



# Audit and Risk Assurance Committee

## Minutes

Meeting Overview	
<b>Meeting:</b>	<b>Location</b>
Audit and Risk Assurance Committee	via Zoom
<b>Date:</b>	<b>Time:</b>
15 March 2023	11.00 am

Attendees	
Name	Title
David Small	ARAC Chair
Fiona Ryan	Commissioner
Joy Hadden	ARAC Member
Rosalind Dempsey	Principal, HIA/TEO
Joanne McComb	Deputy Principal, Corporate Services
Lisa McCord	Accountant (Staff Officer)
Catriona McHugh	Senior Audit Manager, Cavanagh Kelly
Andrew Allen	Auditor, NI Audit Office
Note Taker	Title
Ruth Jordan	PA to the Commissioner



Agenda Item		
1	<b>APOLOGIES</b>	<b>Action</b>
	<p>The Chair welcomed everyone present and advised that Joy Hadden had a prior engagement and would join later in the meeting.</p>	
2	<b>COMMISSIONER'S UPDATE</b>	<b>Action</b>
	<p>The Commissioner, F Ryan stated that TEO and COSICA were currently running parallel campaign initiatives to raise awareness of services provided to victims and survivors. The Commissioner added that some victims and survivors were not aware of services and redress available, while others may choose for various reasons not to engage in the process.</p> <p>The Commissioner informed the Committee that with TEO sponsor branch agreement, the underspend due to the ongoing problem with staffing and recruitment, would be used to reach survivors outside of Northern Ireland. The areas covered by the awareness campaign had been strategically chosen using the research on immigration and migration provided by Jacqueline Melville (DP). Further areas had been provided through the Irish Department of Foreign Affairs.</p> <p>The advertisements were placed in key areas throughout Great Britain, Canada and Australia, as well as local newspapers in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. The Commissioner advised that the aim was to get as much coverage as they could with a low budget.</p> <p>The Chair referred to the importance of making links with key agencies. The Commissioner replied that she would be writing to the Canadian and Australian Ambassadors in Ireland and the relevant High Commissioners in the UK.</p> <p>The Chair enquired if the campaign would be a one-off initiative and was informed by the Commissioner that when reviewing the business plan for 23/24 a follow-up to the initial campaign would be costed to sustain momentum which would be good practice.</p> <p>The Chair commended the Office, acknowledging the time and effort involved and the importance of the work.</p>	



2	COMMISSIONER'S UPDATE continued	Action
	<p>Ms Dempsey stated that in the original COSICA Business Case £2.5m had been allocated to a public information campaign. In the absence of ministers, £260,000 was allocated to run an advertising campaign in Northern Ireland, using the press and targeting identified agencies and community networks. TEO's campaign is confined to Northern Ireland.</p> <p>The Commissioner thanked the Chair and R Dempsey.</p> <p>R Dempsey added that TEO would be running a social media campaign via a media company. The Chair said that it was important to highlight what had been achieved in the absence of a functioning government.</p> <p>The Commissioner stated that two additional colleagues had been recruited through an agency to assist the campaign and ensure that victims and survivors would get through to the office. The Commissioner advised that individuals outside of legislative remit who had been abused in other settings had contacted the office and were signposted to other services.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">----- J Hadden joined the meeting -----</p> <p>R Dempsey stated that advertising was included in the original Business case, therefore TEO had not asked for a new Business Case to cover the awareness initiative and were content for the underspend to be used. The Chair replied that it seemed a reasonable redirection of money.</p> <p>The Commissioner said that the office had gone through a rebrand with a new website due to go live on Monday, 20 March 2023. The original live date should have preceded the awareness initiative and she was disappointed that the date had been changed. She added that the Office continued with political engagement. The Office has signed an Memorandum of Understanding with the Victims &amp; Survivors Service. The Office is looking to develop a monitoring framework with the HIA Redress Board which is a legislative responsibility of the Office.</p>	



