

Taunton Deane Borough Council

Corporate Governance Committee 6 December 2016

Appointment of External Auditors for 2018/19

This matter is the responsibility of Executive Councillor Richard Parrish

Report Author: Paul Carter, Assistant Director – Corporate Services

1 Executive Summary / Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 The report introduces and explains the background to the letter received from Public Sector Auditor Appointments (PSAA) regarding the national scheme for appointing external auditors for 2018/19. Details are provided in the report of the various options open to us for appointing our external auditors from 2018/19 onwards. The report concludes and recommends that we should opt into the national scheme being run by PSAA.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 The Corporate Governance Committee are asked to endorse the recommendation to Full Council on 13 December 2016 for TDBC to opt in to the PSAA scheme for procuring our external auditor for 2018/19 and beyond.

3 Risk Assessment

Risk Matrix

Description	Likelihood	Impact	Overall
Failure to implement and maintain appropriate, cost effective and independent external audit arrangements for 2018/19 and beyond leads to our breaching our legal obligations	3	4	12
<i>The mitigations for this are the proposed changes as set out in the report</i>	2	4	8

Risk Scoring Matrix

Likelihood	5	Almost Certain	Low (5)	Medium (10)	High (15)	Very High (20)	Very High (25)
	4	Likely	Low (4)	Medium (8)	Medium (12)	High (16)	Very High (20)
	3	Possible	Low (3)	Low (6)	Medium (9)	Medium (12)	High (15)
	2	Unlikely	Low (2)	Low (4)	Low (6)	Medium (8)	Medium (10)
	1	Rare	Low (1)	Low (2)	Low (3)	Low (4)	Low (5)
			1	2	3	4	5
			Negligible	Minor	Moderate	Major	Catastrophic
Impact							

Likelihood of risk occurring	Indicator	Description (chance of occurrence)
1. Very Unlikely	May occur in exceptional circumstances	< 10%
2. Slight	Is unlikely to, but could occur at some time	10 – 25%
3. Feasible	Fairly likely to occur at same time	25 – 50%
4. Likely	Likely to occur within the next 1-2 years, or occurs occasionally	50 – 75%
5. Very Likely	Regular occurrence (daily / weekly / monthly)	> 75%

4 Background and Full details of the Report

Background

- 4.1 The Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 abolished the Audit Commission and requires, from 2018/19, local authorities to appoint their own external auditors.
- 4.2 Our current external audit function is provided by Grant Thornton under contract from Central Government. The external audit work currently costs us circa £62k per annum.
- 4.3 By 31 December 2017 we are required to have arrangements in place for our external audit provision for the 2018/19 financial year.
- 4.4 These changes have NO impact on our internal audit arrangements which continue to be provided by the South West Audit Partnership (SWAP).

Options for Procurement

- 4.5 Essentially there are three options available to us:
 - i) Undertake an individual procurement exercise (i.e. do it ourselves);
 - ii) Conduct a joint procurement exercise with other bodies (e.g. a local scheme with other councils or public bodies in our area); or

- iii) Join a 'sector led body' arrangement where specified appointing person status has been achieved under regulations (i.e. the procurement is undertaken on our behalf).

4.6 Options i) and ii) above require the creation of an auditor panel to advise on the appointment. There is no requirement for an auditor panel with option 3.

The Public Sector Audit Appointments National Scheme

4.7 The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government has approved Public Sector Audit Appointments (PSAA) as a sector led body that can undertake this procurement as outlined in Option iii) above.

4.8 PSAA is a not-for-profit company established by the Local Government Association and administers the current external audit contracts on behalf of central government. The PSAA has established an advisory panel drawn from local government and police bodies to assist in the design of the scheme.

4.9 The attached letter from PSAA provides details of the opt in scheme proposed by PSAA. In summary however the intention is to provide a scheme which saves time and resources for councils by undertaking a collective procurement. Specifically this will mean we avoid having to:

- Establish an audit panel with independent members;
- Manage the procurement process
- Monitor the independence of the auditor during the duration of the appointment
- Deal with the replacement of any auditor if required
- Manage the contract with the auditor

4.10 The costs of setting up and managing the scheme will be covered by the audit fees. Whilst the exact costs are unknown at this stage PSAA anticipate them being lower than their current costs.

