



NORTHERN  
IRELAND  
HUMAN  
RIGHTS  
COMMISSION

**23 November 2023**

## **Minutes of the Audit and Risk Management Committee held in the offices of the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission**

**Alfred House, 19-21 Alfred Street, Belfast, BT2 8ED (Note: some members attended virtually via Microsoft Teams)**

**Present:** Sean Donaghy, Chairperson  
David A Lavery CB (via MS Teams)  
Stephen White (via MS Teams)

**In Attendance:** David Russell, Chief Executive  
Lorraine Hamill, Director (Finance, Personnel and Corporate Affairs)  
Colin Caughey, Director (Advice to Government, Research and Investigations) (via MS Teams)  
Claire Martin, Director (Communications and Engagement) (via MS Teams)  
Jacqueline McClintock, Senior Finance, Personnel and Corporate Affairs Officer  
Stephanie Knox, Northern Ireland Office (NIO) (via MS Teams)  
Caoimhe Ward, Ernst & Young (EY) (via MS Teams)  
Philip Whitehead, ASM Belfast  
Vivienne Fitzroy, 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:  
Rhyannon Blythe, Director (Legal Services)  
Éilis Haughey, Director (Human Rights after EU Withdrawal)  
Colin Wilcox, National Audit Office (NAO)  
Elaine Manak, National Audit Office (NAO)  
Mark Lawther, Ernst & Young (EY)  
Thomas Lough, Northern Ireland Office (NIO)  
Amanda McMaw, ASM Belfast
- 1.3 The Chairperson extended thanks to former committee attenders Paul Keane (NIO), Mike Surman (NAO) and Brian Clerkin (ASM).
- 1.4 The Chairperson extended thanks to former member Eddie Rooney.

## **2. Declarations of Interest**

- 2.1 The Chairperson declared his post as Chair for the Northern Ireland Law Centre.

## **3. Chairperson's Business**

- 3.1 The Chairperson had nothing to report.

## **4. Minutes of the meeting held on 23 June 2023 (minutes enclosed)**

- 4.1 The minutes of the Audit and Risk Management Committee meeting held on 23 June 2023 were agreed as an accurate record.

## **5. Matters arising from 23 June 2023**

- 5.1 There were no matters arising.

## 6. Director (Finance, Personnel and Corporate Affairs) Report

- **Financial Report for October 2023:**

- 6.1 The Director provided an overview of the financial report for October 2023 including projections to the year end.
- 6.2 The Director reported that the Commission received business case approval at the end of August 2023 and received an additional £374k to support 4 vacant posts (£197k), programme costs (£137.5k) and operating costs (£39,807).
- 6.3 The Director reported that negotiations with the NIO continue, in fortnightly meetings, to agree carryover of unspent salary costs from 23/24 to 24/25.

- **Staffing update**

- 6.4 Currently recruiting for a Policy and Research Officer (SO). Post is a temporary position until 31 March 2025.
- 6.5 Senior Engagement and Communications officer (DP) recruited through internal trawl. Successful applicant started in post on 21 November 2023. Post is a temporary position until 31 March 2025.
- 6.6 Awaiting permission from Treasury to NIO to allow the Commission to recruit to two vacant posts in 24/25:
  - 1. Policy and Research Officer (SO)
  - 2. Engagement and Communications Officer (SO)
- 6.7 Alice Iskander joined the Commission on 13 November 2023 on a fixed-term temporary contract as an Administrative Officer.

- **High Value Purchases as at 30 September 2023:**

- 6.8 The Director provided an overview on high value purchases for the period 20 June to 30 September 2023.
- 6.9 The Director provided rationale for single tender action awarded to Whitenoise.

- **Freedom of Information requests for period April to August 2023:**

6.10 The Director (Communications and Engagement) provided an overview of Freedom of Information requests for the period 01 April to 31 August 2023.

6.11 The Director highlighted that a response provided on a Freedom of Information request on the Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) report is subject to an Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) complaint. Further details will be provided at the next Committee meeting.

## 7. Oral Update from the Chief Executive

- **Key Performance Indicators (KPI) Framework**

7.1 The Chief Executive provided an overview of the KPI Framework and continuing progress. The KPI Framework will align to the Business Plan 2024/25.

