

Audit and Risk Assurance Committee

Minutes

Meeting Overview

Meeting:	Location
Audit and Risk Assurance Committee	MS Teams
Date:	Time:
9 December 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
Susie Harper	Head of Corporate Services, COSICA
Lisa McCord	Accountant, COSICA
Karen Wilson	Grade 7, TEO HIA/Sponsor Branch
Martin Larkin	TEO HIA/Sponsor Branch
Elicia Erasmus	Internal Audit Manager, Cooper Perry
Andrew Allen	Audit Manager, NI Audit Office
Note Taker	Title
Ruth Jordan	PA & Corporate Services

Agenda Item

APOLOGIES	Action
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No apologies. 	

Agenda Item

2	COMMISSIONER'S UPDATE	Action
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Commissioner advised that the Office was tracking to programme and budget. <p><u>Engagement</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continuing outreach and stakeholder engagement. • TEO Committee appearance rescheduled to March 2026. • COSICA submitted a response to the TEO consultation on Mother and Baby Institutions due to the intersectionality of survivors of historical institutional child abuse. <p><u>Advisory Panel</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Commissioner and team held a successful in person social event for the Advisory Panel in December 2025. <p><u>Consultation of Services</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • COSICA's Consultation of Services will be launched in January 2026. • The Commissioner highlighted the challenges the Office expected to face over the next two years due to staff attrition. She informed the Committee that Accountant, L McCord would be leaving COSICA in December. The Commissioner expressed her gratitude to Ms McCord for the assurance she had consistently provided to her as Accounting Officer, and for her commitment to the organisation across a range of projects beyond her formal remit as Accountant. • The Chair, on behalf of the ARAC, echoed the Commissioner's remarks and extended thanks to Ms. McCord for her valued support to the Committee. • The Commissioner also announced that Head of Corporate Services, S Harper, would leave in December 2025; thanking her for her valuable contribution to COSICA which had added value to the programme. The Chair expressed appreciation for S Harper who had provided valuable support to himself as Chair, including assistance with the ongoing skills audit work. 	

2	COMMISSIONER'S UPDATE (continued)	Action
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It was noted that COSICA had employed a new Head of Corporate Services with an accountancy background who would take up post in January 2026. 	
3	CHAIR'S BUSINESS	Action
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ No Conflict of Interests; ➤ No Fraud reported; The Chair asked for the Policy to be circulated to ARAC. ➤ Register of Gifts & Hospitality shared – no concern; ➤ No Whistleblowing complaints. ➤ Credit Card statement circulated – no issues. • Work has commenced on an ARAC skills audit. The Chair advised that it would be circulated with J Hadden and C Gartley. 	<p>RJ</p> <p>DS</p>
4	MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING	Action
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The minutes of the previous meeting on 14 October 2025 were accepted. 	
5	MATTERS ARISING	Action
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Chair read through matters arising and the following was noted. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Skills audit still ongoing. ➤ Business Planning document had received comments from TEO which would be discussed at SMT and amended. ➤ Assurance mapping will move to Business as Usual and circulated annually. 	

7	RISK REGISTER	Action
	<p><u>Risk 1: Legislative timeframe on tenure of Office</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Chair commented that Risk 1 continued to be the most significant risk facing COSICA. The organisation had lost experienced personnel, and new staff would require time to onboard and become familiar with subject matter, systems and processes. A Allen highlighted that the change of personnel created heightened risk at the end of the financial year. The Commissioner was aware of the risk and recognised potential issues around <i>going concern</i>. Loss of legacy knowledge including systems and processes increased vulnerability and uncertainty. <p><u>Risk 2: Failure to adequately represent the interests of victims and survivors</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Commissioner may be required to shift attention from survivor support to the governance and administrative demands of closing the Office. While survivor support remains an important priority, the closure process presents significant governance challenges and will require considerable time and resources. JMcC advised that every member of the team was highly committed for this year; however, by this time next year, they will be seeking job opportunities elsewhere if there is no clarity. <p><u>Risk 3: Advisory Panel</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Commissioner confirmed that the Advisory Panel would continue until December 2027. <p><u>Risk 6: Inappropriate or unauthorised release of information/loss of IT equipment due to lack of awareness in handling and storing sensitive data</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> C Gartley highlighted that while no breaches had occurred, the sensitivity of databases and information will always present as a risk, it was agreed that this risk should remain. 	

