

Dorset Fire Authority

Audit and Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of a meeting held at the Fire and Rescue Service Headquarters, Poundbury, Dorchester on 18 September 2015.

Present:

Mr Trevor Jones (Chairman)
Mr Christopher Rochester (Vice-Chairman)
Mr Les Burden, Mr Mike Byatt, Mr Ronald Coatsworth and Mr Malcolm Davies.

Officers Attending

Mr Richard Bates (Treasurer), Mr Richard Ironside (for Treasurer), Mr Colin Chapman (Assistant Chief Fire Officer), Mr Ian Cotter (Head of Financial Services), Ms Lisa Pharaoh-Workman (Deputy Clerk) and Mrs Helen Whitby (Committee Officer).

Mrs Rebecca Knox attended under Standing Order 49.

Also attending, for certain items, as appropriate:-

Mr Darren Gilbert (Director, KPMG), Mr Robert Ford (Head of Corporate Planning), Mr David Hill (Director of Planning, South West Audit Partnership), Derek James (Assistant Chief Officer – Organisational Resources) and Mr Craig Baker (Area Manager).

(Note: These minutes have been prepared by officers as a record of the meeting and of any decisions reached. They are to be considered and confirmed at the next meeting of the Fire Audit and Scrutiny Committee on **3 November 2015**).

Election of Chairman

Resolved

36. That Mr Trevor Jones be elected Chairman for the remainder of the year 2015/16.

Election of Vice-Chairman

Resolved

37. That Mr Christopher Rochester be elected Vice-Chairman for the remainder of the year 2015/16.

Apologies for Absence

38.1 Apologies for absence were received from Mr Colin Jamieson and Mr John Wilson. Mr Ronald Coatsworth substituted for Mr Jamieson.

38.2 The Chairman welcomed Mr Malcolm Davies to his first meeting of the Committee.

Code of Conduct

39. There were no declarations by members of any disclosable pecuniary interests under the Code of Conduct.

Minutes

40. The minutes of the meeting held on 13 March 2015 were confirmed and signed.

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External Audit Report 2014/15

41.1 The Committee considered a report by KPMG which set out key issues identified during their audit of the Fire Authority's financial statements for the year ended 31 March 2015 and their assessment to secure value for money in the use of resources.

41.2 The KPMG Director (the Auditor) anticipated an unqualified audit and value for money opinion being issued by the end of September 2015 when the accounts were published. He then referred to the three significant audit differences, two of which had been adjusted, the other being below the materiality level and not adjusted in the accounts. He confirmed that these audit differences had no impact on the General Fund balance. With regard to a recent Local Government Ombudsman ruling relating to pension payments, its retrospective impact on the Fire Authority's accounts over a number of years was explained, and would be disclosed as a post balance sheet event for the 2014-15 accounts. He also drew attention to the Auditor's recommendation that the property valuation policy be reviewed, particularly with regard to frequency.

41.3 It was explained that under the Fire Authority's current policy 20% of assets were reviewed every year whereas Wiltshire and Swindon Fire Authority undertook a quinquennial review. This matter had been discussed at the Shadow Performance and Resources Committee meeting the previous day when a decision about future policy was deferred in order to seek the External Auditor's opinion on frequency of valuations and how best to establish the value of the state of the new Authority. The matter would be considered by the Shadow Policy and Resources Committee at its next meeting.

41.4 There was some discussion about the need for the two Fire Authorities to have valuations which would enable comparisons to be made and allow the Combined Authority to make informed decisions in future.

Noted**Annual Accounts 2014/15**

42.1 The Committee considered the Annual Accounts for 2014/15 and received a presentation which explained the accounts approval process, the financial statements, pensions' liability and the audit differences.

42.2 The Committee was reminded that the External Auditors had indicated that an unqualified audit opinion would be issued following the accounts being signed by the Treasurer and the Chief Fire Officer. The Annual Governance Statement, which formed part of the Accounts, would also be signed and reported to the Dorset Fire Authority meeting on 23 September 2015. The Accounts would then be published by 30 September 2015.

42.3 With regard to the variation in pensions' liability, it was explained that this had arisen following the valuation by the actuary and related to the unfunded Firefighters' Pension Scheme.

Resolved

43.1 That the Accounts for 2014/15 be approved.

43.2 That the Treasurer and Chief Fire Officer sign the Accounts.

43.3 That the Treasurer and Chairman sign off the "management representation" letter as required by the External Auditor.

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Corporate Statement of Assurance

44.1 The Committee considered a report by the Chief Fire Officer on the Corporate Statement of Assurance, which comprised of a number of individual statements. The Authority was required to publish the Statement of Assurance under the National Framework 2012 and failure to do so would result in the Authority being in breach of its duty under the Accounts and Audit (England) Regulations 2011.

