



**25 January 2024**

## **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)

**In Attendance:** David Russell, Chief Executive  
Lorraine Hamill, Director (Finance, Personnel and Corporate Affairs)  
Claire Martin, Director (Communications and Engagement) (via MS Teams)  
Rhyannon Blythe, Director (Legal Services) (via MS Teams)  
Jacqueline McClintock, Senior Finance, Personnel and Corporate Affairs Officer  
Thomas Lough, Northern Ireland Office (NIO)  
Elaine Manak, National Audit Office (NAO)  
Mark Lawther, Ernst & Young (EY)  
Caoimhe Devine, Ernst & Young (EY)  
Philip Whitehead, ASM Belfast (via MS Teams)

## 1. Welcome and Apologies

- 1.1 The Chairperson welcomed everyone to the meeting. Introductions were made.
- 1.2 Apologies were received from:  
Stephen White  
Colin Caughey, Director (Advice to Government, Research and Investigations)  
Éilis Haughey, Director (Human Rights after EU Withdrawal)  
Stephanie Knox, Northern Ireland Office (NIO)  
Amanda McMaw, ASM Belfast  
Vivienne Fitzroy, Boardroom Apprentice

## 2. Declarations of Interest

- 2.1 No declarations of interest were declared.

## 3. Chairperson's Business

- 3.1 The Chairperson highlighted the requirement to plan for an own review of the Committee.

**Action: Director (Finance, Personnel and Corporate Affairs) to include in next ARMC agenda.**

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

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

## 5. Matters arising from 23 November 2023

- 5.1 The Director (Finance, Personnel and Corporate Affairs) reported Risk 28 – Coronavirus, has been removed from the risk register.

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

- **Financial Report for December 2023:**

- 6.1 The Director provided an overview of the financial report for December 2023 including a review of the proposed pay award backdated to August 2023.
- 6.2 The Director reported the Commission had been carrying a 2.5% increase pay award. NIPSA are proposing a 5% pay award. Projections have now been revised to include a 5% pay award.
- 6.3 The Director reported an additional £137,500 received for programme costs has been committed and has been mostly utilised for legal costs.
- 6.4 The Director reported that operating costs would be overspent for the financial year due to an ongoing employment case.

- **Staffing update**

- 6.5 The Director reported funding has been received from the NIO through Treasury for 4 vacant posts.
- 6.6 The recruitment process for the vacant Policy and Research Officer post failed to appoint.
- 6.7 The recruitment process for the vacant Engagement and Communications Officer post has completed and an appointable candidate has accepted the post, with them due to start in April 2024.
- 6.8 The budget allocated for the vacant Policy and Research Officer and Engagement and Communications Officer for 2023/24 remains underspent.
- 6.9 The Chief Executive and Director are due to meet with Richard Sharp (NIO) to discuss carrying over the underspend in the budget allocated for the vacant posts to 2024/25.
- 6.10 The Chief Executive reported that the business case for the Economic Baseline Review is with the NIO and is included in Commission papers for a closed minute discussion in the January Commission meeting.

6.11 Thomas Lough (NIO) reported that Terms of Reference have been signed off at official level. NIO await Ministerial approval.

- **High Value Purchases for period 01 October – 31 December 2023:**

6.12 The Director provided an overview on high value purchases for the period 1 October to 31 December 2023.

## 7. Freedom of Information requests

- **Freedom of Information requests for period September to December 2023:**

7.1 The Director (Communications and Engagement) provided an overview of Freedom of Information requests for the period 1 September to 31 December 2023.

7.2 The Director highlighted that the Information Commissioner's Officer (ICO) upheld the decision by the Commission to withhold personal data under Section 42 'Personal Data Relating To Third Parties'.

## 8. Chief Executive Report

8.1 The Chief Executive reported that SMT were completing 2024-25 Business Planning and this will go to the February Commission meeting for approval.

- **Key Performance Indicators (KPI) template January 2024**

8.2 The Chief Executive reported that the KPI Framework will drive strategic planning going forward in 2025-28.

8.3 The Chief Executive reported that the KPI Framework template is to be reviewed in June 2024.

8.4 The Chief Executive reported that the KPI Framework will feed into the narrative in the Annual Report and Accounts.

## 9. Internal Audit Update

9.1 Philip Whitehead, ASM, presented the Terms of Reference for the Review of Dedicated Mechanism.

- 9.2 Philip Whithead reported that fieldwork had commenced on the Review of Dedicated Mechanism.
- 9.3 Philip Whitehead reported the review of previous recommendations would take place in early March 2024.

## 10. National Audit Office Update

- 10.1 The Committee discussed the Audit Planning Report on the 2023-24 Financial Statements Audit, and in particular the assessment of the risk of management override of controls, assessment for the provision for legal cases and revenue recognition.
- 10.2 It was noted that interim audit fieldwork is due to commence week commencing 19 February.
- 10.3 Present Audit Committee members and those charged with governance did not register any knowledge of areas of enquiry that auditors would not be aware of.

**Action: Director (Finance, Personnel and Corporate Affairs) to confirm with Committee member, Stephen White, if they have any knowledge of areas of enquiry that auditors would not be aware of.**

***Post meeting note:***

- 10.4 Commissioner White confirmed by email, that as a member of the Commission's Audit and Risk Management Committee, there were no matters that needed to be brought to the attention of the auditors.

## 11. Corporate Risk Register

- 11.1 Director (Finance, Personnel and Corporate Affairs) provided an overview of the Corporate Risk Register highlighting changes since the last Committee meeting.
- 11.2 The Director reported that Risk 28 – Coronavirus has been removed.
- 11.3 The Chief Executive highlighted the increased inherent and residual risk of staffing capacity from high to critical due to the inability to fill vacant posts. Committee members agreed the increased risk was appropriate.

## 12. International Travel

12.1 Director (Finance, Personnel and Corporate Affairs) provided an overview of International Travel from October to December 2023.

## 13. Expenses of Chief Commissioner

13.1 Expenses of Chief Commissioner were noted by the Committee.

## 14. Any Other Business

14.1 The Chair reported that the functioning of the Audit Committee will be an agenda item for the next Committee meeting for the annual review.

**Action: Director (Finance, Personnel and Corporate Affairs) to include agenda item at next Committee meeting.**

14.2 There being no other business the meeting closed at 15.10.

**Next Committee meeting dates to be circulated by Director (Finance, Personnel and Corporate Affairs).**