



Hereford & Worcester Fire Authority

Audit and Standards Committee

Monday, 18 January 2016, 10:30

Minutes

Members Present: Ms K S Guthrie, Mrs A T Hingley, Mr G C Yarranton (Chairman), Ms P Agar, Mr A Amos, Mr S D Williams

Substitutes: none

Absent: none

Apologies for Absence: Ms L R Duffy, Mr W P Gretton, Mr G J Vickery, Mr R I Matthews, Professor J W Raine, Mr S C Cross

Declarations of Interest: none

32 Confirmation of Minutes

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Audit and Standards Committee held on 28 September 2015 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

33 Annual Audit Letter

External Auditors, Grant Thornton UK LLP presented the report. An unqualified opinion on the Authority's 2014/15 financial statements and value for money conclusions were issued on 29 September 2015 and were considered to give a true and fair view of the Authority's financial position.

The External Auditor highlighted the following key messages arising in the Audit 2014/15

- i. Testing was conducted as planned and the audit of the accounts went well.
- ii. Officers prepared the accounts in accordance with the agreed timetable, and audit.
- iii. Working papers were good quality and officers were responsive to

questions. The External Auditor expressed appreciation for the continued excellent standard of work from officers and the team.

iv. The Authority has a realistic Medium Term Financial Plan which underpins the annual budget.

v. The Authority has put in place proper arrangements to secure value for money in its use of resources.

RESOLVED the Annual Audit Letter 2014/15 from the External Auditors, Grant Thornton UK LLP be noted.

34 External Audit Fee

The External Auditor summarised the scale fee for audit work and confirmed to Members that no additional fees outside the Audit Code had been incurred. Members discussed the significantly reduced fees and queried whether the fee in the past had been too high. The External Auditor explained to Members that following the demise of the Audit Commission, work outside of the key fundamental areas had been scaled back but that the audit was still conducted in accordance with the Audit Code of Practice and professional standards obligations of auditors. Members were reassured that fees are independently set and that any variation during the course of the audit has to also be independently agreed.

RESOLVED the External Audit Fee 2015/2016 from Grant Thornton UK LLP be noted.

35 Internal Audit Monitoring Report 2015/2016

The Head of Internal Audit Shared Service reported progress against the 2015/16 plan and highlighted to Members that of the three completed audits there are no high priority recommendations. The remaining two reports are close to completion and full report summaries will be presented at the next meeting.

The Chief Fire Officer emphasised to Members the strong and successful relationship that exists not only between the Fire Authority and the Auditors but also between the Internal and External Auditors themselves. He highlighted that it was a credit to all involved including Members that such robust professional conduct is continually maintained.

RESOLVED the Internal Audit Monitoring Report 2015/2016 be noted.

Whistleblowing Policy

In light of recently published best practice Members were advised of suggested amendments to the Whistleblowing Policy. Key changes focused on providing further clarity with regards to legal protection and guidance to staff in raising a concern.

[10:49 Derek Prodger entered the room]

Members were reassured that awareness sessions with managers and updates in the Service Bulletin would ensure that all staff are kept fully informed of the updates to the policy.

Following an ensuing discussion Members were reassured that measures are in place to offer all staff at whatever level a variety of disclosure options to make raising a concern as accessible as possible. Members congratulated Officers on the policy highlighting it as a model of best practice in this field.

***RESOLVED* the revised Whistleblowing Policy be approved.**

The Meeting ended at: 11:03

Signed:.....

Date:.....

Chairman