by far the largest being the Infrastructure Reserve, which is used to help fund the Authority's capital programme and large one-off IT investments. In challenging financial times, it is prudent to maintain an appropriate level of reserves which will help bridge the gap of any shortfall. Our Reserves Strategy 2025/26 was approved at the meeting of the Fire Authority in February 2025.

<u>Capital Strategy</u>. The most recent <u>CIPFA Prudential Code for Capital Finance in Local Authorities</u> was issued in December 2021. Its key objectives remain ensuring that decisions made around local authority capital programmes are affordable, prudent and sustainable. The Authority continues to use the Code as required under <u>Part 1 of the Local Government Act 2003</u>, as a framework to demonstrate effective planning and proper appraisal of its capital finances. A requirement of the Code is that authorities should produce a Capital Strategy which sets out an outline of the reporting requirements that it should be meeting. Our updated Capital Strategy was approved at the <u>meeting of the Fire Authority in February 2025</u>.

Information about the Authority's reserves is also provided in the external auditor's annual report for 2023/24. This was approved at the <u>meeting of</u> the Fire Authority in February 2025.

Each year, the Authority also publishes a Productivity and Efficiency Plan. In February 2025, the Home Office issued updated guidance about how efficiency plans are to be prepared. The replaces the previous guidance issued in January 2024. KFRS has produced the Productivity and Efficiency Plan 2025/26 in accordance with the new guidance and submitted it to the Home Office in line with their deadline of 30 April 2025. This was then taken as an information item to the June 2025 meeting of the Fire Authority.

This covers our efficiencies and productivity initiatives in 2024/25, and our intentions for continuing efficiencies and productivity into 2025/26 onwards. As well as the efficiency information covering cashable efficiency, non-cashable efficiency, recurrent saving and non-recurrent saving, it contains the required information in the 'productivity' narrative section, covering the productivity initiatives enacted across the areas of collaboration, asset management, IT investment and resourcing.

The aim is to offer a degree of context about the way we undertake our financial planning but to also set out that our focus is to ensure the efficient and effective delivery of our services to all our customers. Ensuring our services are delivered as efficiently as possible whilst also considering our outputs and outcomes is an important driver to improving productivity.

4.3 National Fire Chief's Council (NFCC)

The NFCC is the first line of operational advice to central and local government during major incidents. This is outlined within the National Coordination and Advisory Framework (NCAF), which fire and rescue services must proactively engage with. The NFCC has a role to drive continuous improvement and development throughout the sector. Fire and rescue services should consult the NFCC for advice and support when developing improvement plans, particularly in response to inspections. The expectation is that fire and rescue services in England engage with the NFCC and, in turn, that the NFCC works to support and represent every service.

How do we meet these requirements and get assurance?

Through widespread involvement in the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC), we play an active role in sector improvement at the regional and national level.

- The Chief Executive is an active member of the NFCC council, mentors new chief fire officers and regularly contributes knowledge and new products from KFRS into the whole sector.
- The Director of Protection, Prevention and Customer Engagement is the national lead for Home Safety and a member of the NFCC Prevention committee. He is also a non-executive director of the Fire and Rescue Indemnity Company (a discretionary mutual dedicated to providing risk protection services tailored specifically to fire and rescue authorities).
- The Director of Operations is Co-lead Officer on the NFCC Environmental, Sustainability and Climate Change work stream, which is part of the NFCC Sector Resources and Improvement Committee.
- The Director of Finance and Corporate Services plays a significant role in the Fire Finance network.
- The Assistant Director Response is the NFCC Alternative Fuels and Energy systems lead; a member of the USAR National User Group; and a member of the MTA National User Group.

- Assistant Director Resilience is a member of the National Fire Control Board, the NFCC Operational Communications Strategy Board, the
 Emergency Services Network Fire Customer group; the Eastern Region Chair for the Emergency Services Network; sits on national NFCC
 groups for operational communications and fire control; and is the MAIT local strategic lead.
- The Assistant Director Customer and Building Safety Chairs the NFCC Southeast Prevention Group, is the NFCC Prevention Learning Lead (which is part of the NFCC Organisational Learning Board) and Chairs the NFCC Road Safety Practitioners Group. She is also the NFCC 'Post Incident' lead for Road Safety and the Vice Chair for the NFCC Road Safety Group.
- The Area Manager Customer and Building Safety is a board member of the NFCC Protection Committee Steering Group and a board member of the Building Safety Regulator Project.
- The Area Manager Learning and Professionalism is Chair of ICTAS (Incident Command Training and Assessment Subgroup) under SEORRG (Southeast Operational Response and Resilience Group) and sits on NCCUG (National Command and Control User Group).
- The Head of Learning and Development is a member of the NFCC Leadership and Organisational Development Board.
- The Fire Risk Inspection Team Manager is a member of NOLUG (National Operational Learning User Group, a strategic-level committee within the NFCC that oversees how operational learning is taken forward across fire services).
- The Group Manager Building Safety is a member of the Emerging Hazards Group under NFCC Protection.
- The Group Manager Service Delivery and On-Call Project Lead are active members of the NFCC On-Call Practitioners' Group.
- The Resilience Manager is the Chair of the NFCC and Home Office Resilience Group; Chair of the NFCC Business Continuity and Resilience Group; represents the NFCC Business Continuity and Resilience Group at the NFCC Resources Forum and at the NFCC Digital, Technology and Cyber (DTC) Board.
- The Customer Safety Lead is a member of the Home Fire Safety Visit Group.
- The Community Intelligence and Partnerships Supervisor is a member of the Derelict Building Group, which forms part of the NFCC Prevention workstream.
- The Education Manager plays an active role in the Children and Young People Group and the Water Safety Group.
- The Road Safety Manager is the NFCC Road Safety 'Driving for Better Business' thematic lead and chairs the Southeast Regional Road Safety Group.
- The Water Services Manager plays a significant role within the NFCC Water Officer Group.
- The Community Intelligence and Partnerships Supervisor leads the NFCC workstream on Derelict Buildings.

Section 5. Achieving value for money

5.1 Reserves

Sections 31A, 32, 42A and 43 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 requires billing and precepting authorities to have regard to the level of reserves needed for meeting estimated future expenditure when calculating the budget requirement. Each fire and rescue authority should publish their reserves strategy on their website, either as part of their medium-term financial plan or in a separate reserves' strategy document. The information on each reserve should make clear how much of the funding falls into the following three categories:

- a. Funding for planned expenditure on projects and programmes over the period of the current medium term financial plan.
- b. Funding for specific projects and programmes beyond the current planning period.
- c. As a general contingency or resource to meet other expenditure needs held in accordance with sound principles of good financial management (e.g. insurance).

How do we meet these requirements and get assurance?

We have a robust and complaint financial framework, as part of this the following documents are published:

Medium Term Financial Plan. Our approach to budgeting is sustainable and business-led and is detailed in a document called the Medium-Term Financial Plan. The latest document covers the four-year period from 2025/26 to 2028/29 and provides an update on the work of the service and our future plans. Our Budget Book and Medium-Term Financial Plan 2025/26 to 2028/29 was approved at the meeting of the Fire Authority in February 2025.

<u>Treasury Management and Investment Strategy</u>. The CIPFA Code of Practice on Treasury Management and the CIPFA Prudential Code require the Authority to determine and set the Treasury Management and Investment Strategy for the financial year ahead as part of the annual budget papers in February of each year. Our Treasury Management and Investment Strategy 2025/26 was approved at the <u>meeting of the Fire Authority in February 2025</u>.

Reserves Strategy. Every year the Authority's Reserves Strategy is reviewed and updated to ensure that it remains relevant and appropriate. There are five earmarked reserves, with by far the largest being the Infrastructure Reserve, which is used to help fund the Authority's capital programme and large one-off IT investments. In challenging financial times, it is prudent to maintain an appropriate level of reserves which will help bridge the gap of any shortfall. Our Reserves Strategy 2025/26 was approved at the meeting of the Fire Authority in February 2025.

<u>Capital Strategy</u>. The most recent <u>CIPFA Prudential Code for Capital Finance in Local Authorities</u> was issued in December 2021. Its key objectives remain ensuring that decisions made around local authority capital programmes are affordable, prudent and sustainable. The Authority continues to use the Code as required under <u>Part 1 of the Local Government Act 2003</u>, as a framework to demonstrate effective planning and proper appraisal of its capital finances. A requirement of the Code is that authorities should produce a Capital Strategy which sets out an outline of the reporting requirements that it should be meeting. Our updated Capital Strategy was approved at the <u>meeting of the Fire Authority in February 2025</u>.

Information about the Authority's reserves is also provided in the external auditor's annual report for 2023/24. This was approved at the <u>meeting of</u> the Fire Authority in February 2025.

Each year, the Authority also publishes a Productivity and Efficiency Plan. In February 2025, the Home Office issued updated guidance about how efficiency plans are to be prepared. The replaces the previous guidance issued in January 2024. KFRS has produced the Productivity and Efficiency Plan 2025/26 in accordance with the new guidance and submitted it to the Home Office in line with their deadline of 30 April 2025. This was then taken as an information item to the <u>June 2025 meeting of the Fire Authority</u>.

This covers our efficiencies and productivity initiatives in 2024/25, and our intentions for continuing efficiencies and productivity into 2025/26 onwards. As well as the efficiency information covering cashable efficiency, non-cashable efficiency, recurrent saving and non-recurrent saving, it contains the required information in the 'productivity' narrative section, covering the productivity initiatives enacted across the areas of collaboration, asset management, IT investment and resourcing.

The aim is to offer a degree of context about the way we undertake our financial planning but to also set out that our focus is to ensure the efficient and effective delivery of our services to all our customers. Ensuring our services are delivered as efficiently as possible whilst also considering our outputs and outcomes is an important driver to improving productivity.

5.2 Commercial Transformation

Each fire and rescue authority must demonstrate that it is achieving value for money for the goods and services it receives. Every fire and rescue authority should look at ways to improve its commercial practices including whether they can aggregate their procurement with other fire and rescue authorities and other local services (e.g. police) to achieve efficiencies.

Fire and rescue authorities must demonstrate and support national and local commercial transformation programmes where appropriate. Each fire and rescue authority should be able to demonstrate full awareness of the objectives to standardise requirements, aggregate demand and manage suppliers of products and services within their commercial arrangements.

Fire and rescue authorities must ensure that their commercial activities, be that the placement of new contracts or the use of existing contracts, is in line with their legal obligations, including but not limited to the Public Contracts Regulations, the Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012, the Modern Slavery Act 2015 and transparency commitments.

How do we meet these requirements and get assurance?

Our Procurement Regulations set out the legislative framework through which the Authority conducts and authorises the procurement of goods, works and services, providing a clear commitment to ensuring that all goods, services, and contracts are procured efficiently, cost-effectively, and in compliance with legal and regulatory requirements. With the introduction of new public procurement legislation in the form of the Procurement Act 2023, our Procurement Regulations have been updated to bring them in line with the requirements of the Act. These were approved by Members at the July 2025 meeting of the Fire Authority.

We apply an approach called category management. The principle, as defined by the <u>Chartered Institute of Procurement and Supply</u>, is that category management is an approach which organises our resources to focus on specific areas of spend. The results can be greater than traditional transactional based purchasing methods. A structured category management approach helps us generate savings, but also improve supplier performance, reduce supply risks, and drive innovation and continuous improvement. We profile, benchmark, research and assess the market, and look for any risks and trends and new opportunities constantly. We have developed an expert level of knowledge in each category, and we will maintain this approach.

As an organisation that procures a large amount of goods and services and spends time working closely across all communities throughout Kent and Medway, we are highly aware of the issue of modern slavery. Our <u>Modern Slavery and Transparency in Supply Chains Statement 2024/25</u> articulates our commitment to helping to eradicate this crime.

In accordance with the Modern Slavery Act 2015, we have a zero-tolerance approach to modern slavery and its presence within our organisation and supply chains. We welcome the increasing momentum towards mandatory human-rights due diligence and are therefore fully committed to supporting the government in tackling modern slavery. Our Modern Slavery and Transparency in Supply Chains Statement is a reflection of our commitment to this.

In practice we demonstrate this through our procurement and purchasing processes and an active commitment to upholding and protecting the human rights of our customers, supply chain workers, local communities, and employees. We have set out the standards, values and behaviours we expect from our suppliers in our <u>Supplier Code of Conduct</u>. This is also underpinned by our <u>Modern Slavery Policy</u>, which is the mechanism through we ensure that modern slavery is not taking place anywhere in our own business or our supply chains. We also ensure that, when delivering our customer services, our employees are appropriately trained to be able identify potential modern slavery and raise those concerns accordingly.

Equality in Procurement at Kent Fire and Rescue Service. In accordance with our responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010 and our own values in promoting equality in everything we do; we want people who work with us to also demonstrate the same commitment to fairness and equality. The procurement opportunities we publish are inclusive and accessible, and our evaluation of proposals is undertaken using objective and non-discriminatory criteria. We have a formalised approach to equality in procurement at Kent Fire and Rescue Service. We consider it necessary for organisations who intend to supply goods, works or services to us or on our behalf to demonstrate that reasonably practicable steps have been taken to allow equal access and treatment in employment and services for all and can give evidence of their approach to meeting the requirements of the law.

5.3 Research and Development

Fire and rescue authorities should engage with national research and development programmes, including those overseen by the NFCC, unless there is a good reason not to.

How do we meet these requirements and get assurance?

We have a dedicated research and development resource in the Customer Engagement and Safety Team who support the development and improvement of services within Community Safety and Building Safety.

Our Community Intelligence and Partnerships Team works with partners and KFRS colleagues to gather information from underrepresented groups and supporting communities and maximise the benefits to them through coherent and effective partnership working.

A key function is to ensure all our prevention and protection interventions are underpinned by evidence through undertaking research and evaluation. Our approach to research and development is supported by an Evaluation Framework to help ensure our approach to intervention

evaluation follows best practice and is of suitable quality. This framework has been shared with the NFCC and members of the Southeast Prevention Network.

Research is currently supporting several corporate projects and initiatives with the Customer Engagement and Safety Team, which feed into wider strategic and corporate objectives. We undertake research and use behavioural theories to evaluate initiatives, ensuring we are as effective as possible in our approach. We are also undertaking research to better understand who our customers are, what their perceptions of the fire and rescue service are, and how we can best communicate with them to deliver safety initiatives more efficiently. We research behaviour in fires in the home to tailor our customer safety activities and improve the advice we give to people about staying safe. This also supports operational training and emergency call management. The Authority also sponsored world-leading doctoral research on human behaviour in dwelling fires, the outcomes of which supported several areas of Service activity.

