

## Internal Audit Division

*“Providing assurance on  
governance, risk management and  
control.”*



### Internal Audit Report Scottish Fire and Rescue Service

#### Review of the External Communication Arrangements Audit Year 2014/2015

|                     |   |
|---------------------|---|
| Draft Report Issued | 11 June 2015  |
| Final Report Issued | 22 July 2015  |
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## **1 Introduction**

1.1 This report summarises the key findings of the internal audit review of the External Communication Arrangements at Scottish Fire and Rescue (SFRS). The audit forms part of our planned assurance coverage agreed with the SFRS Audit and Risk Committee in March 2014.

A new Directorate Strategic Planning, Performance and Communications has recently been created which has overall responsibility for Corporate Communication, including External Communications and Engagement. One of the aims of this Directorate is to ensure the communication and engagement systems are appropriate for the size and national importance of SFRS. Part of this will be the development of the new Strategic Plan for 2016-19.

The Corporate Communications Team, which reports through this Directorate, provides support and assistance for the communication of key messages throughout the service, including media liaison, events and communication with the public, external partners and stakeholders. In addition to regular incident press release and campaign events, Communications has seen some significant incidents since the establishment of SFRS, including Clutha Bar and the Glasgow School of Art.

## **2 Scope, Key Risks and Approach**

2.1 The scope of the review was to evaluate and report on the control environment established to manage the risks relating to effective Governance arrangements in place around External Communications. This was structured around five areas; Strategy, Roles and Responsibilities, Procedural Guidance and Training, Risk Management Prioritisation and Resources.

The scope was a high level review focussing primarily on the Corporate Communications Team and included meetings and analysis of key documentation only.

2.2 The following key risks associated with the above areas were considered as part of this review:

- Communications capabilities are ineffective due to lack of effective governance and direction.
- Communications efforts fail due to a lack of knowledge/awareness of best practice.
- Communications efforts are targeted inappropriately or lack resources
- Reputational damage due to failure to respond adequately to emerging events/issues

2.3 The key messages and outcomes from this review are highlighted in the summary at Section 3 and the action plan agreed with management is provided at Section 4.

2.4 Annex 1 sets out the process we use for arriving at the Individual Assignment Assurance and the Annual Assurance.

2.5 I gratefully acknowledge the co-operation and assistance provided by the Director of Strategic Planning, Performance and Communications, the Corporate Communications Manager and her team, staff from Prevention and Protection and the wider Fire Service staff during this review.

### 3. Summary

#### Assurance Level

Reasonable

#### Recommendations

#### Number

0 High

4 Medium

1 Low

#### Context

The Fire and Rescue Service Scotland was formed in April 2013 following the amalgamation of eight legacy services. Corporate Communications was formed and included three media officers covering external communication in the North, East and West for the entire Scottish national service. During the period since establishment, Communications procedures continue to develop and a recruitment process is currently underway to expand the resource capacity within the team.

#### Key Messages

##### Areas of Good Practice/ Positives

- A structured approach was adopted for the development of the 2013-16 Communications Strategy which included consultation with the Local Stakeholder and Engagement Committee (LSEC) and there is evidence of the opportunity to participate in the development of the Service's Strategic Plan for 2016-19;
- Effective arrangements have been put in place for oversight and scrutiny of SFRS engagement plans and performance against agreed aims and objectives, with the introduction of a new Engagement Committee in January 2015 which replaces the LSEC
- Documented Procedures have been established for External Media Communication arrangements, which staff have been alerted to and are readily accessible on the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) Intranet;
- A regularly maintained Planner of projects and themed events facilitates preparation and development of Communication Plans for these upcoming Campaigns;
- An Evaluation Report records the success of themed events and campaigns using various quantitative and qualitative measurements.
- A comprehensive contact database is maintained for key partners, including Police Scotland, NHS and local authority and media contacts;

- Corporate Communications Manager provides oversight and support to Media Officers to ensure that messages and reports are consistent and aligned to the SFRS aims and vision. Press release information is retained on a shared database and posted to the Internet for wider record and view.
- Gold Command Training for senior officers incorporates practical media situations and it is understood that any new officers undertaking the role of Media Liaison Officer are required to undertake prescribed media training provided by Police Scotland, along with supported training from the Communications Team;

