

Minutes of the Audit Committee

6 June 2016 at 12.30 pm
at Fire Service Headquarters, Vauxhall Road, Birmingham B7 4HW

Present: Councillors Aston, Sealey, T Singh and P Singh
Mr Ager (Independent Member)

22/16 Minutes of the Audit Committee held on 11 April 2016

Resolved that the minutes of the meeting held on 11 April 2016, be approved as a correct record.

23/16 Governance Statement 2015/16

The Committee received the Authority's draft Governance Statement 2015/16.

The Governance Statement sets out how the Authority has put in place proper arrangements for the Governance of its affairs which facilitates the effective exercise of the Authority's functions and which includes arrangements for the management of risk.

The Governance Statement would be considered for approval by the Authority at its meeting on 27 June, 2016.

24/16 Monitoring Policies on Raising Concerns at Work – Whistle Blowing Standing Order 2/20 and Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000.

Further to Minute No. 19/15 (15 June, 2015), the Committee noted the content of the Authority's Whistle-Blowing Standing Order and that there had been one allegation of whistle blowing through the Whistle Blowing Policy (SO 2/20) and this matter reached a satisfactory conclusion to all parties involved. There had been no requests received to enact the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000.

Members noted that the Whistle Blowing Standing Order was consulted on in June 2014 and published in November 2014 and would, in line with the West Midlands Fire Service's policy, be reviewed every three years. The Data Protection Act 1998 was consulted on and amended to include

Audit Committee – 18 January 2016

a policy on surveillance in May 2012. The policy is currently under review and in consultation. The new Data Protection Framework 2/16 is an amalgamation of Standing Order 2/16 Data Protection Act 1998 and Standing Order 2/21 Personal Information.

Resolved:-

- (1) that it be noted that there had been one allegation of whistle blowing reported through the Whistle Blowing Police (20 2/20) and this matter reached a satisfactory conclusion to all parties involved. There had not been any requests to enact the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 in West Midlands Fire Service in the last year up to 31 March 2016.
- (2) that the content of the Whistle Blowing Standing Order 2/20 and the Data Protection Policy 1998 Standing order 2/16 be noted.

25/16 Corporate Risk Update

Further to minute 14/16 (11 April 2016) the Committee received the revised Corporate Risk Standing Order 22/7 including the changes made to the Corporate Risk reporting process.

Corporate risks were those which, if they occurred, would seriously affect the Authority's ability to carry out its core functions or deliver its strategic objectives as set out in the Plan. The Authority currently has eleven corporate risks. As part of the change to the Standing Order 22/7 the Committee received a Corporate Risk briefing focusing on Corporate Risk 11.

The briefing reflected on the Trade Dispute and Action Short of Strike and it was noted that the Briefing had been produced prior to the dispute being resolved. There had been one period of industrial action during which there had been enough staff available to meet the needs of the community. The risk register would be updated to reflect the risk.

The Committee noted that the Corporate Risk categories were currently being reviewed and would be reported back to the Audit Committee in September 2016 to include the impact of potential changes to governance.

Audit Committee – 18 January 2016

Resolved:

(1) that the changes to the Corporate Risk Standing Order 22/7 be approved.

(2) that the Audit Committee Corporate Risk Briefing be noted.

26/16 Annual Internal Audit Report 2015/16

The Committee received the Authority's Annual Internal Audit Report 2015/16, which detailed the work Internal Audit Service had undertaken during the year. The report indicated that as a result of this work, Internal Audit could provide reasonable assurance that the Authority had adequate and effective governance, risk management and internal control processes.

The report provided one element of the evidence that is required to underpin the Authority's Governance Statement.

A summary of the work undertaken during the year included:

- the areas subject to review during the year (Auditable Area)
- the level of risk to the Authority assigned to each auditable area (high, medium or low)
- the number of recommendations made as a result of each audit review
- details of any other work undertaken outside the original plan

The report also summarised the key control issues that had arisen during the year.

Resolved that the Annual Internal Audit report for 2015/16 be approved.

27/16 Audit Committee Update for West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority

The Committee received and noted an update from its external auditor which set out Grant Thornton's progress in delivering its responsibilities and a summary of emerging national issues and developments which might impact on the Authority.

The external auditor drew the Committee's particular attention to Health and Safety in the Fire Service and in particular the document entitled "Health and Safety in the Fire and Rescue Service – embedding Lessons Learned".

Audit Committee – 18 January 2016

In relation to the associated challenge question “Are members aware of this publication and are officers responding appropriately to the learning in this document?” the Deputy Chief Fire Officer confirmed that the Authority had responded and were working with the Health and Safety Executive through Site Specific Risk Information and the Organisational Development team would also be focussing on the Health and Safety Executive.

In answer to a members’ enquiry it was confirmed that Health and Safety Performance Indicators were reported at the Quarterly Performance Review meeting followed by the Scrutiny Committee.

The external auditor also drew the Committee’s attention to a Grant Thornton report entitled “Joining up the dots, not picking up the pieces, partnership working in mental health” a summary report of Grant Thornton’s mental health collaboration summit.

In relation to the associated challenge question “Is the Authority familiar with the report?” the members felt the key messages included in the report should be widely shared.

The external audit drew the Committee’s attention to a Grant Thornton market insight report entitled “Better Together – building a successful joint venture company”.

28/16 Annual Report of the Audit Committee 2015/16

The Committee received the Annual Report of the Audit Committee 2015/16. The report detailed the business undertaken by the Committee during the 2015/16 Municipal Year.

Members requested that the Report be amended to reflect the attendance of one Member of the Committee who had been requested to attend another Committee that was running concurrently with Audit Committee.

Resolved that, subject to the amendment, as indicated above, the Annual Report of the Audit Committee 2015/16 be approved and presented to the next meeting of the Authority.

29/16 Audit Committee Work Programme 2015/16

The Committee noted its Work Programme for 2015/16 and noted that the next meeting of the Audit Committee would be on 25 July 2016 where they would be required to approve the 2015/16 Statement of Accounts.

Audit Committee – 18 January 2016

29/16 **Update on Topical, Legal and Regulatory Issues**

There was no new information to be presented

(The meeting ended at 13:30 pm)

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