Recent examples of this include the research undertaken into the use and disposal of lithium-ion batteries and a research project with the University of Kent into the psychological impact of our rescue processes on casualties at road traffic collisions. For our d 'Smoke is No Joke' safety campaign, which promotes closing internal doors to delay the spread of smoke and fire, improving the chance of safe escape, and protecting the home from fire and smoke damage, the campaign went through research, co-creation and focus groups with members of the target audience to shape the name, look and feel in line with behaviour change methodology. Work has been undertaken to map customer journeys for home fire safety visit booking and school-based education. The outcomes of this research, which includes hearing from the external customers accessing these services, is being used to improve the experience and ease of accessing these services. We have also undertaken research to better understand interactions with members of the public calling 999 and see how we can further improve the two-way flow of information to keep our customers as safe as possible.

5.4 Trading

Fire and rescue authorities have the power to trade and make a profit but they must ensure that their commercial activities are performed in accordance with the requirements of the Local Government Act 2003, the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 (as amended by the Localism Act 2011), the Local Government Order 2009 and the Local Authorities (Goods and Services) Act 1970. Fire and rescue authorities must also ensure that such commercial activities are exercised through a company within the meaning of Part 5 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989.

How do we meet these requirements and get assurance?

At the current time the Authority does not have a trading arm. However, where we feel it is appropriate to do so and is consistent with our values, we will consider income generation activities and will explore what opportunities exist to do so in a way that is sustainable and effective, recognising that people already pay for us through the tax system.

Section 6. Workforce

6.1 People Strategy

Each fire and rescue authority should have in place a people strategy that has been designed in collaboration with the workforce.

How do we meet these requirements and get assurance?

Our people strategy (referred to as our <u>People Plan</u>) is one of the <u>Enabling Plans that sit under our CRMP Delivery Plan</u>. The People Plan sets out aim to develop a culture of continuous learning and growth to empower our colleagues by fostering a supportive environment that enhances their skills, resilience and well-being, ensuring they are prepared and able to serve and protect our community effectively. The People Plan for this period has a focus on three key areas: 1. Prioritising colleague attendance and wellbeing via a productive wellbeing and management program; 2. Technical training and professionalism; 3. Leadership and learning. Delivery of this plan will ensure that the highest standards of leadership and management are in place to sustain a motivated and engaged workforce. We believe this will foster an organisational culture which truly embraces the diversity and individuality of people and the need for inclusiveness.

6.2 Professional Standards

To enhance professionalism of fire and rescue services, a coherent and comprehensive set of professional standards across all areas of fire and rescue services' work will be developed, drawing on existing standards where appropriate. The development of new standards will be on an ongoing basis.

How do we meet these requirements and get assurance?

At the time of writing, the <u>Fire Standards Board</u> have approved and published the following 19 fire standards:

- Code of Ethics
- Communication and Engagement
- Community Risk Management Planning
- Data Management
- Digital and Cyber
- Emergency Preparedness and Resilience
- Emergency Response Driving
- Fire Control
- Fire Investigation
- Internal Governance and Assurance
- Leading the Service
- Leading and Developing People
- Operational Competence
- Operational Learning
- Operational Preparedness

- Prevention
- Procurement and Commercial
- Protection
- Safeguarding

The Authority has undertaken a gap analysis of its position against each of the published fire standards. This has identified that the Authority is compliant with the majority of the key areas of each of these standards.

During the consultation periods for each, the Authority has been an active participant and engaged with and responded to each of the consultations on the proposed fire standards. As and when consultation opens on additional standards, we will continue to engage actively with the process.

Within KFRS there already exists a well-established culture of professional standards, which is underpinned by and codified in a small number of key documents. The conduct of employees, volunteers and Members is taken very seriously, and we have a Code of Ethical Conduct, a Code of Ethics for Senior Managers and a separate Code of Conduct for Members of the Fire Authority. Each of these clearly set out the standards of ethical and professional behaviour we expect. To further enhance the Authority's commitment to continually improve standards, accountability and behaviour, in early 2024 we introduced a disciplinary policy that specifically addresses the higher level of responsibility and associated expectations that would be required of either the Chief Executive, a member of the Corporate Management Board or one of the Authority's Statutory Officers.

We place the utmost importance on holding ourselves to high standards of behaviour and integrity as embodied in the <u>Seven Principles of Public Life</u> (also known as the Nolan Principles): 1. Selflessness; 2. Integrity; 3. Objectivity; 4. Accountability; 5. Openness; 6. Honesty; 7. Leadership.

In relation to ethical standards, in 2021 the Authority introduced a code of ethical conduct and made it a requirement for all employees to sign it. This presents the Authority's values and commitment to fairness and equality. We also have a Code of Ethics for Senior Managers which expands upon the requirements in the Code of Ethical Conduct, requiring senior managers to hold to an even more robust set of standards. As with the Code of Ethical Conduct, this supports the strategic aim of "Customer - saving lives and reducing harm" by making clear the requirement to uphold ethical standards rooted in the Nolan Principles. It requires colleagues to act with integrity, accountability, transparency, and fairness, creating a workplace where respect and inclusivity are at the core.

As part of good governance arrangements, CIPFA (the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy) and SOLACE (the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Managers) recommend that local authorities develop their own code of corporate governance, which demonstrates how an authority's governance arrangements meet the seven principles of good governance as set out in the <u>CIPFA Delivering Good Governance in Local Government Framework</u>. These seven principles of good governance are themselves based upon the Seven Principles of Public Life (also known as the Nolan Principles). Following the publication of this guidance by CIPFA and SOLACE in 2016, the Authority introduced its own code of corporate governance. In 2020, our Code of Corporate Governance was updated to ensure that it incorporated the requirements of new guidance contained within the <u>CIPFA Financial Management Code (2019)</u>.

The scheduled annual review of the Code of Corporate Governance was undertaken in July 2025 to ensure that it remains current and continues to reflect the requirements of CIPFA's governance framework, including the <u>new guidance published in May 2025 by CIPFA and Solace as an addendum</u> to the 2016 guidance on the annual review of governance and internal controls. This was then taken to <u>the September meeting of the Audit and Governance Committee</u> for approval.

Code of Conduct for Members of the Fire Authority. This establishes the requirement for all Members of the Authority to conduct themselves, when undertaking the business of the Authority, in accordance with our values and ethics. It also contains the mechanism by which inappropriate or unethical behaviour can be reported and investigated. This is aligned to the Kent Code, which in addition to being the Kent County Council Code, has been adopted by the majority of district councils in Kent.

Each October we publish an <u>annual report on Members' standards, allowances and travel expenses</u> and bring this to the meeting of the Fire Authority. No complaints alleging that a Member of the fire authority has breached the Code of Conduct have been made to the Authority during the past year.

All local authorities are required by the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 to appoint a Monitoring Officer whose statutory duty is to report to the Authority on any proposed actions which may contravene the law or constitute maladministration. Following the decision by the previous Monitoring Officer to stand down from the role, in July 2025 the Authority approved the proposal for the appointment of a new Monitoring Officer from Mid Kent Legal Services (a partnership which was formed in 2008 by Maidstone Borough Council, Tunbridge Wells Borough Council and Swale Borough Council).

Under <u>Section 28 of the Localism Act 2011</u>, the Authority must include provision for the appointment of at least one Independent Person whose views must be sought, and considered, before a decision is made on any allegation of misconduct against a Member of the Authority. In addition, the <u>Combined Authorities (Overview and Scrutiny Committees, Access to Information and Audit Committees) Order 2017</u> sets out the requirement on audit committees of a combined authority to have at least one independent person on its membership. At the <u>meeting of the Fire Authority in July 2024</u>, the Authority's current Independent Person was reappointed for another four-year term. This will run up to the Authority's AGM in July 2028.

6.3 Fitness Principles

Fire and rescue authorities have an important role in helping to ensure their firefighters remain fit and are supported in remaining in employment. Each fire and rescue authority must comply with the fitness principles set out at Annex C.

How do we meet these requirements and get assurance?

The Authority has established clear fitness standards required for all operational personnel, alongside a robust process for monitoring and testing these standards. This is done through our Health and Wellbeing Policy, which is available upon request.

All new trainee firefighters, both wholetime and on-call, attend a 12-week detailed physical training programme designed to enhance their fitness, teamwork and operational readiness. All operational colleagues are subject to annual fitness testing and support is given to anyone falling below the required fitness level. We will also be introducing a strength and conditioning programme to help reduce musculoskeletal injuries among firefighters.

We have a team of Physical Training Coaches who are coordinated by two Physical Fitness Consultants, who oversee fitness activities and support for all operational colleagues. Our Physical Fitness Consultants deliver physical training-based workshops and continuing professional development sessions. They also play a key role in assisting with return-to-work programmes by addressing any potential reductions in physical fitness, thereby assisting a smooth and safe reintegration for colleagues who have been away from work.

The working day is structured to allow one hour per day fitness training for all operational colleagues (subject to operational demands). Gyms or fitness equipment is provided on all stations.

The Supporting Performance Policy provides for a process of adjustment and redeployment where an individual cannot maintain or regain the required fitness level. A number of colleagues have already been redeployed under this policy. The Medical Advisory Group within the Authority is a collaboration between our occupational health provider, inclusion, health, safety and wellbeing to ensure tailored support is given to those requiring reasonable adjustments in their role.

In addition to physical health, the Authority has a strong focus on actively supporting colleagues' mental well-being. KFRS takes the issue of mental health very seriously, particularly as in the course of their work, firefighters can be exposed to potentially distressing scenes. We are committed to fostering a culture that challenges the stigma around mental health and removes barriers to seeking help.

We are signatories to the <u>Government's Workplace Wellbeing Charter</u> and we have in place all the appropriate support arrangements, and referral systems into our occupational health provider (available to operational and customer service colleagues).

Our Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) offers year-round access to trained counsellors providing professional, friendly, and non-judgmental support. This is supplemented by a network of Wellbeing Champions and Mental Health First Aiders. These are volunteers among our colleagues who provide a confidential support and guidance, helping colleagues access the resources they need for both physical and mental well-being.

In May 2025, we were awarded the platinum level in the Medway Workplace Wellbeing award. Run by Medway Council's Public Health team, this considers guidance of best practice from Public Health England, Business in the Community and NICE (National Institute for Clinical and Health Excellence) and has been developed with feedback from local business. The award looks at leadership, culture and communication, health and safety and the following health and wellbeing initiatives in place to foster a healthy workplace environment.

6.4 Re-engagement of Senior Officers

Fire and rescue authorities must not re-appoint principal fire officers after retirement to their previous, or a similar, post save for in exceptional circumstances when such a decision is necessary in the interests of public safety. Any such appointment must be transparent, justifiable and time limited.

How do we meet these requirements and get assurance?

The Authority responded to the Government's original consultation on the draft Fire and Rescue National Framework and stated its commitment to not re-appointing principal fire officers after retirement to their previous or a similar post. Since that time, our position remains unchanged.

KMFRA oversight of senior appointments through the Senior Officer Appointments, Conditions and Conduct Committee.

The Localism Act 2011 requires the Authority to publish a <u>Pay Policy Statement</u> for each financial year. The Pay Policy Statement describes the arrangements in place for setting and amending the pay of its employees and contains a section covering the rules around the re-engagement of former employees. The 2025/26 Pay Policy Statement was approved at the <u>February 2025 meeting of the Fire Authority</u>.

When an employee retires from the Authority, they may choose to set themselves up as a consultant. On occasions there has been a need to reengage that individual for their specific expertise and skills.

If this option is taken up, then a taxation test called IR35 needs to be applied. If the consultant meets the thresholds for IR35 to apply, meaning that the consultant is effectively an employee, it is officers' recommendation that abatement rules should also then be applied. At the meeting of the Fire Authority in April 2019, the Authority approved the proposal that abatement will be applied where ex-employees return to the Authority as consultants.

Section 7. Inspection, intervention and accountability

7.1 Inspection

All fire and rescue authorities must cooperate with the inspectorate and its inspectors to enable them to deliver their statutory function. This includes providing relevant data and information to inform inspections. The Home Office and HMICFRS will work together to align data and information collections where possible to avoid duplication. Fire and rescue authorities must give due regard to reports and recommendations made by HMICFRS and – if recommendations are made – prepare, update and regularly publish an action plan detailing how the recommendations are being actioned.

How do we meet these requirements and get assurance?

In March 2025 the inspection fieldwork began for our Round 3 inspection by HMICFRS (His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services). In August 2025 the results were published we were delighted to be praised by HMICFRS for outstanding performance in protecting the public and understanding risk.

HMICFRS graded KFRS' performance across 11 areas. It found the service was 'outstanding' in three areas, 'good' in five areas and 'adequate' in three areas.

The inspectorate found KFRS maintained its outstanding performance in understanding risk. It recognised how we understand, collect and use community risk information to make sure our operational colleagues are well prepared to respond to incidents. In addition, the service was found to be outstanding at how it protects the public through regulation of fire safety, with recognition of our risk-based inspection programme which allows us to focus effectively on the highest-risk buildings. Inspectors also graded our future financial planning as outstanding, stating that KFRS works to make sure it is affordable and sustainable now and, in the future, maintaining value for money through detailed project planning and monitoring.

This latest result continues the recognition by HMICFRS of the strong performance of KFRS and our commitment to continuous improvement and learning from the result of previous inspections.

In relation to previous reports, HMICFRS published their report 'Values and culture in fire and rescue services' in March 2023, which contained 35 recommendations, 20 of which were directed at England's fire and rescue services (the rest were directed towards the government). The Authority has completed all 20 of these recommendations.

The Round 2 inspection by HMICFRS was undertaken over a period of six weeks running from July to August 2022 and provided an exhaustive and robust external validation and accreditation of the effectiveness and efficiency of KFRS.

When the <u>results of the inspection were published in January 2023</u>, we were judged by HMICFRS as 'Outstanding' in the pillar around 'Efficiency' – which is about how everyone in the service spends public money and uses resources – and 'Good' in the two pillars of 'Effective emergency response' and 'People.' 22. Furthermore, within the Efficiency pillar itself, as well as an overall 'Outstanding' judgement, KFRS was also graded as 'Outstanding' against both of the pillar's underlying categories ('Making best use of resources' and 'Making the fire and rescue service affordable now and in the future').

Among the findings presented by HMICFRS is that KFRS is judged to be: "Outstanding in the way that it uses its resources and manages its budgets to provide an efficient fire and rescue service for the public."

In 2020, HMICFRS undertook an inspection of fire and rescue authorities' responses to the coronavirus pandemic. This was a stand-alone thematic inspection that sat outside of its routine round-based inspections. In January 2021, HMICFRS published the results of this inspection. The inspectorate praised the Authority's ability to meet the significant demands placed on it by the pandemic whilst maintaining its statutory duties and acting as the national lead for PPE distribution. Consequently, the arrangements and systems of control employed by the Authority have been shown to be robust and effective, which have allowed it to adapt to the significant challenges presented by the coronavirus pandemic.

