Northamptonshire Commissioner Fire and Rescue Authority

Single Entity

Draft Statement of Accounts for the year 2023/24

Date Published: 31st May 2024

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Narrative Report

Foreword by Chief Finance Officer

These accounts are produced annually to give local taxpayers, employees and other interested parties clear information about the Authority's financial performance.

They are prepared on a going concern basis, assuming that the Northamptonshire Commissioner Fire and Rescue Authority (NCFRA) will continue in operation for the foreseeable future. They have been prepared in accordance with the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015, the CIPFA Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting and the Service Reporting Code of Practice 2023/24.

The information provided also allows for an assessment of the Commissioner's performance in terms of stewardship and the management of the resources entrusted to them. The accounts are, therefore, necessarily detailed and technical, and explanatory notes are included.

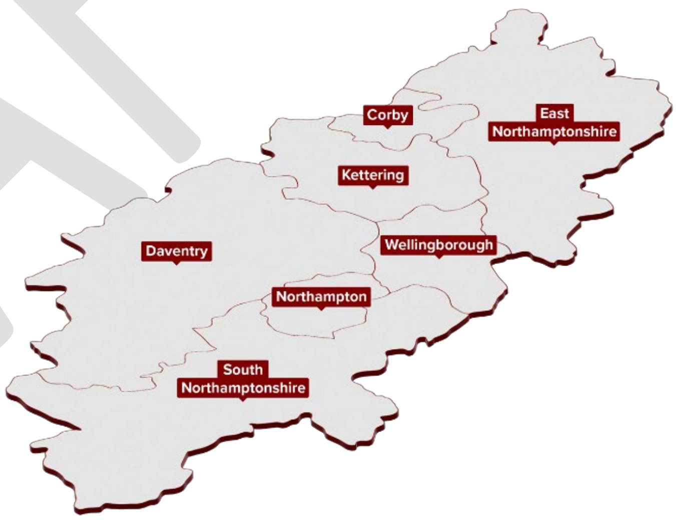
The purpose of this narrative report is to offer a guide on the most important matters reported in the accounts as well as providing information about the strategic direction of the Authority. It provides an explanation of the financial position and assists in the interpretation of the financial statements. It contains information about the activities of the NCFRA and the main influences on the financial statements to provide a link between the Fire activities; Police, Fire and Crime Plan; future challenges and how these impact on its financial resources.

It includes information on the budget preparation process, final accounts, performance information, medium term financial plans and other contextual information such as workforce numbers and strategic risks.

Northamptonshire

The county of Northamptonshire covers an area of 913 square miles and has an estimated population of over 790,000 people. It is the southern-most county in the East Midlands region and its most populated towns are Northampton, Kettering, Corby and Wellingborough. There has been a notable increase in population in recent years with some major new housing development projects and more to come.

Prior to 2021/22, the county was serviced by seven borough/district councils. On 1 April 2021, these were consolidated into two unitary authorities (North and West Northamptonshire) through the reorganisation of local government in Northamptonshire as directed by Central Government. Fire and Rescue Services provided by Northamptonshire Commissioner Fire and Rescue Authority (NCFRA) continue to service the whole of Northamptonshire.



Northamptonshire is a very fast growing county and the 2021 national census highlighted that the county's population has grown by 13.5% since 2011 compared to a national increase of 6.5%.

In fact, the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) Demography Insight Pack 2020 described that the county has had above (national) average population growth in recent decades. In the past 10 years the population of Northamptonshire has grown by an estimated 10.2% versus a 7.84% England average. Looking back over the past 30 years the growth gap is even greater, with an estimated increase of 30.9% between 1989 and 2019 in Northamptonshire compared with 18.4% across England. This is estimated to increase further by 2041.

Statutory Framework

The Police and Crime Act 2017 enabled Police and Crime Commissioners to have a say in the oversight of fire and rescue services within their area, subject to the approval of a business case by the Home Secretary. The aim of this legislation was to "enable fire and rescue services to work more closely together and develop the role of elected and accountable Police and Crime Commissioners."

On 1st January 2019, the Police and Crime Commissioner for Northamptonshire (PCC) became the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner for Northamptonshire (PFCC). On that date Northamptonshire became the first and until 1st April 2023 was the only county Fire and Rescue Service to transfer Governance arrangements in this way.

Whilst the governance of Northamptonshire Commissioner Fire and Rescue Authority is undertaken by the PFCC and their statutory officers, it is a separate corporation sole. Therefore, separate budgets are allocated, separate precepts are set and the funding and accounts for NCFRA are produced separately to the PFCC accounts for policing.

The Policing and Crime Act 2017 stipulates that a Fire and Rescue Plan must be prepared and published by a relevant Fire and Rescue Authority in accordance with the Fire and Rescue National Framework and that it should set out the Authority's priorities and objectives, for the period covered by the document, in connection with the discharge of the Authority's functions.

Group Boundary

The Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner for Northamptonshire (Fire and Rescue Authority) Order 2018 utilised existing legislation (Specifically Section 4A of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004) to create a new corporation sole NCFRA, a role which is held by the Police, Fire and Commissioner, but acting as NCFRA. This legislation outlines the key responsibilities for oversight and ensuring good governance within the NCFRA.

This reflects that the government provides funding to NCFRA and is ultimately responsible for the NCFRA. As such, the NCFRA Accounts are included within the Whole of Government Accounts, which is the consolidation of over 9,000 public sector bodies, including central and local government and public corporations such as the Bank of England, to provide the most complete and accurate picture of the UK's public finances.

Whilst there is some commonality within the Office of the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner for Northamptonshire (OPFCC), Chief Constable and NCFRA, they are three separate corporations sole, with Fire and Police created under separate legislation and with the responsibility to set up and maintain separate "Funds" for each organisation; with separate legal responsibilities and no ability to vire funds between them. As set out by CIPFA, there is not a requirement for the NCFRA accounts to be included within the OPFCC group accounts.

The business case for the governance transfer included maintaining separate management arrangements and operational functions for each service but working towards sharing of some support services and buildings where it makes sense to provide better value for money for the public of Northamptonshire. This direction of travel towards shared support teams continues. The accounts of Fire and Policing are operated separately in line with the legislation.

In line with the Home Office Financial Management Code of Practice, a collaboration agreement is in place between the three separate organisations of: NCFRA, the Northamptonshire Chief Constable and the Northamptonshire Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner which sets out the arrangements for working together where it would be advantageous to the parties to do so, mirroring such collaboration arrangements that Northamptonshire Police have with other police forces.

The arrangements outlined in the legislation result in the PFCC having some influence over some policing relationships with NCFRA, and therefore there is a requirement to disclose the nature of the transactions between OPFCC and the NCFRA and this is provided within the related parties note within the statement of accounts. Most of this note relates to governance services provided by the Office of the PFCC to Fire, and charges for services and shared staff providing services to Fire and Policing.

Police, Fire and Crime Plan 2021-2026

The current Police, Fire and Crime Plan covering the period 2021-2026 was published in early 2022, and the Fire Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) which aligns to the Police, Fire and Crime Plan also during the year.

The Police Fire and Crime Commissioner's Vision as set out in the Police, Fire and Crime Plan was:
"Working with communities to make Northamptonshire safer."

The PFCC also set out the values:
"It is more important than ever that our emergency services are seen to embody the highest ethical standards as we work to make a difference for our communities."

Trustworthy: Doing the right thing with honesty and integrity
Respectful: Treating the public and colleagues with care and dignity
Innovative: Aiming for continuous improvement and learning
Efficient: Working in a well-organised and competent way
Effective: Successfully achieving the best outcomes for our community
Transparent: Being open and honest in everything we do

The Plan sets out the following priorities for Fire and Policing in Northamptonshire:

- Prevention that keeps the county safe
- Effective and efficient response
- Protect and support those who are vulnerable
- Effective justice
- Modern services that are fit for the future

A new Plan is currently being developed by the new Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner.

Community Risk Management Plan

The Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner (PFCC) is the Fire Authority for Northamptonshire and is required through the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England to produce a Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) to identify risks within the county and outline its plan for mitigating these risks and keeping residents safe. The CRMP, which was published in 2022, outlines the plan to keep people, homes, communities and the environment safe until 2025. The CRMP was refreshed in 2023.

The plan sits alongside the Commissioner's Police, Fire and Crime Plan and the Chief Fire Officer's Vision 25.

The CRMP 2022-25 introduced three major workstreams to be delivered, all of which focus on organisational learning and continuous improvement:

1: Emergency Cover Review

To review our data and current resources and ensure that our emergency response is well equipped to respond to current and emerging risks in the county.

2: Adapt to Climate Change

To review our data and current resources to inform recommendations to improve our response to environmental risk, such as flooding and wildfires and ensure that we have the right skills and resources in place.

3: Review Our Current Data and Intelligence

Invest in new technology and work with partner organisations to enhance our understanding of risk and our service delivery to drive performance improvements.

The CRMP also lays out specific areas of focus:

- Collaboration
- People and Culture
- Finance
- Performance

Stability

Whilst NCFRA was established on 1 January 2019 without any reserves being transferred, the Authority put in place priorities to build a stable financial platform and a three year financial stability plan taken forward to ensure an appropriate level of reserves were established; with a financial base that was understood and supported by internal controls.

Whilst the financial stability plan was achieved during 2021/22, the cost of living remains a challenge and the revenue budget is feeling the pressure of increased pay, fuel and utility costs. Therefore, efficiencies are still required, and a plan is in place to ensure a balanced budget can be achieved each year. The impact of these on the MTFP will continue to be kept under review and measures put in place to address them.

A capital programme is in place which enables investment in key operational requirements including investment in new fire tenders, replacement of essential operational equipment and delivery of the joint estates strategy with Police. The Service is continuing to work with Police to integrate essential support services and arrangements where appropriate, building capacity and resilience and releasing efficiencies over the medium term.

Further funding has been obtained for NCFRA since the governance transfer, and efforts will continue to ensure all opportunities are taken to identify and realise savings and efficiencies.

OUR PEOPLE

At 31st March 2024 the NCFRA budgeted establishment was 502 and comprised as follows:

Category of employee	As at 31/3/23	As at 31/3/24
Wholetime Firefighters	254	254
Retained Firefighters	180	180
Control Room	18	18
Support Services	50	53
Total	502	505

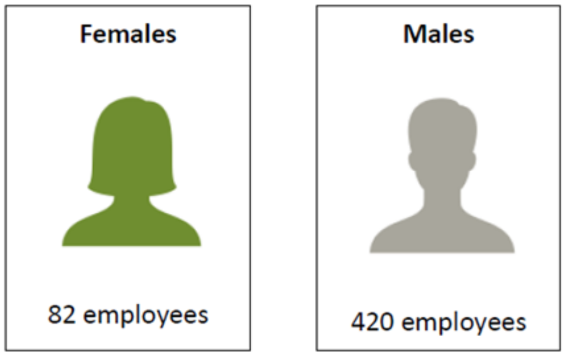
Gender Pay Gap

NCFRA is required by law to carry out Gender Pay Reporting under the Equality Act 2010 (Gender Pay Gap Information) Regulations 2017. This involves carrying out calculations that show the difference between the average earnings of men and women in the organisation; it does not involve publishing individual employees' data. The data used for the calculations is as at 31st March 2023.

The NCFRA Gender pay Gap Report as at 31st March 2023 was published in January 2024 and key elements are set out below.

Workforce Profile

Total headcount as of the 31st March 2023 was 502 with 16.33% of these employees being female.



Median Gender Pay Gap in Hourly Pay

As at 31st March 2023, the mean gender pay gap for Northamptonshire is 8.43% and the median gap is 0%.

National data is taken as an average of Fire & Rescue Services with 500-999 employees covering 15 authorities and shows mean and median gender pay gaps of 13.75% and 11.30% respectively. Thus, Northamptonshire is currently lower than the national averages.

Appointments

The following statutory officers were in role during 2023/24:

Chief Fire Officer

Mark Jones was in post until 7th July 2023 and replaced by Nicci Marzec as Interim Chief Officer until Simon Tuhill took over as Interim Chief Fire Officer from 18th July 2023 to 15th May 2024. Nikki Watson commenced as Chief Fire Officer on a permanent basis from 16th May 2024 and Simon Tuhill reverted to his substantive role is as Deputy Chief Fire Officer.

Chief Finance and S151 Officer for the PFCC and NCFRA

Helen King was replaced by Vaughan Ashcroft in the role on an interim basis from 22nd December 2023

Monitoring Officer for the PFCC and NCFRA

Nicci Marzec was in post until 23rd July 2023 and replaced by David Peet as Interim Monitoring Officer until Jonny Bugg started in the role on a permanent basis from 2nd January 2024.

Operational Performance

The Police Fire and Crime Commissioner produces an Annual Report for consideration by the Police, Fire and Crime Panel at their meeting each Summer. This report, when published sets out the final performance for the year and sets out delivery against priorities and a full copy will be available on the Police, Fire and Crime Panel website.

Accountability for Fire and Rescue performance and service delivery is undertaken through the Accountability Board. Members of the Board include the Commissioner (the Chair), the Chief Fire Officer and both the PFCC and statutory and non-statutory Chief Officers from the OPFCC and Fire. There is a formal agenda which has a schedule of assurance in the form of standard terms.

NCFRA have continued to prioritise prevention and protection activities and increasing the number of Home Safety Visits. Further investment in staff to perform these visits has been allocated to continue into 2024/25.

Key Performance Indicators (Draft) are below.

The outcome measures we will prioritise:		2022/23 Baseline	2023/24 Performance	Outturn
KPI1	Number of deliberate primary fires per 10,000 population	3.15	3.00	Below
KPI2	Number of deliberate secondary fires per 10,000 population	7.90	6.11	Below
KPI3	Number of primary fires per 100,000 population	119.6	114.41	Below
KPI4	Total number of fatalities due to primary fires per 100,000 population	0.13	0.38	Above
KPI5	Total number of non-fatal casualties in fires (excluding precautionary checks and first aid) per 100,000 population	3.43	3.18	Below
KPI6	Number of accidental dwelling fires per 10,000 dwellings	10.69	10.12	Below
KPI7	The number of deaths arising from accidental fires in dwellings per 100,000 population	0.13	0.38	Above
KPI8	The number of injuries (excluding precautionary checks), arising from accidental fires in dwellings per 100,000 population.	1.90	1.52	Below
KPI9	Number of fires in non-domestic premises per 1,000 non-domestic premises	5.49	6.93	Above
KPI10a	Killed or Serious Injury (KSI) Road Traffic Accidents attended by NFRS	261	213	Below
KPI10b	People killed in road traffic accidents (STATS 19 fatal data)	42	34	Below

The Input measures we will track and understand:		2022/23 Baseline	2023/24 Performance	Outturn
KPI11	Standards of Operational Response – Average (mean) Full Response Time (attended incidents)	00:10:30	00:10:23	In line
KPI12	Standards of Operational Response – Average (mean) Call to Mobilise Time	00:01:45	00:01:51	In line
KPI13	Average Appliance Availability (including flexi)	18.4	18.5	In line
KPI14	Home Fire Safety Visits and refits completed.	5675	5659	In line
KPI15	% of Home Fire Safety Visits completed in target groups	71.8%	78.9%	Above
KPI16	Total number of Protective Full Risk Inspections (FI) and Re-Inspections (RI) completed.	1228	1158	Below
KPI17	Full Fire Safety Audits (RBIP)	860	653	Below

HMICFRS

The second full inspection of the service was carried out by His Majesty's Inspection of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) during 2021/22 and the report was published in July 2022 and is available on the OPFCC website.

The next inspection is underway, and results are expected in Spring/Summer 2024.

Financial Performance

As at year-end, NCFRA underspent the budget by £13k on the budget of £30.198m after agreed transfers to/from reserves:

Budget Heading	Variance £'000
Firefighters - Wholetime	52
Firefighters - Retained	(35)
Control Room	(64)
Community Prevention	45
Community Protection	16
Strategic Leadership Team	(103)
Other Staff & Non-Pay	68
Capital & Contingency	11
Funding Variance	(3)
Over/(Under)spend	**(13)**

The areas of overspend were mainly due to the cost of the pay award above budget for both firefighters and staff posts, which was offset in part by higher business rates receipts. Underspends were largely due to staff turnover.

Capital

NCFRA have a significant capital programme following many years of under-investment prior to the governance transfer. The programme is continually reviewed to ensure that it is affordable. In 2023/24, capital expenditure totalled £2.3m and included upgrades to welfare facilities, IT systems, thermal image cameras and a number of new vehicles. It was funded through internal borrowing of £1.9m with the balance from capital receipts, grants and revenue contributions.

Scheme	Expenditure £'000
Expenditure:	
Transport	716
Estates	456
ICT	904
Operational Equipment	230
TOTAL Capital Expenditure	**2,305**
Funded by:	
Capital Receipts	(91)
Capital Grants	(19)
S106 Developer Contributions	(34)
Revenue Contributions	(218)
Internal Borrowing	(1,944)
TOTAL Capital Funding	**(2,305)**

Fixed Assets

NCFRA owns 24 properties across Northamptonshire, of which all but one are freehold.