7.2 The Chief Executive advised that KPI Framework report will come to the March 2024 Committee meeting.

7.3 The Chief Executive reported that KPI Framework is a work in progress however to date reporting has been positive.

- **Reaccreditation**

7.4 The Chief Executive reported that the Commission appeared in front of the Sub Accreditation Committee in October 2023 and the Commission has been re accredited with 'A' status for 5 years.

7.5 The reaccreditation is on the basis of:

1. The in year budget uplift;
2. Supportive letter from the Secretary of State;
3. NIO / UK Government publishing of response to the Independent Review.

7.6 The reaccreditation is subject to the Commission continuing to work with the NIO to implement the recommendations of the Independent Review, and addressing in particular the issues of:

1. Adequate funding;
2. Financial autonomy;
3. Diversity and pluralism;
4. Visiting places of deprivation of liberty.

- **Independent Review**

- 7.7 The Chief Executive reported that Terms of Reference have been agreed with the NIO for the Baseline Assessment. Terms of Reference have been shared with HM Treasury and approval is awaited.
- 7.8 The Chief Executive reported that a business case has been submitted to the NIO on Recommendation 6 (Explore a new pay policy for the NIHRC). The business case proposal would align the Commission's pay policy broadly with the NIO and the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) in GB, implementing the recommendation to secure greater financial autonomy.

## **8. Internal Audit Update**

- 8.1 Philip Whitehead, ASM, presented the internal audit report on 'Systems for Tracking Legislation and Policy Developments'.
- 8.2 Director (Advice to Government, Research and Investigations) provided rationale for partially accepted recommendations.
- 8.3 Director (Finance, Personnel and Corporate Affairs) reported that the next internal audit will cover the Dedicated Mechanism function and is due to take place in January 2024.
- 8.4 The Director (Finance, Personnel and Corporate Affairs) reported that the final 23/24 audit is a Follow up on previous audit recommendations, and is due to take place in March 2024.

## **9. National Audit Office Update**

- 9.1 Caoimhe Ward, EY, reported that the audit planning meeting for 23/24 took place on 22 November 2023 and the Audit Planning report will be presented at the next Committee meeting.

## **10. Corporate Risk Register**

- 10.1 Director (Finance, Personnel and Corporate Affairs) provided an overview of the Corporate Risk Register.
- 10.2 The Director provided detail on tracked changes to the Corporate Risk Register and rationale for changes.

10.3 The Director asked Committee members to consider the removal of Risk 28 – Coronavirus. Committee members agreed to the removal.

**Action: Director (Finance, Personnel and Corporate Affairs) to remove Risk 28 – Coronavirus.**

10.4 Committee members discussed the UK Supreme Court decision on Safety of Rwanda (Asylum and Immigration) Bill and potential impact on the further domestic application of the ECHR. Consideration was given on whether matters, such as threats to the UK human rights framework should be included in the risk register.

**Action: 10.4 to be kept under review and updated at the January 2024 Committee meeting.**

10.5 Committee members approved changes to the Corporate Risk Register.

## **11. International Travel**

11.1 Director (Finance, Personnel and Corporate Affairs) provided an overview of International Travel from April to September 2023.

## **12. Gifts and Hospitality Register**

12.1 Director (Finance, Personnel and Corporate Affairs) provided an overview of Gifts and Hospitality Register from April to August 2023.

## **13. Expenses of Chief Commissioner and Chief Executive**

13.1 Expenses of Chief Commissioner and Chief Executive were noted and approved by the Committee.

## **14. AOB**

- 14.1 The Chair noted that the Commission was successful in securing funding from the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) to support a project for the Commonwealth Forum of National Human Rights Institutions.
- 14.2 The Chief Executive reported the funding from the FCDO until 30 April 2024 is £70k and funding is to recruit a Project Manager for a period of 6 months. The role will support the Commission in seeking to establish a permanent secretariat for the Commonwealth Forum of National Human Rights Institutions. The Commission was successful in recruiting to the Project Manager post through an internal trawl.
- 14.3 There being no other business the meeting closed at 15.15.

**Next Committee meeting agreed for 25 January 2024 at 14:00.**