

Report of Chair of Governance, Audit and Scrutiny Committee

The Committee met on the 16th September 2013 and all 7 members attended.

There were 3 Elected Members present including the Chair of the HFA.

The Committee were asked to consider a number of papers and to make any recommendations the Committee thought appropriate to the HFA. Those before the Committee and papers being presented to the Fire Authority on the 27th September were reviewed in depth. This note summarises the salient points. My report should be read in conjunction with the draft minutes of the Committee.

Minutes of the Previous Meeting and Matters Arising from the HFA Agenda

The HFA is a decision making body. Decisions are made, based on the information provided. If this comes from officers then it is usually covered by a written report. However, not all information will come from officers. There are some ad hoc groups and panels such as the Group Secretaries, the panel looking at Elected Members' expenses and the proposed group reviewing the tenders for the internal auditing function. It is not always clear how these groups would report to the HFA to make a decision. It was hoped that these will produce a written report to the Authority, from a scrutiny and governance perspective.

The Committee would welcome the opportunity in the near future to meet with the Chair of the Authority to discuss progress in respect to the Committee to date and any developments that he and the HFA would like to see in the future.

The Chair had attended the last HFA meeting held on the 9th September 2013. The main discussion was about the operational efficiency programme and the feedback from the engagement process. Having seen the last three efficiency programmes for front line staff, this was by far the most professional and based on facts of response times and risk. The officers had presented all the data in a bound book and had also presented a summary of each option on the table. Some new options have been generated as part of the engagement process. It was also intended to present a summary of the options for formal consultation at the next HFA meeting, to ensure uniformity in the understanding of the outcomes. The officers had obviously put in a lot of time and effort in this analysis.

The GAS Committee does not attend Member Days as such and any new topics such as the proposal for a review system for Chief Fire Officer comes to the group cold when the meeting papers arrive. There is little time for the Committee to discuss items among ourselves prior to the GAS Committee. The paper on the Accountability of the Chief Fire Officer falls into this category. Based on the experience of our members in Appraisal systems, including CEO's, we have now had the opportunity to prepare a proposal which will be sent to the Secretary, to be considered hopefully by the Group Secretaries when they meet.

External Audit Report

Report to Those with Governance

There is a comment on page 3 of the KPMG report (headed Section 2 Headlines) under control environment that the organisation does not always have access rights removed immediately when staff leave. This was also a finding in previous audits on IT and

payroll/pensions. There was a concern that with the new electronic building access system that this may also be an issue as the root cause does not seem to have been bottomed out.

External Audit Progress Report and Technical update

The technical update starting on page 6 of the KPMG report lists various proposals and changes that are in the pipeline. It was felt that this was a useful document and we would like to see it continued in the future to remind us of the actual and impending changes.

Exempt Business

The Committee welcomed the report of the HFR Solutions Performance Report April to June, but noted as yet there had not been a business plan presented. After the meeting the Committee met with the new business development manager to discuss the progress on developing an up to date plan.

Mr David Hughes
Chair of the GAS Committee
9/13