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| Subject: | Appointment of External Auditors | Status: | For Publication |
| Report to: | Full Council | Date: | 15 th December 2021 |
| Report of: | Head of Finance | Portfolio Holder: | Resources |
| Key Decision: | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Forward Plan <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | General Exception | <input type="checkbox"/> Special Urgency <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Equality Impact Assessment: | Required: | No | Attached: No |
| Biodiversity Impact Assessment | Required: | No | Attached: No |
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RECOMMENDATION

- Council is requested to agree to opt into Public Sector Audit Appointments Limited, acting as the appointing person for the appointment of external auditors for Rossendale Borough Council.**

2. PURPOSE OF REPORT

The purpose of the report is to request that council agree to opt in to the national collective scheme administered by Public Sector Audit Appointments Ltd (PSAA) for the appointment of external auditors for the period 2023/24 to 2027/28.

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 The appointment of the council's current external auditors is administered by Public Sector PSAA and the current appointment covers the audits of accounts for Rossendale Borough Council for the financial years 2018/19 to 2022/23. The council's current External Auditor is Mazars LLP. The PSAA scheme does not include the annual Housing Benefit Subsidy Audit, the council is required to engage the Auditor for this piece of work separately.

3.2 The second appointing period is to span the five consecutive financial years commencing 1 April 2023 and cover the audits of accounts for the financial years 2023/24 to 2027/28. The council is required to appoint an external auditor by 31 December 2022 to commence 1 April 2023.

3.4 There are three options available to the council for appointing its external auditor:

Option 1 - Establish its own independent auditor panel under part 3, section 9 and schedule 4 of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014. The panel must be made up of a majority, or of wholly independent members and must be chaired by an independent member. It would therefore be necessary to undertake a selection process to appoint the panel, whose members may be remunerated. The panel's role would be to advise the council on the selection of its external auditor and therefore to oversee a procurement process.

Option 2 - Establish a joint independent auditor panel to carry out the function on behalf of two or more councils which would therefore have to agree on the selection criteria firstly for the panel's members and then for the external auditor, and then oversee a procurement process.

Option 3 - Opt into PSAA's sector led national scheme. Full Council approval would be

required to opt into the sector led body approach as required by the Local Audit (Appointing Person) Regulations 2015. No significant further action would then be required by the council. On 22 September 2021 PSAA invited all principal local government bodies to become opted-in authorities. Eligible bodies have until 11 March 2022 to formally respond and accept the opt-in invitation. The national scheme is considered to represent the best option as the council will benefit from PSAA's experience of working within the context of the Regulations to appoint auditors, manage contracts with audit firms, setting and determining audit fees. It avoids the necessity to establish an independent auditor panel and undertake a procurement exercise and assures the independence of the auditor's appointment for the council.

4. RISK

Section 12 of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 makes provision for the failure to appoint a local auditor: the authority must immediately inform the Secretary of State, who may direct the authority to appoint the auditor named in the direction or appoint a local auditor on behalf of the authority.

5. IMPLICATIONS

5.1. Financial

The current annual scale fee for External Audit is £35k. However the external audit fee levels are likely to increase when the current contract through PSAA ends. The impact of any increase will be built into the next medium-term financial strategy, although following the outcome of the Redmond Review Government have indicated that council's will receive additional funding to reflect the increasing cost of external audit. The recommendation to proceed with PSAA as the appointing body is expected to deliver the most economically advantageous option from the three available options, given the bargaining power and experience PSAA can bring to bear.

As stated above this contract does not include the Housing Benefit Subsidy Audit work. For information the cost of this audit increased to £21k in 2020/21 from £9k the previous year.

5.2 Legal

Section 7 of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 requires a relevant authority to appoint a local auditor to audit its accounts for a financial year not later than 31 December in the preceding year. Section 17 gives the Secretary of State the power to make regulations in relation to an 'appointing person' specified by the Secretary of State. This power has been exercised in the Local Audit (Appointing Person) Regulations 2015 (SI 192) and this gives the Secretary of State the ability to enable PSAA to be the 'appointing person'.

6 POLICY AND EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

N/A

7. CONCLUSION

The most cost effective and efficient option is for the council to opt in to the PSAA scheme for the appointment of the External Auditors.

No background documents