

Audit and Risk Assurance Committee

Minutes

Meeting Overview	
Meeting:	Location
Audit and Risk Assurance Committee	MS Teams
Date:	Time:
11 June 2025	2.00 pm

Attendees	
Name	Title
David Small	ARAC Chair
Fiona Ryan	Commissioner
Craig Gartley	ARAC Member
Joy Hadden	ARAC Member
Joanne McComb	Head of Office, COSICA
Lisa McCord	Accountant, COSICA
David Hall	Grade 7, TEO HIA/Sponsor Branch
Elicia Erasmus	Internal Audit Manager, Cavanagh Kelly
Andrew Allen	Audit Manager, NI Audit Office
Apology	
Name	Title
Susie Harper	Head of Corporate Services, COSICA
Note Taker	Title
Ruth Jordan	PA & Corporate Services

Agenda Item		
1	APOLOGIES	Action
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Chair D Small noted S Harper's apology. 	
2	COMMISSIONER'S UPDATE	Action
	<p><u>Sustainability</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Commissioner received a letter on the 3 June from Office of the First Minister & deputy First Minister inviting her to extend her role for an initial 6 months. A Department of Finance bill would be shortly introduced with an amendment to the HIA (NI Act) 2019 which would allow the Commissioner's term to be increased by a maximum of a further 18 months until December 2027. The Chair acknowledged that with no flexibility in HIA legislation to allow for up to five years appointment, the Executive Office were trying to amend DoF bill before summer recess. He noted that staff had been reassured of their contracts until December 2027 and the amendment to legislation. The Chair asked if there was intention to expand the remit of the Office. The Commissioner explained that her understanding from TEO was that existing legislation would need to be amended; or new legislation introduced which would be a new post externally advertised. Currently there was no brief on widening the Commissioner's role. D Hall confirmed that there was no widening of the Commissioner's role, that no decision had been made but the Commissioner would be eligible to apply if a new Commissioner role was created. <p><u>Work Programme</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <u>Services Consultation</u> - was successful. The planned roadshows took place throughout Northern Ireland where the Office revisited victims and survivors in their groups. It confirmed a lifelong legacy of abuse. <u>Advisory Panel</u> – progressing. The Commissioner would like the model by the Office to be formally evaluated. 	
3	CHAIR'S BUSINESS	Action
	<p>The Chair welcomed Internal Auditor Alicia Erasmus on her first attendance to the meeting. He added that the ARAC have enjoyed a good relationship with Cavanagh Kelly which he hoped would continue.</p>	

3	CHAIR'S BUSINESS continued	Action
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ No Conflict of Interests; ➤ No Fraud reported; ➤ One item on Register of Gifts & Hospitality – no concern; ➤ No Whistleblowing complaints. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ARAC self-assessment is now complete following the guidance from the National Audit Office. It was noted that the ARAC were performing well and would consider a skills audit, to ensure the ARAC have the skills required. • Work continues on Assurance Mapping and the Chair has advised S Harper to keep proportionate to the Organisation. • End of year appraisals complete. 	
4	MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING	Action
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The minutes of the previous meeting on 1 April 2025 were accepted. 	
5	MATTERS ARISING	Action
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 matters arising - all complete. 	
6	FRAUD & PROCESSES	Action
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Chair advised that the deep dive into fraud and processes would be left to the next meeting. 	
7	BUSINESS PLANNING	Action
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • J McComb advised that the Office had a business plan in draft to December 2025. Now that confirmation has been received from FMDFM, the plan would be completed to March 2026. TEO had given an extension to July for the plan to be submitted to them. • The Commissioner advised that the Office would finesse the 2025-26 Business Plan and submit a 2-year Corporate Plan to TEO. 	

8	RISK REGISTER	Action
	<p><u>Risk 1: Legislative timeframe on tenure of Office</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • S Harper will update the risk register with regards to extension of COSICA and updates following today's meeting. • Progress made on Risk 1 which has helped with tenure of the lease, audit and staffing. This risk could now be reduced to amber at this point although is likely to become a greater risk again in the future. Will be considered by SMT and amended. • The Chair recommended retaining as a risk at least until the planned amendment to legislation was in place. He also noted that any change to the remit of COSICA would require updated legislation. J Hadden and C Gartley agreed. <p><u>Risk 2.1: Advisory Panel and Risk 2.2: Legislative responsibilities and powers</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion took place around amalgamating Risks 2.1 and 2.2 and reducing to amber. The Commissioner concluded that this could be reviewed again by the Office. <p><u>Risk 3: Wider political implications and HIA childhood abuse not being sufficiently progressed due to have had no assembly for 2 years</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Chair asked if this risk should be reframed given that the Assembly had returned. The Commissioner advised that there were areas of development in relation to Mothers and Babies, Magdalene Laundries and Workhouses and Historical Clerical Child Abuse so SMT would reframe. 	
9	FINANCE UPDATE	Action
	<p>L McCord presented the Finance update for Quarter 1 2025-26:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Grant in Aid</u> – The final Grant in Aid balance for 2024-25 was £843k with the final Grant in Aid allocation being £977k. This left an underspend of £134k. The January Monitoring Round was effective at building in a contingency Grant in Aid balance, to mitigate the risk of a Grant in Aid breach at year-end. 	