Public Statement of Assurance

44.2 The Committee was reminded that there was no guidance on what the Public Statement of Assurance should include but it was supported by information contained in the appendices to the report. The Statement was to be signed by the Chairman and Chief Fire Officer, when approved.

Annual Governance Statement 2014/15

44.3 This Statement identified the corporate risks faced by the Fire Authority, as recorded in the Corporate Risk Register. Members noted that the level of assurance had been maintained at a time of increased pressure due to the combination and that effective controls were in place. The Statement had been reviewed by the Senior Management Team, the Auditors and the Treasurer.

44.4 Members welcomed the increased number of Retained Duty Firefighters and hoped the increase would continue.

44.5 The Chairman of the Authority asked that paragraph six of the Statement (Lack of clarity nationally over vision for fire and rescue services in England) be updated following the Shadow Policy and Resources Committee meeting the previous day.

Health and Safety Assurance Framework 2014/15

44.6 The Committee noted that no changes had been made to the Health and Safety Policy Statement from the previous year and that an overall grade of “Good” had been achieved.

44.7 Members were pleased that the Fire Authority continued to have external validation of internal performance assessments as they considered this to be good practice. Members asked to be provided with a copy of Wiltshire and Swindon Fire Authority’s Corporate Statement of Assurance.

Annual Operational Capability Assurance Statement 2014/15

44.8 This Statement had been developed over the last three years and indicated the Fire Authority’s readiness to respond. All necessary measures were in place, had been tried and tested and any lessons learned put into practice. There had been no change to overall gradings.

Annual Diversity and Inclusion Assurance Statement 2014/15

44.9 The Fire Authority had been the first in the South West to maintain its “Excellent” level.

Progress Review Against Fire and Rescue Service National Framework

44.10 Members welcomed the report and the activities undertaken by the Fire Authority to comply with the National Framework and noted that Wiltshire and Swindon Fire Authority also complied.

Annual Information Management Assurance Statement 2014/15

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44.11 It was confirmed that the judgements included in the Statement had been reviewed by external accreditation. There were no major concerns.

Recommended

45. That the Dorset Fire Authority endorse the Corporate Statement of Assurance, as amended, at its meeting on 23 September 2015.

Resolved

46. That members be provided with a copy of Wiltshire and Swindon Fire Authority's Corporate Statement of Assurance.

Professional Standards Internal Audit End of Year Reports for 2014/15 and Internal Audit Progress Report to Date for 2015/16

47.1 The Committee considered a report by the Chief Fire Officer which detailed progress against the Professional Standards Internal Audit Plan 2014/15 and set out the proposed Professional Standards Internal Audit Plan for 2015/16.

47.2 All 2014/15 audits had been completed apart from four. One had been deferred and the remainder would be considered by the Combined Authority in early 2016. The audit plan for 2015/16 had been agreed with the South West Audit Partnership.

47.3 The Committee noted that as part of Work Stream 2, a list of external audits and accreditations was being compiled across both Fire Authorities with a view to undertaking a cost benefit analysis of each so as to inform future arrangements under the Combined Authority. Members repeated their support for external validation of internal performance judgements and hoped that this would be continued under the new Combined Authority.

Noted

Dorset Health and Wellbeing Board – Reducing the Harms from Road Traffic collisions in Dorset

48.1 The Committee considered a report by the Chief Fire Officer on a report recently considered by the Dorset Health and Wellbeing Board on reducing harm from road traffic collisions in Dorset.

48.2 The Chairman of the Fire Authority, as Chairman of the Dorset Health and Wellbeing Board, had asked the Committee to consider the report with a view to identifying any action that could be taken to reduce harm from road traffic accidents on Dorset's roads. A draft recommendation was provided for consideration.

48.3 Members discussed a number of factors which they thought might cause accidents and means of addressing these. They supported the work being undertaken by the Dorset Health and Wellbeing Board, recognised the need to raise awareness of both elected members and the public, the need for education and prevention work, and the role that partners could play by working together to improve the current situation.

48.4 The Committee supported the idea of an integrated, dedicated team and agreed the draft recommendation as a means of progressing this.

Resolved

49.1 That the Chairman of the Fire Authority write to the Chairman of the Dorset Strategic Road Safety Partnership (DSRSP) requesting the DSRSP explore the development of a business case for pooling the partners' road safety education

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resources into one team. The aim of the pooled resources would be to deliver road safety education to support a balanced road safety strategy in a more cohesive, efficient and effective way.

49.2 That the Chairman of the Fire Authority request that the DSRSP complete this business case prior to 31 March 2016.

Questions

50. No questions were asked by members under Standing Order 17.

Meeting duration - 10.00am – 11.55am