In 2019 the Authority received its first inspection by HMICFRS (Round 1 inspection). The inspectorate rated KFRS as 'Good' across the three inspection pillars of Effectiveness, Efficiency and People, reflecting the high standard of service provided by the Authority. Of the 45 FRAs which were inspected in 2018/19, the Authority was one of only 16 to have been awarded 'good' in all three pillars. The Inspectorate did not identify any 'causes of concern' (the most serious level) and identified just eight areas for improvement (the least serious level). The breakdown of these eight areas of improvement across the three pillars is as follows: six in the Effectiveness pillar; and one each in the Efficiency and People pillars. Although

there was no requirement placed on the Authority to do so, following the inspection by HMICFRS, we prepared an action plan that addressed each of the eight areas for improvement.

The Inspectorate identified several areas where the Authority was showing notably good practice, particular highlights included the Authority's ability to respond to incidents effectively and to spend public money appropriately and responsibly. The report also found that the Authority offers 'excellent wellbeing support' for employees, noting a culture of 'trust and empowerment'.

In the HMICFRS press release following their inspection of KFRS, HM Inspector of Fire and Rescue Services stated:

"I am pleased that we have rated Kent Fire and Rescue Service as 'good' across all three areas of our inspection, in terms of its efficiency, effectiveness and the way it looks after its staff. This is a modern and innovative fire service that is prepared to find new ways of doing things. Many other fire and rescue services could learn from the example it sets. The service performs well in one of its primary duties: responding to fires and other emergencies. We found good collaboration with other local emergency services, including the ambulance service and the police, which improves the service given to the people of Kent."

7.2 Intervention

Section 22 of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 gives powers to the Secretary of State to intervene should a fire and rescue authority fail, or be likely to fail, to act in accordance with this Framework.

How do we meet these requirements and get assurance?

The Authority is not in this position; therefore, this section is not relevant in this context.

7.3 Accountability

Fire and rescue authorities are expected to have governance and accountability arrangements in place covering issues such as financial management and transparency, complaints and discipline arrangements, and compliance with the seven principles of public life.

In demonstrating their accountability to communities for the service they provide, fire and rescue authorities need to:

- be transparent and accountable to their communities for their decisions and actions.
- provide the opportunity for communities to help to plan their local service through effective consultation and involvement; and
- have scrutiny arrangements in place that reflect the high standard communities expect for an important public safety service.

How do we meet these requirements and get assurance?

Meetings of the Fire Authority are open to the public and agenda packs, reports and minutes are made publicly available. In addition, the following documents relating to the governance of the Fire Authority are publicly available:

• Standing orders. These are rules for the operation of Authority and Committee meetings.

- <u>Scheme of Delegation of Powers to the Chief Executive</u>. This sets out those decisions which can only be taken by the Authority or one of its committees (i.e. by Members of the Authority), and those which can be taken by the Chief Executive or other officers.
- <u>Convention on Member and Officer relationships</u>. This deals with the working relationships between Members (both as individuals and collectively within their political groups) and the officers of the Authority (i.e. the Authority's paid employees).

Consultation with the public and partners is an essential aspect of how the Authority operates. Proposals for changes to the Authority are drawn up and consulted upon with employees, members of the public, businesses and community groups (please see section 1 for further information about this). We also provide a summary of what the public receive for the money they pay in council tax to help run the fire and rescue service across Kent and Medway. Responses to the proposals in the plan are analysed and then presented to the Fire Authority, most recently with changes to our response time definitions, changes to our response time targets, and the council tax options for 2025/26, which following consultation, was approved by the Fire Authority at the meeting on 18 February 2025.

In relation to standards, in 2021 the Authority wrote a Code of Ethical Conduct and made it a requirement for all employees to sign it. This sets out the Authority's values and commitment to fairness and equality. We also have a Code of Ethics for Senior Managers and a separate Code of Conduct for Members of the Fire Authority. Each of these clearly set out the standards of ethical and professional behaviour we expect.

Code of Conduct for Members of the Fire Authority. This establishes the requirement for all Members of the Authority to conduct themselves, when undertaking the business of the Authority, in accordance with our values and ethics. It also contains the mechanism by which inappropriate or unethical behaviour can be reported and investigated. This is aligned to the Kent Code, which in addition to being the Kent County Council Code, has been adopted by most district councils in Kent.

Each October we publish an <u>annual report on Members' standards</u>, <u>allowances and travel expenses</u> and bring this to the meeting of the Fire Authority. No complaints alleging that a Member of the fire authority has breached the Code of Conduct have been made to the Authority during the past year.

As stated in section 6.2, all local authorities are required by the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 to appoint a Monitoring Officer whose statutory duty is to report to the Authority on any proposed actions which may contravene the law or constitute maladministration. Following the decision by the previous Monitoring Officer to stand down from the role, in July 2025 the Authority approved the proposal for the appointment of a new Monitoring Officer from Mid Kent Legal Services (a partnership which was formed in 2008 by Maidstone Borough Council, Tunbridge Wells Borough Council and Swale Borough Council).

Under <u>Section 28 of the Localism Act 2011</u>, the Authority must include provision for the appointment of at least one Independent Person whose views must be sought, and considered, before a decision is made on any allegation of misconduct against a Member of the Authority. In addition, the <u>Combined Authorities (Overview and Scrutiny Committees, Access to Information and Audit Committees) Order 2017</u> sets out the requirement on audit committees of a combined authority to have at least one independent person on its membership. At the <u>meeting of the Fire Authority in July 2024</u>, the Authority's current Independent Person was reappointed for another four-year term. This will run up to the Authority's AGM in July 2028.

Our <u>Code of Corporate Governance</u> sets out the seven key principles of good governance which the Authority has adopted and the means by which these principles are adhered to and evidenced. The scheduled annual review of the Code of Corporate Governance was undertaken in July 2025 to ensure that it remains current and continues to reflect the requirements of CIPFA's governance framework, including the <u>new guidance published in May 2025 by CIPFA and Solace as an addendum</u> to the 2016 guidance on the annual review of governance and internal controls. This was then taken to <u>the September meeting of the Audit and Governance Committee</u> for approval.

The Authority has an effective and up-to-date suite of policies covering anti-fraud bribery, anti-fraud and corruption and anti-money laundering. The Speak Up Policy ensures arrangements are in place to give colleagues the confidence to challenge and report allegations of inappropriate behaviour and the gives the Authority the means to investigate such reports. The Bullying and Harassment Policy makes clear the expectations on all of all employees and ensures we understand our responsibilities. Its purpose is to promote and support a working environment and culture free from intimidation. There is also a formalised process for managing allegations against employees of KFRS.

To further enhance the Authority's commitment to continually improve standards, accountability and behaviour, in early 2024 we introduced a disciplinary policy that is specifically aligned with the higher level of responsibility and associated expectations that would be required of either the Chief Executive, a member of the Corporate Management Board or one of the Authority's Statutory Officers.

The Customer Feedback Policy ensures that feedback received by the Authority is dealt with fairly and properly. The Authority is committed to transparency and an analysis of feedback received is reported annually to the <u>June/July meeting of the Fire Authority</u>. We also offer several communications channels, including social media, through which the public are able to <u>get in contact, provide feedback and offer their views</u>.

7.4 Transparency

Each fire and rescue authority must comply with their statutory transparency requirements. The nature of the requirements is dependent on the legal basis of the authority; for example, combined fire and rescue authorities would be subject to the Local Authority Transparency Code 2015 while PCC FRAs must comply with requirements under section 11 of the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011 and the Elected Local Policing Bodies (Specified Information) Order 2011. All fire and rescue authorities should therefore publish certain information, including senior salaries; register of interests; staffing; income and expenditure; property; rights and liabilities; and decisions of significant public interest. Fire and rescue authorities must make their communities aware of how they can access data and information on their performance.

How do we meet these requirements and get assurance?

We have a Transparency Policy that commits KFRS to ensuring the public has clear, accessible, and accurate information about our services, decisions, and performance. By promoting transparency, public engagement, and informed decision-making, the policy helps individuals and communities understand risks, access safety resources, and hold KFRS accountable for delivering life-saving services effectively.

Making information publicly available on our website. In line with the requirements of Local Government Transparency Code 2015 and the Trade Union (Facility Time Publication Requirements) Regulations 2017, we publish a comprehensive and detailed range of information on our website. This covers information including monthly spend reports, register of suppliers, and senior officers' pay.

We were one of the first FRS to become a signatory to the <u>Charter for Families Bereaved Through Public Tragedy</u>. In adopting this charter, we commit to ensuring that Kent Fire and Rescue Service learn the lessons of the Hillsborough disaster and its aftermath, so that the perspective of the bereaved families is not lost.

As per the requirements of the Freedom of Information Act 2000, the Authority maintains a <u>Publication and Retention Scheme</u>. This sets out the classes of information held and the duration (retention period) for which information will be kept.

We publish a full range of <u>financial information about the Authority</u>. This includes, but is not limited to, the statement of accounts, medium term financial plan, monthly spend reports and the capital strategy.

We set out on <u>our website how people can request information</u> from the Authority through a Freedom of Information Act request, subject access request or general request for information. We also offer a clear explanation about the differences between these three types of requests.

External audit. The Authority is statutorily obliged to have a yearly financial audit conducted by an external audit firm. Grant Thornton is currently the Authority's auditors, and their key responsibilities are two-fold: firstly, to give an opinion on the authority's financial statements; and secondly to assess the authority's arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources, this is the value for money conclusion.

The annual audit reports, draft statement of accounts and the audited annual statement of accounts are all <u>publicly available on our website</u>. For the <u>most recent annual audit report 2023/24</u>, in December 2024 our auditors concluded an unqualified opinion on the audited annual statement of accounts and our annual governance statement. This was approved at the <u>meeting of the Fire Authority in February 2025</u>.

Value for money. As mentioned above, as part of the annual audit of the financial statements Grant Thornton are also required to give a separate opinion on value for money. This focusses on three areas: financial sustainability (how the Authority plans and manages its resources to ensure it can continue to deliver its services); governance (how the Authority ensures that it makes informed decisions and properly manages it risks); and improving economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources (how the Authority uses information about its costs and performance to improve the way it manages and delivers its services). Against each of these, opinion is provided on the arrangements the Authority has undertaken to secure value for money and any significant weaknesses the auditors have identified are highlighted, along with the auditor's recommendations for any areas where they consider may need improvement.

For value for money arrangements for 2023/24, the auditors reported that there was no significant weakness identified in any of the three reporting criteria.

In relation to financial sustainability, for four of the five areas considered no significant weaknesses in arrangements were identified or improvement recommendations raised. The only area where improvement recommendations were made was "plans to bridge its funding gaps and identifies achievable savings", with the auditors highlighting the importance of tracking savings requirements more clearly in relation to the budget.

For governance the auditors stated the Authority has robust governance and risk management arrangements. Processes and ways of working are embedded across the Authority. Of the five areas considered, no improvement recommendations were raised in relation to governance arrangements.

For improving economy, efficiency and effectiveness, improvement recommendations were raised in relation to the use of financial and performance information, assessment of benefits of contracts, updating performance information on the website and ensuring procurement related policy documents are updated.

Internal audit. The Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 require the Authority to maintain an adequate and effective internal audit process and, as such, this is provided by Kent County Council under a service level agreement.

The role of the internal audit function is to provide Members and KFRS management with independent assurance that the control, risk and governance framework in place within the Authority is effective and supports the Audit and Governance Committee in the achievement of its objectives. The work of the KCC Internal Audit Team should be targeted towards those areas within KFRS that are most at risk of affecting its ability to achieve its objectives. Upon completion of an audit, an assurance opinion is given on the effectiveness of the controls in place. The results of the entire programme of work are then summarised in an opinion in the Annual Internal Audit Report on the effectiveness of internal control within the organisation.

The Head of Internal Audit brings an annual report and progress reports to the Audit and Governance Committee. The most recent progress report was taken to the April 2025 meeting of the Audit and Governance Committee. Based on the outcomes of internal audits, action plans will be developed where appropriate and follow up audits undertaken to review progress against any issues identified. This is reflective of our commitment to a culture of continuous improvement and transparency in our activities.

Joint Statement by the Chair of the Authority and the Chief	of Executive
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We acknowledge our responsibility for ensuring the proper governance of the Authority's affairs and the need to give due regard to the requirements of the Fire and Rescue National Framework. We confirm that this Statement of Assurance represents an honest and full assessment of the levels of assurance we have obtained following the assessment process as described above.

Brian Black Ann Millington OBE

Chair, Kent and Medway Fire and Rescue Authority

Chief Executive, Kent and Medway Fire and Rescue Authority

Date:

Assurance level	Definition of assurance levels
High	Internal control, governance and the management of risk are at a high standard. The arrangements to secure governance, risk management and internal controls are extremely well designed and applied effectively. Processes are robust and well-established. There is a sound system of control operating effectively and consistently applied to achieve service/system objectives. There are examples of best practice. No significant weaknesses have been identified.
Substantial	Internal control, governance and management of risk are sound overall. The arrangements to secure governance, risk management and internal controls are largely suitably designed and applied effectively. Whilst there is a largely sound system of controls there are few matters requiring attention. These do not have a significant impact on residual risk exposure but need to be addressed within a reasonable timescale.
Adequate	Internal control, governance and management of risk is adequate overall however, there were areas of concern identified where elements of residual risk or weakness with some of the controls may put some of the system objectives at risk. There are some significant matters that require management attention with moderate impact on residual risk exposure until resolved.
Limited	Internal control, governance and the management of risk are inadequate and result in an unacceptable level of residual risk. Effective controls are not in place to meet all the system/service objectives and/or controls are not being consistently applied. Certain weaknesses require immediate management attention as there is a high risk that objectives will not be achieved.
No Assurance	Internal control, governance and management of risk is poor. For many risk areas there are significant gaps in the procedures and controls. Due to the absence of effective controls and procedures no reliance can be placed on their operation. Immediate action is required to address the whole control framework before serious issues are realised in this area with high impact on residual risk exposure until resolved.

