



NORTHERN
IRELAND
HUMAN
RIGHTS
COMMISSION

AUDIT AND RISK MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE 25th MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY 24 FEBRUARY 2011 AT 10.30AM AT THE NORTHERN IRELAND HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION, TEMPLE COURT, 39 NORTH STREET, BELFAST, BT1 1NA

Present: Bill Smith, Chairperson
Ann Hope
Eamonn O'Neill
Geraldine Rice

In attendance: Lorraine Hamill, Finance Supervisor
Don Leeson, Head of Corporate Services
Pauline Poots, Internal Auditor, ASM
Gareth Caller, National Audit Office

Apologies: None

The Chairperson confirmed that one item of business needed to be discussed prior to the meeting. As this related to ASM, the Internal Auditor was not present for the discussion.

The Committee noted that the contract for the Internal Auditor, which had been in place for 3 years, had the possibility of two 1 year extensions. It was agreed to extend the contract, which was due to end on 31 March 2011, for a further one year (paragraph 2.3 of the minutes of the last meeting refers).

1. Minutes of the previous meetings (15 December 2010)

- 1.1 The minutes of the Audit and Risk Management Committee meeting held on 15 December 2010 were agreed as an accurate record.

2. Matters arising

- 2.1 The draft Internal Complaints Policy, which will incorporate the Grievance Procedure and Dignity at Work policy will be discussed at the Joint Negotiating and Consultative Committee (JNCC) meeting scheduled for Tuesday 8 March 2011. The draft Policy will be presented to the June 2011 Committee meeting for final approval (paragraph 2.1 of the minutes of the last meeting refers).

Action: Head of Corporate Services

- 2.2 The Chairperson reported on the meeting he and the Head of Corporate Services had with representatives of the Audit Committee of the Office of the Police Ombudsman on 11 January 2011 (paragraph 2.2 of the minutes of the last meeting refers).
- 2.3 The Committee noted that the Code of Governance had been signed off by the Northern Ireland Office (NIO) and had been formally adopted at the Commission meeting held on Monday 21 February 2011 (paragraph 2.4 of the minutes of the last meeting refers). Commissioner Ann Hope and the Head of Corporate Services were thanked for their work on the Code of Governance.
- 2.4 The Committee noted that staff were currently undertaking an Information Assurance: e learning course which is to be completed by Friday 25 February 2011 (paragraph 2.6 of the minutes of the last meeting refers).
- 2.5 It was agreed, that as the membership of the Committee would be changing when new Commissioners were appointed in August 2011, not to follow up on the outstanding skills audit questionnaires (paragraph 2.7 of the minutes of the last meeting refers).
- 2.6 The Committee noted that Baker Tilly Mooney Moore had been successful in their tender to provide mentoring support for the Finance Supervisor in the preparation of the Commission's annual accounts (paragraph 3.2 of the minutes of the last meeting refers).

- 2.7 The Committee noted that the NIO had approved the regrading of the posts of Head of Corporate Services and Head of Communications and Education (paragraph 7.2 of the minutes of the last meeting refers).
- 2.8 The Committee noted that the Chairperson had followed up with the Finance Supervisor aspects of the Chief Executive's expenses claim for October/November 2010 (paragraph 9.2 of the minutes of the last meeting refers). The Head of Corporate Services undertook to ensure that the maxima for subsistence claims as set out in Annex 2 to the Staff Handbook would be respected and that no higher payment would be made without explicit written approval from the Chief Executive (or in the case of the Chief Executive, the Chief Commissioner) to justify the exceptional circumstances.
- 2.9 The Chairperson noted that this would be Commissioner O'Neill's last meeting and thanked him for his contribution to the Committee's work since December 2006.

3. Audit Planning Report for the Commission's financial statements for the year ending 31 March 2011

- 3.1 The Committee considered the National Audit Office's (NAO) audit plan for the Commission's Annual Report and Accounts for 2010-11.
- 3.2 The Committee noted that the Commission's Annual Report and Accounts were to be laid in Parliament prior to the summer recess, much earlier than previous years. The Committee were satisfied that procedures had been put in place to ensure the Commission met the deadline.
- 3.3 The Committee noted that the Commission had systems in place for monitoring risk, financial control and compliance with the law, including the risk of fraud.

4. Internal Audit

Review of corporate governance

- 4.1 The Committee noted that notwithstanding the impact of the recent and forthcoming, structural and personnel changes facing the Commission the Internal Auditor had given a satisfactory assurance rating in relation to Corporate Governance.

Progress in implementing Internal Audit recommendations

- 4.2 The Head of Corporate Services tabled a revised version of the progress report on the implementation of the Internal Audit recommendations for the Communication and Education system, in which the recommendation with regard to press releases had been amended to 'accepted'.
- 4.3 The Committee discussed the other recommendations under the Communication and Education system and it was agreed that these should also be amended to 'accepted'.
Action: Head of Corporate Services / Head of Communications and Education
- 4.4 The Committee noted the progress in implementing the Internal Audit recommendations.

5. Financial Procedures Manual

- 5.1 The Finance Supervisor highlighted the areas of change to the Financial Procedures Manual, including segregation of duties and levels of procurement.
- 5.2 The Internal Auditor confirmed that the Treasury's Government Internal Audit Standards (GIAS) had been amended on 23 February 2011 and agreed to forward a copy of the revised Standards to the Chairperson and the Finance Supervisor.
Action: Internal Auditor
- 5.3 The Committee agreed to look at the travel and subsistence rates once the Commission had approved which pay policy it would follow (UK or NI).
Action: Head of Corporate Services
- 5.4 The Committee approved the updated Financial Procedures Manual.

6. Corporate Risk Register 2010-11

- 6.1 The Committee reviewed the Risk Register and the progress of actions to minimise the risks identified.

7. Finance Report

- 7.1 The Committee reviewed the expenditure to the end of January 2011.

8. Contracts

- 8.1 The Committee reviewed the rationale for single tender action for purchases over £5,000. It was agreed that in future reports a more detailed breakdown would be given of the item "Composite Casework".
- 8.2 The Committee noted the purchases over £1,000 for the period December 2010 – February 2011.

9. Expenses of the Chief Commissioner

- 9.1 The Committee reviewed the expenses of the Chief Commissioner for the period November/December 2010.

10. International Events

- 10.1 The Committee reviewed the international events attended by staff for the period December 2010 – February 2011.

11. Any other business

- 11.1 The Finance Supervisor tabled a paper on potential savings if the Commission were to move from its current telecom provider. It was agreed to source other suitable providers before making a final decision.

Action: Finance Supervisor

- 11.2 The Committee noted the Business Plan for the use of funding from The Atlantic Philanthropies to develop Human Rights Education and Training Programme for the Northern Ireland Civil Service, which had been approved at the Commission meeting held on 21 February 2011.

12. Date of next meeting

- 12.1 The next meeting of the Audit and Risk Management Committee will take place on 13 May 2011 at 10.30am. The

Committee agreed to invite Martin Adams from the NIO Sponsorship Team to attend the meeting as an observer.

- 12.2 It was agreed to reschedule the June meeting to take place on 28 June 2011 at 10.30am.