



NORTHERN
IRELAND
HUMAN
RIGHTS
COMMISSION

AUDIT AND RISK MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE 10th MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 18 DECEMBER 2007 AT 10.30AM AT THE NORTHERN IRELAND HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION, TEMPLE COURT, 39 NORTH STREET, BELFAST, BT1 1NA

Present: Bill Smith, Chairperson
Alan Henry
Eamonn O'Neill
Geraldine Rice
Daphne Trimble

In attendance: Peter O'Neill, Chief Executive
Don Leeson, Head of Corporate Services
Lorraine Hamill, Finance Supervisor
Brian Clerkin, ASM Horwath

The Chairperson welcomed Daphne Trimble to the Commission and as a member of the Audit and Risk Management Committee, and Peter O'Neill and Lorraine Hamill to the Committee in their new roles.

1. Minutes of the previous meeting (10 September 2007)

- 1.1 The minutes of the Audit and Risk Management Committee meeting held on 10 September 2007 were agreed as an accurate record.

2. Matters arising

- 2.1 The Commission's draft revised Travel and Expenses Policy was discussed with NIPSA at the Joint Negotiating and Consultation Committee (JNCC) meeting on 5 October 2007 and subsequently agreed and signed off. The revised policy incorporated points made by the Audit and Risk Management Committee at previous meetings, including adopting guidance on hospitality produced by the NIO (paragraph 2.1 of the minutes of the last meeting refers).

2.2 The Chairperson will meet the Chief Commissioner in January 2008 to discuss the appraisal process for Commissioners (paragraph 2.2 of the minutes of the last meeting refers).

Action: Chairperson

2.3 The Commission's accounts for 2006–07 were certified by the Comptroller and Auditor General on 15 October 2007 and the Annual Report and Accounts were laid before Parliament on 13 December 2007 (paragraph 3.1 of the minutes of the last meeting refers).

2.4 Job evaluation of staff posts is due to commence early in 2008 and will take three to four months to complete (paragraph 4.2 of the minutes of the last meeting refers).

2.5 The Register of Interests of Commissioners for 2007–08 has been published on the Commission's website, but requires updating with the details of the new Commissioners who joined the Commission with effect from 1 December 2007 (paragraph 5.1 of the minutes of the last meeting refers).

Action: Head of Corporate Services

2.6 The Committee welcomed the fact that Daphne Trimble has joined the Committee (paragraph 7.2 of the minutes of the previous meeting refers). It was agreed that the Commission should be asked to consider appointing one further member to the Committee to bring the membership back to the level it was prior to the end of the appointments of Christine Eames and Kevin McLaughlin.

Action: Head of Corporate Services

3. Draft internal audit report

3.1 Brian Clerkin gave an overview of the draft internal audit report and the key findings and recommendations.

3.2 As agreed at the last meeting, the report used the revised definitions of assurance ratings set down in guidance developed by the Department of Finance and Personnel.

3.3 The Committee noted the substantial assurance rating given to the Commission's financial management arrangements, which is an exceptional achievement. The Committee congratulated the Head of Corporate Services and Finance Supervisor for their work in this area.

- 3.4 The Committee expressed concern at the 'limited' assurance rating afforded to the Commission's information technology systems and it was agreed that the recommendations made by the auditors should be progressed as soon as possible. IT systems will be incorporated in the Commission's risk register until agreed actions to address the audit findings have been completed. The Chief Executive and the Head of Corporate Services will meet to agree management responsibility for IT systems.

Action: Chief Executive / Head of Corporate Services

- 3.5 The Committee noted the findings and recommendations in the other areas covered by the audit (human resource management and training, and the work of the Legal Services, Policy and Research Team).

- 3.6 A report on actions to take forward work to address all the audit findings will be tabled at each Committee meeting to enable progress to be monitored.

Action: Head of Corporate Services

4. Report on attempted fraud against the Commission

- 4.1 A report on an attempted fraud against the Commission was noted.

- 4.2 The Committee noted that the Commission's anti-fraud policy was followed throughout the investigation and agreed that it is fit for purpose. The Committee also noted that the incident was reported to the police. The Chief Executive will follow up progress of the police's investigations.

Action: Chief Executive

- 4.3 The Committee noted that the Commission had a business plan objective of moving away from cheque payments to electronic transactions, via direct debits and BACS, which are more secure. Staff shortages have delayed progress on this, but it is hoped to take forward this work before the end of the financial year.

Action: Finance Supervisor

5. Corporate Risk Management

- 5.1 The Committee noted the Commission's Risk Register as at December 2007.

- 5.2 Concern was expressed at the fact that the Commission as not yet been notified by the NIO of its budget for 2008–09 due to the delay in the Government’s response to the Comprehensive Spending Review. Representation has been made to the NIO on this matter.
- 5.3 Reports on the Commission’s stakeholder survey conducted in December 2007, and the staff survey which is to be discussed at the residential event for staff on 21/22 January 2008, will be tabled at the next Committee meeting.

Action: Head of Corporate Services

6. Expenses of the Chief Commissioner and Chief Executive

- 6.1 The Committee noted the travel and expenses claims made by the Chief Commissioner and Chief Executive.

7. International events

- 7.1 As required by the Commission’s revised Travel and Expenses policy, a report on international travel made by Commissioners and staff for the period 1 November – 10 December 2007 was tabled at the meeting. The report was noted by the Committee.
- 7.2 It was agreed that details of accommodation and other related expenses should also to be included in future reports, so that the totality of the costs of the Commission’s international work can be noted.

Action: Finance Supervisor

8. Any other business

- 8.1 The Chief Executive’s post has been regraded into the Senior Civil Service. Cabinet Office guidelines require a pay committee to oversee the pay arrangements, particularly the award of performance bonus payments. As a Moderating Panel, chaired by the Chairperson of the Audit and Risk Management Committee, and with other Committee members included in its membership, is already in place to oversee the operation of the Commission’s bonus scheme for staff, the Committee agreed a Commission proposal to incorporate moderation of the Chief Executive’s pay arrangements within its remit.

9. Date of next meeting

- 9.1 The Finance Supervisor will canvas all members for a convenient date for the next meeting, scheduled for April 2008.

Action: Finance Supervisor