Borrowing

Only internal borrowing took place in 2023/24. NCFRA undertook borrowing of 40 years in 2020/21 and there is a balance of £3.1m remaining as at 31st March 2024. NCFRA does not hold any short term loans.

Reserves

As at 31st March 2024, NCFRA hold £5.044m in usable reserves as follows:

Reserve	31 March 2024 £000
General Fund	2,000
Earmarked Revenue Reserves	2,313
Capital Grants and Reserves	731
Balance as at Year End	**5,044**

The Reserves Strategy is reviewed each year and is available on the NCFRA website.

Events after the Balance Sheet Date

There were no events highlighted after the Balance Sheet date.

Risk Management

The manner in which NCFRA manages its response to various risks is part of a continuum of risk management that takes into account the National Security Strategy, the National Risk Register and the

NCFRA risk registers. Risks are regularly considered at the Joint Independent Audit Committee (JIAC) and the last update was considered in March 2024.

Managing risk and business continuity arrangements are a key aspect of NCFRA's governance arrangements. As a Category 1 responder under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004, the Authority is required to have in place business continuity arrangements to ensure that continuity of service can be provided for foreseeable events that may impact upon the delivery of services.

The most significant risks to NCFRA have related to the operational risks required following the HMICFRS inspection and ensuring sufficient level of reserves and funding levels over the medium term.

2024/25 Budget

NCFRA has adopted a prudent approach to budgeting that is both affordable and sustainable over the medium term.

The PFCC has set a balanced budget for Fire for 2024/25. The budget was approved by the PFCC in January 2024 and the proposed precept considered at the Police, Fire and Crime Panel in February 2024. Fire Authorities were given the ability to raise precept by up to 3% without triggering a referendum and the PFCC took this opportunity, raising Band D council tax by £2.19.

Even after this increase, NCFRA is still one of the lowest funded and lowest precepting Fire and Rescue Authorities in the country.

The Fire budget and precept continues in taking forward the statutory duty to collaborate for the three emergency services. This means that the services should be actively seeking opportunities to work together to deliver more efficient and effective public services.

A number enabling services joint teams have already been established and these, together with interoperability proposals, will provide opportunities for efficiencies and greater integration between police and fire and rescue to realise savings to meet financial challenges, increase capacity and resilience and reinvest where possible in frontline services.

However, with the increase in pay, fuel and utilities inflation, further pressures are anticipated in the medium term. The Medium Term Financial Plan will be regularly updated and where appropriate further savings identified.

Medium Term Financial Plan

The MTFP is regularly reviewed and updated in line with the following established principles:

- To make the best use of available resources.
- To maximise income and funding.
- To target expenditure and investments to priorities and value for money opportunities.
- To exploit fixed assets to deliver maximum value.
- To optimise delivery costs.
- To provide sufficient financial reserves in the context of unprecedented uncertainty, transformation and change.

The latest MTFP shows that the NCFRA has produced a balanced budget for 2024/25 with savings targets in place. In the short term, reserves are available to smooth the timing or impact of efficiencies and are sufficient if required.

	24/25 £m	25/26 £m	26/27 £m	27/28 £m	28/29 £m
Expenditure	32.9	34.2	35.5	36.5	37.4
Efficiencies	(1.2)	(0.9)	(0.9)	(0.9)	(1.0)
New Efficiencies	(0.3)	(0.7)	(0.7)	(0.7)	(0.7)
	31.5	32.7	33.9	34.9	35.8
Funding	(31.5)	(32.0)	(32.9)	(33.8)	(34.7)
Shortfall	0.0	0.7	1.0	1.2	1.1

OUTLOOK

RISKS AND OPPORTUNITIES

There are some significant areas of uncertainty which include:

The Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR)

This is a governmental process carried out by HM Treasury to set firm expenditure limits and, through public service agreements, define the key improvements that the public can expect from these resources. The 2021 spending review covered a three-year period to 2024/25. The next spending review is anticipated in 2024, but until it is announced there is considerable uncertainty around future levels of funding.

Economy

The last effects of the pandemic, the conflicts in Ukraine and Gaza, and Brexit have all had an impact on the national and international economies and cost of living. In the UK, we continue to face higher costs of living and inflation rates than the Bank of England target.

Estate

Northamptonshire Police operates within an ageing estate and there had been a history of limited investment.

The PFCC remains committed to bringing together the Estates Strategies for NCFRA and the PFCC to improve services for Northamptonshire across both Fire and Policing. A new longer term masterplan and strategy are driving these ambitions forward.

Investment

The PFCC ring-fenced £1m for transformative projects and will continue to work with the Chief Fire Officer to identify investment which will make a difference in supporting the Police, Fire & Crime Plan.

THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

The accounts are prepared using International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS). Although these are the same standards that a large company would use in preparing its financial statements, some adjustments to costs are applied where they are not a charge to local taxpayers.

The key statements are as follows:

Annual Governance Statement

This statement explains how the NCFRA complies with his Code of Corporate Governance. Preparation and publication of the statement fulfils the PFCC's statutory requirement under the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2011 to conduct a review at least once in each financial year of the effectiveness of his system of internal control and to include a statement reporting on the review with the Statement of Accounts.

Expenditure and Funding Analysis (EFA)

This reconciles the amounts reported internally in line with the General Fund and the amounts reported in the Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement.

Movement in Reserves Statement (MiRS)

This statement shows the movement in the year on the different reserves held by the NCFRA. It shows how the deficit/(surplus) for the year in the Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement is adjusted by the costs that are not a charge to local taxpayers.

Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement (CIES)

This statement shows the income and expenditure accounting cost in the year of providing services under IFRS.

Balance Sheet (BS)

The balance sheet shows the PFCC's assets, liabilities and reserve balances at the financial year end date.

Cash Flow Statement

This statement shows the reason for changes in cash balances during the year and the balance held by the NCFRA at the end of the financial year.

Notes to the Financial Statements

These include information required by the Code and additional material items of interest to assist the reader's understanding of the reported figures.

Events after the reporting period and authorised for issue date

This summarises any major events that happened between the year-end and the authorised-for-issue date. Events coming to light after the authorised-for-issue date will not be included in the financial statements.

Firefighters' Pension Fund Account

The Firefighters Pension Scheme is unfunded and holds no assets. The purpose of this account is to demonstrate the cash-based transactions taking place over the year and to identify the arrangements needed to balance the account.

Statement of Provisions

Provisions are made where an event has taken place that gives the NCFRA a legal or constructive obligation that requires settlement by a transfer of economic benefits or service potential, and a reliable estimate can be made of the amount of the obligation. These accounts include a number of provisions, detailed in the Notes to the Financial Statements.

Accounting Policies

These outline the principles used for how we account and prepare our financial statements.

Glossary of financial terms

The nature of this document means that technical words are unavoidable. The glossary is intended to simplify and explain such words.

Summary and Conclusion

Despite the tight financial climate and future challenges, the NCFRA and wider PFCC Group continues to demonstrate a strong track record of effective financial management and delivering outturn within the approved budget. However, there is a long-term financial impact of economic uncertainty to consider which will continue to be monitored very closely.

The budgeting process continues to develop with rigorous challenge from both the Chief Fire Officer and the PFCC.

The Chief Fire Officer is committed to ensuring that improvements required as part of recommendations from HMICFRS do not lose momentum and ensure the best services can be delivered for the public of Northamptonshire.

The financial outlook remains challenging, but Northamptonshire are already well prepared in meeting these challenges. Fire and Police will continue to actively seek and implement opportunities to work together to deliver more efficient and effective public services.

Vaughan Ashcroft
Interim Chief Finance Officer (s151)
Date:

Danielle Stone
Northamptonshire Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner
Date:

STATEMENT OF RESPONSIBILITIES FOR THE STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS

The Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner's responsibilities

The Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner is required to:

- Make arrangements for the proper administration of its financial affairs and to secure that one of its officers has the responsibility for the administration of those affairs. In this Authority, that officer is the Chief Finance Officer.
- Manage its affairs to secure economic, efficient and effective use of resources and safeguard its assets.
- Approve the Statement of Accounts.

I certify that these accounts were considered and approved.

Danielle Stone
Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner for Northamptonshire
Date:

The Chief Finance Officer's responsibilities

The Chief Finance Officer is responsible for the preparation of the Authority's Statement of Accounts in accordance with properpractices as set out in the CIPFA/LASAAC Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in the United Kingdom (the Code).

In preparing this Statement of Accounts, the Chief Finance Officer has:

- Selected suitable accounting policies and applied them consistently
- Made judgements and estimates that are reasonable and prudent.
- Complied with the local authority Code.

The Chief Finance Officer has also:

- Kept proper accounting records which were up to date.
- Taken reasonable steps for the prevention and detection of fraud and other irregularities.

The Chief Finance Officer's certificate

I certify that the Statement of Accounts has been prepared in accordance with the CIPFA/LASAAC Code and present a true and fair view of the financial position of the Authority at 31st March 2024 and its income and expenditure for the year ended 31st March 2024.

Vaughan Ashcroft
Chief Finance Officer and s151 Officer
Northamptonshire Commissioner Fire and Rescue Authority
Date:

STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTING POLICIES

The Financial Statements must meet the accounting requirements of the CIPFA Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting which has been agreed with HM Treasury. Consequently, the following financial statements have been prepared in accordance with the CIPFA Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting 2023/24. The accounting policies contained in the CIPFA Code of Practice follow International Financial Reporting Standards to the extent that they are meaningful and appropriate to Local Authority Accounts, as determined by His Majesty's Treasury, who are advised by the Financial Reporting Advisory Board. Where the CIPFA Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting permits a choice of accounting policy, the accounting policy which is judged to be the most appropriate to the particular circumstances of the Authority for the purpose of presenting fairly the position of the Authority is selected. The particular policies adopted by the Authority are described below and they have been applied consistently in dealing with items considered material in relation to the Accounts.

Accounting Convention

These Accounts have been prepared under the historical cost convention, modified to account for the revaluation of property, plant and equipment, intangible assets and inventories. Where appropriate, financial assets and liabilities have been impaired or discounted to bring them to fair value.

Acquisitions and Discontinued Operations

Activities are considered to be 'acquired' only if they are taken on from outside the public sector. Activities are considered to be 'discontinued' only if they cease entirely. They are not considered to be 'discontinued' if they transfer from one public sector body to another. The Authority has not acquired or discontinued any operations during the reporting period.

Going Concern

These accounts have been prepared on a going concern basis.

The concept of a going concern assumes that the functions of the Northamptonshire Commissioner Fire and Rescue Authority will continue in operational existence for the foreseeable future. The provisions in the Code (Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in the United Kingdom 2023/24) in respect of going concern reporting requirements reflect the economic and statutory environment in which fire and rescue services operate.

These provisions confirm that, as fire and rescue services cannot be created or dissolved without statutory prescription, they must prepare their financial statements on a going concern basis of accounting.

Fire and Rescue services carry out functions essential to the local community and are themselves revenue-raising bodies (with limits on their revenue-raising powers arising only at the discretion of central government). If a fire and rescue authority were in financial difficulty, the prospects are thus that alternative arrangements might be made by central government either for the continuation of the functions it provides or for assistance with the recovery of a deficit over more than one financial year. As a result of this, it would not therefore be appropriate for the financial statements to be provided on anything other than a going concern basis. Accounts drawn up under the Code therefore assume that a fire and rescue authority and service will continue to operate for the foreseeable future.

NCFRA have undertaken cashflow modelling which demonstrates the Authority's ability to work within its Capital Financing Requirement and has a realistic headroom on a £31.4m annual budget, together with sufficient scope for borrowing if required.

At the time of the approval of the accounts, the Authority has only one long term loan which is well below the Authority's operational boundary and authorised limit. The costs of this borrowing is included within the MTFP.

NCFRA therefore concludes that it is appropriate to prepare the financial statements on a going concern basis and that NCFRA will continue to be a going concern, 12 months from the date of the approval of these accounts.

Accruals of Income and Expenditure

Activity is accounted for in the year that it takes place, not simply when cash payments are made or received. In particular:

- Supplies are recorded as expenditure when they are consumed. Where there is a gap between the date supplies are received and their consumption, they are carried as inventories on the Balance Sheet.
- Expenses in relation to services received (including services provided by employees) are recorded as expenditure when the services are received rather than when payments are made.
- Fees, charges and rents due are accounted for as income at the date the Authority provides the relevant goods or services.
- Interest payable on borrowings and receivable on investments is accounted for as expenditure or income respectively on the basis of the effective interest rate for the relevant financial instrument rather than the cash flows fixed or determined by the contract.
- Where income and expenditure has been recognised but cash has not yet been received or paid, a debtor or creditor for the relevant amount is recorded in the Balance Sheet. Where it is doubtful that debts will be settled, the balance of debtors is written down and a charge made to revenue for the income that might not be collected.

Employee Benefits

Benefits Payable during Employment

Short-term employee benefits are those due to be settled within 12 months of the year-end. They include such benefits as salaries, paid annual leave and flexitime, bonuses and non-monetary benefits (for example cars) for current employees and are recognised as an expense in the year in which employees render service to the Authority. The CIPFA Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting requires the Authority to recognise the amount of untaken annual leave at the 31st March as a liability which is reflected on the Balance Sheet. To ensure consistency annual leave costs have been reflected in the year in which the annual leave should have been taken.

Termination Benefits

Termination benefits are amounts payable as a result of a decision by the Authority to terminate an officer’s employment before the normal retirement date or of an officer’s decision to accept voluntary redundancy in exchange for those benefits. These are charged on an Accruals basis to the CIES at the earlier of when the Authority can no longer withdraw the offer of those benefits or when the Authority recognises costs for a restructuring.

When termination benefits involve the enhancement of pensions, statutory provisions require the General Fund Balance to be charged with the amount payable by the Authority to the Pension Fund or pensioner in the year, not the amount calculated according to the relevant accounting standards. In the Movement in Reserves Statement, appropriations are required to and from the Pensions Reserve to remove the notional debits and credits for pension enhancement termination benefits and replace them with debits for the cash paid to the pension fund and pensioners and any such amounts payable but unpaid at the year-end.

Retirement Benefits

Employees of the Authority are members of the following pensions schemes:

- The 1992, 2006, 2015 and Modified Firefighters’ Pension Schemes (FPS) - these are unfunded schemes, which means that there are no investment assets built up to meet the pensions liabilities, and cash has to be generated to meet the actual payments as they fall due. The Authority is required by legislation to operate a Pension Fund, with the amounts that must be paid into or out of the Pension Fund being specified by regulation. The Authority set up a Pension Fund on 1 April 2006 from which pension payments are made and into which contributions, from the Authority and employees, are received. The Pension Fund receives a top-up grant from the Government equal to the deficit each year, with any surplus on the Pension Fund being repaid to the Government. The Pension Fund is shown separately in the Accounts

- The Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) for support staff, administered by the Northamptonshire Pension Fund, is a funded scheme, which means that the Authority and employees pay contributions into a fund, calculated at a level intended to balance the pensions liabilities with investment Assets.

The above schemes provide defined benefits to members (retirement lump sums and pensions), earned as employees work for the Authority. They are accounted for in accordance with the requirements for Defined Benefits Schemes, based on the principle that an organisation should account for retirement benefits when it is committed to give them, even though this may be many years into the future.

A pensions Asset or Liability is recognised in the Balance Sheet, made up of the net position of retirement Liabilities and pension scheme Assets. Retirement Liabilities are measured on an actuarial basis using the projected unit method, by assessing the future payments that will be made in relation to retirement benefits earned to date by employees, based on assumptions about mortality rates, employee turnover rates and projections of earnings for current employees. Pension scheme assets (LGPS only) attributable to the Authority are included at their Fair Value.
The Authority currently has a net pensions liability and this is matched in the Balance Sheet by a Pensions Reserve.
The change in net pensions Liability during the year is analysed into the following components:
Service cost comprising:

- Current service cost – the increase in Liabilities as a result of service earned by employees in the current year. This is charged to services within the Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement
- Past service cost – the increase in Liabilities as a result of a scheme amendment or curtailment whose effect relates to service earned in earlier years. This is part of the services line in the Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement
- Net interest on the net defined benefit Liability – the change during the period in the net defined benefit Liability that arises from the passage of time. This is calculated by applying the discount rate used to measure the defined benefit obligation at the beginning of the period to the net defined benefit Liability at the end of the period, taking into account any changes in the net defined benefit Liability during the period as a result of contribution and benefit payments. This is charged to the Financing and Investment Income and Expenditure line within the Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement.