### Key Areas for Improvement

- Risks and challenges to achieving the External Communications objectives of the service, including those faced by the Communications team, should be formally documented along with an action plan and ownership of how these will be mitigated and addressed;
- Responsibility for developing and monitoring overall Communication and Engagement performance, including aims and appropriate indicators should be identified communicated and regularly reported.
- A structured process for monitoring, capturing and communicating best practice and lessons learned relating to significant incidents should be established in order to identify and address opportunities for improvement of the External Communications Service.
- High level desk instructions/ further guidance should be developed to support existing procedures and cover key roles and processes, including and not limited to the development, approval, distribution and implementation of communication plans, access and use of social media, regular review of control incident information and performance monitoring of communications output;
- Clear communication and coordination of current training provided should be established to ensure all key staff are aware of training undertaken and content provided to facilitate the ability to identify and address any training gaps.

**4 Action Plan**

| No. | Issue / Risk(s)  | Recommendation  | Priority (H/M/L) | Management Response / Action Owner   | Action Due    |
|-----|--|---|------------------|--|---------------|
| 1.  | <p><u>Managing Risks</u><br/>The risk and challenges of achieving External Communications objectives and specifically those risks faced by the Communications team have not been fully developed, formalised and reported. In particular, capacity issues have been identified both by the Corporate Communications team and by the Senior Leadership Team.</p> <p>Risk: <i>Communications objectives and efforts may not be effectively met and resources may not be effectively aligned.</i></p> | <p>a) Key personnel and stakeholders should have input into identifying risks to the Communication Objectives, identification of controls and an action plan of further mitigating action should be established to manage and reduce the risks. This should include control and management of succession planning.</p> <p>b) Consideration should be given to analysing and benchmarking the level of work related to emerging incidents, on-going themed events and campaigns along with general enquiries on a daily basis in order to ensure communications are effectively resourced.</p> | M                | <p>A) A review will be undertaken to identify the current risks and challenges facing efforts to achieve external communication objectives. This will be undertaken in conjunction with key personnel and stakeholders including SFRS's Engagement Committee. A plan will be prepared which will detail the current risks to the department in fulfilling its core objectives and will identify actions to ameliorate problems and mitigate the risks. This will include documenting on-going resourcing issues and any implications for the department. This will be shared with appropriate key personnel and stakeholders to identify how best to address any potential negative impact</p> | 31 March 2016 |

|    |   |  |   |  |                         |
|----|---|--|---|--|-------------------------|
|    |   |  |   | <p>on the function or on staff resilience and retention.</p> <p>B) Corporate communications will determine an appropriate system to benchmark the volume, scope and scale of work undertaken particularly in relation to media demand, PR campaigns and unexpected emergency work or event activity to ensure gaps in resourcing are identified and fed back to SLT/Board.</p> | <p>31 December 2015</p> |
| 2. | <p><u>Corporate Monitoring</u></p> <p>The Communications Strategy details six objectives for External Communications and states that a suite of indicators will be developed to provide performance information for external communication. It is understood that there is no formal evidence reporting delivery of objectives and while KPI's are identified for individual themed campaigns it is understood that corporate indicators have not been established.</p> <p><i>Risk: Opportunity may be missed to improve safety of communities, raise</i></p> | <p>Responsibility for developing and monitoring overall performance, including aims and indicators should be identified, communicated and regularly reported. Any variances should be analysed with appropriate action plans put in place.</p> | M | <p>Whilst performance indicators form a key part of our planned corporate and P&amp;P focussed communications campaigns we have not identified overall performance indicators for the function. We will now identify a suitable suite for external communications and a plan for monitoring performance and reporting on these objectives moving forward.</p>                  | <p>31 March 2016</p>    |