<u>August 2025, Annual review of compliance with the Local Government Transparency Code 2015 and the Trade Union</u> (Facility Time Publication Requirements) Regulations 2017

Information title	Information which must be published	Information recommended for publication	Is KFRS compliant with this?
1. Expenditure exceeding £500	Quarterly publication Publish details of each individual item of expenditure that exceeds £500, including items of expenditure, consistent with Local Government Association guidance, such as: individual invoices individual invoices grant payments expense payments payments for goods and services grants grant in aid rent credit notes over £500 transactions with other public bodies. For each individual item of expenditure the following information must be published: date the expenditure was incurred local authority department which incurred the expenditure beneficiary summary of the purpose of the expenditure amount Value Added Tax that cannot be recovered merchant category (e.g. computers, software etc.).	 Publish information on a monthly instead of quarterly basis, or ideally, as soon as it becomes available and therefore known to the authority (commonly known as 'realtime' publication). Publish details of all transactions that exceed £250 instead of £500. For each transaction the details that should be published remain as set out in paragraph 29. publish the total amount spent on remuneration over the period being reported on. classify purpose of expenditure using the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy Service Reporting Code of Practice to enable comparability between local authorities. 	Yes The published data meet all the mandatory requirements. Monthly spend reports are published. These are available here: https://www.kent.fire-uk.org/financial-information INFORMATION RECOMMENDED FOR PUBLICATION Yes The published data meet all the recommended requirements. Monthly spend reports are published for all transactions in excess of £250 excluding VAT. See above for the link to the monthly spend reports.
Information title	Information which must be published	Information recommended for publication	Is KFRS compliant with this?
2. Government Procurement Card transactions	Quarterly publication Publish details of every transaction on a Government Procurement Card. For each transaction, the following details must be published:	Publish all transactions on all corporate credit cards, charge cards and procurements, including those that are not a Government Procurement Card. For each transaction the details that should be	Yes

	date of the transaction local authority department which incurred the expenditure beneficiary amount Value Added Tax that cannot be recovered summary of the purpose of the expenditure merchant category (e.g. computers, software etc).	published remain as set out in paragraph 30.	The published data meet all the mandatory requirements. The Authority publish monthly spend reports for all purchasing card transactions. These are available here: https://www.kent.fire-uk.org/financial-information INFORMATION RECOMMENDED FOR PUBLICATION Yes The published data meet all the recommended requirements. The Authority publish monthly spend reports for all purchasing card transactions. See above for the link to the monthly spend reports.
Information title	Information which must be published	Information recommended for publication	Is KFRS compliant with this?
3. Procurement information	Quarterly publication Publish details of every invitation to tender for contracts to provide goods and/or services with a value that exceeds £5,000. For each invitation, the following details must be published: • reference number • title • description of the goods and/or services sought • start, end and review dates • local authority department responsible. Quarterly publication Publish details of any contract, commissioned activity, purchase order, framework agreement and any other legally enforceable agreement with a value that exceeds £5,000. For each contract, the following details must be published: • reference number • title of agreement • local authority department responsible	Place on Contracts Finder, as well as any other local portal, every invitation to tender or invitation to quote for contracts to provide goods and/or services with a value that exceeds £10,000. In addition, for general publication (i.e. on Authority's own website) publish: information on a monthly instead of quarterly basis, or ideally, as soon as it is generated and therefore becomes available (commonly known as 'real-time' publication) every invitation to tender for contracts to provide goods and/or services with a value that exceeds £500 instead of £5,000 details of invitations to quote where there has not been a formal invitation to tender all contracts in their entirety where the value of the contract exceeds £5,000 company registration number at Companies House	"Publish details of every invitation to tender for contracts to provide goods and/or services with a value that exceeds £5,000." Since the implementation of the Procurement Act 2023, the Service's Procurement Policy has been aligned with the statutory requirements set out in the Public Contracts Regulations 2015 (PCR 2015) and, from 24 February 2024, the Procurement Act 2023. We have not introduced a separate internal publication threshold (e.g. £5,000) and instead follow the regulatory thresholds. For opportunities under £25k the Authority follows a process as detailed in the Procurement Policy, which is proportionate to the value and risk of the requirement. Procurements commenced before 24 February 2024 (and any call-offs under frameworks

- description of the goods and/or services being provided
- supplier name and details
- sum to be paid over the length of the contract or the estimated annual spending or budget for the contract
- Value Added Tax that cannot be recovered
- start, end and review dates
- whether or not the contract was the result of an invitation to quote or a published invitation to tender
- whether or not the supplier is a small or medium sized enterprise and/or a voluntary or community sector organisation and where it is, provide the relevant registration number.

- details of invitations to tender or invitations to quote that are likely to be issued in the next twelve months
- details of the geographical (e.g. by ward) coverage of contracts entered into by the local authority
- details of performance against contractual key performance indicators
- information disaggregated by voluntary and community sector category (e.g. whether it is registered with Companies House, charity or charitable incorporated organisation, community interest company, industrial and provident society, housing association, etc.).

awarded under the Public Contracts Regulations 2015) will follow the transparency rules set out in the Public Contracts Regulations 2015.

Procurements commenced on or after 24 February 2024 are subject to the new transparency requirements under the Procurement Act 2023.

As well as advertising opportunities on the Central Digital Platform/ Find a Tender Service in line with Procurement Act 2023, the Authority also advertise new opportunities on the Kent Business Portal.

Thresholds and Requirements

Under Public Contracts Regulations 2015 (Regulation 110), sub-central contracting authorities such as fire and rescue services were required to publish contract opportunities and awards on Contracts Finder for contracts valued at £25,000 (ex VAT) and above.

Under the Procurement Act 2023, the statutory publication threshold for sub-central authorities remains £25,000 (ex VAT), applying to both opportunity notices and contract award notices. For below-threshold contracts (<£25k), there is no statutory requirement to publish opportunities or tender notices.

As a result, KFRS does not propose to take any further action in relation to this.

"Quarterly publication
Publish details of any contract,
commissioned activity, purchase order,
framework agreement and any other legally
enforceable agreement with a value that
exceeds £5,000."

			The Authority publish an updated monthly contract register, this includes Supplier name, contract reference, description of the goods and services, anticipated contract value and start and end dates. The ability to conduct an internet search of supplier name against business area mitigates the need to publish further details. Consequently, KFRS does not propose to take any further action in relation to this.
			Value Added Tax (VAT) that cannot be recovered is published on the monthly spend reports where relevant. It is not on the Contracts Register as it cannot be calculated at the time contracts are issued, therefore it is felt that it would not make sense to have it presented on the Contracts Register. Consequently, KFRS does not propose to take any further action in relation to this.
			INFORMATION RECOMMENDED FOR PUBLICATION
			Where appropriate, contracts are added to this the GOV.UK Contracts Finder.
			"Every invitation to tender for contracts to provide goods and/or services with a value that exceeds £500 instead of £5,000"
			For low value opportunities the Authority follows a process as detailed in the procurement policy, which is proportionate to the value and risk of the requirement.
Information title	Information which must be published	Information recommended for publication	Is KFRS compliant with this?

4. Local authority land

Annual publication

Publish details of all land and building assets including:

- all service and office properties occupied or controlled by user bodies, both freehold and leasehold
- any properties occupied or run under Private Finance Initiative contracts
- all other properties they own or use, for example, hostels, laboratories, investment properties and depots
- garages unless rented as part of a housing tenancy agreement
- surplus, sublet or vacant properties
- undeveloped land
- serviced or temporary offices where contractual or actual occupation exceeds three months
- all future commitments, for example under an agreement for lease, from when the contractual commitment is made.

However, information about the following land and building assets are to be excluded from publication:

- rent free properties provided by traders (such as information booths in public places or ports)
- operational railways and canals
- operational public highways (but any adjoining land not subject to public rights should be included)
- assets of national security
- information deemed inappropriate for public access because of data protection and/or disclosure controls (e.g. such as refuge houses).

Information on social housing is also excluded from this specific dataset.

Publish information on a monthly instead of annual basis, or ideally, as soon as it becomes available and therefore known to the authority (commonly known as 'real-time' publication). It is also recommended that local authorities should publish all the information possible on Electronic Property Information Mapping Service.

Publish the following additional information:

- the size of the asset measured in Gross Internal Area (m2) for buildings or hectares for land, in accordance with the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors Code of Measuring Practice. The Gross Internal Area is the area of a building measured to the internal face of the perimeter walls at each floor level. Local authorities using Net Internal Area (m2) should convert measurements to Gross Internal Area using appropriate conversion factors and state the conversion factor used
- the services offered from the asset, using the services listed in the Effective Services Delivery government service function list http://doc.esd.org.uk/FunctionList/1.00.html (listing up to five main services)
- the reason for holding asset such as, it is occupied by the local authority or it is providing a service in its behalf, it is an investment property, it supports economic development (e.g. provision of small businesses or incubator space), it is surplus to the authority's requirements, it is awaiting development, it is under construction, it provides infrastructure or it is a community asset
- whether or not the asset is either one which is an asset in the authority's ownership that is listed under Part 5 Chapter 3 of the Localism Act 2011 (assets of community value) and/or an asset where the authority

INFORMATION THAT MUST BE PUBLISHED

"Publish details of all land and building assets"

Yes

The required information is published on the 'Property assets' section of the website. https://www.kent.fire-uk.org/our-buildings-fleet-and-equipment

INFORMATION RECOMMENDED FOR PUBLICATION

In part

Work underway to meet compliance standards with all the recommended requirements. However, given the large amount of information required, this is being addressed as and when resources allow.

For each land or building asset, the following information must be published together in one place:

- Unique Property Reference Number
- Unique asset identity the local reference identifier used by the local body, sometimes known as local name or building block. There should be one entry per asset or user/owner (e.g. on one site there could be several buildings or in one building there could be several users, floors/rooms etc where this is the case, each of these will have a separate asset identity). This must include the original reference number from the data source plus authority code
- name of the building/land or both
- street number or numbers any sets of 2 or more numbers should be separated with the '-' symbol (eq. 10-15 London Road)
- street name this is the postal road address
- post town
- United Kingdom postcode
- map reference local authorities may use either Ordnance Survey or ISO6709 systems to identify the location of an asset, but must make clear which is being used. Where an Ordnance Survey mapping system is used (the grid system) then assets will be identified using Eastings before Northings. Where geocoding in accordance with ISO 6709 is being used to identify the centre point of the asset location then that reference must indicate its ISO coordinates
- whether the local authority owns the freehold or a lease for the asset and for whichever category applies, the local authority must list all the characteristics that apply from the options given below:

- is actively seeking transfer to the community
- total building operation (revenue) costs as defined in the corporate value for money indicators for public services
- required maintenance the cost to bring
 the property from its present state up to the
 state reasonably required by the authority
 to deliver the service and/or to meet
 statutory or contract obligations and
 maintain it at that standard. This should
 exclude improvement projects but include
 works necessary to comply with new
 legislation (e.g. asbestos and legionella)
- functional suitability rating using the scale:
 - good performing well and operating efficiently (supports the needs of staff and the delivery of services)
 - satisfactory performing well but with minor problems (generally supports the needs of staff and the delivery of services)
 - poor showing major problems and/or not operating optimally (impedes the performance off staff and/or the delivery of services)
 - unsuitable does not support or actually impedes the delivery of services
- energy performance rating as stated on the Display Energy Certificate under the Energy Performance of Buildings (England and Wales) Regulations 2012 (as amended).

for freehold assets:

	 occupied by the local authority ground leasehold leasehold licence vacant (for vacant properties, local authorities should not publish the full address details and should only publish the first part of the postcode) for leasehold assets: occupied by the local authority ground leasehold sub leasehold licence for other assets: free text description e.g. rights of way, access etc. whether or not the asset is land only (without permanent buildings) or it is land with a permanent building. 		
Information title	Information which must be published	Information recommended for publication	Is KFRS compliant with this?
5. Social housing asset value	Annual publication Publish details on the value of social housing assets within local authorities' Housing Revenue Account. Information to be published using the specified value bands and postal sector: • total number of homes • the aggregate value and mean value of the dwellings for both existing use value (social housing) and market value, and • percentage of homes that are vacant and that are tenanted. Information to be published at a general level: • an explanation of the difference between the tenanted sale value of homes within the Housing Revenue Account and their market sale value, and		This is not applicable to the Authority.

Information title	an assurance that the publication of this information is not intended to suggest that tenancies should end to realise the market value of properties. Other residential tenanted properties that the authority may hold within their General Fund are excluded from this specific dataset, as is information on other building assets or land that local authorities hold within their Housing Revenue Account. Information which must be published	Information recommended for publication	Is KFRS compliant with this?
6. Grants to voluntary, community and social enterprise organisations	Annual publication Publish details of all grants to voluntary, community and social enterprise organisations. This can be achieved by either: • tagging and hence specifically identifying transactions which relate to voluntary, community and social enterprise organisations within published data on expenditure over £500 or published procurement information, or • by publishing a separate list or register. For each identified grant, the following information must be published as a minimum: • date the grant was awarded • time period for which the grant has been given • local authority department which awarded the grant • beneficiary • beneficiary's registration number • summary of the purpose of the grant • amount	 Publish information on a monthly instead of annual basis where payments are made more frequently than a single annual payment, or ideally, as soon as the data becomes available and therefore known to the authority (commonly known as 'realtime' publication). information disaggregated by voluntary and community sector category (e.g. whether it is registered with Companies House, charity or charitable incorporated organisation, community interest company, industrial and provident society, housing association etc). 	Yes The published data meet all the mandatory requirements. The monthly spend reports that are published show 'Grants and Contributions' as an expenses type where relevant. https://www.kent.fire-uk.org/financial-information INFORMATION RECOMMENDED FOR PUBLICATION Yes The published data meet all the recommended requirements. Where grants are made, additional columns are added to the right-hand side of the transparency spend reports identifying additional details in line with the code.
Information title	Information which must be published	Information recommended for publication	Is KFRS compliant with this?
7. Organisation chart	Annual publication Publish an organisation chart covering staff in the top three levels of the organisation. The	Local authorities should publish: charts including all employees in the local authority whose salary exceeds £50,000	INFORMATION THAT MUST BE PUBLISHED Yes

following information must be included for each member of staff included in the chart:

- grade
- job title
- local authority department and team
- whether permanent or temporary staff
- contact details
- salary in £5,000 brackets, consistent with the details published for Senior Salaries
- salary ceiling (the maximum salary for the grade).

- the salary band for each employee included in the chart(s)
- information about current vacant posts, or signpost vacancies that are going to be advertised in the future.

The published data meet all the mandatory requirements. The Authority publishes information about senior employees. This is available via the following link https://www.kent.fire-uk.org/who-we-are and within the statements of accounts.

Full pay details of all members of the Corporate Management Board (CMB) are published on the 'Senior officers' pay' section of the website. https://www.kent.fire-uk.org/financial-information

INFORMATION RECOMMENDED FOR PUBLICATION

In part

The published data meet most of the recommended requirements. Full pay details of all members of the Corporate Management Board (CMB) are published on the 'Senior officers' pay' section of the website. https://www.kent.fire-uk.org/financial-information

Apart from CMB, the Authority deliberately chooses not to publish details of the individual pay of any employees earning more than £50k. This is because we are of the reasonably held view that it would breach the principles set out in Article 5 (1)(a)(b) and (c) of the UK GDPR. To that end, the Authority has a clear position on this.