7	RISK REGISTER (continued)	Action
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Commissioner noted legacy issues and raised the need to identify an information asset owner if preparing for exit. J Hadden added that the organisation's future depends on recognising cascading risks, ensuring each area maintains its own independence while dovetailing into a wider risk framework. Exit strategies must be timed in alignment with both Corporate and Business plans, embedding risk awareness and strategic timing into overall planning. The Chair suggested that a number of issues including the impacts of risks on victims and survivors, as well as the uncertainty surrounding the second year, should be further developed. Both the Chair and J Hadden advised that the exercise may assist the Commissioner in the development of a forward work plan into 2027. 	FR/JMcC
8	FINANCE UPDATE	Action
	<p><u>Budget Position and Monitoring Rounds</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> L McCord presented the Finance update for Quarter 3 2025-26. TEO Budgeting met with ALBs on 6 November to discuss current budget concerns and the monitoring process. The October and January monitoring rounds have been replaced by a single December round. COSICA submitted a nil return in October but has since received confirmation of the licence agreement renewal for Queen's Court. As a result, easements were submitted for the December monitoring round on 6 November: Capital - £27k; Depreciation - £5k; and Interest - £2k. TEO Budgeting acknowledged the easement, however, a formal response outlining the revised budget has not yet been received, the revised budget should be £988k. A further easement of £16k was submitted via the November Consumption Report, bringing the forecast outturn to £972k. The easement arose due to the new Head of Corporate Services covering the accountant role for the rest of the year. C Gartley enquired about the ability to spend the remaining budget in the final quarter. L McCord advised the monthly forecast for the rest of the year was discussed at the latest finance meeting and SMT is aware of the need to notify TEO sponsor branch of any budget that is not required through the consumption reports. <u>Pay Remit</u> – The 2024 and 2025 Pay Remits have been approved by Corporate Governance Branch. When they have been approved by the TEO Accounting Officer, they will be submitted to DoF for approval. 	

9	INTERNAL AUDIT	Action
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • E Erasmus advised that the Internal Audit of Human Resources had been finished at the end of October 2025 with a Satisfactory assurance. <p><u>Financial Management and Report</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Final report was issued following the distribution of the ARAC papers with no changes to the final version. Satisfactory assurance given to the adequacy and effectiveness of the financial management and reporting arrangements within COSICA. • Risks reviewed were: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➢ Financial reporting and monitoring; ➢ Budgeting; ➢ Procurement. • No recommendations received; very good report. • The Chair noted the two very positive audits with strong assurance opinions. 	
10	EXTERNAL AUDIT	Action
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Allen advised that NI Audit Office had started planning for Audit in 2026. • Planning meeting scheduled between COSICA and NIAO for 13 January 2026. 	
11	AUDIT RECOMMENDATIONS TRACKER	Action
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • S Harper advised that the Audit Recommendations tracker was up-to-date with most actions completed. • One remaining recommendation of GDPR and Information Security. 	
12	DAO LETTERS	Action
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DAO 06/25 reviewed for information only. 	

13	AOB	Action
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ARAC Terms of Reference circulated in papers. The Chair content to endorse as relevant and appropriate. • The Chair wished L McCord and S Harper the very best adding that they have both been a very strong support to the ARAC. <p><u>Date of next Meeting:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Monday, 23 March 2026 at 2.00 pm (MS Teams). 	

ARAC ACTIONS

Action Point	Agenda Item	Action	Responsible	Status
1	3 – Chair’s Business	Fraud Policy to be circulated to ARAC.	R Jordan	Complete
2	3 – Chair’s Business	Skills audit to be circulated to ARAC.	D Small / E Marley	Complete
3	6 – Business Planning	Business Planning document had received comments from TEO which would be discussed at SMT and amended	J McComb / E Marley	Circulated at next meeting
4	6 – Business Planning	Update on Department of Finance Bill, re Commissioner’s contract.	K Wilson	Update at next meeting
5	7 – Risk Register	To note risk to victims and survivors if office closes.	J McComb / E Marley	In Progress

Agreed by ARAC Chair D Small
23 March 2026