|            |   |  |                         |  |                   |
|------------|---|--|-------------------------|--|-------------------|
|            | <i>awareness of the service, engage effectively with stakeholders and improve the communications service.</i>   |  |                         |  |                   |
| 3.         | <p><b>Procedures</b><br/>It is acknowledged that Media Liaison procedures have been developed (along with supporting templates) covering responsibilities for responding to media request, media interest and press releases. However, there are no desk instructions which cover the process/procedure for development of Communication Plans (approval and engagement), or the routine process of checking control information with regard to incidents and responding to social media</p> <p>Observation point only: The Media Protocol document obtained has not been updated to reflect any review undertaken. The Toolkit has a date and version control number, however no note of review date.</p> <p><i>Risk: Key personnel may not have a clear understanding of the requirements of communication roles, processes and deliverable. This may lead to inconsistencies and a failure in communication efforts due to a lack of knowledge/awareness of best practice.</i></p> | Desk instructions covering key duties and processes not currently covered by procedures should be established, communicated and regularly reviewed to ensure that they remain fit for purpose. | M                       | <p>We will undertake to identify the gaps in the current suite of step-by-step guides/high-level desk procedures/templates we have in place. A priority action list will be prepared and guides will be produced and reviewed to ensure they are up to date and provide a relevant and easy to use reference tool.</p> <p>We will undertake a further review of the Media Protocol to reflect reviews and amendments made by Corporate Communications and ensure that the associated toolkit has the same review cycle attached to it.</p> | 31 December 2015  |
| <b>No.</b> | <b>Issue / Risk(s)</b>  | <b>Recommendation</b>  | <b>Priority (H/M/L)</b> | <b>Management Response / Action Owner</b>  | <b>Action Due</b> |
| 4..        | <u>Incident Monitoring</u>  | A formal and structured process for  | M                       | The Director of Strategic  | 31                |

|           |   |   |          |   |                         |
|-----------|---|---|----------|---|-------------------------|
|           | <p>It is understood that significant incidents are reviewed for lessons learned and improvement. This review however does not include an evaluation of Communications.</p> <p><i>Risk: Opportunity may be missed to improve the communications service and prevent reputational damage resulting from inadequate responses to emerging events and incidents.</i></p>  | <p>significant incidents should be established to evaluate the effectiveness of Communications. This should include input from key personnel involved in the process, feedback from stakeholders and relevant qualitative and quantitative measures. Following which there should be an action plan and ownership of the implementation of any required improvements or sharing of best practice.</p> |          | <p>Planning, Performance and Communications will recommend that the incident debrief process on significant incidents includes the evaluation of the effectiveness of corporate communications.</p> <p>This will ensure that post-incident debriefs are carried out and written up for significant events.</p> <p>Corporate communications will also report on best practice and any identified improvements as part of this process.</p> | <p>December 2015</p>    |
| <p>5.</p> | <p><u>Training</u><br/>Improved coordination and review of training gaps is required:<br/>a) Within the Corporate Communications team Media Officers and Corporate Communications Officer receive on-going support from the Corporate Communications Manager and it is understood that training had been previously provided under some of the legacy services. However, no formal review of training requirement and potential gaps has taken place since the new Scottish Fire Service was established.</p> | <p>Communications training accessible and received should be reviewed, monitored and recorded as part of the strategic objectives and overall development of individuals. Any gaps identified should be addressed.</p>  | <p>L</p> | <p>A) Corporate communications will carry out a review of staff training needs to identify any gaps and liaise with the Training and Employee Development function to make suggestions for addressing any training requirements. A survey is being conducted to collate staff training needs and we will ensure that corporate</p>  | <p>31 December 2015</p> |

