

Audit and Risk Assurance Committee

Minutes

Meeting Overview

Meeting:	Location
Audit and Risk Assurance Committee	MS Teams
Date:	Time:
20 March 2024	11.00 am

Attendees

Name	Title
David Small	ARAC Chair
Fiona Ryan	Commissioner
Craig Gartley	ARAC Member
Joy Hadden	ARAC Member
Joanne McComb	Deputy Principal, COSICA Corporate Services
David Hall	Grade 7, TEO HIA/ Sponsor Branch
Andrew Allen	Auditor, NI Audit Office
Steven Lindsay	Senior Audit Manager, Cavanagh Kelly
Catriona McHugh	Senior Audit Manager, Cavanagh Kelly
Note Taker	Title
Ruth Jordan	PA & Corporate Services

Agenda Item		
1	APOLOGIES	Action
	The Chair, D Small welcomed everyone and noted no apologies.	
2	COMMISSIONER'S UPDATE	Action
	<p>The Commissioner advised the Committee that it had been a busy and challenging time as an Office.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Spring Awareness campaign</u> - launched w/c 18 March 2024. As well as Britain and ROI, there was international media awareness into Canada and Australia to reach victims and survivors who had immigrated from Northern Ireland. • <u>Redress Scheme</u> - final year of Redress is April 2025. There is a direct correlation between Redress and Contributions. • <u>Staffing/Capacity</u> – Joanne McComb temporarily promoted to Grade 7; A DP for Corporate Services commenced on 20 March 2024 through a recruitment agency. Ongoing capacity issues have had a detrimental impact on the office. • <u>Office continuity</u> – First Minister and deputy First Minister to evaluate organisation and potential continuity of Commissioner term. The Commissioner advised that she was concerned that staff attrition would be greater coming into the final year of the Office. It would therefore be important for an evaluation process to be completed by the end of 2024 to plan the potential close of the Office. <p>The Chair agreed with the Commissioner regarding attrition and continuity of services for Victims and Survivors. It was important that the evaluation process was completed in good time.</p> <p>D Hall confirmed that TEO were in the early stages of developing Terms of Reference to procure the review of the Commissioner and they would like the review completed by December 2024. The Commissioner requested that formal correspondence be sent to her with a timeline. She asked that the Terms of Reference be shared with her as an opportunity for input and added that she would formally write to P Gallagher (TEO). The Chair asked that the views of the ARAC and need for certainty be reflected in the Commissioner's letter.</p>	

2	COMMISSIONER'S UPDATE (continued)	Action
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>The Executive Office Committee</u> – invitation received and accepted by the Commissioner to go before Committee on 10 April 2024. • <u>Memorial/Contributions</u> – Victims and Survivors are principally reliant for health and social care on the primary health and social care system. The Commissioner said she would be impressing on the Committee the need for a plan for future services. • <u>Media</u> – The awareness initiative had proved successful with opportunities for the Commissioner to extend the Office's reach via radio and newspapers. Several radio interviews had taken place to inform victims and survivors of the last year of Redress (unpaid publicity). • <u>COSICA Salaries</u> – issue raised with Gareth Johnston, TEO re Commissioner's salary and legal advice sought by TEO. The delay in approval has a direct impact on the COSICA Accountant who is unable to accrue an accurate amount under salaries. TEO Sponsor branch contacted HR Connect to advise that staff should be reinstated on a personal paypoint which removes the automated pay uplift in line with NICS. <p>The Chair stated that pay concerns were of interest to the ARAC – they were a distraction from core business - and may impact the accounts. He further reinforced that the delay in grade 7 approval had inhibited the office in recruiting for essential positions within the team and added a lot of work and pressure to the Commissioner.</p> <p>C Gartley enquired if COSICA had received additional funding for the proposed 5% proposed with a £1,500 one off pay award. J McComb replied that the office had received a letter advising of additional funding based on the figures provided by L McCord at the request from TEO.</p> <p>The Commissioner reassured the ARAC that she was hugely committed and commended the staff for going above and beyond in pursuance of their duties in the context of an uncertain future/ time bound office.</p>	
3	CHAIR'S BUSINESS	Action
	<p>The Chair advised:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No Conflicts of Interest. • Fraud – Policy had been seen by ARAC and no issues noted. • Whistleblowing – Policy on website and no cases. 	

4	MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING	Action
	The minutes of the previous meeting on 13 December 2023 were approved.	
5	MATTERS ARISING	Action
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Risk Management training</u> - to be rescheduled with Cavanagh Kelly. • <u>ARAC self-assessment</u> – almost complete and a summary document would be circulated to ARAC. It was noted that the NAO process was very detailed and probably did not need to be completed in full annually. 	LMcC
6	INTERNAL AUDIT	Action
	<p>C McHugh advised that due to capacity issues they were not as advanced as they would hope to be and would provide an Annual Assurance report to the committee in June.</p> <p>The Commissioner stated that the Office was ready to go internally with the audit and she was keen to proceed.</p>	
7	BUSINESS PLANNING	Action
	<p>The Chair referred to four areas – Memorial; Redress Board; Contributions and Advisory Panel. The Commissioner answered his queries.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Memorial</u> – Commissioner has no legislative responsibilities per se, this lies with the Arts Council (commissioning) and TEO (funding). The Commissioner provided advice and recommendations to the TEO Project Board on approach to memorial namely to adapt a programme approach to memorial and engage in widespread consultation. She also met with the Arts Council on a number of occasions and facilitated introductions between the Arts Council and TEO HIA/IB. • <u>Contributions</u> – Commissioner has no legislative responsibilities in relation to Contributions. The Historical Institutional Abuse Inquiry recommended that contributions were a matter of negotiation between TEO and the relevant institutions. COSICA facilitated Paul Sweeney, Independent Facilitator, to meet with Victims and Survivor group representatives. 	