Remeasurements comprising:

- The return on plan assets (LGPS only) – this excludes amounts included in net interest on the net defined benefit Liability and is charged to the Pensions Reserve as Other Comprehensive Income and Expenditure.
- Actuarial gains and losses – changes in the net pensions Liability that arise because events have not coincided with assumptions made at the last actuarial valuation or because the actuaries have updated their assumptions. This is charged to the Pensions Reserve as Other Comprehensive Income and Expenditure.
- Contributions paid / benefits paid – cash paid as employer’s contribution by the Authority either to LGPS or directly to pensioners to reduce the scheme Liabilities.

Statutory provisions require that the amount charged to the General Fund Balance is that payable by the Authority to Pensions Funds or directly to pensioners during the year rather than that calculated under accounting standards. This means that an appropriation to or from the Pensions Reserve is done within the Movement in Reserves Statement to replace the notional sums for retirement benefits with the actual pensions costs. The negative balance on the Pensions Reserve thereby measures the beneficial impact to the General Fund of being required to account for retirement benefits on the basis of cash flows rather than as benefits are earned by employees.

On 31st March 2022, following the Sergeant and McCloud ruling for Pensions Age Discrimination, both the 1992 & 2006 schemes were closed and all members of these schemes will be transferred to the 2015 pension scheme.

Other Expenses

Other operating expenses are recognised when, and to the extent that, the goods or services have been received. They are measured at the Fair Value of the consideration payable.

Property, Plant and Equipment Recognition

Property, plant and equipment is capitalised if:

- it is expected to be used for more than one financial year;
- the cost of the item can be measured reliably; and
- the item has a cost of at least £6,000 or is part of a project or replacement programme costing above £6,000.

Where a large Asset, for example a building, includes a number of components with significantly different Asset lives (a minimum of 5 years), the components are treated as separate Assets if they have a cost that is a significant proportion of the whole Asset (a minimum of 25%). The components are treated as separate Assets and depreciated over their useful economic life.

Donated Assets are recognised at their value and are defined in the CIPFA Code of Practice on Local Government Accounting as those Assets that are transferred at nil value or acquired at less than Current Value. Donated Assets that are from other public bodies are accounted for as a government grant (as required by IAS 20).

Valuation

All property, plant and equipment are measured initially at cost, representing the cost attributable to acquiring or constructing the Asset and bringing it to the location and condition necessary for it to be capable of operating in the manner intended by management. All Assets are measured subsequently at Current Value.

Land and buildings used by the Authority are stated in the Balance Sheet at their re-valued amounts, being the Current Value at the date of valuation. Revaluations are performed with sufficient regularity to ensure that carrying amounts are not materially different from those that would be determined at the end of the Reporting Period. Current Values are determined as follows:

- Operational Buildings – Depreciated Replacement cost.
- Land and non-specialised buildings – Current value for existing use.
- Vehicles, plant and equipment – historic cost less accumulated depreciation (as a proxy for current replacement cost).

Properties in the course of construction are carried at cost, less any impairment loss. Costs include professional fees but not borrowing costs, which are recognised as expenses immediately, as allowed by IAS 23 for assets held at Current Value. Assets are re-valued and depreciation commences when they are brought into use. An increase arising on revaluation is taken to the Revaluation Reserve except when it reverses an impairment previously recognised in expenditure, in which case it is credited to expenditure to the extent of the decrease previously charged there. A revaluation decrease is recognised as an Impairment charged to the Revaluation Reserve to the extent that there is a balance on the Reserve for the Asset, and, thereafter, to expenditure. Gains and losses recognised in the Revaluation Reserve are reported as other comprehensive income in the Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement.

Disposals

Capital receipts from the sale of non-current assets are held in the Capital Receipts Unapplied Account until such time as they are used to finance other Capital Expenditure or to repay debt. Gains and losses on the disposal of non-current assets are recognised in the Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement.

Depreciation and Impairments

Depreciation is charged to write off the costs or valuation of property, plant and equipment and intangible non-current assets, less any residual value, over their Useful Economic Lives, on a straight line basis. The Useful Economic Life of an Asset is the period over which the Authority expects to obtain economic benefits or service potential from the Asset. This is specific to the Authority and may be shorter than the physical life of the Asset itself. The Useful Economic Life and Residual Values are reviewed each year end, with the effect of any changes recognised on a prospective basis.

The approximate average useful lives (depreciation periods) are categorised below:

- Buildings 30 – 60 years
- Vehicles – Fire Appliances 15 years
- Vehicles – Lorries and Vans 7 years
- Vehicles – Non FDS Cars and Light Vans 7 years
- Vehicles – FDS Cars 5 years
- Equipment 5 years
- Specialised Equipment (e.g. Breathing Apparatus) 10 Years

Assets acquired under Finance Leases are Depreciated over the term of the lease (or the life of the asset if this is lower than the term of the lease) on a straight line basis.

At each reporting period end, the Authority checks whether there is any indication that any of its non-current Assets have suffered an impairment loss. If there is indication of an Impairment loss, the recoverable amount of the Asset is estimated to determine whether there has been a loss and, if so, its amount.

If there has been an Impairment loss, the Asset is written down to its recoverable amount, with the loss charged to the Revaluation Reserve to the extent that there is a balance on the Reserve for the Asset and, thereafter, to expenditure. Where an impairment loss subsequently reverses, the carrying amount of the Asset is increased to the revised estimate of the recoverable amount but capped at the amount that would have been determined had there been no initial impairment loss. The reversal of the impairment loss is credited to expenditure to the extent of the decrease previously charged there and thereafter to the Revaluation Reserve.

The Authority undertakes regular reviews of all it’s assets to verify that they still are in use and will provide an economic benefit to the Authority. A non-property asset that is due to last 5 years will incur depreciation for each of those five years and have a £0 balance at the end of the 5 years, but will still be recorded in the asset register after these five years if it still exists and provides an economic benefit to the authority.

The Authority is not required to raise council tax to cover Depreciation and Impairment, however it is required to make an annual provision from its revenue budget to contribute towards the reduction in its overall borrowing requirement, the Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP). The Authority borrowed for the first time in 2021/22 for capital purposes. The policy is to charge MRP over the life of the asset from the year after the asset acquired comes into use, so the first charge was made in 2021/22.

Government Grants

Government grants are grants from Government bodies. Revenue grants are matched against the expenditure to which they relate. Capital grants are credited to income once any conditions of the grant have been satisfied. Assets purchased from government grants are valued, Depreciated and Impaired as described for purchased Assets.

Leases

Leases are classified as Finance Leases when substantially all of the risks and rewards of ownership are transferred to the lessee. All other leases are classified as Operating Leases.

The Authority as a Lessee

The Authority has a single asset held under a Finance Lease (a vehicle). The outstanding Liability relating to Finance Leases is reflected in the Authority's Balance Sheet, with the Assets acquired under Finance Leases added to the Authority's Asset register and the value reflected in the Property, Plant and Equipment total on the Balance Sheet. Interest costs relating to Finance Leases are reflected in the Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement. Payments for Finance Leases are made in equal amounts over the term of the lease. Operating Lease payments are recognised as an expense on a straight-line basis over the lease term. Lease incentives are recognised initially as a Liability and subsequently as a reduction of rentals on a straight-line basis over the lease term. Where a lease is for land and buildings, the land and building components are separated. Leased land is treated as an Operating Lease. Leased buildings are assessed as to whether they are Operating Leases or Finance Leases.

Inventories

Inventories are valued at the lower of cost and Net Realisable Value using the average cost method. This is considered to be a reasonable approximation to Fair Value.

Cash and Cash Equivalents

Cash is cash in hand and deposits with any financial institution repayable without penalty on notice of not more than 24 hours. The balances on the current account and the business reserve account are cash. The balance in the liquidity manager account is a cash equivalent (as this is held for investment purposes until a sufficient balance is achieved and a short-term investment entered into). In the Cash Flow Statement, cash and cash equivalents are shown net of bank overdrafts that are repayable on demand and that form an integral part of the Authority's cash management.

Provisions

Provisions are recognised when the Authority has a present legal or constructive obligation as a result of a past event, it is probable that the Authority will be required to settle the obligation, and a reliable estimate can be made of the amount of the obligation. The amount recognised as a provision is the best estimate of the expenditure required to settle the obligation at the end of the reporting period, taking into account the risks and uncertainties.

Reserves

The Authority sets aside specific reserves for future policy purposes. Details of these reserves are provided in the relevant note to the Accounts. The Authority has the following reserves:

- General Fund Reserve
- Insurance
- Funding Reserve
- Transformation Reserve
- Carry Forwards Reserve
- S106 Developer Contributions
- Capital Receipts Reserve
- Capital Grants Unapplied Reserve
- Capital Reserve
- Equipment Reserve

Other reserves held by the Authority, are held to meet accounting requirements:

- Revaluation Reserve
- Pension Reserve
- Capital Adjustment Account
- Accumulated Absence Reserve

Financial Assets

Financial assets are recognised when the Authority becomes party to the Financial Instrument contract or in the case of trade receivables, when goods or services have been delivered. Financial assets are derecognised when the contractual rights have expired or the Asset has been transferred. Financial Assets are initially recognised at Fair Value.

Financial Assets are classified into the following categories: Financial Assets at Fair Value through profit and loss; held to maturity investments; available for sale Financial Assets, and loans and receivables. The classification depends on the nature and purpose of the financial assets and is determined at the time of initial recognition.

Loans and Receivables

Loans and receivables are non-derivative Financial Assets with fixed or determinable payments which are not quoted in an active market. After initial recognition, they are measured at Amortised cost using the Effective Interest Method, less any Impairment. Interest is recognised using the Effective Interest Rate Method.

Fair Value is determined by reference to quoted market prices where possible, or failing that by reference to similar arms-length transactions between knowledgeable and willing parties.

The Effective Interest Rate is the rate that exactly discounts estimated future cash receipts through the expected life of the financial asset.

At the end of the reporting period the Authority assesses whether any Financial Assets, other than those held at 'Fair Value through profit and loss' are impaired. Financial assets are impaired and Impairment losses recognised if there is objective evidence of impairment, as a result of one or more events which occurred after the initial recognition of the Asset and which has an impact on the estimated future cash flows of the Asset.

For Financial Assets carried at amortised cost, the amount of the Impairment loss is measured as the difference between the Assets carrying amount and the present value of the revised future cash flows discounted at the Asset's original effective interest rate. The loss is recognised in expenditure and the carrying amount of the Asset reduced directly.

If, in a subsequent period, the amount of the Impairment loss decreases and the decrease can be related objectively to an event occurring after the Impairment was recognised, the previously recognised impairment loss is reversed through expenditure to the extent that the carrying amount of the receivable at the date of the Impairment is reversed does not exceed what the amortised cost would have been had the Impairment not been recognised.

Financial Instruments

Financial instruments are recognised on the Balance Sheet when the Authority becomes party to the contractual provisions of a financial instrument. They are initially measured at fair value.

Financial Assets

Financial assets held at amortised cost. These represent loans and similar arrangements where repayments of interest and principal take place on set dates and at specified amounts in advance. The amount presented in the Balance Sheet represents the outstanding principal received plus accrued interest. Interest credited to the CIES is the amount receivable as per the loan agreement.

Changes in the value of assets carried at fair value are debited/credited to the CIES as they arise.

Financial Liabilities

Financial Liabilities are recognised in the Balance Sheet when the Authority becomes party to the contractual provisions of the Financial Instrument or, in the case of trade payables, when the goods or services have been received. Financial liabilities are derecognised when the liability has been discharged, that is, the Liability has been paid or expired. Financial Liabilities are recognised at Fair Value.

Exceptional Items

Exceptional items shall be included in the costs of the service to which they relate and noted accordingly.

Events After The Reporting Period

Material events after the Balance Sheet date shall be disclosed as a note to the Accounts and amended in the Accounts as required. Other events after the Balance Sheet date will be disclosed in a note with an estimate of the likely effect.

VAT

Where output tax is charged or input VAT is recoverable, the amounts are stated net of VAT. Irrecoverable VAT is charged to the relevant expenditure category or included in the capitalised purchase cost of Non-Current Assets.

ACCOUNTING STATEMENTS

Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement

For the Year Ending 31st March 2024

2022/23 Gross Expenditure £000	2022/23 Gross Income £000	2022/23 Net Expenditure/ Income (-) £000		Note Ref	2023/24 Gross Expenditure £000	2023/24 Gross Income £000	2023/24 Net Expenditure/ Income (-) £000
33,918	(6,354)	27,564	Fire and Rescue Services		31,616	(7,632)	23,984
33,918	**(6,354)**	**27,564**	**Cost of Services**		**31,616**	**(7,632)**	**23,984**
342	(19)	323	Other Operating Expenditure		75	(91)	(16)
8,926	(46)	8,880	Financing and Investment Income\Expenditure		10,969	(238)	10,731
-	(26,276)	(26,276)	Taxation and Non Specific Grant Income	3	-	(29,827)	(29,827)
		10,491	**Surplus(-) or Deficit on Provision of Services**				**4,872**
		(2,032)	(Surplus) or deficit on revaluation of non current assets	9			(2,233)
		(103,429)	Remeasurements of the net defined benefit liability (asset)	26.2			2,671
		(105,461)	**Other Comprehensive Income and Expenditure**				**438**
		(94,970)	**Total Comprehensive Income(-) and Expenditure**				**5,310**

Movement In Reserves Statement

For the Year Ending 31st March 2024

	General Fund £000	Earmarked Reserves £000	Capital Grants Unapplied £000	Capital Receipts Reserve £000	Usable Reserves Total £000	Unusable Reserves Total £000	Reserves Total £000
Balance at 31st March 2022	**(2,000)**	**(2,665)**	**(1,046)**	**-**	**(5,711)**	**294,190**	**288,479**
Movement in Reserves for 2022/23							
Total comprehensive income and expenditure	10,492	-	-	-	10,492	(105,461)	(94,969)
Adjustments between accounting and funding basis under regulations (note 7)	(10,101)	239	628	-	(9,234)	9,234	-
Transfer to Earmarked Reserves	(391)	391	-	-	-	-	-
(Increase)/Decrease in 2022/23	-	**630**	**628**	**-**	**1,258**	**(96,227)**	**(94,969)**
Balance carried forward at 31 March 2023	**(2,000)**	**(2,035)**	**(418)**	**-**	**(4,453)**	**197,963**	**193,510**
Movement in Reserves during 2023/24							
Total comprehensive income and expenditure	4,872	-	-	-	4,872	438	5,310
Adjustments between accounting and funding basis under regulations (note 7)	(5,497)	34	-	-	(5,463)	5,463	-
Transfer to Earmarked Reserves	625	(625)	-	-	0	-	-
(Increase)/Decrease in 2023/24	**-**	**(591)**	**-**	**-**	**(591)**	**5,901**	**5,310**
Balance carried forward at 31 March 2024	**(2,000)**	**(2,626)**	**(418)**	**-**	**(5,044)**	**203,864**	**198,820**

Balance Sheet

As at 31st March 2024

31 March 2023 £000		Notes	31 March 2024 £000
48,681	Property, Plant and Equipment	9	47,469
48,681	**Long Term Assets**		**47,469**
264	Inventories	10	344
2,240	Short Term Debtors	11	3,811
-	Short Term Investments	12	10
-	Asset Held for Sale	13	3,500
4,203	Cash and Cash Equivalents	12	2,344
6,707	**Current Assets**		**10,009**
(5,852)	Short Term Creditors	14	(7,179)
(388)	Provisions	14.1	(178)
(6,240)	**Current Liabilities**		**(7,357)**
(3,135)	Long Term Borrowing	16.1	(3,060)
(239,523)	Other Long Term Liabilities	16.2	(245,881)
(242,658)	**Long Term Liabilities**		**(248,941)**
(193,510)	**Net Liabilities**		**(198,820)**
(4,453)	Usable Reserves	17	(5,044)
197,963	Unusable Reserves	18	203,864
193,510	**Total Reserves**		**198,820**

Balance Sheet Approved for Issue

Signed:

Danielle Stone
Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner

Date:

Vaughan Ashcroft
Chief Finance Officer & s151 Officer

Date:

Cash Flow Statement

For the Year Ending 31st March 2024

2022/23 £000	Cashflow Statement	2023/24 £000
(10,492)	**Net Surplus on the provision of services**	**(4,872)**
1,516	Depreciation and Amortisation	1,860
-	Impairments and Upward Revaluations	311
1,343	Increase/Decrease(-) in Creditors	1,117
356	Increase(-)/Decrease in Debtors	(1,571)
(20)	Increase(-)/Decrease in Inventories	(80)
(2,869)	Additions of PPE Assets	(2,305)
8,517	Movement in Pension Liability (difference between employer's contributions paid and IAS19 adjustments)	3,687
-	Increase(-)/Decrease in Long Term Liabilities	-
3,000	Increase(-)/Decrease in Investments	(10)
(83)	Proceeds from Borrowing	(75)
347	Derecognition of PPE Assets	(11)
464	Other Non Cash Movements	-
2,079	**Net cashflows from operating activities**	**(1,949)**
	Net cashflows from investing activities	
19	Proceeds from Sale of Assets	90
2,098	**Net Increase /Decrease (-) in cash and cash equivalents**	**(1,859)**
2,105	Cash and Cash equivalents at the beginning of the reporting period	4,203
4,203	**Cash and Cash equivalents at the end of the reporting period**	**2,344**

NOTES TO THE ACCOUNTS

The notes provided in the following pages are intended to aid interpretation of the financial statements set out above and provide further information upon the financial performance of the Authority during 2023/24.