However, to strike the balance between protecting employees' personal data and transparency, the number of employees receiving more than £50k per year is set out in in £5k bands and is published within the

			statements of accounts. This also includes salary information for CMB. Additionally, in the interests of transparency, to give an idea of the responsibilities someone attracting a salary in excess of £50k has, descriptions of the role-related responsibilities are published on the 'Pay policies' section of the website. https://www.kent.fire-uk.org/financial-information
Information title	Information which must be published	Information recommended for publication	Is KFRS compliant with this?
8. Trade union facility time	 Annual publication Publish the following information: total number (absolute number and full time equivalent) of staff who are union representatives (including general, learning and health and safety representatives) total number (absolute number and full time equivalent) of union representatives who devote at least 50 per cent of their time to union duties names of all trade unions represented in the local authority a basic estimate of spending on unions (calculated as the number of full time equivalent days spent on union duties multiplied by the average salary), and a basic estimate of spending on unions as a percentage of the total pay bill (calculated as the number of full time equivalent days spent on union duties multiplied by the average salary divided by the total pay bill). 		Yes The published data meet all the mandatory requirements. The Authority publish information in line with both the Local Government Transparency Code 2015 and the Trade Union (Facility Time Publication Requirements) Regulations 2017. This is available under the 'Pay policies' section: https://www.kent.fire-uk.org/financial-information
Information title	Information which must be published	Information recommended for publication	Is KFRS compliant with this?
9. Parking account	 Annual publication Publish on their website, or place a link on their website to this data published elsewhere: a breakdown of income and expenditure on the authority's parking account. The 		This is not relevant to the Authority.

Information title	breakdown of income must include details of revenue collected from on-street parking, off-street parking and Penalty Charge Notices a breakdown of how the authority has spent a surplus on its parking account. Information which must be published	Information recommended for publication	Is KFRS compliant with this?
10. Parking spaces	Annual publication Publish the number of marked out controlled on and off-street parking spaces within their area, or an estimate of the number of spaces where controlled parking space is not marked out in individual parking bays or spaces.	Local authorities should publish the number of: • free parking spaces available in the local authority's area and which are provided directly by the local authority, and • parking spaces where charges apply that are available in the local authority's area and which are provided directly by the local authority. Where parking space is not marked out in individual parking bays or spaces, local authorities should estimate the number of spaces available for the two categories.	INFORMATION THAT MUST BE PUBLISHED This is not relevant to the Authority. INFORMATION RECOMMENDED FOR PUBLICATION This is not relevant to the Authority.
Information title	Information which must be published	Information recommended for publication	Is KFRS compliant with this?
11. Senior salaries	 Annual publication Local authorities must place a link on their website to the following data or must place the data itself on their website: the number of employees whose remuneration in that year was at least £50,000 in brackets of £5,000 details of remuneration and job title of certain senior employees whose salary is at least £50,000 employees whose salaries are £150,000 or more must also be identified by name. a list of responsibilities (for example, the services and functions they are responsible for, budget held and number of staff) and details of bonuses and 'benefits in kind', for all employees whose salary exceeds £50,000. 		In part The published data meet most of the mandatory requirements. Full pay details of all members of CMB are published on the 'Senior officers' pay' section of the website. https://www.kent.fire-uk.org/financial-information Apart from CMB, the Authority deliberately chooses not to publish details of the individual pay of any employees earning more than £50k. This is because we are of the reasonably held view that it would breach the principles set out

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			in Article 5 (1)(a)(b) and (c) of the UK GDPR. To that end, the Authority has a clear position on this.
			However, to strike the balance between protecting employees' personal data and transparency, the number of employees receiving more than £50k per year is set out in in £5k bands and is published within the statements of accounts. This also includes salary information for CMB.
			Additionally, in the interests of transparency, to give an idea of the responsibilities someone attracting a salary in excess of £50k has, descriptions of the role-related responsibilities are published on the 'Pay policies' section of the website. https://www.kent.fire-uk.org/financial-information
			INFORMATION RECOMMENDED FOR PUBLICATION
			N/A
Information title	Information which must be published	Information recommended for publication	Is KFRS compliant with this?
12. Constitution	Annual publication Local authorities must publish their Constitution on their website.		INFORMATION THAT MUST BE PUBLISHED Yes
			The published data meet all the mandatory requirements. The Kent Fire Services (Combination Scheme) Order 1997 is the Parliamentary Order that established the Authority. A copy of this, along with all of our other constitutional documents, is available on the 'Governance' section of our website.
	1	1	https://www.kent.fire-uk.org/fire-authority

			INFORMATION RECOMMENDED FOR PUBLICATION N/A
Information title	Information which must be published	Information recommended for publication	Is KFRS compliant with this?
13. Pay multiple	 Annual publication Publish the pay multiple on their website defined as the ratio between the highest taxable earnings for the given year (including base salary, variable pay, bonuses, allowances and the cash value of any benefits-in-kind) and the median earnings figure of the whole of the authority's workforce. The measure must: cover all elements of remuneration that can be valued (e.g. all taxable earnings for the given year, including base salary, variable pay, bonuses, allowances and the cash value of any benefits-in-kind) use the median earnings figure as the denominator, which should be that of all employees of the local authority on a fixed date each year, coinciding with reporting at the end of the financial year exclude changes in pension benefits, which due to their variety and complexity cannot be accurately included in a pay multiple disclosure. 		Yes This information is published in our annual Pay Policy Statement, which can be found of the 'Pay policies' section of the website. https://www.kent.fire-uk.org/financial-information INFORMATION RECOMMENDED FOR PUBLICATION N/A
Information title	Information which must be published	Information recommended for publication	Is KFRS compliant with this?
14. Fraud	Annual publication Publish the following information: number of occasions they use powers under the Prevention of Social Housing Fraud (Power to Require Information) (England) Regulations 2014, or similar powers total number (absolute and full time equivalent) of employees undertaking investigations and prosecutions of fraud	Local authorities should publish: total number of cases of irregularity investigated total number of occasions on which a) fraud and b) irregularity was identified total monetary value of a) the fraud and b) the irregularity that was detected, and total monetary value of a) the fraud and b) the irregularity that was recovered.	Yes The published data meet the requirements. This is set out in the 'Fraud Transparency' section of our website. https://www.kent.fire-uk.org/financial-information INFORMATION RECOMMENDED FOR

	 total number (absolute and full time equivalent) of professionally accredited counter fraud specialists total amount spent by the authority on the investigation and prosecution of fraud total number of fraud cases investigated. 		Yes The published data meet the requirements. This is set out in the 'Fraud Transparency' section of our website. https://www.kent.fire-uk.org/financial-information
Information title	Information which must be published	Information recommended for publication	Is KFRS compliant with this?
15. Waste contracts	One-off publication Local authorities must publish details of their existing waste collection contracts, in line with the details contained in paragraphs 32 of the Code, at the point they first publish quarterly contract information under Part 2 of this Code.		INFORMATION THAT MUST BE PUBLISHED This requirement is not relevant to the Authority. INFORMATION RECOMMENDED FOR PUBLICATION N/A

Compliance Summary document – Local Government Transparency Code 2015 and the Trade Union (Facility Time Publication Requirements) Regulations 2017

Information title	Information which must be published	Information recommended for publication	Additional information
1. Expenditure exceeding £500	Yes. The published data meet all the mandatory requirements.	Yes. The published data meet all the recommended requirements.	
Information title	Information which must be published	Information recommended for publication	Additional information
2. Government Procurement Card transactions	Yes. The published data meet all the mandatory requirements.	Yes. The published data meet all the recommended requirements.	
Information title	Information which must be published	Information recommended for publication	Additional information
3. Procurement information	Yes. The published data meet all the mandatory requirements. KFRS has a clear position statement for the following areas: Invitation to tender for contracts to provide goods and/or services with a value that exceeds £5,000 Supplier details beyond the name Non-recoverable VAT	Where appropriate, KFRS adds information to the GOV.UK contracts finder and Kent Business Portal Contracts Finder. KFRS has a clear position statement on low value opportunities.	
Information title	Information which must be published	Information recommended for publication	Additional information
4. Local authority land	Yes. The published data meet all the mandatory requirements.	Work is underway to meet compliance standards with all the recommended requirements. However, given the large amount of information required, this is being addressed as and when resources allow.	
Information title	Information which must be published	Information recommended for publication	Additional information

5. Social housing asset value	This is not applicable to the Authority	This is not applicable to the Authority	
Information title	Information which must be published	Information recommended for publication	Additional information
6. Grants to voluntary, community and social enterprise organisations	Yes. The published data meet all the mandatory requirements. The only outstanding area relates to the time period for which grants are awarded, although this will be dependent upon whether grants are actually time limited.	The published data meet the recommended requirements.	
Information title	Information which must be published	Information recommended for publication	Additional information
7. Organisation chart	Yes. This is published in a format that suits the needs of the website. Nonetheless, the data published meet all the mandatory requirements.	The published data meet the majority of the recommended requirements. The only area where this area is not fully compliant is because the Authority deliberately chooses not to publish details of the individual pay of any Grey or Customer Service (Green Book) employee earning more than £50k. This is because we are of the reasonably held view that it would breach the principles set out in Article 5 (1)(a)(b) and (c) of the UK GDPR. To that end, the Authority has a clear position on this.	
Information title	Information which must be published	Information recommended for publication	Additional information
8. Trade union facility time	Yes. The published data meet all the mandatory requirements.	No recommended information	
Information title	Information which must be published	Information recommended for publication	Additional information
9. Parking account	This is not applicable to the Authority	This is not applicable to the Authority	

Information title	Information which must be published	Information recommended for publication	Additional information
10. Parking spaces	This is not applicable to the Authority	This is not applicable to the Authority	
Information title	Information which must be published	Information recommended for publication	Additional information
11. Senior salaries	In part. The published data meet the majority of the mandatory requirements.	No recommended information	
	The only area where this area is not fully compliant is because the Authority deliberately chooses not to publish details of the individual pay of any Grey or Customer Service (Green Book) employee earning more than £50k.		
	This is because we are of the reasonably held view that it would breach the principles set out in Article 5 (1)(a)(b) and (c) of the UK GDPR. To that end, the Authority has a clear position on this.		
Information title	Information which must be published	Information recommended for publication	Additional information
12. Constitution	Yes. The published data meet all the mandatory requirements.	No recommended information	
Information title	Information which must be published	Information recommended for publication	Additional information
13. Pay multiple	Yes. The published data meet all the mandatory requirements.	No recommended information	
Information title	Information which must be published	Information recommended for publication	Additional information
14. Fraud	Yes. The published data meet all the mandatory requirements.	The published data meet the recommended requirements.	
Information title	Information which must be published	Information recommended for publication	Additional information

15. Waste contracts	This is not applicable to the Authority.	This is not applicable to the Authority.	
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Al (Artificial Intelligence) Policy



Policy owned by:	Policy and Governance
Tier 2:	Policy
Version:	3
Does policy apply to any groups in addition to colleagues?	Yes Members, Volunteers, Cadets
Related Tier 2 Policies:	Data Protection Policy IT Policy Procurement Policy Code of Ethical Conduct Code of Ethics for Senior Managers

Organisational Aim

An effective AI policy based on principles of Service and benefits, accountability, ethical use, privacy and data protection, and education and training supports the aim of "Customer - Saving lives and reducing harm" by using AI technologies to improve public safety by enhancing the effectiveness of our services. By prioritising AI applications that focus on public benefit and ethical considerations, the policy ensures that the formal use of AI systems will contribute to help save lives and reduce harm. Transparent decision-making processes build trust and confidence in AI-enabled services, while strong data protection measures safeguard colleagues' and customers' privacy rights.

Introduction

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is a branch of computer science that focuses on creating machines or software that can perform tasks that normally require human intelligence. These tasks include things like understanding language, recognising patterns, solving problems, and assisting in decision making processes. Essentially, AI is about teaching computers to think and learn in ways that mimic human thought processes.

KFRS will actively consider the introduction of AI where there is a clear business case based upon improving efficiency, improving inclusivity, and supporting our vision, aim and objectives, and strategic priorities as set out in our CRMP delivery plan.

Examples of where AI is used include the following:

- Content Creation Tools: Tools like ChatGPT, Google Gemini, and Mistral, which can help generate text for emails, articles, or social media posts.
- Al programmes that generate images from textual descriptions.
- Smart Email Assistants: Features in email platforms that suggest replies or help draft emails based on the content of the received messages.

- Customer Service Chatbots: Many companies use Al-powered chatbots on their websites to handle customer queries, provide support, and offer product recommendations.
- Microsoft Copilot is a type of AI. It uses advanced machine learning models to help users
 with various tasks in software like Microsoft Office. For example, it can help write text,
 generate code, create presentations, and analyse data by understanding and processing
 natural language inputs.

Currently there is no legislation in place that directly refers to the use of AI. However, where an AI system is using or collecting personal data, it will fall within the scope of the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR), the Data Protection Act 2018 and the Data (Use and Access) Act 2025. This would include where personal data is being used as training data for AI.

Service Policy

At the current time KFRS has not formerly adopted any stand-alone Al applications. The opportunities and risks of Al are still developing and being understood. Because this is a rapidly developing area, KFRS has established the following set of principles to govern our approach to the formal procurement, adoption and use of Al in the Service and the deliberate choice to invest in Al or an Al enhanced tool or application.

Benefits the Service and our customers

- Only introduce and use, or permit the use of, AI where there is a clear business case based upon improving efficiency and supporting our vision, aim and objectives, and strategic priorities as set out in our CRMP delivery plan.
- Ensure any AI applications serve the wider public interest and contribute (even if indirectly) to the safety of customers and communities.

Accountability and governance

- Ensure clear governance and accountability mechanisms for the adoption, deployment, management and use of AI systems within KFRS.
- Define roles and responsibilities of stakeholders involved in Al programmes and projects.
- Ensure transparency around the adoption, deployment, management and use of Al systems within KFRS.
- Decisions to adopt AI systems must always follow the established project and procurement processes, including approval from CMB and SLT.

Ethical and fair use

- Embed ethical principles (fairness, transparency, and accountability) into the adoption, deployment, management and use of AI systems within KFRS.
- Understand Al providers' position on any biases in their Al products to ensure decisionmaking processes and equitable outcomes for all customers and users.
- Colleagues are accountable for anything they produce as part of their work, this includes
 using Al applications to create content for reports, documents, emails and
 communications. Therefore, colleagues must use Al with integrity (no plagiarism or
 false/misleading representation) and in a way that is in accordance with the values set
 out in the KFRS Code of Ethical Conduct.

Privacy and data protection

 Uphold privacy rights and comply with data protection regulations (UK GDPR, the Data [Use and Access] Act 2025 and the Data Protection Act 2018). This includes the use of data protection impact assessments.

- Do not use any personal data, organisationally sensitive data (including of partners), or commercially sensitive data in any non-KFRS procured Al applications (for example, ChatGPT, Google Gemini, Mistral, Perplexity).
- Make colleagues, customers and partners aware when personal data we collect, and process will be used in KFRS procured AI applications.

