



NORTHERN
IRELAND
HUMAN
RIGHTS
COMMISSION

AUDIT AND RISK MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE 13th MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 9 SEPTEMBER 2008 AT 10.30AM AT THE NORTHERN IRELAND HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION, TEMPLE COURT, 39 NORTH STREET, BELFAST, BT1 1NA

Present: Bill Smith, Chairperson
Alan Henry
Daphne Trimble

Apologies: Eamonn O'Neill
Geraldine Rice

In attendance: Peter O'Neill, Chief Executive
Lorraine Hamill, Finance Supervisor
Don Leeson, Head of Corporate Services
Laura Murphy, Northern Ireland Audit Office
Virginia McVea, Head of Legal Services (Agenda Item 5)
Pauline Poots, ASM Horwath

1. Minutes of the previous meeting (11 June 2008)

- 1.1 The minutes of the Audit and Risk Management Committee meeting held on 11 June 2008 were agreed as an accurate record.

2. Matters arising

- 2.1 The Chief Executive reported on a meeting with the Equality Commission held on 2 September 2008 to discuss the implementation of internal audit recommendations relating to the aspects of the IT system that they support (paragraph 2.3 of the minutes of the last meeting refers). Implementation of these issues will be monitored and reported to the Committee in the regular progress report on the implementation of audit recommendations.

3. Feedback on the audit of the Commission's Annual Report and Accounts for 2007-08

- 3.1 Laura Murphy from the Northern Ireland Audit Office reported on the recent audit of the accounts for 2007-08. A formal written report on the audit will be sent to the Audit and Risk Management Committee once the accounts are certified by the Comptroller and Auditor General.

Action: Head of Corporate Services

4. Strategic Internal Audit Plan 2008-11

- 4.1 The Committee noted that ASM Horwath have been appointed as the Internal Auditor for the NIO's sponsored bodies, including the Commission, for three years from April 2008.
- 4.2 Pauline Poots, ASM Horwath, presented the draft Strategic Internal Audit Plan for 2008-11. The Committee approved the Strategic Internal Audit Plan, subject to some minor amendments, from which annual audit plans will be derived.
- 4.3 ASM Horwath were congratulated on providing such an indepth internal audit plan which would provide useful background information for other committees.
- 4.4 The Committee noted that field work to implement the first year of the Strategic Internal Audit Plan is due to begin on 6 October and the outcome will be reported to the Committee in December 2008.

Action: Head of Corporate Services

5. Legal Costs

- 5.1 The Head of Legal Services briefed the Committee on the Commission's systems for approving and monitoring expenditure on its legal interventions.
- 5.2 The Committee noted that a report has been prepared by the Cost Drawer, which benchmarks the legal fees paid by the Commission with other public bodies and makes recommendations for changes to the terms on which the Commission makes offers of assistance. These are currently being considered as part of a wider review of the Commission's strategy in respect of legal costs, which is being undertaken by the Head of Legal Services. This review is expected to be complete in early 2009 and will be reported to the Committee in February 2009.

Action: Head of Legal Services

- 5.3 As part of the review, it was suggested that the Head of Legal Services might find it worthwhile to meet relevant staff in the Legal Services Commission to compare their approach to funding and managing legal expenditure. Pauline Poots agreed to pass on contact details.

Action: Pauline Poots / Head of Legal Services

6. Corporate Risk Management

- 6.1 The Risk Register as at September 2008 was noted.

7. Internal audit recommendations – progress report

- 7.1 The Committee noted the progress report on the internal audit recommendations.

8. Future development of the Audit and Risk Management Committee

- 8.1 The Committee noted the paper on the future development of the Audit and Risk Management Committee, which drew on the approach adopted by the Equality Commission's Audit and Risk Committee.

- 8.2 It was agreed that the Committee should adopt a more proactive role, with an organisational development focus and a particular emphasis on ensuring that value for money is secured. The Head of Corporate Services will propose revisions to the terms of reference for consideration at the November Commission meeting.

Action: Head of Corporate Services

- 8.3 In the meantime, it was agreed that the Internal Auditor should attend all Committee meetings, that managers should be invited to Committee meetings to discuss aspects of their teams' work covered by the Risk Register and that, following each meeting, a member of the Committee will give a report to the next Commission meeting on the work of the Committee.

- 8.4 The Head of Corporate Services will contact the Northern Ireland Office to enquire if the Chair can observe one of their Audit Committee meetings.

Action: Head of Corporate Services

- 8.5 It was also agreed that the Committee benchmark its work on an annual basis, possibly benchmarking against its counterpart in the Legal Services Commission in 2009.

9. Expenses of the Chief Commissioner and Chief Executive

- 9.1 The Committee noted the expenses of the Chief Commissioner and the Chief Executive.

10. International events

- 10.1 The Committee noted the paper on international events attended by Commissioners and staff for the period April – August 2008.

11. Any other business

- 11.1 It was noted that the Chair will facilitate the Management Team's discussion on implementation of the findings of the job evaluation exercise and possible future restructuring.

12. Date of next meeting

- 12.1 The next meeting of the Audit and Risk Management Committee will be on Tuesday 16 December 2008 at 10.30 am.