Note 1. Expenditure and Funding Analysis

This statement shows how annual expenditure is used and funded from resources (government grants, rents, council tax and business rates) by local authorities in comparison with those resources consumed or earned by authorities in accordance with proper accounting practices. Income and expenditure accounted for under proper accounting practices is presented more fully in the Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement (CIES).

Net Surplus Chargeable to the General Fund £000	Adjustments between Funding and Accounting Basis £000	2022/23 Net Surplus in the CIES* £000		Net Surplus Chargeable to the General Fund £000	Adjustments between Funding and Accounting Basis £000	2023/24 Net Surplus in the CIES* £000
18,330	9,234	27,564	Fire and Rescue Services	18,521	5,463	23,984
18,330	**9,234**	**27,564**	**Net Cost of Services**	**18,521**	**5,463**	**23,984**
(17,072)	-	(17,072)	Other Income and Expenditure	(19,112)	-	(19,112)
1,258	**9,234**	**10,492**	**Surplus or Deficit**	**(591)**	**5,463**	**4,872**
(5,159)			Opening Revenue Reserves	(4,453)		
(552)			Add: CGUA Reserve	-		
(4,453)			**Closing Usable Reserves at 31 March 2024**	**(5,044)**		

*CIES – Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement
Note 7 outlines the breakdown of the adjustments between Funding and Accounting Basis

Note 2. Accounting standards that have been issued but not adopted

Under The Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting disclosure of the impact of accounting standards issued but not yet adopted is required. Following a review of the relevant standards it has been determined that there would be no material changes to the accounts if these were to have been adopted. The relevant standards being introduced for 2023/24 are:

- Definition of Accounting Estimates (Amendments to IAS 8) issued in February 2021.
- Disclosure of Accounting Policies (Amendments to IAS 1 and IFRS Practice Statement 2) issued in February 2021.
- Deferred Tax related to Assets and Liabilities arising from a Single Transaction (Amendments to IAS 12) issued in May 2021.
- Updating a Reference to the Conceptual Framework (Amendments to IFRS 3) issued in May 2020.
- Updated disclosures based on IFRS 16 Leases issued in January 2016

Note 3. Taxation and Non-Specific Grant Income

12 Months to 31 March 2023 £000	Council Tax and Non Domestic Rates Income	12 Months to 31 March 2024 £000
(17,063)	Council Tax Funding	(19,019)
(2,349)	Revenue Support Grant	(2,587)
(6,864)	Non Domestic Rates Funding	(8,221)
(26,276)	**Total Funding**	**(29,827)**

Note 4. Events after the Balance Sheet Date

The statement of accounts was authorised for issue by the Chief Finance Officer in May 2024 and one post-balance sheet event had been reported at this date.

On the 2nd May 2024, the elections for Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner (PFCC) for Northamptonshire took place, with Danielle Stone elected as PFCC. The transition between Commissioners has taken place in May 2024.

Note 5. Assumptions made about the future and other major sources of estimation uncertainty

The statement of accounts contains estimated figures that are based on assumptions made by the Authority about the future or that are otherwise uncertain. Estimates are made taking into account historical experience, current trends and other relevant factors. However, balances cannot be determined with certainty, so actual results could be materially different from the assumptions and estimates.

The items in the Balance Sheet at 31st March 2024 for which there is a risk of material adjustment in the forthcoming financial year are as follows:

Item	Uncertainties	Effect if actual results differ from assumptions
Property, Plant and Equipment	Assets are depreciated over useful lives that are dependent on assumptions about the level of repairs and maintenance that will be incurred for each asset. The current economic climate makes it uncertain that the Authority will be able to sustain its current spending on repairs and maintenance, bringing into doubt the useful lives assigned to assets.	If the useful economic life (UEL) of assets is reduced, depreciation will increase and the carrying value of assets will decrease. It is estimated that the annual depreciation charge for buildings would increase by £15k for every year that useful lives had to be reduced.
Pensions Liability	Estimation of the net pension liability to pay pensions depends on a number of complex actuarial assumptions/judgements relating to the discount rate used, salary increases, changes in retirement ages, mortality rates and expected return on assets. A firm of consulting actuaries is engaged to provide the Authority with expert advice about the assumptions to be applied.	The carrying value of the Fire Staff pension liability as at 31 March 2024 is £245.9m. The effect on the net pensions' liability as a result of changes in individual assumptions is detailed within the Pensions Note 26.
Council Tax (CT) and Business Rates (BR)	One local billing authority was unable to complete their Council Tax returns and therefore the result of the Council Tax Collection Fund for that authority has been estimated.	The estimation technique is to assume the equivalent debtor, creditor or cash balance for the size of the Council compared to historical trends and published forecast information where available. Material differences in Council Tax collection fund would have a material impact on Council Tax funding NCFRA will receive in the 2024/25 financial year and future years. However due to the recommended accounting treatment for these items there would be no impact on the NCFRA reserves position as at the 31st March 2024 of any material differences between the estimate used and the actual values when they become available.

Note 6. Material items of income and expenditure

There are no material items of income or expenditure arising in the year that require separate disclosure.

Note 7. Adjustments between accounting basis and funding basis under regulations

This note details the adjustments that are made to the total comprehensive income and expenditure recognised by the Authority in the year in accordance with proper accounting practice to the resources that are specified by statutory provisions as being available to the Authority to meet future capital and revenue expenditure.

	Usable Reserves				
2022/23 Adjustments to the Revenue Resources	**General Fund Balance £000**	**Earmarked Reserves £000**	**Capital Grants Unapplied £000**	**Capital Receipts Reserve £000**	**Movement in Unusable Reserves £000**
Amounts by which income and expenditure included in the CIES are different from Revenue for the year calculated in accordance with Statutory Requirements:					
Pension costs (transferred to (or from) the Pensions Reserve	(8,518)				**8,518**
Depreciation and Impairment Losses moved to Capital Adj Account	(2,016)				**2,016**
Change in Accumulated Absence Charge	(16)				**16**
Capital Expenditure Funded by Revenue Funding (RCCO)	479	-	-	-	**(479)**
Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP)	-				**-**
Capital Receipts Received in year	60	-		(60)	**-**
Loss on Disposal	(331)				**331**
Application of S106 Funding	-	239			**(239)**
Application of Capital Receipts	-			60	**(60)**
Application of Capital Grants	-		628		**(628)**
Application of Collection Fund Income	241				**(241)**
Total Adjustment to Revenue Resources	**(10,101)**	**239**	**628**	**0**	**9,234**

2023/24 Adjustments to the Revenue Resources	**General Fund Balance £000**	**Earmarked Reserves £000**	**Capital Grants Unapplied £000**	**Capital Receipts Reserve £000**	**Movement in Unusable Reserves £000**
Amounts by which income and expenditure included in the CIES are different from Revenue for the year calculated in accordance with Statutory Requirements:					
Pension costs (transferred to (or from) the Pensions Reserve	(3,685)				**3,685**
Depreciation and Impairment Losses moved to Capital Adj Account	(2,511)				**2,511**
Change in Accumulated Absence Charge	-				**-**
Capital Expenditure Funded by Revenue Funding (RCCO)	218	-	-	-	**(218)**
Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP)	166				**(166)**
Capital Receipts Received in year	90	-		(90)	**-**
Loss on Disposal	-				**-**
Application of S106 Funding	-	34			**(34)**
Application of Capital Receipts				90	**(90)**
Application of Capital Grants	19				**(19)**
Application of Collection Fund Income	206				**(206)**
Total Adjustment to Revenue Resources	**(5,497)**	**34**	**0**	**0**	**5,463**

Note 8. Transfers to/from Earmarked Reserves

This note sets out the amounts set aside in earmarked reserves to provide financing for future expenditure plans.

	Opening Balance April 2023 £000	Transfers to Reserve £000	Transfers from Reserve £000	Closing Balance March 2024 £000
Earmarked Reserves:				
Section 106 Contributions	34	-	(34)	**-**
Insurance reserve	250	-	-	**250**
Funding Reserve	292	675	-	**967**
Transformation Reserve	1,000	-	-	**1,000**
Capital &ESN	314	-	-	**314**
Equipment Reserve	100	-	(30)	**70**
Service Carry Forwards	45	-	(20)	**25**
Total General Fund and Earmarked Reserves	**2,035**	**675**	**(84)**	**2,626**

Note 9. Property, Plant and Equipment

The movement in fixed assets during the year is shown in the table below.

Operational Assets	Land and Buildings £000	Assets Under Construction £000	Vehicles, Plant and Equipment £000	Total Assets £000
Cost or Valuation				
At 31 March 2022	34,624	3,610	9,985	**48,219**
Additions/Enhancement	225	136	2,508	**2,869**
Revaluation Increases/(Decreases) to Revaluation Reserve	2,032	-	-	**2,032**
Depreciation eliminated on Revaluation	(564)	-	-	**(564)**
Revaluation Loss Reversal to Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement	(483)	-	-	**(483)**
Derecognitions & Disposals	-	-	(400)	**(400)**
Reclassifications	-	-	981	**981**
At 31 March 2023	**35,834**	**3,746**	**13,074**	**52,654**
Depreciation/Impairment				
At 31 March 2022	-	-	(2,093)	**(2,093)**
Charge for the twelve months to 31st March 2023	(564)	-	(952)	**(1,516)**
Depreciation written out to the Revaluation Reserve	-	-	-	**-**
Depreciation written out to the CIES	564	-	-	**564**
Impairments	-	-	-	**-**
Derecognitions	-	-	53	**53**
Reclassifications	-	-	(981)	**(981)**
At 31 March 2023	-	-	(3,973)	**(3,973)**
Balance as at 31 March 2023	**35,834**	**3,746**	**9,101**	**48,681**
Cost or Valuation				
At 31 March 2023	35,834	3,746	13,073	**52,653**
Additions/Enhancement	456	1,014	835	**2,305**
Revaluation Increases/(Decreases) to Revaluation Reserve	2,233	-	-	**2,233**
Depreciation eliminated on Revaluation	(606)	-	-	**(606)**
Revaluation Loss Reversal to Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement	(64)	(246)	-	**(310)**
Derecognitions & Disposals	-	(3,500)	(346)	**(3,846)**
Reclassifications	-	-	89	**89**
At 31 March 2024	**37,853**	**1,014**	**13,651**	**52,518**
Depreciation/Impairment				
At 31 March 2023	-	-	(3,975)	**(3,975)**
Charge for the twelve months to 31st March 2024	(606)	-	(1,254)	**(1,860)**
Depreciation written out to the Revaluation Reserve	-	-	-	**-**
Depreciation written out to the CIES	606	-	-	**606**
Impairments	-	-	-	**-**
Derecognitions	-	-	268	**268**
Reclassifications	-	-	(88)	**(88)**
At 31 March 2024	-	-	(5,050)	**(5,049)**
Balance as at 31 March 2024	**37,853**	**1,014**	**8,601**	**47,469**

The freehold and leasehold properties within the Authority's property portfolio are valued by the Authority's property advisors (Wilkes, Head and Eve) with impairment reviews made annually.

A full valuation was undertaken as at 31st March 2024. All valuations were undertaken in accordance with the Statements of Asset Valuation Practice and Guidance Notes of the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors. Fire Stations are valued at depreciated replacement cost and other properties are valued at existing use value.

Note 10. Inventories

The values of stock items held are summarised in the table below:

31 March 2023 £000		31 March 2024 £000
244	Opening Balance	264
20	Year End Stock Take Adjustment	80
264	**Total Inventories**	**344**

Note 11. Debtors

The analysis of Debtors is shown below:

31 March 2023 £000		31 March 2024 £000
606	Trade Debtors	692
1,634	Other Debtors	3,119
2,240	**Total Debtors**	**3,811**

Trade Debtors consist primarily of payments in advance made to suppliers for goods and services. Other debtors include the Authority's share of Council Tax and Business Rates debtors due to be paid to the Northamptonshire Unitary Authorities by taxpayers, grants and from other local government organisations for a variety of arrangements.

Note 12. Cash, Cash Equivalents and Short-Term Investments

31 March 2023 £000		31 March 2024 £000
4,203	Cash at Bank	2,344
4,203	**Total Cash**	**2,344**

31 March 2023 £000		31 March 2024 £000
-	Cash at Bank (95 Day Notice Account)	10
-	**Total Short Term Investments**	**10**

Note 13. Assets Held for Sale

The Authority has one asset held for sale at the 31st March 2024 which is valued at £3.5m. This relates to a site purchased in Earls Barton to facilitate a joint garage for both NCFRA and Northamptonshire Police. The initial estimates for the total cost of the project were £7.4m in 2020, however, subsequent global events have led to this estimate increasing substantially which led to the project no longer being value for money, and subsequently the decision has been made to sell the site and for it to be actively marketed for sale at the balance sheet date.

31 March 2023 £000		31 March 2024 £000
0	Assets Held for Sale	3,500
0	**Total Assets Held for Sale**	**3,500**

Note 14. Creditors

The analysis of Creditors is shown below:

31 March 2023 £000		31 March 2024 £000
(1,744)	Trade Creditors	(4,660)
(4,108)	Other Creditors	(2,519)
(5,852)	**Total Creditors**	**(7,179)**

Other creditors include the Authority's share of Council Tax and Business Rates prepayments made to the Northamptonshire Unitary Authorities by taxpayers, grants received in advance from central government (see Note 15), payments due to central government for income tax and national insurance and pension contributions due to be paid to the pension fund.

Note 14.1. Provisions

Each Unitary Council, based on their local data, calculates a provision for potential losses arising from ratepayers successfully appealing the level of their property's rateable value. A proportion of each provision (currently 1%) is allocated to the Authority and recognised in the accounts.

31 March 2023 £000		31 March 2024 £000
(388)	Provision for Business Rates Appeals	(178)
(388)	**Total Provisions**	**(178)**

Note 15. Grant Receipts in Advance

The Authority has grant receipts in advance, all of which are for revenue purposes.

31 March 2023 £000		31 March 2024 £000
(651)	Emergency Services Network Grant	(651)
(50)	Fire Protection Grant Building Risk	(50)
(243)	Fire Protection	(253)
(944)		**(954)**

Note 16.1 Long Term Borrowing

31 March 2023 £000		31 March 2024 £000
(3,135)	PWLB Loan	(3,060)
(3,135)	**Total Long Term Borrowing**	**(3,060)**

Note 16.2. Other Long Term Liabilities

The Authority has other long term liabilities as below, which relate to pension liabilities estimated to fall due over the longer term.

31 March 2023 £000		31 March 2024 £000
(239,523)	Pension Liabilities	(245,881)
(239,523)	**Total Long Term Liabilities**	**(245,881)**

Note 17. Usable Reserves

Movements in the Authority's usable reserves are summarised in the Movement in Reserves Statement. The nature and purpose of these reserves is set out below:

31 March 2023 £000		31 March 2024 £000
(2,000)	General Fund	(2,000)
(34)	Section 106 Receipts	0
(250)	Insurance Fund External	(250)
(292)	Funding Reserves	(967)
(45)	Carry Forwards	(25)
(1,000)	Transformation Reserve	(1,000)
(314)	Capital	(314)
(100)	Equipment Reserve	(70)
(4,035)	**General Fund + Earmarked Reserves**	**(4,626)**
(418)	Capital Grants Unapplied Account	(418)
(418)	**Capital Grants Unapplied Account**	**(418)**
-	Capital Receipts Reserve	0
-	**Capital Receipts Reserves**	**0**
(4,453)	**Total Usable Reserves**	**(5,044)**

Note 17.1. General Fund

This is the accumulated surplus of income over expenditure after allowing for any General Fund Reserves. It's strategic use is to safeguard against budget risk and adverse impact on future funding levels.

Note 17.2. Capital Grants Unapplied

These are grants received for a specific purpose but remaining unspent at the end of the year.

Note 18. Unusable Reserves

An analysis of the unusable reserves is shown below:

31 March 2023 £000		31 March 2024 £000
(7,351)	Revaluation Reserve	(9,584)
(34,336)	Capital Adjustment Account	(32,613)
239,524	Pensions Reserve	245,881
86	Accumulated Absences Account	347
40	Council Tax and NDR Collection Fund Account	(167)
197,963	**Total Unusable Reserves**	**203,864**

Note 18.1. Revaluation Reserve

The Revaluation Reserve contains the gains/losses made by the Authority arising in the value of its Property, Plant and Equipment.