Education and training

- Provide training and resources to colleagues involved in AI projects to enhance their understanding of AI technologies, ethical considerations, and best practice.
- Inform colleagues about the role and impact of AI used within KFRS and encourage colleagues to engage with AI systems effectively.

Relevant Legislation and Codes of Practice

- Al Opportunities Action Plan GOV.UK
- Cabinet Office and Central Digital and Data Office Guidance Generative Al Framework for HMG
- Code of Practice for the Cyber Security of AI GOV.UK
- Data Protection Act 2018
- Data (Use and Access) Act 2025
- ICO guidance What are the accountability and governance implications of AI?
- National Cyber Security Centre Guidelines for secure AI system development
- NFCC guidance Framework for the Ethical Use of AI in Fire and Rescue
- UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR)

Underlying Tier 3 Procedure

None yet

Data Inputs and Controls

Contract information
Project documentation
Records of processing activity

Security Marking

Not protectively marked

Policy Audit Information

Policy version	Original approval and revision dates	Author	Changes made (unless new document) Significant or Nonsignificant amendment
V3	16/10/2025	Head of Policy	Policy taken to KMFRA for scheduled annual review and approval.

			Addition of reference in Ethical and Fair Use section to colleagues using AI in an ethical way.
V2	30/01/2025	·	Addition of government's 'Al Opportunities Action Plan' and 'Code of Practice for the Cyber Security of Al' to Relevant Legislation section.
V1	17/10/2024	Head of Policy	New policy developed and published to cover this area. PIA undertaken and published.

Approval Process (latest version)

When new approval process takes place for a significant amendment, the table below will be moved into the 'Procedure Audit Information' table above, by being cut and pasted into the 'Changes made column' in the row that corresponds to the relevant version number.

The table below will then be cleared and completed for the new approval process for the latest version

Key dates and information		
Approved by (including date)	ALL NEW AND SIGNIFICANTLY REVISED T2s MUST GO THROUGH CMB AND AFTER THAT, IF THRESHOLD MET, WILL THEN GO TO KMFRA OR A&G CMB 10/09/2025 KMFRA 16/10/2025	
First approval (implementation) date	17/10/2024	
Latest approval (implementation) date	16/10/2025	
Review by	16/10/2026 (Rather than the three year standard, Al Policy has a one year review date)	
Date came to Policy Steering Group	13/08/2025	
Reviewers (including date)	Digital, Data, Systems and Processes Steering Group (07/08/2025)	
Changes required to any underlying Tier 3 Procedure/Guidance resulting from changes to this Tier 2 Policy?	No	
Changes required to any underlying Tier 3 Procedure/Guidance resulting from changes to this Tier 2 Policy?	No	

Senior responsible manager	Head of Policy
Direct enquiries to	Head of Policy
People Impact Assessment (PIA)	887 - Al Policy V3.docx

Consultation History of Latest Version

T2 policy and its underlying T3 procedure will be consulted on as a package.

Formal consultation as part of development	Date of consultation
Joint Secretaries (Fire Brigades Union)	No consultation required with other parties
FRSA (Fire and Rescue Services Association and FOA (Fire Officers' Association) consulted	No consultation required with other parties
Colleagues via feedback in One Team Update as part of policy development	No consultation required with other parties
Internal services meeting as part of policy development	No consultation required with other parties
Informal consultation post-implementation	Date of consultation
Colleagues via feedback in One Team Update as part of periodic checks	N/A at this point
Internal services meeting as part of periodic checks	N/A at this point

Community Right to Challenge Policy



Policy owned by:	Policy and Governance
Tier 2:	Policy
Version:	5
Does policy apply to any groups in addition to colleagues?	No
Related Tier 2 Policies:	Community Risk Management Policy Procurement Policy

Organisational aim

The Community Right to Challenge Policy KFRS supports the organisational aim of "Customer – saving lives and reducing harm" by ensuring the Service meets its lawful responsibilities under the Localism Act 2011 to consider expressions of interest from eligible groups, KFRS enhances community involvement and ensures opportunity for resources to be used effectively to improve public safety.

Introduction

Sections 81 to 86 of the Localism Act 2011 establish the Community Right to Challenge, which introduces the right for voluntary groups, community groups, charities, parish councils, and authority employees to express an interest in running a local authority service. Along with this it requires local authorities to consider expressions of interest submitted by eligible groups. Authorities must assess whether the proposal meets statutory requirements before proceeding to a procurement exercise. This policy sets out KFRS' position in relation to this.

Examples of where this has been implemented include the following: 'Bulky Bob's' in Liverpool, a social enterprise that secured contracts with Liverpool City Council and others to collect, reuse, and recycle bulky household waste; and 'Shiney Advice and Resource Project (ShARP)' in Sunderland, an independent welfare rights advice centre providing guidance on debt, welfare benefits, housing, and employment or vulnerable adults or individuals in stressful situations.

Service Policy

In relation to the Community Right to Challenge, KFRS' policy is as follows:

1. Eligibility

KFRS will consider expressions of interest under the Community Right to Challenge from "relevant bodies" (i.e. those designated as eligible), these are as follows:

- Voluntary or Community Bodies: Non-profit organizations, social enterprises, community interest companies and cooperatives that operate for community benefit rather than private profit.
- Charitable Organisations: Registered charities and charitable trusts that provide public benefit.
- Parish Councils: Town and parish councils that want to take over a service within their jurisdiction.
- KFRS employees: Two or more employees of KFRS can form a mutual organisation and challenge to run a service currently provided by the Service.
- Other bodies designated by the Secretary of State: covers organisations not listed above but who become eligible through amendments to the legislation.

2. Scope

The policy applies to all services provided by or on behalf of KFRS, except statutory functions, exempted services, those services KFRS has decided to stop providing, or those already under planned or actual review, procurement, or negotiation.

3. Initial expressions of interest

Interested parties must first get in contact through the 'Contact us' page on the website (https://www.kent.fire-uk.org/contact-us) to notify KFRS of their intention to submit a written initial expression of interest to confirm eligibility. Please see the Tier 3 Procedure and Guidance for more information about how to get in contact and the format of initial expressions of interest.

CMB (the Corporate Management Board) will assess whether the expression of interest is from a relevant body under the Act and the service concerned is a relevant service under the Act.

If both these conditions are met, then for services with an annual cost to KFRS below £75,000 (as specified in the most recent approved accounts), the Corporate Management Board will decide whether to accept or reject the initial expression of interest.

If the value is above £75,000, the Corporate Management Board will consult with and seek the view of the Members of the Fire Authority on a decision. This will be either as urgent business with the Chair and Group Leaders, or as part of a decision report to the next meeting of the Fire Authority where timescales allow.

If an expression of interest is rejected, written feedback with reasons will be provided.

Responses to initial expressions of interest will be made within 20 working days of receipt, starting from the next working day after the expression of interest was received.

4. Detailed expressions of interest

Initial expressions of interest that are accepted will proceed to a detailed submission stage. Please see the Tier 3 Procedure and Guidance for more information about the format of detailed expressions of interest.

If the value of the service set out in the detailed expression of interest is below an annual cost to KFRS of £75,000, as specified in its most recent approved accounts, then the decision to accept, reject or request the submission be amended will made by the Corporate Management Board.

Responses to detailed expressions of interest below the £75,000 threshold will be made within 20 working days of receipt, starting from the next working day after the expression of interest was received.

Decisions on detailed expressions of interest above £75,000 will require approval from the Members of the Fire Authority. To ensure an adequate degree of scrutiny it will be as part of a decision report to the next meeting of the Fire Authority where timescales allow.

For detailed expressions of interest above £75,000, notification of receipt, along with the date of the next meeting of the Fire Authority when this will be considered, will be made within 20 working days of receipt, starting from the next working day after the detailed expression of interest was received.

If an expression of interest is rejected, written feedback with reasons will be provided.

5. Procurement Process

If a detailed expression of interest is accepted, KFRS will conduct a procurement exercise. This will be led by the Procurement Team.

6. Responsibilities

Subject to the £75,000 threshold, the Corporate Management Board and or the Fire Authority will make any decisions regarding whether to accept, reject or request amendments or modifications to initial and detailed expressions of interest.

The Director of Finance is responsible for the efficient and effective handling of initial and detailed expressions of interest, including feedback to the submitting body.

7. Transparency and monitoring

A register will be maintained of all expressions of interest. This will list submission dates, outcomes, and reasons for decisions.

Relevant legislation and Codes of Practice

- Localism Act 2011
- The Community Right to Challenge (Fire and Rescue Authorities and Rejection of Expressions of Interest) (England) Regulations 2012
- Community Right to Challenge: statutory guidance GOV.UK

Underlying Tier 3 Procedure

Guidance for the Community Right to Challenge Policy

Data inputs and controls

- A record of all expressions of interest made under the Community Right to Challenge
- Copies of expressions of interest received under the Community Right to Challenge
- Information related to any procurement processes following accepted detailed expressions
 of interest

Security Marking

Not protectively marked

Policy Audit Information

Policy version	Original approval and revision dates	Author	Changes made (unless new document)
V5	16/10/2025	Head of Policy	V5 (16/10/2025) revised and updated in line with new Tier 2 policy and Tier 3 guidance format. Policy and underlying Procedure and Guidance significantly revised to clarity eligible groups and services and processes around expressions of interest (EOI) including template structure for any EOIs. PIA undertaken.
V1-V4	13/06/2022	Assistant Director Corporate Services	New document

Approval Process (latest version)

When new approval process takes place for a significant amendment, the table below will be moved into the 'Procedure Audit Information' table above, by being cut and pasted into the 'Changes made column' in the row that corresponds to the relevant version number.

The table below will then be cleared and completed for the new approval process for the latest version

Key dates and information		
Approved by (including date)	ALL NEW AND SIGNIFICANTLY REVISED T2s MUST GO THROUGH CMB AND AFTER THAT, IF THRESHOLD MET, WILL THEN GO TO KMFRA OR A&G	
	CMB 10/06/2025	
	KMFRA 16/10/2025	

First approval (implementation date)	13/06/2022
Latest approval (implementation) date	16/10/2025
Review by	16/10/2028
Date came to Policy Steering Group	14/05/2025
Reviewers (including date)	Policy Steering Group 14/05/2025
Changes required to any underlying Tier 3 Procedure/Guidance resulting from changes to this Tier 2 Policy?	No
Changes required to any underlying Tier 3 Procedure/Guidance resulting from changes to this Tier 2 Policy?	No
Senior responsible manager	Head of Policy
Direct enquiries to	Policy and Governance
People Impact Assessment (PIA)	PIA for Community Right to Challenge Policy

Consultation History of Latest Version

T2 policy and its underlying T3 procedure will be consulted on as a package.

Formal consultation as part of development	Date of consultation
Joint Secretaries (Fire Brigades Union)	No consultation required with other parties
FRSA (Fire and Rescue Services Association and FOA (Fire Officers' Association) consulted	No consultation required with other parties
Colleagues via feedback in One Team Update as part of policy development	No consultation required with other parties
Internal services meeting as part of policy development	No consultation required with other parties
Informal consultation post-implementation	Date of consultation
Colleagues via feedback in One Team Update as part of periodic checks	N/A at this point
Internal services meeting as part of periodic checks	/A at this point

Item Number: B6

By: Chief Executive

To: Kent and Medway Fire and Rescue Authority – 16 October 2025

Subject: PROTECTIVE SECURITY CHARTER

Classification: Unrestricted

FOR DECISION

SUMMARY

This report covers the following:

A. Protective Security Charter

RECOMMENDATIONS

Members are requested to:

1. Approve the Protective Security Charter, paragraphs 1 to 6 and **Appendix 1** refer.

LEAD/CONTACT OFFICER: Head of Policy - Owain Thompson

TELEPHONE NUMBER: 01622 692121 EMAIL: kmfraclerk@kent.fire-uk.org BACKGROUND PAPERS: None

COMMENTS

A. Protective Security Charter

Lead/contact officer: Owain Thompson, Head of Policy

- 1. Along with other public sector organisations, KFRS faces a range of security threats from terrorism, fraud, cyber-crime, and theft of equipment.
- Protective security describes the implementation of measures designed to understand and protect KFRS from these threats. These measures encompass physical, people, and information security, aiming to reduce vulnerabilities and enhance resilience against security threats.
- 3. Understanding and assessing the threats facing KFRS will ensure protective security measures are proportionate, co-ordinated, effective and responsive.
- 4. The Protective Security Charter sets out Kent Fire and Rescue Service's (KFRS) approach to protective security, outlining how we identify, assess, and manage the wide range of security threats that could impact our people, property, information, and operations.
- 5. It defines a clear framework for maintaining a safe and secure environment across the organisation, aligned with national standards and best practice.
- 6. By detailing the principles, governance structures, and thematic areas that underpin our protective security strategy, this document supports consistent decision-making, strengthens resilience, and ensures that all colleagues understand their role in keeping KFRS safe from security threats.

IMPACT ASSESSMENT

5. There are no direct impacts from the contents of this paper which cannot be contained within existing budgetary provision.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 6. Members are requested to:
- 6.1 Approve the Protective Security Charter, paragraphs 1 to 6 and **Appendix 1** refer.

Protective Security Charter



Introduction

This Protective Security Charter sets out Kent Fire and Rescue Service's (KFRS) approach to protective security, outlining how we identify, assess, and manage the wide range of security threats that could impact our people, property, information, and operations.

It defines a clear framework for maintaining a safe and secure environment across the organisation, aligned with national standards and best practice.

By detailing the principles, governance structures, and thematic areas that underpin our protective security strategy, this document supports consistent decision-making, strengthens resilience, and ensures that all colleagues understand their role in keeping KFRS safe from security threats.

Protective security and why it is important

Along with other public sector organisations, KFRS faces a range of security threats from terrorism, fraud, cyber-crime, and theft of equipment.

Protective security describes the implementation of measures designed to understand and protect KFRS from these threats. These measures encompass physical, people, and information security, aiming to reduce vulnerabilities and enhance resilience against security threats.

Understanding and assessing the threats facing KFRS will ensure protective security measures are proportionate, co-ordinated, effective and responsive.

Our approach to protective security

We have developed a coherent, risk based, cost-effective and proportionate approach to protective security, which is supported by effective governance structures and processes.

In line with government guidance, our approach to protective security is holistic, which means we don't just focus on one aspect, like physical barriers or cybersecurity, but instead look at the entire ecosystem of risks and protections.

Our protective security framework is structured around 20 themes (see below), which collectively cover the following five key areas:

1. Physical security

Safeguarding our buildings, infrastructure, assets and equipment.

2. People security

Ensuring we have trustworthy, vetted individuals and that insider threats are mitigated and that we also protect our colleagues, for example when working alone.

3. Information security

Protecting sensitive data from being accessed, stolen, or leaked.

4. Cybersecurity

Ensuring we have effective and up-to-date IT security systems in place.

