MERSEYSIDE FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY			
MEETING OF THE:	**AUDIT COMMITTEE**		
DATE:	**26 SEPTEMBER 2024**	**REPORT NO:**	**CFO/57/24**
PRESENTING OFFICER	**DIRECTOR OF FINANCE AND PROCUREMENT, MIKE REA**		
RESPONSIBLE OFFICER:	**MIKE REA**	**REPORT AUTHOR:**	**MIKE REA**
OFFICERS CONSULTED:	**STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP TEAM**		
TITLE OF REPORT:	**FORVIS MAZARS (MFRA EXTERNAL AUDITORS) AUDIT STRATEGY MEMORANDUM 2023/24**		

APPENDICES:	**APPENDIX A:**	**FORVIS MAZARS AUDIT STRATEGY MEMORANDUM FOR YEAR ENDING 2023/24**

Purpose of Report

1. To present to Members Forvis Mazars Audit Strategy Memorandum that outlines the Auditor's approach to auditing the Authority's 2023/24 financial statements.

Recommendation

2. It is recommended that Members note Forvis Mazars 2023/24 Audit Strategy Memorandum and the timing of the Authority's 2023/24 audit of the financial statements.

Introduction and Background

3. Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority ('the Authority') is required to prepare a set of financial statements annually as required by the relevant codes and regulations. The deadline for the production of the 2023/24 unaudited financial statements was the end of May 2024.

4. The financial statements must then be audited by an independent auditor, who will then issue an opinion on the statements. Members will be aware that the Authority chose to opt into the Public Sector Audit Appointments (PSAA) national scheme for the appointment of the Authority's Auditors. The PSAA awarded new contracts in 2022 to cover the financial years 2023/24 to 2027/28.

5. Forvis Mazars were appointed as the Authority's Auditors to cover the period 2023/24 to 2027/28. A copy of their 2023/24 Audit Strategy Memorandum is contained within appendix A of this report for Members to note.

6. Between 8 February and 7 March 2024 the then Department for Levelling-Up Housing and Communities (DLUHC) consulted on amending the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 as part of measures to tackle the backlog of unaudited local body accounts in England. The proposals consulted upon included setting a statutory backstop date to clear the backlog of unaudited accounts up-to-and-including financial year 2022/23. They also included setting backstop dates for financial years 2023/24 to 2027/28 to enable the local audit system to recover.

7. Following the consultation, the government intends to set the following statutory deadlines for these years:

    - 2023/24: 28th February 2025
    - 2024/25: 27th February 2026
    - 2025/26: 31st January 2027
    - 2026/27: 30th November 2027
    - 2027/28: 30th November 2028

    It is the aspiration of the government and key local audit system partners that, in the public interest, local audit recovers as early in this five-year period as possible.

8. For financial years 2024/25 to 2027/28, the date by which the Authority should publish 'draft' (unaudited) accounts will change from 31 May to 30 June following the financial year to which they relate.

Equality and Diversity Implications

9. There are no equality and diversity implications contained within this report.

Staff Implications

10. There are no staff implications contained within this report.

Legal Implications

11. The regulations require the unaudited financial statements for 2023/24 to be prepared by 31st May 2024, and the statements to be audited by 28th February 2025.

Financial Implications & Value for Money

12. The 2023/2024 external audit fee, £97,117 has been included within the budget.

Risk Management and Health & Safety Implications

13. Failure to prepare the financial statements or have them audited within the statutory deadlines may have an adverse impact on the Authority's financial management reputation.

Environmental Implications

14. There are no environmental implications contained within this report.

Contribution to Our Vision: To be the best Fire & Rescue Service in the UK.

Our Purpose: Here to serve, Here to protect, Here to keep you safe.

15. The achievement of sound financial administration and Value For Money arrangements is essential to achieve the Authority's vision.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

NONE

GLOSSARY OF TERMS