31 March 2023 £000		31 March 2024 £000
(5,320)	Opening Balance	(7,351)
(2,726)	Revaluation gains in the period	(2,606)
695	Revaluation loss in the period	373
(7,351)	**Revaluation Reserve**	**(9,584)**

The Reserve contains only revaluation gains/losses accumulated since 1 January 2019, the date that the Reserve was created.

Note 18.2. Capital Adjustment Account (CAA)

The Capital Adjustment Account absorbs the timing differences arising from the different arrangements for accounting for the consumption of non-current assets and for financing the acquisition, construction or enhancement of those assets under statutory provisions. The Account is debited with the cost of acquisition, construction or enhancement as depreciation, impairment losses and amortisations are charged to the Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement (with reconciling postings from the Revaluation Reserve to convert fair value figures to a historical cost basis). The Account is credited with the amounts set aside by the Authority as finance for the costs of acquisition, construction and enhancement. The Account contains accumulated gains and losses on Investment Properties and gains recognised on donated assets that have yet to be consumed by the Authority. The Account also contains revaluation gains accumulated on Property, Plant and Equipment before 1 January 2019, the date that the Revaluation Reserve was created to hold such gains. Note 7 provides details of the source of all the transactions posted to the Account, apart from those involving the Revaluation Reserve. A breakdown of the CAA balance is set out below:

31 March 2023 £000		31 March 2024 £000
(35,276)	Opening Balance	(34,336)
(479)	Additions funded by revenue funding	(403)
(239)	Additions funded by S106 Funding	(34)
(628)	Additions funded by Capital Grants Unapplied	-
(60)	Additions funded by Capital Receipts	(90)
1,516	Depreciation	1,862
830	Revaluation Losses + Disposals	388
(34,336)	**Capital Adjustment Reserves**	**(32,613)**

Note 18.3. Pension Reserve

The Pension Reserve absorbs the timing differences arising from the different arrangements for accounting for post-employment benefits and for funding benefits in accordance with statutory provisions. The Authority accounts for post-employment benefits in the Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement as the benefits are earned by employees accruing years of service, updating the liabilities recognised to reflect inflation, changing assumptions and investment returns on any resources set aside to meet the costs. However, statutory arrangements require benefits earned to be financed as the Authority makes employer's contributions to pension funds or eventually pay any pensions for which it is directly responsible. The debit balance on the Pensions Reserve therefore shows a substantial shortfall in the benefits earned by past and current employees and the resources the Authority has set aside to meet them. The statutory arrangements will ensure that funding will have been set aside by the time the benefits come to be paid.

31 March 2023 £000		31 March 2024 £000
334,435	Opening Balance	239,524
(94,911)	Actuarial (Gains)/Losses	6,357
239,524	**Pension Reserve**	**245,881**

Note 18.4. Accumulated Absences Account

31 March 2023 £000		31 March 2024 £000
70	Opening Balance	86
16	Provision for the period	261
86	**Accumulated Absences Account**	**347**

Note 18.5. Collection Fund Adjustment Account

31 March 2023 £000		31 March 2024 £000
(159)	Council Tax Collection Fund Adjustment Account	(320)
199	NNDR Collection Fund Adjustment Account	153
40	**Collection Fund Adjustment Account**	**(167)**

Note 19. Officers' Remuneration

The number of officers whose remuneration, excluding pension contributions, was **£50,000** or more during 2023/24 is listed below:

Number of Officers 2022/23	Remuneration Band	Number of Officers 2023/24
28	£50,000 - £54,999	26
26	£55,000 - £59,999	16
10	£60,000 - £64,999	16
7	£65,000 - £69,999	7
5	£70,000 - £74,999	5
2	£75,000 - £79,999	3
-	£80,000 - £84,999	-
2	£85,000 - £89,999	-
1	£90,000 - £94,999	1
-	£95,000 - £99,999	1
2	£100,000 - £104,999	-
-	£105,000 - £109,999	1
-	£110,000 - £114,999	-
-	£115,000 - £119,999	1
-	£120,000 - £124,999	-

Note 19.1. Senior Officer Remuneration

Full year remuneration amounts for all senior officers are included in the table of remuneration by pay band in Note 19 (above).

The tables below detail the individual remuneration of senior employees for 2023/24 and 2022/23 respectively.

2023/24 Post Holder Information	Start Date (with NCFRA)	Leaving Date	Salary £	Other £	Total Excl Pension £	Employer's Pension £
Chief Fire Officer M Jones	03/10/2022	07/07/2023	93,953	30,000	**123,953**	-
Interim Chief Fire Officer S Tuhill	18/07/2023		99,652	-	**99,652**	28,700
Assistant Chief Fire Officer (1)	01/01/2019	28/06/2023	32,766	-	**32,766**	19,315
Assistant Chief Fire Officer (2)	01/01/2019		116,358	-	**116,358**	33,511
Assistant Chief Fire Officer (3)	01/07/2023		80,844	- 102	**80,742**	23,193
Area Manager (1)	01/01/2019	30/06/2023	19,922	5,525	**25,447**	7,328
Area Manager (2)	01/01/2020	02/06/2023	14,731	4,088	**18,819**	5,420
Area Manager (3)	01/01/2019	06/11/2023	42,414	11,876	**54,290**	15,636
Area Commander (1)	15/01/2024		13,414	3,756	**17,170**	2,970
Area Commander (2)	01/08/2021		61,512	13,890	**75,402**	21,144
Area Commander (3)	25/11/2019		62,266	16,228	**78,494**	22,207
Head of Protection	01/01/2019		68,486	-	**68,486**	11,983
Prevention, Safeguarding and Partnership Manager	01/01/2019		68,486	-	**68,486**	11,983

The Chief Fire Officer left their post on the 7th July 2023 by mutual agreement. The additonal payments made reflect NCFRA's contractual obligations which were paid as they fell due.

Prior to the appointment of Simon Tuhill as Chief Fire Officer, the Monitoring Officer and Head of Paid Staff for the Office of Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner was appointed Interim Chief Officer for NCFRA for which no additional consideration was paid.

During the period 30/10/23 and 11/02/2024, an external secondee performed the role of Area Commander for which NCFRA paid £36k.

2022/23 Post Holder Information	Start Date (with NCFRA)	Leaving Date	Salary £	Other £	Total Excl Pension £	Employer's Pension £
Chief Fire Officer - M Jones	03/10/2022		69,247	-	**69,247**	-
Chief Fire Officer - D Dovey	01/01/2019	11/10/2022	71,901	-	**71,901**	-
Assistant Chief Fire Officer (1)	01/01/2019		101,773	-	**101,773**	29,310
Assistant Chief Fire Officer (2)	01/01/2019		101,773	-	**101,773**	29,310
Area Manager (1)	01/01/2019		62,408	17,267	**79,675**	22,946
Area Manager (2)	01/01/2020		62,232	17,267	**79,499**	22,896
Area Manager (3)	01/01/2019		57,826	15,571	**73,397**	20,501
Head of Protection	01/01/2019		61,687	-	**61,687**	10,672
Prevention, Safeguarding and Partnership Manager	01/01/2019		61,687	-	**61,687**	10,672

A number of the senior officers for the NCFRA are employed and remunerated by either the OPFCC or the Office for the Chief Constable (OCC). These posts are detailed below and details of their remuneration are included within the OPFCC accounts:

Post Holder Information	Start Date (with NCFRA)	End Date
Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner	01/01/2019	-
Monitoring Officer	01/01/2019	23/07/2023
Interim Monitoring Officer	24/07/2023	01/01/2024
Chief Executive Officer (Monitoring Officer)	02/01/2024	-
Chief Finance Officer	01/01/2019	21/12/2023
Interim Chief Finance Officer	22/12/2023	-
Assistant Chief Officer (Enabling Services)	01/04/2020	-

For the 2023/24 financial year, the Authority made a contribution to OPFCC and this is referenced further within the related parties note.

Note 20. External Audit costs

The Public Sector Audit Appointments (PSAA) have set a scale fee of £95k for external audit services carried out by the appointed auditor (Grant Thornton) in 2023/24 (a scale fee of £33k was payable for 2022/23 for services carried out by the previous auditor (EY)) with any further costs requested be subject to discussion with PSAA).

Note 21. Related parties

IPSAS 20 Related Party Disclosures, based on IAS 24, requires NCFRA to disclose material transactions and outstanding balances with related parties – bodies or individuals that have the potential to control or influence NCFRA or to be controlled or influenced by NCFRA.

Central Government has effective control over the general operations of both NCFRA and the OPFCC. It is responsible for providing the statutory framework within which NCFRA and the OPFCC operates, together with funding in the form of general or specific grants.

The Chief Executive (and Monitoring Officer) and Chief Finance Officer of the OPFCC also undertake these roles in NCFRA, and all OPFCC Directors and staff support the governance of NCFRA. There is also a Joint Communications Team for OPFCC and Fire. The costs are reviewed annually as part of the budget setting process and in 2023/24, the sum of £0.38m was charged to NCFRA for all this support.

NCFRA and Northamptonshire Police work together on a number of collaboration and other activities or where one organisation provides services for another. A separate collaboration agreement is in place which sets out the governance arrangements for existing and future collaborative activities between OPFCC, the Chief Constable (CC) and NCFRA. This agreement is due to be reviewed in 2024/25.

NCFRA and Police collaborate on operational and non-operational activities. Shared support services teams are in place for a number of services and shared accommodation in Darby House. During 2023/24, net charges of £2.755m were charged by Police to NCFRA.

NCFRA collaborate and deliver mutual aid arrangements to and from other Fire Authorities. They collaborate with Warwickshire for the control room and system.

The OPFCC maintains a register of business interests and key members of staff in the OPFCC and NCFRA Chief Officers and the JIAC members are required, at the end of each year, to declare whether they, or any member of their immediate family, have had any related party transactions (i.e. significant financial dealings) with the OPFCC and NCFRA. All returns were received and reviewed by the s151 Officer and no disclosures are required.

During the year, whilst NCFRA do not contribute financially, they continued as active participants in the Cadets arrangements with other emergency services in Northamptonshire.

NCFRA continued to receive some support services from West Northamptonshire which had been previously provided by Local Government Shared Services (LGSS) and Northamptonshire County Council (NCC). These charges equated to £67k. The arrangement finished at the end of the year when the remaining support functions (eg. Payroll) were brought in-house.

Note 22. Capital Expenditure and Capital Financing

The movement on the Capital Financing Requirement in the year was as follows:

31 March 2023 £000		31 March 2024 £000
5,753	**Opening Capital Financing Requirement**	7,218
	Capital Investment:	
2,871	Property, Plant and Equipment	2,305
2,871	**Total Capital Spending**	**2,305**
	Sources of Finance:	
(60)	Capital Receipts	(90)
(628)	Earmarked Reserves	-
(239)	Section 106 Receipts	(34)
	Sums set aside from revenue:	
(479)	Direct revenue contributions	(403)
(1,406)	**Total Sources of Finance**	**(527)**
7,218	**Closing Capital Financing Requirement**	**8,996**

The year end position on the Capital Financing Requirement consists of the following:

31 March 2023 £000		31 March 2024 £000
	Capital Investment:	
48,681	Property, Plant and Equipment	47,469
-	Asset Held for Sale	3,500
48,681	**Total Capital Spending**	**50,969**
	Unusable Capital Reserves:	
(7,351)	Revaluation Reserve	(9,584)
(34,336)	Capital Adjustment Account	(32,613)
(41,687)	**Total Unusable Capital Reserves**	**(42,197)**
	1st January 2019 Stock on Governance Transfer	
224	Inventories	224
7,218	**Closing Capital Financing Requirement**	**8,996**

Note 23. Operating Leases

The Authority has some property and vehicle leases which have been accounted for as operating leases.

The future minimum payments due under operating lease in future years are:

31 March 2023 £000		31 March 2024 £000
59	Minimum lease payments	18

The expenditure charged to service lines in the Comprehensive Income and Expenditure during the period in relation to these leases were:

31 March 2023 £000		31 March 2024 £000
59	Less than one year (payments)	45
138	One to five years	138
197	**Total**	**183**

Note 24. Commitments

NCFRA discloses all material Capital Commitments and after a review of all approved contracts, there were no significant capital commitments in existence prior to 31st March 2024. NCFRA has a significant capital programme for the next 10 years and therefore the expectation is to spend a material amount on a capital expenditure in future years but as at the 31st March 2024 not entered into any material contracts for delivery in the 2024/25 financial year and beyond.

Note 25. Redundancy and Early Retirement Costs – Exit packages

Redundancy and early retirement costs are payable when employment is terminated before the normal retirement date or when an employee accepts voluntary redundancy in exchange for these payments.

These costs are recognised only when the Authority is demonstrably committed to terminate the employment on the affected employees.

In the 12 months between April 2023 and March 2024 there was one redundancy payment committed to during this period with an expected value of between £25-£30k. There were no redundancy payments decided in the 12 months between April 2022 and March 2023.

Note 26. Pensions

Note 26.1. Participation in pension schemes

As part of the terms and conditions of employment of its officers and other employees, the Authority offers retirement benefits. Although these will not actually be payable until employees retire, the Authority has a commitment to make payments that need to be disclosed at the time that employees earn their future entitlement. The Authority participates in two defined benefit pension schemes:

- the Local Government Pension Scheme for civilian employees, administered by West Northamptonshire Council – this is a funded scheme, meaning that the Authority and employees pay contributions into a fund, calculated at a level estimated to balance the pensions liabilities with investment assets. In 2023/24, the rate of contributions payable by employees range from 5.5% to 12.5% depending on the salary band of the employee. The Authority contributes at the rate prescribed by the Fund's actuary.

- the Firefighters’ Pension Scheme – this is an unfunded scheme, meaning that there are no investment assets built up to meet the pensions liabilities, and cash has to be generated to meet actual pensions payments as they eventually fall due.

  On 1 April 2015 a new Firefighters’ Pension Scheme was introduced, and the following notes include the data for the three schemes combined (2015, 2006 and 1992). Employees' and employers' contributions into the Firefighters’ Pension Fund are determined by the Secretary of State on the advice of the Government Actuary. Payments of pensions and other retirement benefits are made from the Pension Fund. Government grant is payable to cover any shortfall on the Pension Fund Account.

Note 26.2. Transactions relating to retirement benefits

The Authority recognises the cost of retirement benefits in the Net Cost of Services when employees earn them, rather than when the benefits are eventually paid as pensions. However, the funding needs of the Authority are based upon the cash payable in the year, so the real cost of retirement benefits is reversed out after Net Operating Expenditure. The following transactions have been made during the year:

	Local Government Pension Scheme March 2023 £000	Fire Fighters Pension Scheme March 2023 £000	Total March 2023 £000	Local Government Pension Scheme March 2024 £000	Fire Fighters Pension Scheme March 2024 £000	Total March 2024 £000
Income and Expenditure Account						
Cost of Services						
Current Service Cost	913	5,420	6,333	455	1,530	1,985
Past Service Cost (including Settlements and Curtailments)			-		(40)	(40)
Financing and Investment Income and Expenditure						
Net Interest Expense	126	8,730	8,856	19	10,950	10,969
Total defined benefit cost recognised in Income and Expenditure Account	**1,039**	**14,150**	**15,189**	**474**	**12,440**	**12,914**
Return on plan assets (excluding the amount included in the net interest expense)	676	-	676	(504)	-	(504)
Actuarial gains and losses arising on changes in demographic assumptions	(68)	-	(68)	(56)	-	(56)
Actuarial gains and losses arising on changes in financial assumptions	(6,023)	98,400	92,377	(698)	(3,120)	(3,818)
Other	758	-	758	297		297
Total remeasurements recognised in Other Comprehensive Income (OCI)	**(4,657)**	**98,400**	**93,743**	**(961)**	**(3,120)**	**(4,081)**
Movement in Reserves Statement						
Reversal of net charges made for retirement benefits in accordance with IAS19	4,331	90,580	94,911	868	(6,720)	(5,852)
Actual amount charged against the General Fund Balance for pensions in the year:						
Employers' contribution payable to scheme (LGPS)/Retirement Benefits payable to pensioners (FPS)	(341)	(6,330)	(6,671)	(389)	(8,840)	(9,229)

Note 26.3. Assets and liabilities in relation to retirement benefits

The Local Government Pension Scheme contributions payable by employers are determined by the actuary to the Pension Fund based on triennial valuations, the most recent of which was at 31 March 2022 which has changed the level of contributions from 2023/24. The level of contributions payable during the year was consistent with 2022/23.