4.11 A Full Council decision is required should we wish to opt in to the PSAA scheme and we need to formally notify PSAA by 9 March 2017 should we intend to do so.

Conclusions

4.12 Our annual spend on external audit is circa £62k per annum. The costs of undertaking our own procurement exercise could be disproportionate and are unlikely to result in our procuring a contract at a lower price than a sector led exercise.

4.13 Whilst a detailed analysis of the various options has not been undertaken, it is clear that the scheme proposed by PSAA offers distinct benefits in terms of simplicity, cost, resources and time over procuring and managing a contract locally.

5 Links to Corporate Aims / Priorities

5.1 There are no specific links to the Corporate Aims and Priorities

6 Finance / Resource Implications

6.1 External audit provide a vital role in auditing our accounts, ensuring we are operating within the law and have proper arrangements in place for securing economy, efficiency

and effectiveness.

- 6.2 Our annual spend on this function and the value of the 'contract' is comparatively small. The costs of running an internal procurement exercise could be disproportionate and consequently it makes sense from a financial perspective to opt into the PSAA scheme.

7 Legal Implications (if any)

- 7.1 We are required by law to have independent external audit arrangements in place. Opting into the PSAA scheme provides us with a cost effective and low resource mechanism for delivering this responsibility.

8 Environmental Impact Implications (if any)

- 8.1 No implications.

9 Safeguarding and/or Community Safety Implications (if any)

- 9.1 No implications.

10 Equality and Diversity Implications (if any)

- 10.1 No implications.

11 Social Value Implications (if any)

- 11.1 The proposal relates to the procurement of specialist external auditing work. It will be led by a non-for-profit company established by the Local Government Association who will consult with us as part of the procurement process.

12 Partnership Implications (if any)

- 12.1 The proposal allows us to work in partnership with other public sector bodies to jointly procure services. This should allow us to both minimise procurement and contract costs.

13 Health and Wellbeing Implications (if any)

- 13.1 No implications.

14 Asset Management Implications (if any)

- 14.1 No implications.

15 Consultation Implications (if any)

- 15.1 No implications.

Democratic Path:

- **Corporate Governance Committee – Yes / ~~No~~** (delete as appropriate)
- **Cabinet/Executive – Yes / No** (delete as appropriate)

- **Full Council – Yes / ~~No~~** (delete as appropriate)

Reporting Frequency : Once only Ad-hoc Quarterly
 Twice-yearly Annually

List of Appendices (delete if not applicable)

Appendix A	Letter dated 27 October 2016 from Public Sector Audit Appointments
------------	--

Contact Officers

Name	Paul Carter	Name	Richard Sealy
Direct Dial	07802 868175	Direct Dial	01823 358690
Email	p.carter@tauntondeane.gov.uk	Email	r.sealy@tauntondeane.gov.uk

Name		Name	
Direct Dial		Direct Dial	
Email		Email	

27 October 2016

Email: appointingperson@psaa.co.uk

Penny James
Taunton Deane Borough Council
The Deane House
Belvedere Road
Taunton Somerset TA1 1HE

Copied to: Shirlene Adam, Director - Operations, Taunton Deane Borough Council
Bruce Lang, Monitoring Officer, Taunton Deane Borough Council

Dear Mrs James

Invitation to opt into the national scheme for auditor appointments

As you know the external auditor for the audit of the accounts for 2018/19 has to be appointed before the end of 2017. That may seem a long way away, but as there is now a choice about how to make that appointment, a decision on your authority's approach will be needed soon.

We are pleased that the Secretary of State has expressed his confidence in us by giving us the role of appointing local auditors under a national scheme. This is one choice open to your authority. We issued a prospectus about the scheme in July 2016, available to download on the [appointing person](#) page of our website, with other information you may find helpful.

The timetable we have outlined for appointing auditors under the scheme means we now need to issue a formal invitation to opt into these arrangements. The covering email provides the formal invitation, along with a form of acceptance of our invitation for you to use if your authority decides to join the national scheme. We believe the case for doing so is compelling. To help with your decision we have prepared the additional information attached to this letter.