9	FINANCE UPDATE continued	Action
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Budget Position 2025-26</u> - The 2025-26 opening budget allocation confirmed a Resource budget of £900k. This excluded Depreciation, which TEO Budgeting hoped to confirm through the June Monitoring Round. The Chair acknowledged that COSICA had received a good opening budget. L McCord confirmed that based on business as usual and no changes in the Office's remit, the budget should be adequate. • <u>TEO Consolidated Pack</u> – completed and issued to TEO on 28 April 2025. TEO Consolidation team came back with a few clarifying questions, no issues to date. • <u>Pay Remit</u> – L McCord had had an initial discussion with Corporate Governance Branch on the 2024 Pay Remit. A request has been made to submit the 2024 and 2025 Pay Remits for approval at the same time. This would help expedite the approval process and reduce duplication of work. • <u>Consultancy Fees</u> – L McCord noted that COSICA was looking at reclassifying Consultancy Fees to Managed Services and gave examples of expenses that had been previously classified as Consultancy. A Allen (NIAO) confirmed that it seemed the sensible thing to do. • <u>Annual Report & Accounts</u> – currently working to have the Annual Report approved by ARAC during July. <p>The Chair enquired as to what the capital budget was used for. L McCord advised that the Queen's Court licence agreement was subject to IFRS 16, giving rise to an asset, interest and depreciation.</p> <p>The Chair confirmed that COSICA was in a good position. C Gartley also commended a good outcome asking if the Office had submitted June monitoring bids. L McCord replied that no bids/easements were submitted in the June monitoring round.</p>	
10	INTERNAL AUDIT	Action
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • E Erasmus referred to the Annual Internal Audit Plan 2025-26 and the following elements which would be audited: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. GDPR and Information Security (August 2025); 2. Human Resources (September 2025); 3. Financial Management and Reporting (November 2025); 	

10	INTERNAL AUDIT continued	Action
	<p>4. Follow-up of Prior Year Recommendations (November 2025).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> It was noted that Cavanagh Kelly's contract due to expire in December 2025. C Gartley stated that these were three strong audits to have on file. 	
11	EXTERNAL AUDIT	Action
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A planning meeting took place on 1 April 2025 between NIAO and the Office of the Commissioner and planning was complete. Audit Strategy to be presented at next meeting but could be shared with ARAC after the meeting. Two significant risks have been identified: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (1) Management override of controls; and (2) Going concern. A Allen referred to completion of ARAC self-assessments and advised that NIAO had useful good practice guides that could be circulated for reference, if required. Annual Report and Accounts to be submitted to NIAO by 25 August 2025. The Chair noted that this could be facilitated through correspondence outside the ARAC meeting. 	<p>R Jordan</p> <p>R Jordan</p>
12	AUDIT RECOMMENDATIONS TRACKER	Action
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> One recommendation remaining – Assurance mapping. The Chair stated the Office was in a good place with audit recommendations with the majority implemented in good time. 	
13	DAO LETTERS	Action
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> L McCord advised that there had been no DAO letters at the time papers were circulated. On 5 June, DAO 06/22 was issued in relation to Direct Award Contracts, to reflect the Procurement Act 2023. 	

14	AOB	Action
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Chair asked Auditors to meet prior to the next ARAC meeting in October. <p><u>Date of next Meeting:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Wednesday, 15 October 2025 at 11.00am (MS Teams) unless there is a need to change relating to external audit. 	

ARAC ACTIONS

Action Point	Agenda Item	Action	Responsible	Status
1	3 – Chair's Business	NIAO Good Practice guides for ARAC	A Allen / R Jordan	Complete
2	11 – External Audit	Audit Strategy circulated to ARAC	A Allen / R Jordan	Complete

Agreed by ARAC Chair D Small

14 October 2025