Reconciliation of asset and benefit obligation:

	Local Government Pension Scheme 31 March 2023 £000	Fire Fighters Pension Scheme 31 March 2023 £000	Total 31 March 2023 £000	Local Government Pension Scheme 31 March 2024 £000	Fire Fighters Pension Scheme 31 March 2024 £000	Total 31 March 2024 £000
Opening Defined Benefit Obligation	**13,811**	**329,740**	**343,551**	**9,384**	**239,160**	**248,544**
Current Service Cost	913	5,420	6,333	455	1,530	**1,985**
Past Service Cost			-		(40)	**(40)**
Interest Cost	381	8,730	9,111	455	10,950	**11,405**
Contribution by Scheme Participants	126	1,290	1,416	142	1,430	**1,572**
Actuarial Gains and Losses:			-			**-**
Arising from changes in demographic assumptions	(68)	-	(68)	(56)	-	**(56)**
Arising from changes in financial assumptions	(6,023)	(98,400)	(104,423)	(698)	3,120	**2,422**
Return on assets	-	-	-	-	-	**-**
Other	378	-	378	297	-	**297**
Curtailments, Settlements and past Service Costs	-	-	-	-	-	**-**
Benefits paid	(134)	(7,620)	(7,754)	(197)	(10,270)	**(10,467)**
Closing Defined Benefit Obligation	**9,384**	**239,160**	**248,544**	**9,782**	**245,880**	**255,662**

Reconciliation of opening and closing balances of the fair value of scheme assets:

	LGPS Pension Scheme 31 March 2023 £000	LGPS Pension Scheme 31 March 2024 £000
Opening Fair Value of Employer Assets	9,117	9,021
Return on Plan Assets, excluding the amount included in the net interest costs	(676)	504
Interest income on Plan assets	255	436
Benefits Paid	(142)	(197)
Contributions from Employer	341	389
Contributions by scheme participants	126	142
Closing Fair Value of Employer Assets	**9,021**	**10,295**

The expected return on scheme assets is determined by considering the expected returns available on the assets underlying the current investment policy. Expected yields on fixed interest investments are based on gross redemption yields as at the Balance Sheet date. Expected returns on equity investments reflect long-term real rates of return experienced in the respective markets.

Note 26.4. Scheme history

	Local Government Pension Scheme March 2023 £000	Fire Fighters Pension Scheme March 2023 £000	Total March 2023 £000	Local Government Pension Scheme March 2024 £000	Fire Fighters Pension Scheme March 2024 £000	Total March 2024 £000
Present value of the defined benefit obligation	(9,384)	(239,160)	(248,544)	(9,782)	(245,880)	(255,662)
Fair value of plan assets	9,021	-	9,021	10,295	-	10,295
Net Liability arising from defined benefit obligation	**(363)**	**(239,160)**	**(239,523)**	**513**	**(245,880)**	**(245,367)**

The liabilities show the underlying commitments that the Authority has in the long-run to pay retirement benefits. The total liability of £245.4m has a substantial impact on the net worth of the Authority as recorded in the Balance Sheet. However, statutory arrangements for funding the deficit mean that the financial position of the Authority remains healthy:

- the pension fund has recently undergone a triennial valuation, which recommended increased contributions over the remaining working life of employees, as assessed by the scheme actuary. Whilst the on going financial actuarial valuation is more positive that it previously has been, it is important to note, that this considers those increased contributions; and
- finance is only required to be raised to cover fire pensions when the pensions are actually paid.

Note 26.5. Basis for estimating assets and liabilities

Liabilities have been assessed on an actuarial basis using the projected unit method, an estimate of the pensions that will be payable in future years dependent on assumptions about mortality rates, salary levels, etc. The annual Authority budget will make allowance for the firefighter's pension scheme payments based on an estimate of when such payments fall due. The Authority's budget is set taking the employer's pension contribution into account and government grant is received to cover any shortfall in the account.

The Government Actuaries Department (GAD), has assessed both the Firefighters' scheme and the Local Government Pension Scheme (LPGS) liabilities. The main assumptions used in their calculations are as follows:

Local Government Pension Scheme March 2023 %	Fire Fighters Pension Scheme March 2023 %		Local Government Pension Scheme March 2024 %	Fire Fighters Pension Scheme March 2024 %
2.95	3.00	Rate of inflation	2.75	2.60
3.45	4.75	Rate of increase in salaries	3.25	3.85
2.95	3.00	Rate of increase in pensions	2.75	2.60
4.75	2.65	Rate for discounting scheme liabilities	4.85	4.75
50	N/A	Take up of option to convert annual Pension into retirement grant	50	N/A

The estimation of the defined benefit obligations is sensitive to the actuarial assumptions set out in the table above. The sensitivity analyses below have been determined based on reasonably possible changes of the assumptions occurring at the end of the reporting period and assumes for each change that the assumption analysed changes while all the other assumptions remain constant. The assumptions in longevity, for example, assume that life expectancy increases or decreases for men and women. In practice, this is unlikely to occur, and changes in some of the assumptions may be interrelated. The estimations in the sensitivity analysis have followed the accounting policies for the scheme, i.e. on an actuarial basis using the projected unit credit method. The methods and types of assumptions used in preparing the sensitivity analysis below did not change from those used in the previous period.

Local Government Pension Scheme March 2023	Fire Fighters Pension Scheme March 2023		Local Government Pension Scheme March 2024	Fire Fighters Pension Scheme March 2024
		65 year old current pensioner		
20.6	21.5	Male	20.4	21.3
24.9	21.5	Female	24.7	21.3
		45 year old future pensioner at age 65		
21.8	23.2	Male	21.6	22.9
25.7	23.2	Female	25.5	22.9

		Impact on Defined Benefit Obligation		
Local Government Pension scheme March 2023	Fire Fighters Pension Scheme March 2023	Increase/Decrease in assumption	Local Government Pension scheme March 2024	Fire Fighters Pension Scheme March 2024
4%	3.5%	Longevity (increase in 1 year)	4%	2.5%
0.0%	1.5%	Rate of increase in salaries (increase by 0.1%)	0.0%	0.5%
2.0%	8.0%	Rate of increase in pensions (increase 0.1%)	2.0%	7.0%
2.0%	-9.5%	Rate for discounting Scheme liabilities (decrease by 0.1%)	2.0%	-6.5%

The Fire Pension Scheme has no assets to cover its liabilities. The Local Government Pension Scheme's assets consist of the following categories, by proportion of the total assets held:

31 March 2023 £000		31 March 2024 £000
136	Cash and Cash Equivalents	194
	Equity Securities	
	Consumer	109
	Manufacturing	96
	Energy and Utilities	45
	Financial Institutions	93
	Health and Care	72
	Information Technology	185
	Other	19
	Debt Securities Bonds	
741	Government	1,509
	Property	
521	UK	546
71	Overseas	75
	Private Equity	
677	All	765
	Investment Funds and Trust Units	
5,351	Equities	4,446
890	Bonds	1,499
	Commodities	
634	Infrastructure	643
	Derivatives	
0	Other	0
9,021	**Total Assets**	**10,295**

Note 26.6. Pensions Reserve

	Local Government Pension Scheme 31 March 2023 £000	Fire Fighters Pension Scheme 31 March 2023 £000	Total 31 March 2023 £000	Local Government Pension Scheme 31 March 2024 £000	Fire Fighters Pension Scheme 31 March 2024 £000	Total 31 March 2024 £000
Opening Balance	**4,694**	**329,740**	**334,434**	**363**	**239,160**	**239,523**
Current service cost	913	5,420	6,333	455	1,530	**1,985**
Interest cost	126	8,730	8,856	19	10,950	**10,969**
Changes in assumptions	(5,029)	(98,400)	(103,429)	(961)	3,120	**2,159**
Past service cost, including curtailments	-	-	-	-	(40)	**(40)**
Contributions by employer/employee	(341)	1,290	949	(389)	1,430	**1,041**
Benefits Paid	-	(7,620)	(7,620)	-	(10,270)	**(10,270)**
Return on assets less interest	-	-	-	-	-	**-**
Closing Balance	**363**	**239,160**	**239,523**	**(513)**	**245,880**	**245,367**

Note 27. Financial Instruments

Financial instruments are recognised on the Balance Sheet when the Fire Authority becomes party to the contractual provisions of a financial instrument. They are initially measured at fair value.

Financial Liabilities

Financial liabilities are subsequently measured at amortised cost. For the Fire Authority's borrowing this means that the amount presented in the Balance Sheet is the outstanding principal repayable (plus accrued interest).

Annual charges to the Financing and Investment Income and Expenditure line in the Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement are based on the carrying amount of the liability, multiplied by the effective rate of interest for the instrument.

Financial Assets

Financial assets are classified as below:

1) Financial assets held at amortised cost. These represent loans and loan-type arrangements where repayments of interest and principal take place on set dates and at specified amounts. The amount presented in the Balance Sheet represents the outstanding principal received plus accrued interest. Interest credited to the CIES is the amount receivable as per the loan agreement.
2) Fair Value Through Profit and Loss (FVTPL). These assets are measured and carried at fair value. All gains and losses due to changes in fair value (both realised and unrealised) are recognised in the CIES as they occur.

Allowances for impairment losses have been calculated for amortised cost assets, applying the expected credit losses model. Changes in loss allowances (including balances outstanding at the date of derecognition of an asset) are debited/credited to the Financing and Investment Income and Expenditure line in the CIES.

As at the 31st March 2024 (or 31st March 2023), the Authority has no type 2) assets or liabilites in its balance sheet.

Changes in the value of assets carried at fair value are debited/credited to the Financing and Investment Income and Expenditure line in the CIES as they arise.

Note 27.1. Financial Instruments

The value of debtors and creditors reported in the table below are solely those amounts meeting the definition of a financial instrument. The balances of debtors and creditors reported in the balance sheet and Notes 11 and 14 also include balances which do not meet the definition of a financial instrument, such as tax-based debtors and creditors.

31 March 2023			31 March 2024	
Long term £'000	Short term £'000		Long term £'000	Short term £'000
		Financial assets at amortised cost		
0	0	Investments	0	10
0	1,699	Debtors	0	3,811
0	**1,699**	**Total Financial Assets**	**0**	**3,821**
		Financial liabilities at amortised cost		
(3,135)	0	Borrowing	(3,060)	0
0	(4,877)	Creditors	0	(7,179)
(3,135)	**(4,877)**	**Total Financial Liabilities**	**(3,060)**	**(7,179)**

Note 27.2. Financial Instruments - Income, Expense, Gains and Losses

2022/23			2023/24	
Financial Liabilities Measured at Amortised Cost £'000	Financial Assets Measured at Amortised Cost £'000		Financial Liabilities Measured at Amortised Cost £'000	Financial Assets Measured at Amortised Cost £'000
70		Interest Expense	62	
70	**-**	**Total Expense in Surplus/Deficit on the Provision of Service**	**62**	
0	(46)	Interest Income		(238)
-	**(46)**	**Total income in Surplus/Deficit on the Provision of Services**		**(238)**
70	**(46)**	**Net Gain/(Loss) for the Year**	**62**	**(238)**

Note 27.3. Financial Instruments - Fair value of assets and liabilities

Financial liabilities and financial assets classed as financial assets and financial liabilities at amortised cost are carried in the balance sheet at amortised cost. Their fair values can be estimated by calculating the present value of cash flows that will take place over the remaining term of the instruments.

31 March 2023			31 March 2024	
Carrying Amount £'000	Fair Value £'000		Carrying Amount £'000	Fair Value £'000
		Financial Assets Held at amortised cost		
0	0	Investments	10	10
1,699	1,699	Debtors	3,396	3,396
1,699	**1,699**	**Total Financial Assets**	**3,406**	**3,406**
		Financial liabilities at amortised cost		
(3,135)	(2,445)	Public Works Loan Board Borrowing	(3,060)	(2,257)
(4,877)	(4,877)	Creditors	(6,225)	(6,225)
(8,012)	**(7,322)**	**Total Financial Liabilities**	**(9,285)**	**(8,482)**

The fair value of borrowing is less than the carrying value because this reflects the fact that the average rate of interest (1.98%) on the Fire Authorities's borrowing is less than current rates (4.23%) for new borrowing.

Note 27.4. Credit risk management practices

The authority's credit risk management practices are set out in the annual Treasury Management Strategy document.

Firefighters' Pension Fund Account

For The Year Ended 31 March 2024

2022/23 £000		Note	2023/24 £000
	Income To The Fund		
	<u>Income to the Fund</u>		
	Contributions Receivable		
	From Employer		
(3,163)	Normal Contributions	7	(3,253)
(1,456)	From Members	9	(1,457)
	Transfers in		
(65)	Individual transfers in from other schemes		(10)
	Other income		(5)
	<u>Expenditure by the Fund</u>		
	Benefits Payable		
7,844	Pensions including ill health		8,833
534	Commutations and lump sum retirement benefits		1,623
	Less Injury		(426)
	Payments to and on account of leavers		
170	Individual transfers out to other schemes		-
3,864	**Net amount payable for the year**		**5,305**
-	Refund to be received from HMRC		-
(3,864)	**Top up grant receivable from Central Government**	10	(5,305)
-	**Net Fund position for year**		-

31 March 2023 £000	Net Current Assets and Liabilities	Note	31 March 2024 £000
(952)	Top Up grant receivable/(received) from Central Government	10	(1,490)
952	Amount Owing to/(owed by) Northamptonshire Fire & Rescue		1,490
-	**Total**		-

NOTES TO FIREFIGHTERS' PENSION FUND ACCOUNT

Notes to the Firefighters Pension Fund Statement

1. This statement has been prepared in accordance with the Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in Great Britain.

2. Three pension schemes operate within the Fund, the 1992 scheme, the 2006 scheme, and the 2015 scheme. However, the 1992 scheme and the 2006 scheme closed to future accrual on 31 March 2022.

3. The Fund is administered and managed according to the statutory requirements set out in the 1992, 2006, and 2015 scheme legislation.

4. The Firefighters Pension Schemes are unfunded and as such have no investment assets. They are funded through employee and employer contributions and Government grant.

5. All firefighter pension related benefits are charged to the Firefighters Pension Fund Account with the exception of costs relating to non-member retirement on ill health grounds and all costs relating to injury pensions, which are charged to the Fire Service Operating Account (revenue).

6. The Fund Account captures income and liabilities relevant to the period shown and therefore does not take account of liabilities to pay pensions and other benefits after the period end.

7. Normal Employer contributions for 2015 scheme are 28.8% of pensionable pay.

8. For any retirement on ill health grounds the Fire Service is required to make a payment to the Pension Fund from its revenue account. This is payable over 3 years. There were 0 retirements of scheme members on ill health grounds.

9. Members contributions for the 2015 scheme, changed to having banded contributions, as set out below:

2015 scheme members Pensionable Pay	FPS 2015 %
Up to £27,818	11.0
£27,819 to £51,515	12.9
£51,516 to £142,500	13.5
£142,501 or more	14.5

10. These accounts have been prepared on an accruals basis.

Glossary Of Terms

1 Accounting period
The length of time covered by the accounts, normally a period of twelve months commencing on 1 April. The end of the accounting period is the Balance Sheet date.

2 Accruals
Sums included in the final accounts to recognise revenue and capital income and expenditure earned or incurred in the financial year, but for which actual payment had not been received or made as at 31 March.

3 Actuarial gains and losses
For defined benefit schemes, the changes in actuarial deficits or surpluses arise because:
events have not coincided with the actuarial assumptions made for the last valuation (experience gains or losses) or the actuarial assumptions have changed.

4 Asset
An item having value to the authority in monetary terms. Assets are categorised as either current or fixed:
A current asset will be consumed or cease to have material value within the next financial year (e.g. cash and stock);

A fixed asset provides benefits to the Authority and to the services it provides for a period of more than one year and may be tangible e.g. a community building, or intangible, e.g. computer software licences.

5 Audit of accounts
An external audit is an independent examination of the financial records prepared by an organisation. The main objective of an external audit is to verify that the accounting records for a company provide a true and accurate picture of the organisation's finances and that statements are prepared in accordance to the set laws and accounting standards. External audits also add value by identifying areas where efficiency in the business can be improved and where controls and processes may be made more effective.

6 Balance sheet
A statement of the recorded assets, liabilities and other balances at the end of the accounting period.

7 Budget
The forecast of net revenue and capital expenditure over the accounting period.

8 Capital expenditure
Expenditure on the acquisition of a fixed asset, which will be used in providing services beyond the current accounting period, or expenditure which adds to and not merely maintains the value of an existing fixed asset.

9 Capital financing
Funds raised to pay for capital expenditure. There are various methods of financing capital expenditure including borrowing, leasing, direct revenue financing, usable capital receipts, capital grants, capital contributions, revenue reserves and earmarked reserves.

10 Capital programme
The capital schemes the Authority intends to carry out over a specific period of time.

11 Capital receipt
The proceeds from the disposal of land or other fixed assets. Proportions of capital receipts can be used to finance new capital expenditure, within rules set down by the government but they cannot be used to finance revenue expenditure.

12 CIPFA
The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy.

13 Collection fund
A separate fund that records the income and expenditure relating to Council Tax and non-domestic rates.

14 Consistency
The concept that the accounting treatment of like items within an accounting period and from one period to the next is the same.

15 Contingent asset
A contingent asset is a possible asset arising from past events whose existence will be confirmed only by the occurrence of one or more uncertain future events not wholly within the Authority's accounts.

