

8. Review of Committee Structure

Purpose of report

1. To approve the review of the Committee Structure undertaken by the Governance Review Working Group, as recommended by the Audit Committee.
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Recommendation

The Audit Committee recommends that the Authority consider the proposed revised Committee Structure, amended Terms of Reference of Committees and delegations to the Chief Fire Officer for approval.

Background

2. In March the Audit Committee agreed the Terms of Reference and work programme of the Governance Review Working Group. The group is chaired by Cllr Prodger.
3. The first element of the work programme was to review the current Committee Structure and Terms of Reference of Committees. The current Committee Structure and Terms of Reference are set out in Appendix 1.
4. The Working Group consulted Group Leaders and PMM as well as various other Officers. The external auditors have been consulted in relation to the Terms of Reference of the Audit Committee. Feedback from the consultation highlighted two main concerns:
 - i. The first related to the dis-jointed approach taken in relation to the consideration of the policy and financial strategy of the Authority. Both should be closely interlinked yet one element sits within the Terms of Reference of the Budget Committee, the other within the Best Value Policy and Performance Committee. It is proposed that a single Policy and Resources Committee be formed to ensure an integrated approach between finance and policy which will be critical during the coming months and years as the Authority faces a worsening budgetary situation.
 - ii. The second area where improvement was sought related to Committees' decision-making powers. At the moment Committees have very few delegated powers, most decision-making powers either being delegated to Officers or reserved for the Authority meeting. Whilst Group Leaders did not wish to see a major shift they recognised that some issues, usually around contractual resource management, do not need to be considered in detail and determined by the full Authority. Consequently minor changes have been incorporated into the Terms of Reference of the proposed Policy and Resources Committee. In addition certain human resource functions have been included to enable feed back from the Joint Consultative Committee, Equality & Diversity Group and Health and Safety Liaison Group to be considered in a Member forum.

5. Consideration was also given to forming a joint Standards Committee; however, further discussion on this issue has been shelved pending the Government's announcement on the abolition of Standards for England.
6. The proposed Committee Structure and Terms of Reference are enclosed at Appendix 2. In addition to the two changes highlighted above the Terms of Reference have been widened to provide greater clarity as to the Committees' existing role and certain provisions have been added to reflect procedures contained elsewhere.
7. The Appointments Committee's Terms of Reference have been expanded to include The Monitoring Officer and Section 151 Officer appointments, Terms and conditions and dismissals. The Appointments Committee will also consider any grievance concerning the Chief Fire Officer, Section 151 Officer and the Monitoring Officer and act as Appeals Committee for the Deputy Chief Fire Officer. It is also recommended that the Appointments Committee form a sub committee of three Members to carry out an annual performance appraisal of the Chief Fire Officer, Section 151 Officer and Monitoring Officer.
8. The Audit Committee and Standards Committee have had alterations as to form rather than content. A number of sub committees need to be formed as part of the Standards regime in the event that the Authority receives a complaint concerning Member conduct and they have been included in the Standards Committee's Terms of Reference.
9. Following consultation with Group Leaders it is proposed that the Urgent Decisions Committee be disbanded and that decisions be delegated to the Chief Fire Officer in consultation with Group Leaders where the Monitoring Officer in consultation with the Chairman agrees that the decision is urgent and that it would be impractical to call a meeting of the Authority.
10. Group Leaders considered this report prior to the Extraordinary meeting of the Audit Committee on 7 September and their feedback was included in the considerations of the Audit Committee.

Summary and Conclusion

11. The Standards Committee and the Appointments committee have specific matters to address and will meet the least often. The restructured Audit Committee and the proposed Policy and Resources Committee will have the broadest range of functions and duties and will need to meet on a more regular basis.
12. At the Extraordinary Meeting of the Audit Committee on 7 September to consider these proposals Members felt that the restructure should give each Member of the Authority the opportunity to participate at Committee level and, in order to accommodate this, it is proposed to appoint 15 Members to the Policy and Resources Committee and 10 to the Audit Committee.

13. In order to meet the requirement for political proportionality, these 2 Committee will comprise the following appointments:

	Conservatives	Lib. Dem/ Liberal	Non-Party/ Labour	Total Number
Policy & Resources Committee	11	2	2	15
Audit Committee	7	2	1	10
Total Committee Appointments	18	4	3	25
Authority Membership	18	4	3	25

14. While it is not a statutory requirement, it is appropriate to have regard to the constitution of the Authority in terms of the numbers of Members from each of the constituent bodies, i.e. Herefordshire Council and Worcestershire County Council. These numbers are proportional to the relative populations of the 2 constituents, and are currently 19 Members from Worcestershire and 6 from Herefordshire. If these proportions are to be reflected in the 2 Committees mentioned above, then the composition of the appointments would be as follows:

	Worcestershire	Herefordshire	Total Number
Policy & Resources Committee	11	4	15
Audit Committee	8	2	10
Total Committee Appointments	19	6	25
Authority Membership	19	6	25

15. Whilst finance has not been the motivating factor in making these suggestions there will be a small saving in the proposal, in the region of £2,000 as a result of the restructure.

Supporting Information

Appendix 1: Current Committee Structure and Terms of Reference

Appendix 2: Proposed Terms of Reference and Committee Structure

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