I need to highlight two things:

- we need to receive your formal acceptance of this invitation by 9 March 2017; and
- the relevant regulations require that, except for a body that is a corporation sole (a police and crime commissioner), the decision to accept the invitation and to opt in needs to be made by the members of the authority meeting as a whole. We appreciate this will need to be built into your decision making timetable.

If you have any other questions not covered by our information, do not hesitate to contact us by email at appointingperson@psaa.co.uk.

Yours sincerely



Jon Hayes, Chief Officer

Appointing an external auditor

Information on the national scheme

Public Sector Audit Appointments Limited (PSAA)

We are a not-for-profit company established by the Local Government Association (LGA). We administer the current audit contracts, let by the Audit Commission before it closed.

We have the support of the LGA, which has worked to secure the option for principal local government and police bodies to appoint auditors through a dedicated sector-led national procurement body. We have established an advisory panel, drawn from representative groups of local government and police bodies, to give access to your views on the design and operation of the scheme.

The national scheme for appointing local auditors

We have been specified by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government as the appointing person for principal local government bodies. This means that we will make auditor appointments to principal local government bodies that choose to opt into the national appointment arrangements we will operate for audits of the accounts from 2018/19. These arrangements are sometimes described as the 'sector-led body' option, and our thinking for this scheme was set out in a prospectus circulated to you in July. The prospectus is available on the [appointing person](#) page of our website.

We will appoint an auditor for all opted-in authorities for each of the five financial years beginning from 1 April 2018, unless the Secretary of State chooses to terminate our role as the appointing person beforehand. He or she may only do so after first consulting opted-in authorities and the LGA.

What the appointing person scheme will offer

We are committed to making sure the national scheme will be an excellent option for auditor appointments for you.

We intend to run the scheme in a way that will save time and resources for local government bodies. We think that a collective procurement, which we will carry out on behalf of all opted-in authorities, will enable us to secure the best prices, keeping the cost of audit as low as possible for the bodies who choose to opt in, without compromising on audit quality.

Our current role means we have a unique experience and understanding of auditor procurement and the local public audit market.

Using the scheme will avoid the need for you to:

- establish an audit panel with independent members;
- manage your own auditor procurement and cover its costs;
- monitor the independence of your appointed auditor for the duration of the appointment;
- deal with the replacement of any auditor if required; and
- manage the contract with your auditor.

Our scheme will endeavour to appoint the same auditors to other opted-in bodies that are involved in formal collaboration or joint working initiatives, if you consider that a common auditor will enhance efficiency and value for money.

We will also try to be flexible about changing your auditor during the five-year appointing period if there is good reason, for example where new joint working arrangements are put in place.

Securing a high level of acceptances to the opt-in invitation will provide the best opportunity for us to achieve the most competitive prices from audit firms. The LGA has previously sought expressions of interest in the appointing person arrangements, and received positive responses from over 270 relevant authorities. We ultimately hope to achieve participation from the vast majority of eligible authorities.

High quality audits

The Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 provides that firms must be registered as local public auditors with one of the chartered accountancy institutes acting in the capacity of a Recognised Supervisory Body (RSB). The quality of registered firms' work will be subject to scrutiny by both the RSB and the Financial Reporting Council (FRC), under arrangements set out in the Act.

We will:

- only contract with audit firms that have a proven track record in undertaking public audit work;
- include obligations in relation to maintaining and continuously improving quality in our contract terms and in the quality criteria in our tender evaluation;
- ensure that firms maintain the appropriate registration and will liaise closely with RSBs and the FRC to ensure that any quality concerns are detected at an early stage; and
- take a close interest in your feedback and in the rigour and effectiveness of firms' own quality assurance arrangements.

We will also liaise with the National Audit Office to help ensure that guidance to auditors is updated as necessary.

Procurement strategy

In developing our procurement strategy for the contracts with audit firms, we will have input from the advisory panel we have established. The panel will assist PSAA in developing arrangements for the national scheme, provide feedback to us on proposals as they develop, and helping us maintain effective channels of communication. We think it is particularly important to understand your preferences and priorities, to ensure we develop a strategy that reflects your needs within the constraints set out in legislation and in professional requirements.

