



Combined Fire Authority

16 September 2022

Recruitment of Independent Person to the Audit and Finance Committee

Report of the Deputy Chief Executive

Purpose of Report

1. To update members on the position regarding the recruitment of an Independent Person to the Audit and Finance Committee.

Background

2. The Authority's constitution was amended in July 2021 to include the addition of an Independent Person to the membership of the Audit and Finance Committee. The Audit and Finance Committee provides assurance to the Authority on the effectiveness of the Authority's governance, financial management, risk management and internal control arrangements and it approves the Authority's Statement of Accounts and Annual Governance Statement. Having an Independent Person as a member of the committee is recommended best practice by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA).
3. At the meeting of the Authority held on 16 February 2022 members agreed to commence a recruitment exercise to appoint an Independent Person to the Audit and Finance Committee.

Update on the Recruitment Process

4. An advert was placed in the local press, on social media sites and on the Authority's website to seek a suitable candidate to fill the position. The position was advertised on an unpaid basis with travelling and subsistence expenses to be reimbursed in line with the rates payable to elected members of the Authority.
5. Applications for the role were sought from individuals ideally with a financial, accountancy, risk management or audit background preferably within a large or public sector organisation. Unfortunately, no applications were received for the position.

Proposed Way Forward

6. On 31 May 2022, the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) provided its response to a consultation on the Independent Review of Local Authority Financial Reporting and Audit (Redmond Review) which outlined plans to make audit committees compulsory for all local authorities (including fire authorities), with at least one independent member appointed to each audit committee.
7. As it is likely to be a legal requirement to have an independent member of the Audit and Finance Committee it is essential that an appointment is made as soon as possible. To attract suitable candidates, it is proposed that the post is re-advertised on a remunerated basis, with an annual allowance in line with the basic allowance paid to Fire Authority members (£1,158 per annum) together with reimbursement of travelling and subsistence expenses.
8. For comparison purposes, Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Authority have recently advertised for a similar position, with an allowance of £1,648 per annum.
9. As outlined in the previous report, it is proposed that the recruitment is delegated to the Clerk to the Authority and members of the Appointments Panel.
10. The Authority previously agreed a term of office for the Independent Person which was originally proposed to conclude on 30 April 2023. Given the passage of time between the original report being approved and the proposed recruitment period it is also recommended that members extend the term of office until 30 April 2024.

Recommendation

11. Members are recommended to **agree** and **approve** to re-commence the recruitment exercise to appoint an Independent Person to the Audit and Finance Committee until 30 April 2024 in accordance with the parameters set out in this report.