16 Contingent liability
A contingent liability is either: a possible obligation arising from past events whose existence will be confirmed only by the occurrence of one or more uncertain future events not wholly within the Authority's control; or a present obligation arising from past events where it is not probable that a transfer of economic benefits will be required, or the amount of the obligation cannot be measured with sufficient reliability.

17 Creditor
Amount owed by the Authority for work done, goods received or services rendered within the accounting period, but for which payment has not been made by the end of that accounting period.

18 Current service cost (pensions)
The increase in the present value of a defined benefits pension scheme's liabilities, expected to arise from employee service in the current period.

19 Debtor
Amount owed to the Authority for works done, goods received or services rendered within the accounting period, but for which payment has not been received by the end of that accounting period.

20 Deferred charges
Expenditure which can be properly deferred (i.e. treated as capital in nature), but which does not result in, or remain matched with, a tangible asset. Examples of deferred charges are grants of a capital nature to voluntary organisations.

21 Defined benefit pension scheme
Pension schemes in which the benefits received by the participants are independent of the contributions paid and are not directly related to the investments of the scheme.

22 Depreciation
The measure of the cost of wearing out, consumption, or other reduction, in the useful economic life of the Authority's fixed assets during the accounting period, whether from use, the passage of time or obsolescence through technical or other changes.

23 Discretionary benefits (pensions)
Retirement benefits which the employer has no legal, contractual or constructive obligation to award and are awarded under the Authority's discretionary powers such as the Local Government (Discretionary Payments) Regulations 1996.

24 Equity
The Authority's value of total assets less total liabilities.

25 Events after the balance sheet date
Events after the Balance Sheet date are those events, favourable or unfavourable, that occur between the Balance Sheet date and the date when the Statement of Accounts is authorised for issue.

26 Exceptional items
Material items which derive from events or transactions that fall within the ordinary activities of the Authority and which need to be disclosed separately by virtue of their size or incidence to give fair presentation of the accounts.

27 Expected return on pension assets
For a funded defined benefit scheme, this is the average rate of return, including both income and changes in fair value but net of scheme expenses, which is expected over the remaining life of the related obligation on the actual assets held by the scheme.

28 Extraordinary items
Material items, possessing a high degree of abnormality, which derive from events or transactions that fall outside the ordinary activities of the Authority and which are not expected to recur. They do not include exceptional items, nor do they include prior period items merely because they relate to a prior period.

29 Fair value
The fair value of an asset is the price at which it could be exchanged in an arm's length transaction less, where applicable, any grants receivable towards the purchase or use of the asset.

30 Government grants
Grants made by the government towards either revenue or capital expenditure in return for past or future compliance with certain conditions relating to the activities of the Authority. These grants may be specific to a particular scheme or may support the revenue spend of the Authority in general.

31 Impairment
A reduction in the value of a fixed asset to below its carrying amount on the Balance Sheet.

32 Income and expenditure account
The revenue account of the Authority that reports the net cost for the year of the functions for which it is responsible and demonstrates how that cost has been financed from precepts, grants and other income.

33 Interest cost (pensions)
For a defined benefit scheme, the expected increase during the period of the present value of the scheme liabilities because the benefits are one period closer to settlement.

34 Investments (pension fund)
The investments of the Pension Fund will be accounted for in the statements of that fund. However, authorities are also required to disclose, as part of the disclosure requirements relating to retirement benefits, the attributable share of the pension scheme assets associated with their underlying obligations.

35 Liability

A liability is where the Authority owes payment to an individual or another organisation. A current liability is an amount which will become payable or could be called in within the next accounting period, e.g. creditors or cash overdrawn.

A deferred liability is an amount which by arrangement is payable beyond the next year at some point in the future or to be paid off by an annual sum over a period of time.

36 Liquid resources

Current asset investments that are readily disposable by the Authority without disrupting its business and are either: readily convertible to known amounts of cash at or close to the carrying amount; or traded in an active market.

37 Long term contract

A contract entered into for the design, manufacture or construction of a single substantial asset or the provision of a service (or a combination of assets or services which together constitute a single project), where the time taken to substantially complete the contract is such that the contract activity falls into more than one accounting period.

38 Materiality

The concept that the Statement of Accounts should include all amounts which, if omitted, or mis-stated, could be expected to lead to a distortion of the financial statements and ultimately mislead a user of the accounts.

39 Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP)

The minimum amount which must be charged to the revenue account each year in order to provide for the repayment of loans and other amounts borrowed by the Authority.

40 Net book value

The amount at which fixed assets are included in the Balance Sheet, i.e. their historical costs or fair value less the cumulative amounts provided for depreciation.

41 Net debt

The Authority’s borrowings less cash and liquid resources.

42 Non-domestic rates (NDR)

The Non-Domestic Rate is a levy on businesses, based on a national rate in the pound set by the government and multiplied by the assessed rateable value of the premises they occupy.

43 Non-operational assets

Fixed assets held by the Authority but not directly occupied, used or consumed in the delivery of services. Examples are investment properties, assets under construction or assets surplus to requirements pending sale or redevelopment.

44 Operating lease

A lease where the ownership of the fixed asset remains with the lessor.

45 Operational assets

Fixed assets held and occupied, used or consumed by the Authority in the pursuit of its strategy and in the direct delivery of those services for which it has either a statutory or discretionary responsibility.

46 Past service cost (pensions)

For a defined benefit pension scheme, the increase in the present value of the scheme liabilities related to employee service in prior periods arising in the current period as a result of the introduction of, or improvement to retirement benefits.

47 Pension scheme liabilities

The liabilities of a defined benefit pension scheme for outgoings due after the valuation date. Scheme liabilities measured during the projected unit method reflect the benefits that the employer is committed to provide for service up to the valuation date.

48 Precept

The levy made by precepting authorities to billing authorities, requiring the latter to collect income from Council Tax on their behalf.

49 Prior year adjustment

Material adjustments applicable to previous years arising from changes in accounting policies or from the correction of fundamental errors. This does not include normal recurring corrections or adjustments of accounting estimates made in prior years.

50 Provision

An amount put aside in the accounts for future liabilities or losses which are certain or very likely to occur but the amounts or dates of when they will arise are uncertain.

51 Public Works Loan Board (PWLB)

A Central Government Agency, which provides loans for one year and above to authorities at interest rates only slightly higher than those at which the government can borrow itself.

52 Rateable value

The annual assumed rental of a hereditament, which is used for NDR purposes.

53 Related parties

There is a detailed definition of related parties in IAS 24. For the Authority's purposes related parties are deemed to include the Authority's members, the Chief Executive, its Directors and their close family and household members.

54 Related party transactions

The Code requires the disclosure of any material transactions between the Authority and related parties to ensure that stakeholders are aware when these transactions occur and the amount and implications of such.

55 Remuneration

All sums paid to or receivable by an employee and sums due by way of expenses allowances (as far as those sums are chargeable to UK income tax) and the money value of any other benefits. Received other than in cash. Pension contributions payable by the employer are excluded.

56 Reserves

The accumulation of surpluses, deficits and appropriations over past years. Reserves of a revenue nature are available and can be spent or earmarked at the discretion of the Authority. Some capital reserves such as the fixed asset restatement account cannot be used to meet current expenditure.

57 Residual value

The net realisable value of an asset at the end of its useful life.

58 Retirement benefits
All forms of consideration given by an employer in exchange for services rendered by employees that are payable after the completion of employment.

59 Revenue expenditure
The day-to-day expenses of providing services.

60 Revenue support grant
A grant paid by Central Government to authorities, contributing towards the general costs of their services.

61 Stocks
Items of raw materials and stores an authority has procured and holds in expectation of future use. Examples are consumable stores, raw materials and products and services in intermediate stages of completion.

62 Temporary borrowing
Money borrowed for a period of less than one year.

63 Useful economic life (UEL)
The period over which the Authority will derive benefits form the use of a fixed asset

Annual Governance Statement - NCFRA

The Police and Crime Act 2017 enabled Police and Crime Commissioners to become responsible for the governance of fire and rescue authorities, subject to the approval of a business case by the Home Secretary. The aim of this legislation was to "enable fire and police services to work more closely together and develop the role of our elected and accountable Police and Crime Commissioners". Northamptonshire Commissioner Fire and Rescue Authority (NCFRA) was created on 1st January 2019. The Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner also acts as NCFRA.

The CIPFA/SOLACE Framework of Good Governance

In 2007, CIPFA developed with the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (Solace) a framework – "*Delivering good governance in local government".* This was subsequently reviewed in 2015 and an updated edition was published in April 2016.

This framework recognises that no two organisations are the same and as such allows an organisation to test its governance structures against a set of principles which are:

- Principle A: Behaving with integrity, demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values and respecting the rule of law
- Principle B: Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement
- Principle C: Defining outcomes in terms of sustainable, economic, social and environmental outcomes
- Principle D: Determining the interventions necessary to optimise the achievement of intended outcomes
- Principle E: Developing Capacity and Capability
- Principle F: Managing Risks and Performance
- Principle G: Implementing good practices in transparency, reporting and accountability.

What is Governance?

Governance as defined in the 2016 framework is:

"Governance comprises the arrangements put in place to ensure that the intended outcomes for stakeholders are defined and delivered."

Good governance is not only about rules, policies and procedures but should also incorporate a spirit of good governance as an integral part of the culture of the organisation, its values and the expected behaviours.

Senior leaders have a significant responsibility not only to ensure that good governance arrangements are properly codified and documented but also that the proper culture exists so that the concept of good governance, including transparency and openness, is effectively conveyed throughout their organisation.

This statement explains how the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner (PFCC) and Chief Constable has complied with the CIPFA/SOLACE framework and also meets the requirements of the Accounts and Audit Regulations in relation to the publication of an Annual Governance Statement.

The Annual Governance Statement

It is a requirement on each public body to prepare an annual governance statement. This is intended to provide an assessment of how effectively it has complied with its own governance arrangements and the principles set out in the framework.

This governance statement provides a high-level overview. It comments on the effectiveness of governance arrangements over 2023/24 and makes proposals to improve processes, or mitigate issues or risks identified.

The Purpose of the Governance Framework

The Corporate Governance Framework comprises the systems and processes, and culture and values, by which NCFRA is directed and controlled and its activities through which it accounts to, engages with, and leads the community. It enables the Authority (the PFCC) to monitor the achievement of its strategic objectives and to consider whether those objectives have led to the delivery of appropriate, value for money services.

The system of internal control is a significant part of that framework and is designed to manage risk to a reasonable level. It cannot eliminate all risk of failure to achieve policies, aims and objectives and can therefore only provide reasonable and not absolute assurance of effectiveness. The system of internal control is based on an ongoing process designed to identify and prioritise the risks to the achievement of the PFCC's policies, aims and objectives, to evaluate the likelihood of those risks being realised and the impact and to manage them efficiently, effectively and economically.

The Joint Corporate Governance Framework was reviewed last year and published in May 2023.

The Governance Framework

The Police, Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011 brought in the responsibility for local authorities to create a Police and Crime Panel. This panel is made up of local elected councillors and independent members with the responsibility to scrutinise and support the work of the Police and Crime Commissioner.

The Policing and Crime Act 2017 amended Section 28 (Powers of Police and Crime Panels) of the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011 to include the responsibilities of the new Fire and Rescue Authority. The functions of the Panel are set out in legislation and the Panel must also review or scrutinise decisions made, or other actions taken by the PFCC in connection with the discharge of their functions in relation to Policing and Fire and Rescue. The Panel is referred to as the Police, Fire and Crime Panel (PFCP).

The PFCC's Governance Arrangements

To ensure the effective administration of NCFRA, key meetings are as follows:

- The PFCC holds a monthly Accountability Board with the Chief Fire Officer, supported by statutory officers and senior fire and PFCC officers. Minutes are available on the OPFCC website.
- The PFCC meets regularly with the Chief Fire Officer and meetings are held between the Chief Fire Officer and key Officers from the Office of the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner (OPFCC).
- The terms of reference of the Joint Independent Audit Committee (JIAC) includes NCFRA. Four meetings of the Committee took place in 2023/24 and notes of the meetings are published on the OPFCC website. Additional workshops with a specific focus were also held. The JIAC provides independent assurance to the PFCC as NCFRA.
- A joint Assistant Chief Officer leads the Enabling Services Programme and provides strategic leadership of joint support services across Fire and Policing.
- A collaboration agreement is in place in line with the Home Office Financial Management Code of Practice. The agreement is due for review in 2024/25.
- Fire and Rescue Service have a number of meetings established at strategic and operational levels. Where appropriate, members of the OPFCC attend to provide scrutiny and challenge.
- During 2021/22, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services undertook their second inspection of Northamptonshire. The report was produced in July 2022. The next review concluded in April 2024 and findings are awaited.

In the full year to 31st March 2024, the PFCC has sought to ensure that appropriate management and reporting arrangements are in place to give assurance that the approach to corporate governance was both adequate and effective in practice.

The system of internal control is based on a system of financial, contractual, management and administrative controls and is reviewed by both internal and external audit.

Compliance with the seven principles set out in the CIPFA/SOLACE Framework

Principle A: Behaving with integrity, demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values and respecting the rule of law

The Corporate Governance Framework provides guidance on expected behaviours to ensure integrity and builds on the clear statements made by the PFCC and the Chief Fire Officer. The OPFCC has its own whistleblowing policy and associated policies in relation to complaints.

For the financial year 2023/24, related party disclosures have been received for all key staff in the OPFCC, JIAC members, and the Chief Fire Officer and Senior Officers.

The statutory roles of Monitoring Officer and Chief Finance Officer to NCFRA are held by the post holders in the OPFCC which provides consistency and continuity. Further details under Principle E below.
The policies for Fire transferred across to NCFRA under the Governance arrangements. Most have been reviewed and a policy/process is in place to ensure regular reviews are undertaken.

Principle B: Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement

The Authority's purpose is set out in statute. The vision for Northamptonshire is set out in the Police, Fire and Crime Plan and supported by the Community Risk Management Plan.

The OPFCC website is used to publish a wide range of policy and information, making this easily accessible to the public. The website includes key NCFRA governance information and the role of the PFCC in Fire Governance is set out. Agendas are available on the PFCC website, together with the minutes of the Accountability Board.

Decisions made by the PFCC are published on the website, together with consultations and details of future public events. The PFCC undertook public consultation to inform setting the Fire precept for 2022/23 and 2023/24. This consultation included wider public engagement on Fire and the report is available on the OPFCC website.

Significant stakeholder engagement was undertaken for the Police, Fire and Crime Plan and the Community Risk Management Plan. The report for the Police, Fire and Crime Plan is available on the PFCC website. Both of these plans are being reviewed in 2024/25.

Principle C: Defining outcomes in terms of sustainable, economic, social and environmental outcomes.

For the 2023/24 budget and precept, the Police, Fire and Crime Plan was used to direct the resources of NCFRA through the Revenue and Capital budgets.

Whilst still one of the lowest funded authorities nationally, and although future efficiencies are required, it is now in a much more stable and resilient position. The NCFRA revenue budget has increased by around £8.8m (over 39%) since the governance transfer and reserves are currently deemed adequate.

As in previous years, the 2023/24 and 2024/25 budgets were prepared on zero-based budget principles, the Chief Fire Officer was fully involved in the preparation of the budgets and a number of targeted meetings took place to develop the detail of the budget and the capital programme, which were aligned to key priorities.

Volatility on Fire budgets has continued to reduce in most areas during 2023/24 as demonstrated in the budget outturn position, with the main variations caused by the unavoidable affect of pay awards. Budget manager engagement continues to improve and the Finance personnel continue to work with the Chief Fire Officer and budget managers to improve monitoring and forecasting.

Principle D: Determining the interventions necessary to optimise the achievement of intended outcomes.

The NCFRA Capital Programme has continued to develop and includes essential operational requirements, together with some transformative requirements for the service. It is supported by asset strategies and these reflect the desired direction of travel for joint working between Fire and Police, building capacity or reducing costs to be reinvested in operational services.

As part of the monthly budget monitoring the Chief Fire Officer provides regular updates to the PFCC on the costs and delivery of the capital programme, particularly in relation to large scale building projects which have been affected by delays and inflationary increases following Brexit and Covid to ensure they can regularly be reviewed.
As a result the previously approved joint workshop is one project which was deemed cost prohibitive and an alternative delivery model is actively being progressed as part of a joint estates masterplan with Police.
The Authority has the strategies and plans in place to continue to evolve and change over time, and the Government's White Paper "Reforming our Fire and Rescue Service", will potentially bring further changes.
Joint Heads of Department are in place for all support functions, overseen by Assistant Chief Officer for Enabling Services. A joint finance system has been in place between Fire and Police since April 2023 and HR and payroll were implemented from April 2024. NCFRA are receiving the benefits of extra resilience and professional expertise from the joint arrangements.

The second HMICFRS Inspection took place in 2021/22 and was published in Summer 2022. The latest inspection report is expected in early Summer 2024.