5. Security culture

Embedding awareness and responsible behaviour throughout KFRS.

The 20 themes that comprise our protective security framework are based on those set out in the National Protective Security Authority (NPSA)'s <u>Passport to Good Security</u>. These themes are as follows:

- 1. Good governance
- 2. Identify most valuable assets
- 3. Identify the threats
- 4. Adopt a risk management approach
- 5. Mitigate risks
- 6. Legality, ethics and transparency
- 7. Control access
- 8. Security culture: soft measures
- 9. Security culture: hard measures
- 10. Protect information
- 11. Secure sharing of information
- 12. Online social behaviour
- 13. Security pre-screening
- 14. Home and mobile working
- 15. Colleagues exit strategy
- 16. Build secure
- 17. Search and screening
- 18. Business continuity
- 19. Incident management
- 20. Emerge stronger learning from security incidents

Within each of these 20 themes, the Passport to Good Security contains a number of subthemes, each of which has its own priority, impact and compliance rating, along with evidence of compliance. This provides an effective means of identifying, assessing and mitigating the threats to KFRS.

Governance and oversight

We have a robust and effective approach to governance and oversight of security. This operates through a suite of policies and procedures covering the five key areas set out in paragraph 8 and a dedicated steering group whose focus is protective security. More information about this approach is provide below.

Our suite of Tier 2 Policy and Tier 3 Procedure documents detail the systems and processes in place to ensure effective protective security. These set out in clear terms the actions that are taken and the associated responsibilities of colleagues and the wider organisation. A list of these along with the teams responsible is set out in table 1 below.

We have a Security Steering Group (SSG) whose role is to ensure that the Strategic Leadership Board (SLB) remains fully informed about emerging, potential, and current

security risks across the areas covered by the Passport to Good Security and any escalation of the UK threat level.

The SSG is responsible for providing the SLB with regular updates on current risk mitigation and resilience measures, while also advising on what actions are necessary to address emerging and potential risks, including the appropriate risk recording processes. Additionally, the SSG monitors compliance with relevant legislative requirements and tracks progress against the Passport to Good Security.

By offering clear, specialist, and balanced advice, the SSG enables the SLB to make informed decisions about the level of focus and prioritisation given to identified security risks.

Where appropriate, updates will also be taken to the meetings of the Kent and Medway Fire and Rescue Authority. This ensure that the Members of the Fire Authority are kept appraised of relevant issues and their assistance sought when necessary.

Table 1. Security related policies (Tier 2) and procedures and guidance (Tier 3)

Security Area	Team	Relevant Documentation and Tier
Contractor Management	Property Services / Fleet and Equipment Services	 PS-CON-01 - Control of Contractors Policy (Property) (T2) PS-CON-04 - Contractor Vetting and ID Access Cards (T3) Driving at Work Policy (T2)
Data Protection	Policy and Governance	 Data Protection Policy (T2) Guidance for the Data Protection Policy (T3) Data Breach Policy (T2) Guidance for the Data Breach Policy (T3) CCTV Policy (T2)
Forgery, Theft and Bribery	Finance Team	 Anti-Fraud and Corruption Policy (T2) Anti-Bribery Policy (T2) Anti-Money Laundering Policy
Colleagues (ensuring we have trustworthy, vetted individuals and that we also have systems and procedures to protect our colleagues)	HR and Culture Team	 Recruitment and Selection Policy (T2) Guidance for the Recruitment and Selection Policy (T3) Employment Checks Policy (T2) Employment checks for new starters guidance (T3) Employment checks for current colleagues' guidance (T3) Overview of Checks, Vetting and Training by Team (T4) Leaving the Organisation (T2) Lone Working - OIN 069 Guidance on working alone/Lone working guidance

IT and Cyber Security	IT	 New IT Policy. In draft, will be once complete and approved by CMB in September Information Technology Policy (legacy policy due to be replaced in late 2025)
Physical Security	Property Services	 PS-AM-06 - Physical Security (T3) PS-AM-08 - Premises Sharing (T3)
Security of Equipment	Resilience Team	 <u>Security of Premises, Equipment and Vehicles -</u> <u>RIN 014</u>
Vehicles	Fleet and Equipment Services	Driving at Work Policy (T2)
Social Media	Engagement Team	 Social Media Policy (T2) Guidance for the Social Media Policy (T3)
Visitors	Health and Safety Team	Visitors on Service Premises Guidance (T3)
Organisational Risk	Corporate Risk Management	Corporate Risk Management Policy (T2)

Protective security in practice

Effective protective security starts with having a security culture embedded within the Service. This refers to a shared set of values, beliefs, and behaviours around security that are consistently practised and reinforced throughout KFRS.

In addition to our policies and technology, how we think about and approach security in our daily work is essential to good security. Simple practical examples of this include:

- Wearing our KFRS ID badges, and where practical, on the official KFRS lanyard.
- Politely challenging people, we do not recognise who are not displaying a valid ID or visitor badge and escorting them to reception or to their host.
- Locking our computer and device screens when we are away from them.
- Reporting things that don't look or feel right.

Key to embedding and maintaining an effective security culture is training on security related areas. Within KFRS mandatory training is provided to all colleagues on essential foundational areas, such as data protection, cyber security and anti-fraud and corruption, with more specialised security related training provided to teams as necessary, examples of which include recruitment practices and security of premises. This allows us to balance good security without compromising our focus on customer and community openness.

Protective security standards

Our approach to protective security is informed by and follows the guidance and standards listed below. These have been purposely selected as we believe they represent the most authoritative, accessible and effective standards that we can apply.

- NPSA Passport to Good Security
- Cyber Essentials NCSC.GOV.UK
- Digital and Cyber Fire Standards Board

We monitor these to ensure that we continue to follow best practice in this area.

Summary

In summary, this Protective Security Charter outlines a clear, coordinated, and practical approach to managing the diverse range of security threats facing KFRS. By embedding a proportionate, but robust, security culture, supported by appropriate training, clear governance, and nationally recognised standards, we ensure that protective security becomes an integral part of our day-to-day operations.

Everyone at KFRS has a role to play, whether that's following our policies, remaining vigilant, or taking simple but effective actions that help safeguard our people, property, and information. Through our shared commitment and continued focus, we can protect the Service from the many threats it faces and ensure it continues to operate safely, securely, and as effectively as possible in serving our communities.

Document Audit Information

Policy version	Original approval and revision dates	Author	Changes made (unless new document)
V1	16/10/2025	Security Steering Group	New document

Approval Process

Key dates and information	
Approved by (including date)	CMB 11/08/2025 (TBC) KMFRA 16/10/2025 (TBC)
Approval (implementation) date	16/10/2025
Review by	16/10/2026
Reviewers	Security Steering Group 03/07/2025 Strategic Leadership Board 24/07/2025

Senior responsible manager	Owain Thompson, Head of Policy and DPO
Policy applies to	Colleagues, Members, Volunteers, Cadets, Contractors
Direct enquiries to	Security Steering Group
People Impact Assessment (PIA)	Not required

Consultation History of Latest Version

Formal consultation	Date of consultation
Joint Secretaries (Fire Brigades Union)	No consultation required with other parties
FRSA (Fire and Rescue Services Association and FOA (Fire Officers' Association) consulted	No consultation required with other parties
Colleagues via feedback in One Team Update as part of policy development	No consultation required with other parties
Internal services meeting as part of policy development	No consultation required with other parties
Information consultation	Date of consultation
Colleagues via feedback in One Team Update as part of periodic checks	No consultation required with other parties
Internal services meeting as part of periodic checks	No consultation required with other parties

Item Number: B7

By: Clerk to the Authority

To: Kent and Medway Fire and Rescue Authority – 16 October 2025

Subject: PROPOSED CALENDAR OF MEMBER MEETINGS AND OTHER

EVENTS FOR 2026/27

Classification: Unrestricted

FOR DECISION

SUMMARY

This report sets out for Members' consideration and approval, the proposed Calendar of Member Meetings and Other Events for 2026/27.

RECOMMENDATION

Members are requested to:

1. Approve the proposed Calendar of Member Meetings for 2026/27 as set out in **Appendix 1** (paragraphs 2 and 3 refers).

LEAD/CONTACT OFFICER: Clerk to the Authority - Kirsty Driver

TELEPHONE NUMBER: 01622 692121 EMAIL: kmfraclerk@kent.fire-uk.org BACKGROUND PAPERS: None

COMMENTS

Introduction

1. It is the Authority's normal practice to approve the programme of Member meetings for the forthcoming municipal year (June to June).

Member Meetings for the Remainder of 2025/26 Calendar Year

2. In October 2024, the Authority set and agreed the dates for its meetings for the remainder of the current Authority year (through to the annual meeting in June 2026) Members are required to note the existing calendar of dates which are identified in Part 1 of **Appendix 1.**

Proposed Meeting Dates for 2026/27

- 3. Suggested dates for the proposed Authority and Audit and Governance Committee meetings from June 2026 until June 2027 are shown in Part 2 of **Appendix 1** for Members' consideration and approval.
- 4. All currently known dates which have an influence on the meetings programme (such as local elections, LGA Conferences, and annual meetings of the constituent authorities) are also shown where known.
- 5. The suggested dates for 2026/27 follow a similar pattern to that adopted for 2025/26, avoiding school holiday periods as far as reasonably possible.
- 6. As usual, the relevant officers at both Kent County Council and Medway Council have been consulted and confirmed that there are no significant date clashes. As it is often necessary for the constituent Councils to call meetings at short notice, it is inevitable that clashes will occur from time to time, despite the best efforts of all parties.
- 7. Once Member agreement has been sought to the proposed dates, the Clerk will send out formal calendar invitations.

IMPACT ASSESSMENT

8. All costs associated with the meetings are contained within existing budgetary provisions.

RECOMMENDATION

- 9. Members are requested to:
- 9.1 Approve the proposed Calendar of Member Meetings for 2026/27 as set out in **Appendix 1** (paragraphs 2 and 3 refers).

PROPOSED CALENDAR OF MEMBER MEETINGS AND OTHER EVENTS 2026/27

Part 1: Dates for remainder 2025/26 and start of 2026/27 - Previously Approved by the Authority at its meeting on 17 October 2024

2026

Audit and Governance Committee Thursday 29 January at 10.30am

Kent and Medway Fire and Rescue Authority

Budget Meeting

Wednesday 18 February at 10.30am

Audit and Governance Committee Thursday 23 April at 10.30am

Kent and Medway Fire and Rescue Authority

Annual Meeting

Thursday 25 June at 10.30am

LGA Annual Fire Tuesday 11th and Wednesday 12th March

Conference

Medway Council Annual Meeting Wednesday 13th May

Kent County Council Annual Meeting Thursday 21st May

LGA Annual Conference and Exhibition Tuesday 7th – Thursday 9th July

Part 2 – Proposed dates for remainder of 2026/27 – for Member approval

2026

Audit and Governance Committee Thursday 24th September at 10.30am

Kent and Medway Fire and Rescue Authority Thursday 15th October at 10.30am

2027

Audit and Governance Committee Thursday 28th January at 10.30am

Kent and Medway Fire and Rescue Authority

Thursday 18th February at 10.30am

Budget Meeting

Audit and Governance Committee Thursday 22nd April at 10.30am

Kent and Medway Fire and Rescue Authority Thursday 24th June at 10.30am

Annual Meeting

Item Number: C1

By: Chief Executive

To: Kent and Medway Fire and Rescue Authority – 16 October 2025

Subject: CHAIR OF AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE'S

ANNUAL REPORT TO THE AUTHORITY

Classification: Unrestricted

FOR INFORMATION

SUMMARY

This report summarises the work undertaken by the Audit and Governance Committee throughout the year demonstrating to the Authority its effectiveness in assessing and maintaining the organisation's internal control environment and governance arrangements.

Throughout the year, Committee Members received specialised training and presentations designed to enhance knowledge and understanding but also help Members gain assurance across the breadth of work within the remit of the Committee. Over the year, the Committee reviewed numerous reports and provided recommendations to the Authority.

CONCLUSION

Members are requested to:

1. Note the contents of this report.

COMMENTS

Background

- 1. The Audit and Governance Committee was established in February 2021, following approval by the Authority. It was agreed that an Audit and Governance Committee would be established to support and enhance key aspects of good governance. Its function and operation align with clear guidance and recommended best practice from the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA).
- 2. Audit Committees are a key component of any authority's governance framework and provide a high-level resource to support good governance and robust public financial management. The Audit and Governance Committee provides independent assurance on the adequacy of the risk management framework, the internal control environment and the integrity of the financial reporting and governance processes. By overseeing both internal and external audit the Committee makes an important contribution to ensuring that effective assurance arrangements are in place.
- 3. This annual report covers the Audit and Governance Committee's work from November 2024 to September 2025. During this period, the Committee held three meetings (excluding the current one) in November 2024, January 2025, and April 2025. These meetings are timed to review key aspects of work during the financial year focusing on Governance, Risk and Control, Internal Audit, External Audit, and Financial Reporting.

Audit and Governance Committee

- 4. The Committee has ten members, is independent from the full Authority and meets three times annually. Throughout the year, Cllr Vince Maple has served as the Committee's Chair and Cllr Barry Kemp has served as Vice-Chair. Key attendees at Committee meetings include the Chief Executive, the Director of Finance, the Director of Prevention, Protection, Customer Engagement and Safety, and the Director of Response and Resilience, as well as both External and Internal Auditors.
- 5. Training is crucial for an effective Audit Committee, so this year Committee Members received; fraud awareness training from the Counter Fraud team at Kent County Council, an economic update and benchmarking presentation on the Authority's treasury activity from the Authority's external Treasury Advisor at MUFG, and training on the new Global Internal Audit Standards and Members' roles and responsibilities from the Internal Audit Manager at Kent County Council. Additionally, in preparation for the September 2025 meeting, Committee Members received training from CIPFA on Local Authority Accounts.

6. The Committee has developed a structured work programme which maps out its activities on an annual basis.

Governance, Risk and Control

- 7. The Audit and Governance Committee received a mid-year update on the Corporate and Strategic Risk Register, building on an initial report in April 2024 which introduced a more detailed approach to risk management, including identification, reporting, risk tolerance, and risk appetite. The Committee continues to monitor and review progress against actions for strategic risks, with the mid-year update presented to the Committee in January 2025.
- 8. The Committee reviewed the Authority's Treasury Reports, receiving a benchmarking presentation from the Authority's external Treasury Advisor at MUFG. This provided assurance that the Authority's investments were within acceptable risk profiles in comparison to other Fire Authorities, and its debt profile was in a better position than most comparators. Committee Members also reviewed the Mid-Year Treasury report and Treasury Management Provisional Outturn report for 2024/25, recommending both for approval by the full Authority at its February 2025 and July 2025 meetings, respectively.
- 9. The Authority's Anti-Fraud and Corruption Framework underwent a thorough review, which included utilising the Fighting Fraud and Corruption checklist. This process provided assurance that the Authority has robust controls to detect and prevent fraud and corruption. Additionally, the Committee approved the two-year Anti-Fraud and Corruption Plan (2025-2027), outlining the Authority's upcoming initiatives to sustain a strong anti-fraud culture within the Service.
- 10. The Head of Policy presented a report on the annual review of the Code of Corporate Governance. This report confirmed that the Authority's governance arrangements align with the seven principles of good governance, which are based on the Seven Principles of Public Life. The Authority is required to conduct an annual review of its governance arrangements, a task which is undertaken by the Audit and Governance Committee on its behalf. This process results in the production of an Annual Governance Statement (AGS), which is reviewed by the Committee and subsequently signed by both the Chair of the Committee and the Chief Executive.