3	CHAIR'S BUSINESS	Action
	<p>The Chair introduced those present to J Hadden and welcomed her to the meeting.</p> <p>(a) Conflicts of Interest: No conflicts of interest declared.</p> <p>It was noted that the (b) Fraud, (c) Register of Gifts and Hospitality; and (d) Whistleblowing policies were all still in draft stage with TEO for approval and would be circulated once finalised.</p> <p>Although nothing was reported regarding the above, the Chair advised that it would be good practice for COSICA to create registers as a record to report if necessary.</p> <p>The Chair advised that a positive pre-meeting with Auditors had taken place prior to the ARAC meeting. The Chair said that it was good practice to have a pre-meeting scheduled with auditors once a year. He added that the short meeting had been useful in terms of settling ARAC members into their new role and, although early days, the discussion had been very positive in terms of governance arrangements, the operation of the ARAC and the support provided by the COSICA team to the auditors. The Commissioner thanked colleagues in Corporate Services and ARAC.</p>	JMCC
4	MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING	Action
	<p>The minutes were agreed as circulated.</p>	
5	MATTERS ARISING	Action
	<p>It was agreed that ARAC training would be arranged when the third member was recruited. J McComb advised that recruitment would be commencing before the end of March and that the momentum of the Campaign should raise more of an awareness for prospective candidates.</p>	JMCC
6	BUSINESS PLANNING	Action
	<p>The Commissioner advised that the quarterly Accountability &amp; Liaison meeting held with TEO on 7 March 2023 was positive coming up to Financial Year-End. TEO envisaged that the 23/24 budget would likely remain the same with HIA ringfenced.</p>	





6	BUSINESS PLANNING continued	Action
	<p>R Dempsey reiterated that it was her understanding that HIA ALB budgets were ringfenced. The Chair reaffirmed that any reduction in the COSICA budget would undermine the purpose of the organisation and impact on the victims and survivors.</p> <p>The Commissioner informed that she had asked about the Office's budget at the ALB Forum around services/memorial/redress payments and received confirmation from TEO that these budgets were ringfenced.</p> <p>The Chair confirmed that it gave the Organisation confidence knowing what the budget would be. He asked if there was a Business Plan and End of Year Report.</p> <p>The Commissioner replied that TEO had not requested the Business Plan or end of year report and the 22/23 plan was still with TEO for approval. R Dempsey advised that it would be required.</p> <p>J McComb stated that TEO received Quarterly Assurance Reports and Statements as well as monthly Consumption Reports so there were no surprises at year end.</p> <p>R Dempsey said that TEO were assured that the Commissioner would have a limited underspend and outlined a request from the Commissioner, downgrading the Grade 7 vacancy to Deputy Principal; permission had been sought and received from DoF within 48 hours. R Dempsey assured that the Commissioner had TEO support and they were available to assist as much as possible.</p> <p>The Commissioner replied that she appreciated the turnaround time and that the Grade 7 role had been designed on the initial set up of the organisation. The Job Description for the Grade 7 was outdated due to no longer requiring the set-up of the office with governance polices and financial structures. The structure may change in the future and revert to the original staffing structure.</p>	



7	RISK REGISTER	Action
	<p>The Chair advised that the right risks were identified and were clearly linked to the business and what COSICA wanted to achieve.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <u>Strategic Risk 1 &amp; Strategic Risk 2</u> – Risk description had come off.</li></ul> <p>The Chair noted that the additional information supporting the movement from raw risk to residual risk was helpful, though he would have expected the residual risk after mitigations to go down and not up. The Commissioner stated that the team were due to sit down at the end of March and review the current risks within a live/agile organisation to see what was still relevant. The Chair clarified that although the Risk will change, it was important to keep the document live.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <u>Strategic Risk 6</u></li></ul> <p>The Chair asked if this risk had improved? The Commissioner replied that it had improved within the past two weeks but was still classified as a high risk. The Chair asked if the nature of the risk had changed and J Hadden identified the risk of employing agency staff who could leave at short notice.</p> <p>The Chair asked for clarification on agency workers. The Commissioner advised that there was one Deputy Principal who had been seconded from the Department of Health and two EO2 employees were on temporary agency contracts. She agreed that agency presented real risk and an added expense, however this was typical of small Non-Governmental Organisations.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <u>Strategic Risk 8</u></li></ul> <p>The Chair asked if the Business Continuity Plan had been with TEO since February 2022 and stated that it would be useful to have it approved.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <u>Strategic Risk 10</u></li></ul> <p>The Chair asked if this risk should still be red or if there were specific issues that could be addressed. The Commissioner clarified that there were issues around legacy, eg, apology, memorial, contributions that she needed politicians to take forward and which required political response. J Hadden advised that she was content to keep the risk as red acknowledging that memorial was a difficult topic and conversation.</p> <p>The Chair summarised that the Risk Register looked good and confirmed that it was good practice to refresh the document once a year.</p>	JMCC



