

AUDIT & PERFORMANCE REVIEW COMMITTEE

(Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue Authority)

12 September 2017

Present:-

Councillors Wheeler (Chair), Burridge-Clayton (Vice-Chair), Healey MBE, Saywell and Trail BEM

In attendance:-

Councillor Coles

* **APRC/8** **Minutes**

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on 28 June 2017 be signed as a correct record.

* **APRC/9** **Appointment of External Auditors**

The Committee considered a report of the Treasurer (APRC/17/14) that set out the position in respect of the appointment of new external auditors following new regulation requirements requiring the Authority to move to a local appointment.

It was noted that the Authority's existing auditors, Grant Thornton, had been appointed originally under a contract let by the Audit Commission. The contract was novated subsequently to Public Sector Audit Appointments (PSAA) following the closure of the Audit Commission. The transitional arrangement was due to end on 31 March 2018 and, following completion of a national procurement process during the summer of 2017, the Authority has received a formal communication proposing that Grant Thornton (UK) LPP be appointed to audit the accounts of the Authority for a five year period commencing on 1 April 2018.

RESOLVED that the Committee endorses the proposed appointment of Grant Thornton (UK) LLP as the Authority's external auditors for the five year period commencing on 1 April 2018.

* **APRC/10** **Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue Authority's Financial Statements 2016-17:**

The Committee considered the Authority's Financial Statements (as circulated) for the year ended 31 March 2017, including:

- a. The Audit Findings for the Authority;
- b. The Statement of Accounts 2016-17; and
- c. The 2016-17 draft Letter of Representation.

The Authority's external auditor, Grant Thornton, presented the external audit findings and the external auditor's opinion on the Authority's financial statements for the year ended 31 March 2017.

The Committee noted that the draft financial statements presented for audit were free from material error. The key messages were that the draft accounts had been produced to a good standard and the audit facilitated by good supporting working papers with excellent assistance from the Service's finance team. The auditors were also satisfied in respect of value for money that, in all significant aspects, the Authority had proper arrangements in place to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources. An action plan to address the recommendations made as a result of the audit was set out at Appendix A of the Audit Findings. No issues had been identified with the Annual Governance Statement (Annual Statement of Assurance), submitted along with the financial statements (see also Minute *APRC/11 below).

The external audit work had also concluded that, in all significant aspects, the Authority had in place proper arrangements to secure value for money through economic, efficient and effective use of its resources. It was anticipated that the Authority would be issued with an unqualified audit opinion on its financial statements for 2016-17.

RESOLVED

- (a). that the final Statement of Accounts for the 2016-17 financial year, as included with the agenda for this meeting, be approved and published on the Authority website;
- (b). that the Audit & Performance Review Committee Chair and Treasurer be authorised, on behalf of the Authority, to sign the Letter of Representation to the external auditor (Grant Thornton) on the Authority's 2016-17 financial statements;
- (c). that, subject to (a) to (c) above, the external audit findings and external auditor's opinion on the Authority's financial statements for the year ended 31 March 2017 be noted.

* **APRC/11** **2016-17 Annual Statement of Assurance**

The Committee considered a report of the Area Manager (Organisational Assurance) (APRC/17/15) to which was appended the final 2016-17 Annual Statement of Assurance for the Authority. The document had been prepared in accordance with relevant legislative and best practice requirements (including the Accounts and Audit Regulations, the Fire and Rescue National Framework and the CIPFA/SOLACE good governance framework).

The Committee had approved the document in draft form at its meeting on 28 June 2017 (Minute *APRC/6 refers) after which it had been submitted for external verification with the Authority's financial statements for 2016-17. The external auditor (Grant Thornton) had not identified any issues with the Annual Statement of Assurance.

RESOLVED

- (a). that the final Authority Annual Statement of Assurance for 2016-17 be approved and published on the Authority website;
- (b). that the Audit & Performance Review Committee Chair and Chief Fire Officer be authorised to sign the 2016-17 Annual Statement of Assurance on behalf of the Authority;
- (c). that, subject to (a) to (b) above, the report be noted.

(see also Minute *APRC/10 above).

* **APRC/12** **Audit & Review 2017-18 Progress Report**

The Committee considered a report of the Area Manager - Organisational Assurance - (APRC/17/16) on progress to date against the approved 2017-18 internal audit plan. The report also included an overview of the assurance tracking process and the current high priority recommendations that had been identified and that remained open at this stage.

The Committee noted that the internal audit plan was delivered in partnership between the Service's internal audit team and the Devon Audit Partnership.

* **APRC/13** **Corporate Risk Register**

The Committee received for information a report of the Area Manager – Organisational Assurance (APRC/17/16) that set out an overview of some key risks that had been included within the Authority's Corporate Risk Register recently.

It was noted that the new risks identified had been:

- ambulance service resource pressures; and
- changes to the Data Protection Regulations as a result of the United Kingdom being part of the European Union.

* **APRC/14** **Authority Policy for Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 (RIPA)**

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Corporate Services (APRC/17/18) that set out the background to the instigation of a policy in 2014 on procedures and processes to be followed in the event of the Authority wishing to use certain covert investigatory techniques under the Regulation of Investigative Powers Act 2000 (RIPA).

It was noted that a revised Policy had been approved by this Committee at its meeting on 6 February 2015 (Minute *APRC/18 refers). Following adoption of the revised Policy, the Service was subject to an inspection by the Office of the Surveillance Committee (OSC) to assess its RIPA policy and procedures. The recommendations from this inspection as set out within Appendix A to this report) were incorporated into a revised policy, the draft of which was attached to the report at Appendix B.

RESOLVED

- (a). That the revised Authority Policy for the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act (RIPA), as set out at Appendix B OF report APRC/17/18 be approved;
- (b). That a report be submitted to a future meeting as necessary on any recommendations stemming from the forthcoming RIPA inspection to be undertaken by the Office of the Surveillance Commissioners (OSC);
- (c). That, notwithstanding (b), a report reviewing the current RIPA policy be submitted to this Committee in twelve months' time; and
- (d). That, subject to (a) to (c) above, the report be noted.

* **APRC/15** **Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue Service Performance Report: July 2016 to June 2017**

The Committee received for information a report of the Chief Fire Officer (APRC/17/19) setting out the performance of the Service as measured against the indicators and targets within the Corporate Plan 2013/14 to 2016/17. The report also included an overview of performance against new corporate performance measures for illustrative purposes.

The key points made during the presentation were that:

- there had been 25,452 incidents in the 12 month period from July 2016 to June 2017 of which 2368 (14%) were primary fires and 2925 (17%) were for medical emergencies.
- There was a total of 4394 fires where 265 people needed help;
- Of the 265 fires, 203 people had been saved, there had been 12 fire related deaths and 102 injuries.

Reference was also made to benchmarking information (copies of which were circulated at the meeting) setting out the Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue Service incident statistics for the period April 2016 to March 2017. The data showed a long term downward trend in the number of incidents attended by the Service which varied from the national picture as attendance at non-fire incidents had exceeded that of fire incidents for many years. This was largely due to the co-responding work that the Service carried out on behalf of the South West Ambulance Services Trust. In 2005/06 there was 5314 fires as compared to 6525 non fire incidents whereas in 2016/17, there was 4229 fires with 6974 non fire incidents. The number of false alarms had increased, however, during this period.

The Committee noted that the Service was not complacent and continued to work on its prevention and protection activities in order to reduce fire deaths, injuries and incidents.

***DENOTES DELEGATED MATTER WITH POWER TO ACT**