Internal Audit

11. The Internal Audit Service, provided by Kent County Council, is overseen by the Audit and Governance Committee. At the start of the year the Committee approved the Internal Audit Plan for 2024/25 which detailed the specific audits to be conducted throughout the financial year.

12. The Committee monitors performance against the plan through progress reports at each meeting, supplemented by verbal updates from the Internal Audit Manager, who attends the Committee meetings. The Internal Audit Annual Report for 2024/25 was presented to the September 2025 Audit and Governance Committee for review and consideration.

External Audit

- 13. The Audit and Governance Committee is responsible for approving the External Auditor's Annual Audit Plan. This plan, presented by Grant Thornton at the April 2025 meeting, outlines their proposed work programme and fee, based on the initial fees set by Public Sector Audit Appointments Ltd (the independent company set up by Government to oversee the procurement process).
- 14. To assist with the External Audit Risk Assessment, Officers are now required to provide details of processes concerning fraud, compliance with laws and regulations, related parties, an assessment of the Authority as a "Going Concern" and the Authority's accounting estimates. This document was reviewed by the Committee at its April 2025 meeting.
- 15. The Committee has been regularly updated on the Government's proposals aimed at resolving the issues impacting Local Authority external audits and the timely sign-off of Financial Statements.

Financial Reporting

16. The Committee has received and considered, the draft Financial Statements for 2024/25 as approved by the Director of Finance. In addition, a summary version of the Financial Statements was produced, and Officer's provided a presentation to the Committee on the key areas of the Financial Statements.

Effectiveness of the Audit and Governance Committee

- 17. This is the fourth year that the Audit and Governance Committee has been operating and during that time specialist knowledge has continued to grow and develop, largely due to the ongoing training provided. This enhanced expertise has enabled the Committee to focus in more detail in key areas of activity within its remit. As a result, the Authority can effectively demonstrate its commitment to best practices by applying relevant guidance.
- 18. This report summarises the work completed between November 2024 and September 2025, demonstrating that the Committee is functioning in line with best practices and providing independent assurance of the Authority's governance arrangements.

IMPACT ASSESSMENT

19. This update provides further assurance for Members that the Authority has robust governance arrangements in place.

CONCLUSION

- 20. Members are requested to:
 - 20.1 Note the contents of the report.

Item Number: C2

By: Director of Finance

To: Kent and Medway Fire and Rescue Authority – 16 October 2025

Subject: MID-YEAR TREASURY MANAGEMENT AND INVESTMENT

UPDATE 2025/26

Classification: Unrestricted

FOR INFORMATION

SUMMARY

This Mid-year Treasury Management and Investment update for 2025/26 was reviewed at the 25 September 2025 Audit and Governance Committee meeting and is provided to Authority Members for information.

This report provides a mid-year update on the Authority's treasury management activities for 2025/26. It details the treasury activity undertaken and provides an assessment of compliance with the agreed Prudential Indicators. This update is a requirement of the Treasury Management and Investment Strategy 2025/26, which was approved by Member's at the Authority meeting on 18 February 2025, and is set in accordance with the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) Code of Practice on Treasury Management and the CIPFA Prudential Code.

In line with CIPFA guidance, the Authority continues to prioritise security and liquidity over potential yield. The Bank of England's Monetary Policy Committee recently voted to cut the Base Rate for the fifth time in a year, bringing it to 4.0% from 4.25% in its August 2025 meeting. Consequently, the Authority has recently seen interest rates on deposits reduce across the board. For the first five months of this financial year average cash balances have been approximately £64.99m, which has resulted in an interest yield of £1.083m for that period against an annual budget of £1.594m.

CONCLUSION

Members are requested to:

1. Note the contents of this report.

LEAD/CONTACT OFFICER: Head of Finance, Treasury and Pensions – Nicola Walker

CONTACT DETAILS: T: 01622 692121 / E: kmfraclerk@kent.fire-uk.org

BACKGROUND PAPERS:

Draft Revenue and Capital Budgets 2025/26 and MTFP 2025-29 – 18 February 2025 Appendix 4 – Annual Treasury Management and Investment Strategy 2025/26

COMMENTS

Introduction

- 1. The Authority operates a balanced budget, which broadly means cash raised during the year will meet its cash expenditure but there is often a timing difference between when cash is received and when expenditure is incurred. As part of its treasury management operations, this cash flow must be adequately planned, with surplus monies being invested in low-risk counterparties, to ensure sufficient funds are available to meet anticipated cash expenditure before any other consideration is given to optimising investment returns.
- 2. Another key requirement of the treasury management function is to ensure that the necessary cash is available, when needed, to meet the agreed commitments set out in the Authority's Capital Plan, whether that's by using the Authority's own cash balances or by undertaking new external borrowing. Hence, effective treasury management and proactive cashflow planning are essential to enabling the Authority to meet its capital and infrastructure spending commitments.
- 3. This report has been written in accordance with the requirements of the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy's (CIPFA) Code of Practice on Treasury Management (revised 2021).

Economic Outlook

- 4. The Bank of England's Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) cut the Base Rate to 4.00% at its August meeting after voting to maintain the rate at 4.25% in June. Expectations are that the Base Rate will remain at 4.00% until the end of 2025.
- 5. **Inflation** Consumer Price Inflation (CPI) rose from 3.6% in June to 3.8% in July, with the Bank of England warning that food prices could drive inflation to 4% in the coming months. Core Consumer Price Inflation (CPI without energy and food) also increased to 3.8% in July 2025, up slightly from the 3.7% in the 12 months to June 2025.
- 6. Interest Rate Forecast Interest rates on deposits with counterparties are lower than those of a year ago, but as the Base Rate has been cut at a slower pace than expected it has meant that interest rates available from counterparties have remained higher for longer than anticipated when the budget was approved by Members in February 2025. This, along with slippage on the capital programme and an additional unexpected government grant in relation to the Matthew's pension case means that the current forecast for investment income for 2025/26 is £2.567m against a budget of £1.594m. The Authority's Treasury Advisor, MUFG Pension & Market Services, has provided the following interest rate forecasts:

MUFG Corporate Markets Interest Rate View 11.08.25													
	Sep-25	Dec-25	Mar-26	Jun-26	Sep-26	Dec-26	Mar-27	Jun-27	Sep-27	Dec-27	Mar-28	Jun-28	Sep-28
BANK RATE	4.00	4.00	3.75	3.75	3.50	3.50	3.50	3.50	3.25	3.25	3.25	3.25	3.25
3 month ave earnings	4.00	4.00	3.80	3.80	3.50	3.50	3.50	3.50	3.30	3.30	3.30	3.30	3.30
6 month ave earnings	4.00	3.90	3.70	3.70	3.50	3.50	3.50	3.50	3.30	3.30	3.40	3.40	3.40
12 month ave earnings	4.00	3.90	3.70	3.70	3.50	3.50	3.50	3.50	3.30	3.40	3.50	3.60	3.60
5 yr PWLB	4.80	4.70	4.50	4.40	4.30	4.30	4.30	4.20	4.20	4.20	4.20	4.10	4.10
10 yr PWLB	5.30	5.20	5.00	4.90	4.80	4.80	4.80	4.70	4.70	4.70	4.70	4.60	4.60
25 yr PWLB	6.10	5.90	5.70	5.70	5.50	5.50	5.50	5.40	5.40	5.30	5.30	5.30	5.20
50 yr PWLB	5.80	5.60	5.40	5.40	5.30	5.30	5.30	5.20	5.20	5.10	5.10	5.00	5.00

(PWLB – Public Works Loan Board is a statutory body of the UK Government that provides loans to public bodies)

Treasury Management Strategy and Annual Investment Update

- 7. The Treasury Management Strategy (TMS) for 2025/26 was approved by the Authority on 18 February 2025. This report reflects the current position of the Authority's deposits, which are in line with the Treasury Management Strategy. The appropriate Prudential Indicators can be found at paragraph 14 within this report.
- 8. The table below shows the forecast of funds available for investing, reflecting the expectation that the balance reduces over the year. Depending on how projects progress the investment balance often changes which can result in a higher level of funding being available for depositing with the agreed counterparties.

Table 1 Reserves and Balances Reserves and Balances	2024/25 Forecast £'000	2024/25 Outturn £'000	2025/26 Budget £'000	2025/26 Revised £'000
General reserve	4,680	4,680	4,890	4,890
Earmarked reserves	31,416	36,655	23,622	26,430
Insurance & General Provision	773	494	494	494
Capital Receipts	8,931	8,647	7,307	7,022
Total Core Funds	45,800	50,476	36,313	38,836
Working Capital (Deficit)/Surplus	- 3,566	18,625*	- 3,566	21,625*
Under-borrowing	- 5,341	- 3,722	- 13,361	- 12,823
-				
Expected Investments	36,893	65,379	19,386	47,638

^{*}The Authority saw a significant increase in its working capital surplus during 2024/25 and 2025/26. This was primarily due to additional unexpected grants received from the government relating to the Matthew's pension case.

Investment Portfolio

- 9. The Authority's primary goal is to safeguard its capital, ensure sufficient liquidity, and achieve a return that aligns with the Authority's risk appetite. Since March 2025, returns on deposits had been gradually decreasing, in line with the Bank of England's reductions in the Base Rate.
- 10. The Authority held £81.054m of deposits as of 29 August 2025 (£66.189m on 31 March 2025). This increase in cash balances is primarily due to funding being received in advance of expenditure being incurred e.g. the Pension Fund top-up grant is paid to the Authority in July each year but associated expenditure will continue to be incurred throughout the remainder of the financial year. A breakdown of the Authority's actual deposits and the average interest rates on 31 March 2025 are compared to actual deposits and actual interest rates as at 29 August 2025 in the table below:-

Table 2 Investments and Average Interest Rates	As At 31.	03.25	As At 29.08.25			
	Total Investment (£000's)	Average Interest Rate	Total Investment (£000's)	Average Interest Rate		
Debt Management Office (Including Treasury Bills)	11,734	4.44%	17,757	4.16%		
RBS Group: Royal Bank of Scotland & NatWest	100	2.75%	5,100	3.97%		
Barclays Bank plc	5,000	4.65%	5,000	4.05%		
DMADF	3,000	4.45%	8,947	3.95%		
HSBC	7,000	4.40%	7,000	3.90%		
Standard Chartered Bank	5,000	4.41%	5,000	4.09%		
Lloyds Bank	7,000	4.54%	7,000	4.32%		
Landesbank Hessen-Thueringen Girozentrale	5,000	4.96%	2,000	4.62%		
Aberdeen Liq. Fund	5,000	4.48%	5,000	4.03%		
Aviva Investors Liq. Fund	5,000	4.57%	5,000	4.11%		
Goldman Sachs Liq. Reserves	5,000	4.43%	5,000	4.00%		
HSBC Liq. Fund	5,000	4.42%	3,250	3.97%		
BlackRock Liq. Fund	2,355	4.42%	5,000	4.00%		
Totals	66,189	4.52%	81,054	4.08%		

11. **Compliance with Treasury and Prudential Limits** - The Director of Finance confirms that the approved limits were within the Annual Investment Strategy and that there is no expectation that these will be breached. All treasury management operations have been conducted in full compliance with the Authority's Treasury Management Practices.

Borrowing

- 12. The Authority's capital financing requirement (CFR) for 2024/25 is £3.959m. The CFR denotes the Authority's underlying need to borrow for capital purposes. Currently, the Authority's surplus cash balances have been utilised in lieu of externally borrowing for this amount. This is a prudent and cost-effective approach in the current economic climate.
- 13. The latest forecast for the CFR for 2025/26 is £13.069m which reflects the forecast spend on the Ashford Live Fire project which is currently being funded by internal borrowing, at least for the short term, until such time as interest rates on borrowing have reduced.

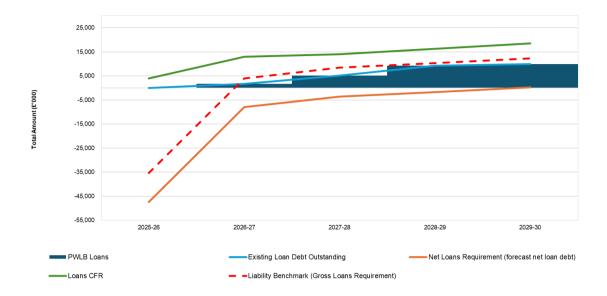
Prudential Indicators

14. A summary of the Prudential Indicators agreed at the Authority meeting in February 2025 are detailed below and shown against the 2024/25 outturn figures and revised projections for 2025/26.

			2025/26
Table 3	2024/25	2025/26	Revised
Prudential Indicators for affordability, prudence	Outturn	Budget	Budget
and capital expenditure	£'000	£'000	£'000
Revenue Expenditure	93,951	98,232	98,232
Revenue Provision for debt repayment	1,295	1,295	1,295
Capital expenditure	5,852	13,677	14,994
CFR as at 31 March	3,959	13,548	13,069
Total loans outstanding as at 31 March	0	50	50
Ratio of Financing Costs to Net Revenue Stream	1.41%	1.32%	1.32%
Treasury Indicators			
Assumed Operational Boundary for external debt	23,500	38,500	38,500
Assumed Authorised Limit for external debt	27,500	42,500	42,500
Interest rate exposure for borrowing at fixed rates	100%	100%	100%
Interest rate exposure for borrowing at variable rates	20%	20%	20%
Interest rate exposure for investing at fixed rates	100%	100%	100%
Interest rate exposure for investing at variable rates	100%	100%	100%

15. **Debt Liability Benchmark:** is a projection of the amount of loan debt outstanding that the Authority needs each year into the future to fund its existing debt liabilities, planned prudential borrowing and other cash flows.

16. As shown in the graph below, there will be a need to undertake new external borrowing within the next year if anticipated costs and planned works are as expected.



IMPACT ASSESSMENT

17. All financial implications associated with servicing the Authority's loans can be contained within the overall budget.

CONCLUSION

- 18. Members are requested to:
 - 18.1 Note the contents of this report.