

REVIEW OF GOVERNANCE, AUDIT AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

SUMMARY

1. At the 24 June 2013 meeting of the Fire Authority, Members decided that the Group Secretaries and the Chair meet with regard to two matters concerning the Governance, Audit and Scrutiny Committee. The first was in respect to the appointment of a Vice Chair of that Committee. The second in relation to the term of office of Independent Members of the Committee. That group has however proposed that the review of the Governance, Audit and Scrutiny Committee be brought forward from that previously agreed as Spring 2014. The Chair has asked that this be put to the Special Meeting of the Authority for consideration.
2. Members will find attached at Appendix 1 the previous paper which provides background to the first review of the Committee in April 2013 and Appendix 2 which contains the matters arising report.

RECOMMENDATIONS

3. Members are asked to consider this report.

THE GOVERNANCE, AUDIT AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

4. The report to the Authority at its 23 April 2013 meeting (Appendix 1) set out clearly the rationale for the Governance, Audit and Scrutiny Committee, areas for review and the assurance provided externally around the Committee. The decision of the Authority is within the report attached at Appendix 2, which in broad terms decided to carry out a further review in Spring 2014, given the short period of time that the Committee has been in operation.
5. It is entirely a matter for the Authority to determine its governance arrangements, to ensure that its governance is effective and efficient.
6. However, the previous recommendations of the Secretary/Monitoring Officer are unchanged and it is suggested that a fuller review be undertaken as planned in Spring 2014. This would allow the Committee a full year's operation and enable a more informed review to take place as a result.
7. Perhaps one of the concerns of Members in respect to the Governance, Audit and Scrutiny Committee is not having an early sight of reports received by the Committee, prior to the Authority. This can be remedied by full sets of papers being circulated to all Members (the agenda is circulated and open papers are online). The practice of circulating full sets of papers was followed in the past under previous committee structures, but Members at the time decided that they would call for full reports when they deemed necessary.
8. A further concern may be the timing of the Committee prior to Authority.

9. Members at their home authorities will be more used to formal scrutiny arrangements, and while the requirements for governance structures post the Localism Act 2011 have become more flexible for unitary councils, many have maintained their scrutiny structures. The Governance, Audit and Scrutiny Committee was not intended as a pure audit or pure scrutiny committee, but was designed to act as a challenge to the Corporate Management Team and help Members to reach decisions. The Committee, through performance and audit reports, does scrutinise decision making and processes, but there exists no call-in or similar arrangements. The timing of the Committee and in turn its role was debated as part of the third review of corporate governance during 2011/12. However, there is no perfect model for governance and most Fire Authorities have retained traditional committee structures, with a small number mirroring their constituent authority overview and scrutiny arrangements.
10. Should Members wish to change the role or otherwise of the Committee, then Members are asked to revisit Appendix 1.
11. In terms of recruitment to the current vacancy on the Committee, there have been 11 expressions of interest. However, given the request for the Committee to be reviewed, that process has been put on hold. All applicants are aware.
12. In considering this report, Members should be aware that the report has not been through the normal Governance, Audit and Scrutiny Committee and therefore does not contain any views of that Committee.
13. In summary therefore, the Authority may now wish to consider earlier than first planned:
 - Size, purpose/role of the Governance, Audit and Scrutiny Committee;
 - The composition of any such Committee;
 - Current membership of the Committee, including the matters arising set out in Appendix 2.

STRATEGIC PLAN COMPATIBILITY

14. Good governance underpins both the Vision and Strategic Plan of the Authority.

FINANCIAL/RESOURCES/VALUE FOR MONEY IMPLICATIONS

15. None arising directly.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

16. The Authority must have in place effective governance arrangements to enable good openness and decision making, alongside ensuring accountability. There have never been any requirements upon combined Fire Authorities to adopt any particular governance structure or arrangements.

EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT/HR IMPLICATIONS

17. None arising directly.

CORPORATE RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

18. Good governance will enable effective risk/opportunity management.

HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

19. None arising directly.

COMMUNICATION ACTIONS ARISING

20. None arising.

DETAILS OF CONSULTATION

21. None.

BACKGROUND PAPERS AVAILABLE FOR ACCESS

22. None.

RECOMMENDATIONS RESTATED

23. Members are asked to consider this report.

R GRAHAM

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