



NORTHERN
IRELAND
HUMAN
RIGHTS
COMMISSION

AUDIT AND RISK MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

**MINUTES OF THE 3rd MEETING
HELD ON MONDAY 23 OCTOBER 2006 AT 10.30AM
AT THE NORTHERN IRELAND HUMAN RIGHTS
COMMISSION, TEMPLE COURT, 39 NORTH STREET,
BELFAST, BT1 1NA**

Present: Bill Smith, Chairperson
Christine Eames
Alan Henry
Kevin McLaughlin

In attendance: Paddy Sloan, Chief Executive
Don Leeson, Head of Corporate Services
Lorraine Hamill, Administrative Officer (Finance)
Tomas Wilkinson, Northern Ireland Audit Office (for
agenda item 3)

Apologies: Geraldine Rice

1. Minutes of the last meeting (19 June 2006)

1.1 The minutes of the last meeting were agreed as an accurate record.

2. Matters arising

2.1 As Geraldine Rice is on long term sick leave and Christine Eames and Kevin McLaughlin's terms of office are due to end in November 2007, members agreed to invite another Commissioner to sit on the Committee to ensure adequate cover for meetings.

Action: Head of Corporate Services

- 2.2 The skills audit of Committee members has not yet taken place due to work pressures over the summer (paragraph 2.2 refers). Members asked for a paper on methodology to be drafted for discussion at their next meeting.
Action: Head of Corporate Services
- 2.3 The Head of Corporate Services has been in contact with a trainer about providing training on risk management to Commissioners (paragraph 2.3 refers). It was agreed to organise the training for January 2007. The Chief Executive agreed to contact the Equality Commission and NICCY to invite them to attend.
Action: Chief Executive
- 2.4 There has been a slight delay in setting up the 'e-banking' facility, and therefore the Financial Procedures Manual has not yet been updated (paragraph 2.4 refers). The first payroll transaction using the Commission's new BACS facility took place in October 2006. The Manual will be updated for consideration at the next meeting.
Action: Head of Corporate Services
- 2.5 The Chief Executive confirmed that the Chairperson will be invited to attend Commission meetings for discussion of issues relevant to corporate governance and risk management (paragraph 2.5 refers).
Action: Chief Executive
- 2.6 The Head of Corporate Services reported that Catherine McCann had left the NIO and had not yet been replaced. Therefore a presentation to Commissioners on the Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) process would not be possible. However, the outcome of the CSR will be reported to Commissioners in due course (paragraph 3.2 refers).
- 2.7 The business case for the proposed new pay arrangements for staff is not yet complete as discussions with NIPSA are still ongoing. A full update will be given to the next Committee meeting (paragraph 7.2 refers).
Action: Head of Corporate Services
- 2.8 The Head of Corporate Services had received a copy of the OFCOM travel expenses guidelines from Kevin McLaughlin. The Head of Corporate Services will adapt this for the Commission and prepare a draft for the next Committee meeting (paragraph 9.4 refers).
Action: Head of Corporate Services

- 2.9 The Head of Corporate Services confirmed that the Register of Interests for Commissioners has been updated (paragraph 10.2 refers).

Tomas Wilkinson joined the meeting

3. Matters arising from the audit of the Commission's accounts for 2005-06 (verbal briefing)

- 3.1 Tomas Wilkinson from the Northern Ireland Audit Office briefed the Committee on the audit of the Commission's accounts for 2005-06. He reported that there had been a steady improvement in the quality of the Commission's accounting arrangements over recent years and there were no serious issues or problems arising out of the 2005-06 audit. The audited accounts will be sent to the Comptroller and Auditor General (C&AG) for certification as soon as possible, so that they can be published with the Annual Report before the end of the year.

Action: Head of Corporate Services

Christine Eames joined the meeting at 11.25 am.

- 3.2 It was agreed to review the timetable for the submission and audit of the Commission's 2006-07 accounts, so that they can be published in autumn 2007.

Action: Head of Corporate Services

Tomas Wilkinson left the meeting

4. Corporate Risk Management

- 4.1 The Risk Register was reviewed in detail and noted.
- 4.2 The Committee noted that the NIO had decided not to proceed with the Landscape Review as originally planned, but had agreed to review the Commission's financial delegation thresholds.
- 4.3 In relation to external political activity (page 9 of the Register), the Committee recommended that the full Commission should be invited to consider the need for clear guidance for staff on the public expression of personal views on potentially controversial political issues. It was suggested that such guidance might be adapted from that given to civil servants in administrative grades.

Action: Head of Corporate Services

- 4.4 In relation to the revision of pay arrangements (page 18), the Committee emphasised the importance of completing work within the current financial year.

Action: Chief Executive

5. Format of financial reports to the Commission

- 5.1 The Committee reviewed the format of the Corporate Services Report, which includes information on the Commission's financial performance. It was agreed that the report provided the information needed to enable Commissioners to monitor the Commission's budget and other corporate governance issues effectively.

- 5.2 It was agreed to include statistics on human resources-related issues in the Corporate Services Report.

Action: Head of Corporate Services

6. Expenses of the Chief Commissioner and Chief Executive

- 6.1 The Committee reviewed the expenses claimed by the Chief Commissioner and Chief Executive from July to September 2006.

- 6.2 The Committee noted that in one instance a hospitality claim for meals had exceeded the ceiling of £30 per head specified in the Manual, and emphasised the need for all Commissioners and staff to comply with the rules. In reviewing the Manual, the Commission might wish to consider whether there was a case for raising the ceiling.

Action: Head of Corporate Services

- 6.3 The Committee queried the need for the Chief Executive to claim for corporate hospitality on her personal travel and subsistence claim forms. This will be considered in the development of revisions to the Financial Procedures Manual.

Action: Head of Corporate Services

7. Date of next meeting

- 7.1 The next Committee meeting will be held on Tuesday 12 December 2006 at 10.30 am.