

MERSEYSIDE FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

MEETING OF THE

AUDIT SUB-COMMITTEE

28 JANUARY 2016

MINUTES

Present: Cllr Denise Roberts (Chair) Councillors Mike Kearns and Lesley Rennie

Also Present:

Apologies of absence were received from: Cllr James Roberts and Cllr Paul Tweed

7. Chair's Announcement

Prior to the start of the meeting, information regarding general housekeeping and confirmation of the recording of proceedings was provided by the Chair to all in attendance.

The Chair then declared the meeting open and recording of the proceedings commenced.

1. Preliminary Matters

Members considered the identification of declarations of interest, any urgent additional items, and any business that may require the exclusion of the press and public.

Resolved that:

- a) no declarations of interest were made by individual Members in relation to any item of business on the Agenda
- b) no additional items of business to be considered as matters of urgency were determined by the Chair; and
- c) no items of business required the exclusion of the press and public during consideration thereof because of the possibility of the disclosure of exempt information.

2. Minutes of Previous Meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 21st July 2015, were approved as a correct record and signed accordingly by the Chair.

3. External Audit Update Report

John Padfield representing the Authority's External Auditors, Grant Thornton, presented a report concerning progress in delivering their responsibilities as External Auditor for the Authority.

Members were provided with an overview of the report which highlighted forthcoming changes to reporting deadlines for the sign off of accounts by the Authority and External Audit, which will both be brought forward (although this will not be a regulatory requirement until 2017/18). Members were advised that in order to meet these new deadlines consideration will be given to elements of Audit work which can be undertaken earlier in the year.

The update informed Members that the scope of the Value for Money (VFM) conclusion has been slightly amended to have more emphasis on ways of working with partners and 3rd parties, in addition to informed decision making and sustainable resource deployment. Another key consideration will be assessing the way the Fire Authority responds to the financial challenges.

Discussion took place regarding the move of the Fire and Rescue Policy from DCLG to the Home Office, the potential for the governance of Fire and Rescue Services to transfer to the Police and Crime Commissioner; and the possible affects these may have on the Fire and Rescue Service.

Members were informed that there are significant uncertainties surrounding these issues at present however the situation will continue to be monitored by External Audit.

Members resolved that:

The contents of the report be noted.

4. INTERNAL AUDIT PROGRESS REPORT – APRIL TO NOVEMBER

Members considered report CFO/010/16 of the Treasurer concerning the work of Internal Audit for the period April to November 2015.

Members were provided with an overview of the report which highlighted the number of audit days allocated to a review of the Authority's fundamental systems and specific projects.

Members were informed that the majority of audit work around specific projects will be undertaken in the final quarter of the financial year, allowing the projects to be sufficiently progressed prior to audit.

Members resolved:

That contents of the report be noted.

5. Treasury Management Interim Report 2015/16

Members considered report CFO/003/16 of the Treasurer outlining the Treasury Management activities and performance for April to November for the financial year 2015/16, in accordance with the CIPFA Code of Practice on Treasury Management and CIPFA Prudential Code for Capital Finance in Local Authorities.

Members were informed that investments and borrowing have continued in line with the agreed strategy and that investment returns have been above the benchmark.

Members questioned if the Authority invests in UK Local Authorities and it was confirmed that this is currently not the case.

Members resolved that:

The contents of the report be noted.

6. CORPORATE RISK REGISTER UPDATE JULY - OCT 2015

Members considered report CFO/005/16 of the Deputy Chief Fire Officer concerning the current risks contained within the Corporate Risk Register, the status of the risks and associated control measures, including reference to any new risks added to the register or any risks that no longer apply and can be removed

Members were provided with an overview of the report which highlighted some of the key risks:

- In relation to risks around maintaining sufficient staffing, members were informed that the recruit course has now concluded with the recruits operating a more flexible wholetime retained crewing system.
- In relation to risks around the relationship between the Authority and the Police and Crime Commissioner, Members were informed that the collaborative working continues to work well.
- Officers continue to monitor risk 4.3 from the Corporate Risk Register, concerning tackling of inequalities and changes to society.
- With regard to risks around increased flooding and more extreme weather conditions, Members were informed of the recent deployment of Merseyside Search and Rescue teams in the North West Region in response to flood conditions. Although the circumstances were challenging the deployment was welcomed.

Members raised concerns regarding risks associated with reduced operational staff numbers and the potential for increased collaboration with the Police.

It was reported that although there is a need to decrease the number of Firefighter posts by 2020-21, MFRS is committed to sustainable succession planning which has been factored into the financial management of the Service. With relation to increased collaboration with the Police it was confirmed that Officers are mindful of the drive locally and nationally towards greater collaboration.

Members commented favourably on the Fire Service's role in responding to flooding incidents nationally and on the resilience provided by the operational recruitment process.

Members resolved that:

The updated Corporate Risk Register, be approved.

Close

Date of next meeting Thursday, 9 June 2016

Signed: _____

Date: _____