8	FINACE UPDATE (Paper)	Action
	<p>The Chair thanked L McCord for the Finance update paper provided. L McCord advised that she had to seek clarity around service charges with the Department of Finance regarding premises.</p>	
9	EXTERNAL AUDIT UPDATE (RTTCWG – Paper)	Action
	<p>The Chair referred to the Report To Those Charged With Governance (RTTCWG) confirming that the Report was very good.</p> <p>A Allen, NI Audit Office referred to the Report and summarised key points advising that it was an unqualified audit opinion with no irregular expenditure.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Significant Risk 1 (Page 5): Management Override of Controls - No management override.</li><li>• Qualitative aspects (Page 6) - No significant issues.</li><li>• Audit Recommendations (Page 9) - No findings identified.</li></ul> <p>A Allen stated that this audit was a good outcome.</p> <p>The Chair reiterated that it was a very good report. He queried the timing of the audit process, noting that this year's audit report was almost a year late – relating to the 2021/22 accounts.</p> <p>A Allen advised that he would set up a meeting with the COSICA team regarding the timetable for the next audit, with staff available to carry out the audit over the summer months. The Commissioner agreed this would be helpful. R Dempsey said that TEO would like the audit completed earlier to show the Commissioner's achievements in year. J Hadden echoed that it was a good report.</p>	A Allen



10	INTERNAL AUDIT UPDATE (Paper)	Action
	<p>The Chair asked C McHugh to briefly summarise the Internal Audit. C McHugh referred to the summary of the internal GDPR review which had a satisfactory assurance.</p> <p>In total, four recommendations were made; One Priority 2 and three Priority 3 which C McHugh acknowledged was very good progress and should be commended.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Privacy notice on website: Updated.</li><li>2. Cyber protection training: With staff in COSICA coming and going, internal audit is happy that it has been considered and addressed.</li><li>3. Advice-Pro System: As this system is externally managed, it was recommended that COSICA request and review audit reports from Advice-Pro. This was important re cyber security as the risk lay with COSICA.</li><li>4. Formal record of staff being trained in data security/GDPR: Induction manual had been developed and NICS mandatory training completed annually in relation to data security.</li></ol> <p>C McHugh advised that all information in relation to the Audit had been discussed verbally with everything accepted and she was delighted to give a satisfactory assurance.</p> <p>The Chair stated that it was really good to get a satisfactory assurance report with recommendations already being implemented. He asked if there were remaining audits?</p> <p>C McHugh confirmed that there would be an Annual Assurance Report before the end of April 2023 and advised that the Advisory Panel audit had been replaced by Human Resources which was currently underway.</p> <p>The Commissioner said that she appreciated the GDPR audit as it was a priority and that identity issues of Survivors was one of the Office's top three priorities.</p> <p>The Chair confirmed that the Advisory Panel audit would be pushed to next year due to legal advice being sought. He asked which Audits were planned for next year and if there was an Audit strategy. J McComb replied that she would send the Audit strategy to the Chair and J Hadden.</p>	JMCC





10	INTERNAL AUDIT UPDATE (Paper)	Action
	<p>C McHugh advised that the following audit issues were outstanding –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Communications &amp; Engagement;</li><li>• Risk Management;</li><li>• Appointing of Advisory Panel;</li><li>• Represent Interests of Victims &amp; Survivors.</li></ul> <p>The Commissioner reflected that this formed the legislation of her role and C McHugh advised that she would bring forward the plan for next year and discuss which three issues COSICA preferred to focus on.</p> <p>The Chair confirmed that he was happy with the updated plan and asked if ARAC would get a progress report to track implementation of recommendations?</p> <p>C McHugh replied that it was covered in the previous year's recommendation and added that it would be useful for COSICA to create a register for management to report on twice a year as a tracker. The Chair added that it would be good to have a mechanism to track progress and add to the ARAC agenda going forward.</p>	JMcC/ LMcC
11	AOB	Action
	<p>No other business discussed.</p> <p><u>Date of next Meeting:</u> June 2023</p>	



AGENDA ITEM	ACTION	RESPONSIBLE	STATUS
1 Apologies	None.		
2 Commissioner's Update	None.		
3 Chairs Business (a) Conflicts of Interest	None.		
(b) Fraud (c) Register of Gifts and Hospitality; (d) Whistleblowing	Policies to be circulated to ARAC once returned from TEO.	JMcC/RJ	Ongoing
	Create Registers	JMcC	Complete
4 Minutes of Previous Meeting	None.		
5 Matters Arising	ARAC Training for members.	JMcC	Postponed for 3 <sup>rd</sup> member
6 Business Planning	End of Year Report.	FR/JMcC	
7 Risk Register	Description added to Risks 1 & 2.	RJ/JM	Complete
8 Finance Update	None.		
9 External Audit Update	Audit Planning Meeting	AA	Complete
10 Internal Audit Update	Audit Strategy sent to D Small & J Hadden	JMcC	Complete
	Create Register for Internal Audit Recommendations	JMcC/LMcC	Complete
11 AOB	None.		

Signed:  
Chairperson

Date:

23/3/23