



NORTHERN  
IRELAND  
HUMAN  
RIGHTS  
COMMISSION

**10 May 2023**

## **Minutes of the Audit and Risk Management Committee Meeting**

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 Lavery (via MS Teams)  
Eddie Rooney

**In Attendance:** David Russell, Chief Executive  
Lorraine Hamill, Director (Finance, Personnel and Corporate Affairs)  
Jacqueline McClintock (Senior Finance, Personnel and Corporate Affairs Officer)  
Paul Flynn, NIO (via MS Teams)  
Jenny McGuckin, ASM (via MS Teams)  
Mark Lawther, EY  
Mike Surman, NAO (via MS Teams)  
Elsie McLoughlin (Boardroom Apprentice) (via MS Teams)

## **1. Welcome and Apologies**

- 1.1 The Chairperson welcomed everyone, including new members to the meeting and introductions were made.
- 1.2 Apologies were received from:  
Stephen White  
Eilis Haughey, Director (Human Rights after EU Withdrawal)  
Claire Martin, Director (Communications & Engagement)  
Colin Caughey, Director (Policy, Research, and Investigations)  
Rhyannon Blythe, Director (Legal Services)  
Paul Keane, NAO  
Thomas Lough, NIO  
Eleanor Hayden, NIO  
Brian Clerkin, ASM

## **2. Declarations of Interest**

- 2.1 The Chairperson declared his position 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 05 December 2023 (minutes enclosed)**

- 4.1 The minutes of the Audit and Risk Management Committee meeting held on 05 December 2023 were agreed as an accurate record.

## **5. Matters arising from 05 December 2023**

- 5.1 There were no matters arising.

## **6. Oral Update from the Chief Executive**

- **Business Plan 23-24**

- 6.1 The Chief Executive provided an update on the Business Plan for 2023-24.

- 6.2 The Business Plan for 2023-24 has not yet been signed off which was due on 01 April 2023, as the Commission awaits the outcome of a business case submitted to Treasury, with input from the NIO, following the independent review.
- 6.3 The Chief Executive provided an overview of the impact of the business case on the Business Plan for 2023-24.

- **Independent Review**

- 6.4 The business case for a temporary uplift in the budget, will partly address recommendation one of the Independent Review. This is currently with HM Treasury and NIHR continues to wait for a response.
- 6.5 The Chief Executive provided an overview of recommendation two of the independent review – the wider comprehensive economic assessment and future financial requirements of the Commission.
- 6.6 The Chief Executive reported on the importance of the Independent Review being published by the NIO and the Secretary of State providing a full response to the recommendations. This remains critical for the UN reaccreditation process. There is an ongoing risk that the Commission may be notified in October/November 2023 of downgrading from its current 'A' status. The delay is increasing the likelihood of this risk being realised.
- 6.7 The Chief Executive reported on a recommendation from the independent review on pay policy with a view to potentially aligning to other National Human Rights Institutions in the United Kingdom. The NIO has indicated that it will be open to receiving a business case, but this may remain dependent on the completion of a wider economic assessment and the establishment of an appropriate baseline budget.
- 6.9 The Chief Executive reported that the Commission is meeting with the NIO fortnightly to progress the Independent Review.
- 6.10 The Chief Executive advised that the senior management have drafted Key Performance Indicators, as recommended by

the Independent Review, which will be presented to Commissioners at the next Commission meeting.

- **Legal Proceedings Risk**

6.11 The Chief Executive reported on the risk to the Commission in terms of legal proceedings and resulting financial liabilities for costs.

6.12 Mark Lawther, EY, advised of the need to provide in year-end financial statements under IAS37 for financial liabilities for costs in legal cases.

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

- **Finance Report**

7.1 The Director reported on the projected financial position of Core and the Dedicated Mechanism at 31 March 2023, which may be subject to minor changes following the completion of the Commission's Annual Report and Accounts for 2022-23.

- **High Value Purchases**

7.2 The Director provided an overview of high value purchases up to 31 March 2023.

- **Absence Statistics**

7.3 The Committee reviewed the absence statistics. The Director advised of an error in the report and an amended report would be presented at the next meeting.

**Action: Director (Finance, Personnel and Corporate Affairs) to circulate reviewed absence statistics for 31 March 2023 to members.**

- **Prompt Payment**

7.4 The Director reported that the Commission paid 98.8% of invoices within 5 working days for 2022-23.

- **Personnel**

7.5 Jacqueline McClintock, Senior Finance, Personnel and Corporate Affairs Officer returned to post on 17 April 2023.

7.6 Fiona Lockwood, Administrative Officer, left the Commission on 31 March 2023.

- **GDPR**

7.7 It was noted that there were no breaches of GDPR.

- **Equality**

7.8 Staff continue to complete annual equality training requirements on the Civil Service Learning platform.

7.9 The annual Equality Scheme has been delayed due to staffing pressures and is scheduled to be with the Equality Commission by the end of June 2023.

- **Managing Difficult Members of the Public**

7.10 It was noted that there were no incidents of unacceptable behaviour by members of the public since 05 December 2022.

## **8. Internal Audit Update**

8.1 ASM updated on the internal audit findings on Corporate Governance, Risk Management and Complaints Handling.

8.2 Areas for improvement were recommended and accepted.

8.3 There were no priority one findings, two priority two findings

and eight priority three findings in relation to Corporate Governance, Risk Management and Complaints Handling.

8.4 ASM provided an update on the follow up review from 2021-22.

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

9.1 EY advised that planning and interim audit are complete.

9.2 EY advised that final year-end audit is due to commence Monday 15 May 2023.

9.3 EY provided an overview of identified significant risks covered in year-end audit.

## **10. Quarterly Report against Business Plan**

10.1 The Chief Executive reported on the quarterly report against the business plan for the year ended 31 March 2023.

## **11. Any Other Business**

11.1 The Chairperson highlighted outstanding training requirements for the Committee as identified at the last effectiveness review.

11.2 The next Committee meeting is scheduled for Friday 23 June 2023 at 14:00.

**Meeting ended at 15:15.**