



NORTHERN
IRELAND
HUMAN
RIGHTS
COMMISSION

28 October 2021

Minutes of the Audit and Risk Management Committee held at Alfred Street and via Microsoft Teams

Present: Sean Donaghy, Chairperson (in person)
David A Lavery CB (via MS Teams)
Eddie Rooney (in person)

In Attendance: David Russell, Chief Executive (via MS Teams)
Lorraine Hamill, Director (Finance, Personnel and Corporate Affairs) (in person)
Jacqueline McClintock, Senior Finance, Personnel and Corporate Affairs Officer (minutes) (via MS Teams)
Mark Lawther, Ernst & Young (in person)
Emma Boyd, Ernst & Young (in person)
Anna Wojtal, National Audit Office (via MS Teams)
Melissa Lopez Santacruz, ASM Belfast (in person)
Margie Murphy, Boardroom Apprentice (via MS Teams)

1. Welcome and Apologies

- 1.1 The Chairperson welcomed everyone to the meeting and introductions were made.
- 1.2 Apologies were received from:
 - Stephen White (Commissioner)
 - Claire Martin (Director of Engagement)
 - Rhyannon Blythe (Director of Legal, Research and Investigations and Advice to Government)
 - Éilis Haughey (Head of Service, Dedicated Mechanism)
 - Paul Keane, National Audit Office
 - Brian Clerkin, ASM Belfast

2. Declarations of Interest

- 2.1 No declarations of interest were declared.

3. Chairperson's Business

- 3.1 The Chairperson expressed regrets and sadness at the passing of ex-member Maura Muldoon.
- 3.2 The Chairperson welcomed new member, Stephen White, and will make contact before the next meeting of 6 December 2021.

4. Minutes of the meeting held on 22 June 2021

- 4.1 The minutes of the Audit and Risk Management Committee meeting held on 22 June 2021 were agreed as an accurate record.

5. Matters arising from 22 June 2021

- 5.1 It was noted that the Chairperson spoke with Brian Clerkin to clarify why no reliance was placed on the work of internal

audit by the external auditors. External audit standards have risen and placing reliance on internal audit work would require external auditors to re-audit the work of internal audit.

- 5.2 The Director (Finance, Personnel and Corporate Affairs) highlighted that the Annual Report and Accounts were laid in Parliament on 8 July 2021.

6. Director (Finance, Personnel & Corporate Affairs) Report

- **Financial Expenditure as at 30 September 2021:**

6.1 The Director provided an overview of the financial report to 30 September 2021.

6.2 The Director reported that the November Monitoring round with the NIO was currently taking place and forecasts that there will be no underspend at the year end.

6.3 The Director reported that the Commission currently have a bid with the NIO to move £11,000 from resource to capital to purchase audio visual equipment for the Alfred Street office to support hybrid meetings.

Action: Director (Finance, Personnel and Corporate Affairs) to report on the outcome of the November monitoring round and the Comprehensive Spending Review at December committee meeting.

- **Cash Flow report as at 30 September 2021:**

6.4 The Director provided an overview of the cash flow report at 30 September 2021.

- **High Value Purchases as at 18 October 2021:**

6.5 It was agreed that going forward context for the reasons for a single tender action would be included in the High Value Purchases report.

Action: Senior Finance, Personnel and Corporate Affairs Officer to include context for reasons for single tender action in High Value Purchases report.

- **Freedom of Information Act Requests:**

6.6 The Director reported on the Freedom of Information requests.

- **Absences Statistics as at 30 September 2021:**

6.7 The Director reported on the absence statistics as at 30 September 2021.

- **Other issues:**

6.8 The Director (Finance, Personnel and Corporate Affairs) reported prompt payment statistics are currently at 100%.

6.9 The Director reported that there have been no data breaches since 1 April 2021.

6.10 The Director reported that Commissioner Eddie Rooney is now the Data Protection Officer and will attend training on 9 November 2021.

6.11 The Director reported that all staff are currently completing mandatory training as set by the NIO. Commissioners and the Chairperson will also be required to complete set mandatory training.

Action: Director (Finance, Personnel and Corporate Affairs) to arrange access for Commissioners and the Chairperson to the Civil Service Learning platform to enable completion of mandatory training requirements.