In order to secure the best prices we are minded to let audit contracts:

- for 5 years;
- in 2 large contract areas nationally, with 3 or 4 contract lots per area, depending on the number of bodies that opt in; and
- to a number of firms in each contract area to help us manage independence issues.

The value of each contract will depend on the prices bid, with the firms offering the best value being awarded larger amounts of work. By having contracts with a number of firms, we will be able to manage issues of independence and avoid dominance of the market by one or two firms. Limiting the national volume of work available to any one firm will encourage competition and ensure the plurality of provision.

Auditor appointments and independence

Auditors must be independent of the bodies they audit, to enable them to carry out their work with objectivity and credibility, and in a way that commands public confidence.

We plan to take great care to ensure that every auditor appointment passes this test. We will also monitor significant proposals for auditors to carry out consultancy or other non-audit work, to protect the independence of auditor appointments.

We will consult you on the appointment of your auditor, most likely from September 2017. To make the most effective allocation of appointments, it will help us to know about:

- any potential constraints on the appointment of your auditor because of a lack of independence, for example as a result of consultancy work awarded to a particular firm;
- any joint working or collaboration arrangements that you think should influence the appointment; and
- other local factors you think are relevant to making the appointment.

We will ask you for this information after you have opted in.

Auditor appointments for the audit of the accounts of the 2018/19 financial year must be made by 31 December 2017.

Fee scales

We will ensure that fee levels are carefully managed by securing competitive prices from firms and by minimising our own costs. Any surplus funds will be returned to scheme members under our articles of association and our memorandum of understanding with the Department for Communities and Local Government and the LGA.

Our costs for setting up and managing the scheme will need to be covered by audit fees. We expect our annual operating costs will be lower than our current costs because we expect to employ a smaller team to manage the scheme. We are intending to fund an element of the costs of establishing the scheme, including the costs of procuring audit contracts, from local government's share of our current deferred income. We think this is appropriate because the new scheme will be available to all relevant principal local government bodies.

PSAA will pool scheme costs and charge fees to audited bodies in accordance with a fair scale of fees which has regard to size, complexity and audit risk, most likely as evidenced by audit fees for 2016/17. Pooling means that everyone in the scheme will benefit from the most competitive prices. Fees will reflect the number of scheme participants – the greater the level of participation, the better the value represented by our scale fees.

Scale fees will be determined by the prices achieved in the auditor procurement that PSAA will need to undertake during the early part of 2017. Contracts are likely to be awarded at the end of June 2017, and at this point the overall cost and therefore the level of fees required will be clear. We expect to consult on the proposed scale of fees in autumn 2017 and to publish the fees applicable for 2018/19 in March 2018.

Opting in

The closing date for opting in is 9 March 2017. We have allowed more than the minimum eight week notice period required, because the formal approval process for most eligible bodies, except police and crime commissioners, is a decision made by the members of an authority meeting as a whole.

We will confirm receipt of all opt-in notices. A full list of authorities who opt in will be published on our website. Once we have received an opt-in notice, we will write to you to request information on any joint working arrangements relevant to your auditor appointment, and any potential independence matters that would prevent us appointing a particular firm.

If you decide not to accept the invitation to opt in by the closing date, you may subsequently make a request to opt in, but only after 1 April 2018. The earliest an auditor appointment can be made for authorities that opt in after the closing date is therefore for the audit of the accounts for 2019/20. We are required to consider such requests, and agree to them unless there are reasonable grounds for their refusal.

Timetable

In summary, we expect the timetable for the new arrangements to be:

- Invitation to opt in issued 27 October 2016
- Closing date for receipt of notices to opt in 9 March 2017
- Contract notice published 20 February 2017
- Award audit contracts By end of June 2017
- Consult on and make auditor appointments By end of December 2017
- Consult on and publish scale fees By end of March 2018

Enquiries

We publish frequently asked questions on our [website](#). We are keen to receive feedback from local bodies on our plans. Please email your feedback or questions to: appointingperson@psaa.co.uk.

If you would like to discuss a particular issue with us, please send an email to the above address, and we will make arrangements either to telephone or meet you.