The JIAC receive regular updates throughout the year on the progress of HMICFRS recommendations and the PFCC requires regular reports to the Accountability Board.

Principle E: Developing Capacity and Capability.

Following the governance transfer, after many years of holding vacancies, work has continued to recruit staff to build capacity and capability. Workforce planning is in place which regularly reviews current and future staffing plans and profiles.

The commitment to increasing wholetime firefighters supports wellbeing of the workforce whilst increasing capacity and resilience for the public of Northamptonshire. As such, appliance availability is always sought to be above 14 on average.

Whilst significant strides have been made in managing staffing resources, the links between risk, resources and appliance availability needs to be further aligned. An Emergency Cover Review (ECR) has taken place and will inform transformational plans in the coming months.

NCFRA has training capacity, skills and knowledge and there are options to review these to maximise the benefit from these resources of NCFRA. The Joint Commercial Team is working well across Fire and Police, and a commercial strategy is in place which is intended to consider all opportunities available to both services.

During 2023/24, both the Chief Finance Officer and Monitoring Officer left the OPFCC. A permanent replacement for the Monitoring Officer was recruited, and since 22nd December 2023 the Chief Finance Officer post has been filled on an interim basis. These statutory roles continued to be undertaken by the same advisers to the PFCC for policing which enables consistent advice to be provided across the services.

Mark Jones was in post as Chief Fire Officer until 7th July 2023 and replaced by Nicci Marzec as Interim Chief Officer until Simon Tuhill took over as Interim Chief Fire Officer from 18th July 2023 to 15th May 2024. Nikki Watson commenced as Chief Fire Officer on a permanent basis from 16th May 2024 and Simon Tuhill reverted to his substantive role is as Deputy Chief Fire Officer.

The permanent appointment into these roles will provide stability and capacity to drive forward work on the ECR and culture in particular.

Principle F: Managing Risks and Performance

NCFRA have a developed Risk Management process that is consistent with the OPFCC and Policing. The NCFRA risk register is considered at the JIAC meetings. Furthermore, an OPFCC Director attends the Fire Risk Management meetings where risks are considered. During 2023/24, internal auditors continued to deliver risk management support and expertise. As part of the move to joint working, in April 2023, NCFRA implemented the 4Risk risk management system, to support the approach with the OPFCC and the Force.

An audit was undertaken by Mazars during the year to specifically give assurance on risk management activity. The result was a 'Moderate' opinion, with two 'medium' and one 'low' recommendations. The recommendations were accepted and work is underway to address them.

An operational performance framework is in place that aligns to the outcomes in the previous Police, Fire and Rescue Plan and CRMP. This is a regular item at the Accountability Board, with monthly monitoring to the Chief Fire Officer's executive meeting.

During 2023/24, West Northamptonshire Council continued to deliver some payroll and HR activities, but all activities have transferred in house from 1st April 2024.

The JIAC Chair and three members continued in their roles throughout the year. A further member was appointed to complete the full compliment, and commenced their role in March 2024. JIAC members were offered and some attended CIPFA, EY (the external auditors), Public Sector Audit Appointments (PSAA) or other events. Additionally, EY and other circulars are shared with JIAC members and senior officers where provided.

Principle G: Implementing good practices in transparency, reporting and accountability.

External governance is managed through a system of assurance that includes attendance at meetings by OPFCC staff to fully understand activities and associated risks. There is a monthly robust, formal Accountability Board meeting regularly between the PFCC and Chief Fire Officer and this is supported by regular informal meetings.

The PFCC provides regular updates to the Police, Fire and Crime Panel as well as to elected Members, officials and members of the local community and has continued with the regular newsletter to Northamptonshire Members of Parliament. This includes an annual report by the Joint Independent Audit Committee (JIAC) that sets out their terms of reference, the work completed over the year and their opinion on the controls in place.

The OPFCC website contains a substantial amount of information to an appropriate level of transparency. In line with the Accounts and Audit Regulations, the draft 2022/23 NCFRA statement of accounts were placed on the OPFCC website by the 31st May 2024.

As with every year since NCFRA were established in 2018/19, it is a major concern to the PFCC, the Panel, JIAC and statutory officers, that, due to factors outside of NCFRA's and the PFCC's control, the audit of accounts has been delayed. Throughout the year, local and national concerns have been raised on a number of occasions regarding the time taken by current audit contracts for the organisation and the public of Northamptonshire.

Despite these strong representations, whilst the audit of 2021/22 accounts was completed successfully, the 2022/23 Statement of Accounts have not be audited in line with the statutory timescales. This is a national issue for external audit firms, and following detailed consultation, legislative changes are expected which should provide the ability for audit firms to catch up with historic audits. The changes will also seek to enable timely audits to be carried out for 2023/24 and into the future. The Chief Finance Officer will continue to work closely with the auditor to ensure audit work is scheduled and concluded as soon as possible so that transparency and accountability is delivered for the public of Northamptonshire in a timely and effective manner. Any delays will be reported on the PFCC website in line with the legislative requirements.

Internal Audit and Internal Audit Review of Effectiveness

The PFCC has the responsibility for conducting, at least annually, a review of the effectiveness of the governance framework, including the system of internal control. The review of effectiveness is informed by the work of the JIAC, internal and external auditors, HMICFRS, statutory officers and senior managers within the Authority who have responsibility for the development and maintenance of the governance environment.

The agreed Internal Audit Plan for 2023/24, was informed by statutory officers, approved by the PFCC and considered by JIAC in March 2023. The plan covered identified areas of risk and internal control. At the date of the reviewing the draft annual internal auditor report at the end of April 2024, two audit reports remain in draft form with final versions imminent. The assessment of internal controls for these audits and overall is not expected to change when these are finalised.

Fire provide an annual update for the PFCC on the progress of audit recommendations and the PFCC asks for updates on specific audits as appropriate. Furthermore, the JIAC received updates on Internal Audit Reports and Management's implementation of recommendations during the year.

Milton Keynes Internal Audit Services (MKIA) provided a comprehensive internal audit service to NCFRA from the governance transfer in January 2019 up to 2022/23. NCFRA contracted with Mazars from 2023/24 to provide the service to both Fire and Policing. This enables a comprehensive and holistic internal audit plan to be delivered across all services and also provides efficiencies for both Fire and Police.

Under the MKIA methodology, internal audits undertaken were given two assurance ratings:

- System – How the control environment is assessed and documented, and
- Compliance – How well the system and environment is working in practice.

There were five assurance ratings as follows: Substantial, Good, Satisfactory, Limited and No Assurance.

Under Mazars, each audit received a total rating of Significant, Moderate, Limited or No Assurance. (The ratings previously known as Good or Satisfactory are now under one heading – Moderate.)

Since the governance transfer, the PFCC and statutory officers have prioritised the need for Fire to embed an effective internal control framework and have targeted the internal audit programme to consider these key areas and to monitor them until controls have improved.

The assurance received shows demonstrable progress since the governance transfer as follows:

Audit Area	Assurance Rating				
	2021/22		2022/23		2023/24
	System	Compliance	System	Compliance	
Annual IA Report/Governance Statement	Satisfactory		Good		Moderate
Target Operating Model Performance Monitoring	Good	Good	Good	Good	
Target Operating Model - Golden Thread Data Quality	Limited	Limited			
Corporate Governance	Good	Good	Good	Satisfactory	
Financial Controls Environment	Good	Good	Substantial	Substantial	
Accounting Systems	Good	Good	Good	Good	
Core Financials*					Moderate
MTFP/Budgetary controls	Good	Good	Good	Satisfactory	
Payroll	Good	Satisfactory	Good	Satisfactory	Moderate
Contract Management			Good	Limited	
Project Management			Good	Satisfactory	
ICT Security - Data Recovery	Limited	Limited			
Network Infrastructure Security - Windows File Server			Good	Good	
Network Infrastructure Security - Privileged Access Control			Good	Good	
New Systems Assurance					Moderate
IT Identity Access Management*					Limited
IT Asset Management*					Moderate
Risk Management					Moderate
Equipment Maintenance and Testing	Good	Satisfactory			
Policies and Procedures - Safeguarding			Satisfactory	Limited	
EDI Plan (prev. People and Culture)	Good	N/A	Good	Satisfactory	Moderate
Grievance Policy & Procedure					Substantial

* Denotes joint audits with Police in 2023/24.

The audits reflect that whilst policies, procedures and compliance are adequately robust in the most part, there is work to do to elevate internal controls further.

The PFCC, the S151 Officer and the Chief Fire Officer will continue to monitor these areas closely and will identify areas where further assurance is required and act accordingly.

The Draft Internal Audit Annual Report for 2023/24 has been produced and a final report will be produced after all audit reports have been finalised. The final report will be considered by the JIAC at their meeting in July 2024. The results of the report are summarised as follows:

> "On the basis of our internal audit work, our opinion on the framework of governance, risk management, and control is Moderate in its overall adequacy and effectiveness. This opinion is provided on the basis that some improvements are required to enhance the adequacy and effectiveness of the framework of governance, risk management and control.
> Certain weaknesses and exceptions were highlighted by our internal audit work, where we have raised recommendations to further enhance the control framework. These matters have been discussed with management, with a full analysis of the assurance gradings and accompanying recommendations provided…"

CIPFA Financial Management Code

The CIPFA Financial Management Code translates the principles of good financial management into a series of financial standards that comprise: leadership and accountability, governance and financial management, medium term financial planning to inform and ensure financial resilience, and monitoring financial performance to address emerging issues through to financial reporting. Taken together these financial management standards underpin the effective governance of the use and control of resources utilised by NCFRA in pursuance of its stated objectives.
The S151 Officer, together with the Joint Finance Team and Joint Assistant Chief Officer for Enabling Services have considered a self-assessment against this framework. This review highlighted that compliance has mainly been achieved in all significant areas of the framework and a small number of areas have been highlighted for further consideration in 2024/25, and this is captured in the Annual Governance Statement (AGS) action plan as a recommendation.

Review of Effectiveness

The Internal Audit Plan was in place in 2023/24. The results of the audits continue to show good progress in key financials since the time of the governance transfer. The PFCC is fully appraised of these and will continue to seek assurance through statutory officer updates and the Accountability Board.

A training and induction session is scheduled for both new and existing audit committee members in July 2024 with key individuals and the S151 officers in attendance to provide context and understanding of the funding, governance, decision making and internal control environments for NCFRA.

There were four JIAC meetings during the year, and workshops to go through all the draft 2022/23 Statement of Accounts in detail. The four meetings considered the following across Fire and Police:

JIAC Meeting	Areas Covered	Fire	Police
July 2023	• Meeting of members with auditors without officers present • Annual Report of the JIAC and Terms of Reference Review • External Audit Update • Internal Audit Annual Report 2022/23 • Internal Audit Progress Report 2023/24 • Risk Register Update • Internal Audit progress against recommendations update • System Implementation (including new finance system) • HMICFRS Update • Benefits Realisation • Enabling Services Evaluation 2020 to 2023	Y Y Y Y Y Y Y Y Y Y Y	Y Y Y Y Y - - Y - Y Y
September	• Internal Audit Progress Report 2023/24	Y	Y

2023	• Internal Audit progress against recommendations update • External Audit Update • Anti-Fraud and Corruption Processes • HMICFRS Update • 2024/25 Budget and MTFP Processes, Plan and Timetable • OPFCC Risk Register Update • Enabling Services update	- Y Y - Y - Y	Y Y - Y Y Y Y
December 2023	• Internal Audit Progress Report 2023/24 • Internal Audit progress against recommendations update • External Audit Update • Anti-Fraud and Corruption Processes • HMICFRS Update • IT Disaster Recovery assurance • Feedback from the Accounts Workshops • Risk Register Update • Benefits Realisation	Y Y Y - Y Y Y - Y	Y - Y Y - Y Y Y Y
March 2024	• Internal Audit Progress Report 2023/24 • Internal Audit Plan 2024/25 • Internal Audit progress against recommendations update • External Audit Update • HMICFRS Update • 2024/25 Treasury Management Strategy • Risk Register Update	Y Y - Y - Y Y	Y Y Y Y Y Y -

Significant Governance Issues

There were no formal reports issued by the S151 or Monitoring Officer during the year, outcomes of Monitoring Officer Investigations, objections from local electors or ombudsman referrals. The financial settlement and precept flexibility for 2024/25 have enabled NCFRA to set a balanced budget for three years with an agreed realistic efficiency plan which will be kept under close review.

NCFRA have Fixed Asset Strategies, Reserves, Treasury Management Strategies and a Capital Programme in place, and the Capital Programme is regularly reviewed to ensure deliverability and affordability.

Representation will continue to be made for funding to mitigate this impact. It remains essential that opportunities to build resilience and capacity and maximise efficiencies continue to be taken forward with Policing. The internal control framework continues to develop, and it is important that this momentum is maintained.

Progress on the 2023/24 Recommendations

Good progress has been made on the 2023/24 AGS recommendations as follows:

Progress on 2023/24 Internal Control Actions		
Principle C: Defining outcomes in terms of sustainable, economic, social and environmental outcomes.	**Recommendation 1:** Complete the Emergency Cover Review and Propose Options for the PFCC Consideration and next steps.	Update: Ongoing. – On 2024/25 The review was completed and an action plan is being developed.
Principle D: Determining the interventions necessary to optimise the achievement of intended outcomes.	**Recommendation 2:** Northamptonshire HMICFRS Report 2022 - Continue to take forward recommendations and areas for improvement with specific attention to the Cause of Concern. Take forward recommendations and actions from the national HMICFRS Report "Culture and Values in Fire and Rescue Services 2023 and monitor updates regularly through JIAC and the Accountability Board.	Update: Ongoing. – On 2024/25 Regular updates are provided to the PFCC and JIAC. Insightful work has been undertaken through the 'Serving with Pride' project which forms the foundation for improvements in culture and core values. The next HMICFRS report is due in Summer 2024 and any areas for improvement will addressed.
Principle F: Managing Risks and Performance.	**Recommendation 3:** Take forward the recommendation from the Target Operating Model Performance Data audit and progress.	Update: Ongoing – On 2024/25 The recommendation was specifically around review of the Risk Management Policy, which needed informing by a secondary audit that was completed in Jan 2024. A new policy is going through consultation and should resolve this matter within Q1.
Principle G: Implementing good practices in transparency, reporting and accountability.	**Recommendation 4:** To work closely with Budget managers and the service to understand that the impact of proposals and decisions made can be fully understood to ensure that reliance can be placed on information provided and that unexpected volatility on the budget headings is minimised.	Completed – day-to-day budget management has improved and in 2023/24, the degree of volatility has reduced. However, a new recommendation has been added for 2024/25 specifically around the governance structure and business cases.
	Recommendation 5: To continue to take forward the Actions Identified from the self- assessment of the CIPFA Financial Management Code.	Update: Ongoing. – On 2024/25 Whilst there is progress in some areas, there are still improvements to be made to ensure robust and consistent governance is maintained.

Recommendations for 2024/25

Following the assessment of internal controls, the following areas have been recommended to embed and improve internal controls further in 2024/25:

2024/25 Internal Control Action Plan	
Principle C: Defining outcomes in terms of sustainable, economic, social and environmental outcomes.	**Recommendation 1:** Complete the Emergency Cover Review and Propose Options for the PFCC Consideration and next steps.
Principle D: Determining the interventions necessary to optimise the achievement of intended outcomes.	**Recommendation 2:** Northamptonshire HMICFRS Reports 2022 and 2024 - Continue to take forward recommendations and areas for improvement with specific attention to the Cause of Concern. Take forward recommendations and actions from the national HMICFRS Report "Culture and Values in Fire and Rescue Services 2023" and monitor updates regularly through JIAC and the Accountability Board.
Principle F: Managing Risks and Performance.	**Recommendation 3:** Take forward the recommendation from the Target Operating Model Performance Data audit and progress.
Principle G: Implementing good practices in transparency, reporting and accountability.	**Recommendation 4:** To improve the consistent application governance principles to option appraisals and investment decisions, ensuring business cases are robust and go through all the appropriate channels for well-informed decision-making.
Principle G: Implementing good practices in transparency, reporting and accountability.	**Recommendation 5:** In addition to those outlined above, to continue to take forward the actions identified from the self- assessment of the CIPFA Financial Management Code.
Principle D: Determining the interventions necessary to optimise the achievement of intended outcomes.	**Recommendation 6:** To undertake a review of the collaboration agreement between Police and Fire to ensure that governance arrangements are relevant and up-to-date.

Conclusion

Actions have been identified within this statement to take steps to address the above matters and further enhance the NCFRA governance arrangements. These actions will be monitored during the year and updated as part of the next annual review.

Signed: Danielle Stone
Police Fire and Crime Commissioner

Date:

Vaughan Ashcroft,
Interim Chief Finance Officer & s151 Officer
Northamptonshire Commissioner Fire and Rescue Authority

Date:

Independent Auditor's Report To The Police, Fire And Crime Commissioner For Northamptonshire

TBC