6.12 The Director reported that the Equality Scheme had been submitted to the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland.

6.13 The Director reported that there was one incident of unacceptable behaviour from a member of the public. An

appeal was received which was reviewed by the Chairperson and was not upheld. No further correspondence received.

7. Chief Executive Report

- 7.1 The Chief Executive reported that conversations are ongoing with the NIO regarding an independent review of the Commission. Terms of reference are with the NIO. Clearance from the Cabinet Office may be required. NIO to confirm.
- 7.2 The Chief Executive advised that the Commission has offered to assist with the cost of an independent review from current underspend.
- 7.3 The Chief Executive reported that the Comprehensive Spending Review is now complete and the Commission awaits notification from the Permanent Secretary and the NIO as to the outcome.
- 7.4. The Chief Executive reported that budgets for the next 3 years have been modelled on a 5% cumulative cut. Recruitment has been suspended as a contingency which has resulted in operating at a 20% reduction on Core baseline staffing levels.
- 7.5 The Chief Executive reported that the 20% reduction in Core staffing levels has an effect on the current Business Plan due to the Business Plan being signed off with the assumption of a full complement of staff.
- 7.6 The Chief Executive advised that the Commission has completed the reaccreditation process in front of the Global Alliance for National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI) in Geneva. The Chief Executive expects to hear the outcome from the committee in the next 2-3 weeks.
- 7.7 The Chief Executive reported that the Chair of GANHRI wrote to the Secretary of State however no response received to date.

8. Internal Audit – Final Terms of Reference

8.1 Melissa Lopez Santacruz, ASM Belfast provided an overview of the final terms of reference for:

- Pensions, Payroll and Travel and Subsistence
- Financial Systems
- Strategic and Business Planning

8.2 Melissa Lopez Santacruz reported that the fieldwork for internal audit Pensions, Payroll and Travel and Subsistence is complete and a draft report has been issued.

Action: ASM (Belfast) to present internal audit reports on Pensions, Payroll and Travel and Subsistence and Financial Systems at December committee meeting.

9. National Audit Office

9.1 Mark Lawther, EY, reported that EY have been reappointed following a tender process by the NAO.

9.2 Mark Lawther advised that a planning meeting with the Director (Finance, Personnel and Corporate Affairs) was scheduled directly after the Committee meeting.

Action: EY to present the formal planning report at the December Committee meeting.

10. Draft Corporate Risk Register

10.1 The Chief Executive and Director (Finance, Personnel and Corporate Affairs) provided an overview of the draft corporate risk register.

10.2 The Director reported that ongoing issues with the Magique programme has led to a reformatting and the new format would be adopted going forward.

10.3 The Chief Executive advised of a circular to all ALB's and Government departments received from the Permanent Secretary on 22 October 2021 on Cyber Security risk and it was agreed to update the IT risk. The Chief Executive advised Committee members that the Commission's SLA with the Equality Commission covers cyber security.

10.4 The Chief Executive highlighted concern regarding the risk posed due to the absence of a replacement for Commissioner Maura Muldoon in regards to pluralism and equality issues and how this is captured in the Risk Register.

10.5 It was agreed that the Chairperson, Chief Executive and Director (Finance, Personnel and Corporate Affairs) would meet separately to go through the risk register in detail and make any necessary amendments. An updated risk register would then be brought to the next meeting for discussion and consideration.

Action: Chairperson, Chief Executive and Director (Finance, Personnel and Corporate Affairs) to meet separately to go through the risk register.

Action: The Committee to consider the updated Risk Register at its December 2021 meeting.

11. Expenses of Chief Executive

11.1 The Committee reviewed, noted and approved the expenses of the Chief Executive.

12. Revised Terms of Reference

12.1 The Committee reviewed and approved the revised Terms of Reference.

13. Any other Business

13.1 The Chairperson requested that Committee members meet separately prior to the commencement of the December

Committee meeting to complete the Self-Assessment questionnaire that was previously circulated.

Action: Committee members will meet separately at 9.15am on Monday 6 December 2021. Staff and internal and external auditors to join the meeting at 10.00am.

The meeting closed at 10:30.