7	BUSINESS PLANNING continued	Action
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Services</u> - The Commissioner advised that she was looking at the future services needs of victims and survivors, but believed the real cost to Northern Ireland state would exceed funds from contributions. While VSS and its community partner WAVE were providing specialist services to victims and survivors; victims and survivors were still reliant on the primary health and social care system and these needs are acute in the context of dual diagnosis and/ or complex psychiatric conditions. Needs would also increase as victims and survivors are an aging population with existing physical and mental health needs. • <u>Advisory Panel</u> – ARAC sought progress update. The appointment of an Advisory Panel would be an open process and the Commissioner had briefed politicians on the issues and presenting risks in meetings throughout October/November 2023. Issues identified: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Capacity – delay in agreement for the Grade 7, resulting in the Commissioner effectively doing two jobs; 2. Safeguarding concerns – assurance that an individual would not be on a panel with a peer abuser; 3. Framework for development. Internally proceeding with caution now that resourcing in place. • <u>Prevalence</u> – advocating prevalence study in relation to child abuse/child sexual abuse. There is a lack of data of victims and survivors, therefore very little idea of survivor population affecting ability to plan accordingly for services and resourcing. The Chair referenced statistics reported at 2.1.1 of the 2023-24 Business Plan as important and valuable. He added that the Office should establish work ahead and provide a strong record of what would be needed to capture the important data. <p>The Commissioner stated that 930 individuals had contacted her Office with 1300 cases/queries recorded. These queries were mostly relating to Redress along with service enquires. It was noted, however, that Redress applications were dropping.</p> <p>J Hadden added that there should be an evidence informed approach and robust data sharing. The Office should produce a robust monitoring framework but with lack of population data/evidence it may be difficult to have evidence verified.</p>	

7	BUSINESS PLANNING continued	Action
	<p>The Commissioner said she intended to provide an End of Year report which would be an amalgamation of the Annual Account process and Assurance Statement. Now that the First Minister and deputy First Minister were in post, a direction ahead may be more accessible.</p> <p>The Chair asked if COSICA had been advised of the 2024/25 budget. J McComb replied that we did not yet know. The Executive Office would review and Department of Finance would inform of budget.</p> <p>The Commissioner stated that there should be a whole government response to the lack of data and how it affects health and other areas.</p>	
8	RISK REGISTER	Action
	<p>The June 2024 meeting would be provided with a new template for the Risk Register.</p> <p>The Chair noted five green issues and discussion took place around when it was appropriate to close risks.</p> <p>The Commissioner asked for clarification from internal and external auditors about risk ownership and how risks should be assessed and managed in relation to the overall internal programme goal. The response was that a risk is a risk at a point of time which could impact delivery. The Chair said the discussion was very important particularly around risk assessment and closure.</p>	LMcC
9	FINANCE UPDATE	
	<p>J McComb advised that the Office was working on the end of year accounts which L McCord would send to the ARAC at a later date. The Commissioner added that the issue of pay remits and her salary had been covered earlier in the meeting.</p>	LMcC
	<p>9.1 <u>TEO Consolidated Accounts</u></p> <p>L McCord would cover this area at the June 2024 Committee.</p>	LMcC
10	EXTERNAL AUDIT	Action
	<p>A Allen commented that there had been agreement on a timetable for the production of Accounts. This programme would be discussed at the next meeting of the ARAC.</p>	

11	DAO LETTERS	Action
	8 February 2024 – reminding final accounts due on 31 July 2024. Business As Usual – did not perceive anything different.	
12	AOB	Action
	<p>No other business noted.</p> <p><u>Date of next Meeting</u>: Tuesday, 5 June 2024 at 2.00 pm (MS Teams)</p>	

AGENDA ITEM	ACTION	RESPONSIBLE	STATUS
5. Risk Management Training	To be rescheduled with Cavanagh Kelly.	L McCord	Pending
6. Internal Audit	Annual Assurance Report to be circulated at June meeting.	C McHugh	Pending
7. Business Planning	End of year report.	F Ryan / J McComb	Pending
8. Risk Register	New template at June meeting.	J McComb / S Harper	Complete
9. Finance Update	Annual Report & Accounts circulated to ARAC.	L McCord	In Progress
	9.1 TEO Consolidated Accounts shared at June meeting.	L McCord	Complete
10. External Audit	Accounts timetable shared at June meeting.	A Allen	Pending
12. AOB	Link to meeting of 5 June 2024.	R Jordan	Complete