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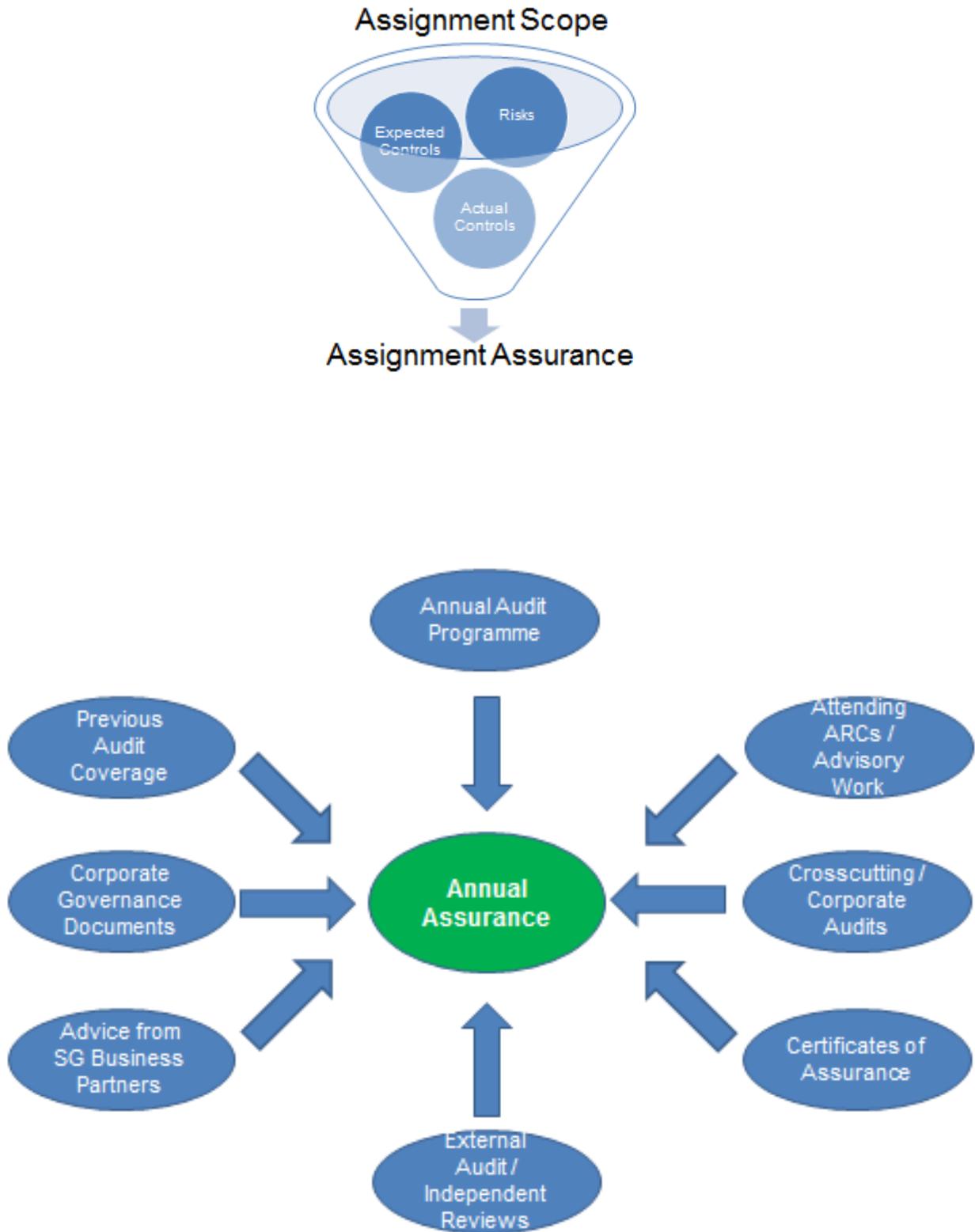
**Agenda  
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|--|--|--|--|--|--|
|  | <p>b) New Media Liaison Officers are required to undergo training before undertaking the role. There is not however a clear understanding in the wider forum of Corporate Communications regarding the application and content of this training.</p> <p>Risks: <i>Communications efforts fail due to a lack of knowledge</i></p> |  |  | <p>communication staff requirements are reflected in that exercise.</p> <p>B) Corporate communications will liaise with the Training and Employee Development function to ensure that there is a clear understanding of what support and training is and should be available to MLO uniformed officers and ensure that this information is shared appropriately.</p> |  |
|--|--|--|--|--|--|

**Annex 1**

**Process for Assignment Assurance and Annual Assurance**



## Annex 2

## Definition of Assurance Categories and Recommendation Priorities

## Assurance

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <b>Substantial Assurance</b><br><i>Controls are robust and well managed</i>                     | Risk, governance and control procedures are effective in supporting the delivery of any related objectives. Any exposure to potential weakness is low and the materiality of any consequent risk is negligible.                                |
| <b>Reasonable Assurance</b><br><b>Controls are adequate but require improvement</b>             | Some improvements are required to enhance the adequacy and effectiveness of procedures. There are weaknesses in the risk, governance and/or control procedures in place but not of a significant nature.                                       |
| <b>Limited Assurance</b><br><b>Controls are developing but weak</b>                             | There are weaknesses in the current risk, governance and/or control procedures that either do, or could, affect the delivery of any related objectives. Exposure to the weaknesses identified is moderate and being mitigated.                 |
| <b>Insufficient Assurance</b><br><b>Controls are not acceptable and have notable weaknesses</b> | There are significant weaknesses in the current risk, governance and/or control procedures, to the extent that the delivery of objectives is at risk. Exposure to the weaknesses identified is sizeable and requires urgent mitigating action. |

## Recommendations

|               |   |
|---------------|---|
| <b>High</b>   | Serious risk exposure or weakness requiring urgent consideration.         |
| <b>Medium</b> | Moderate risk exposure or weakness with need to improve related controls. |
| <b>Low</b>    | Relatively minor or housekeeping issue.                                   |