

Audit and Risk Assurance Committee

Minutes

Meeting Overview

Meeting:	Location
Audit and Risk Assurance Committee	MS Teams
Date:	Time:
5 June 2024	2.00 pm

Attendees

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

Agenda Item		
1	APOLOGIES	Action
	The Chair, D Small welcomed everyone and noted Joy Hadden’s apology.	
2	COMMISSIONER’S UPDATE	Action
	<p>The Commissioner advised the ARAC that it had been a busy operational period as highlighted below.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u><i>First Minister/deputy First Minister</i></u> - The Commissioner met with the First Minister and deputy First Minister (including Special Advisors and TEO officials) at Stormont on 9 April 2024. This was an opportunity to advocate for a Memorial programme, ongoing need for services, ongoing need for awareness raising in relation to redress and the concerns relating to aging voiced by victims and survivors. • <u><i>The Executive Committee</i></u> - was attended on 10 April 2024 by the Commissioner and Head of Policy & Engagement, Denise Morgan. The Commissioner clarified the responsibility of her Office to the Committee including her role in Memorial, Contributions and Redress. She also included the fear of victims and survivors about potentially having to go into residential and end of life care (an institutional setting) and lack of prevalence data. She called for services to be provided as part of life-long journey. She highlighted need for ongoing awareness activities in relation to redress and services. • <u><i>Victims of Crime Commissioner Designate</i></u> – met with Geraldine Hanna, Commissioner Designate (5 June 2024) and discussed how best to support victims and survivors out of remit. • <u><i>MLA Engagement</i></u> – the Office wrote to members of The Executive Committee following the Commissioner’s attendance on 10 April 2024 and will follow up with individual meetings late summer. • <u><i>Australian Ambassador, Gary Gray</i></u> – met with the Australian Ambassador to Ireland in Dublin on 24 April 2024. He agreed to send a letter to the Editor of Australian newspapers on behalf of the Office with the intention of reaching victims and survivors in Australia. 	

2	COMMISSIONER'S UPDATE (continued)	Action
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Irish Ambassador to Britain, Martin Fraser</u> – an invitation was extended to the Commissioner by the Irish Ambassador to meet with him during a two-day engagement trip to London on 21-22 May 2024. Ambassador Fraser chairs the Irish Government's steering group with responsibility for developing the Republic of Ireland's Museum/ national site of conscience to all victims and survivors of institutional abuse They discussed the potential of reaching Northern Irish survivors in an all-island context. • <u>London Irish Centre</u> – successful engagement with victims and survivors, where individuals wanted the Commissioner to hear of their experiences as children in institutions in Northern Ireland. There is an awareness that there is likely to be survivors in Britain not being reached during this last year of Redress. The London Irish Centre have agreed to circulate TEO leaflets and communicate with agencies in Britain on behalf of the Office of the Commissioner. • <u>Services Consultation</u> – the Office is poised to launch a consultation on 'Current and Future Service Needs of Victims and Survivors' mid-June. The consultation can be accessed and completed online, via telephone or by emailing the office and arranging a call with a member of the policy and engagement team. • <u>Review of Office</u> - The Chair, D Small asked David Hall, TEO if there had been any progress on the review of the Office? D Hall replied that TEO were due to talk to CPD about procurement with the hope that a consultant would be procured in the autumn. The Commissioner advised that she had not heard and would further communicate with TEO Director of Sponsor Branch Patrick Gallagher in writing. The Commissioner raised concerns over the timeline of procuring a consultant in which case the decision of the review would be in the second quarter of 2025. She asked that the Terms of Reference be shared with key stakeholders for comment. D Hall agreed. <p>The Commissioner voiced her concern that staff attrition would become a factor due to uncertainty around future and one member of staff had already resigned. D Hall stated that that the Office would remain open until the First Minister and deputy First Minister said otherwise; the Commissioner's term was separate.</p> <p>The Chair advised that the prospect of potential closure caused concern for staff and could take focus away from work in the last 18 months; it would be good to receive certainty as soon as possible.</p>	

2	COMMISSIONER'S UPDATE (continued)	
	<p>The Commissioner asked the purpose of the Review. D Hall advised it was to address how the Office had performed and if there was a need for it moving forward for a second term. J McComb stated that she had responsibility for HR and 8 out of 10 staff members have informed that they would have to look for alternative employment if a decision was not agreed by January 2025.</p> <p>The Chair raised the concerns of ARAC stating that delay could negatively impact the Office's programme delivery.</p>	
3	CHAIR'S BUSINESS	Action
	<p>The Chair advised that the ARAC self-assessment had been finalised and circulated to COSICA. He added that actions would be taken forward and asked C McHugh if Cavanagh Kelly would look at it as an independent review. C McHugh agreed.</p>	DS
4	MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING	Action
	<p>The minutes of the previous meeting on 20 March 2024 were approved with a minor change.</p>	
5	MATTERS ARISING	Action
	<p>COSICA Annual Report and Accounts will be circulated to ARAC once complete.</p>	LMcC
6	INTERNAL AUDIT	Action
	<p>The Chair referred to the internal audit reports and commended the office for the satisfactory ratings, he noted no concerns.</p> <p>C McHugh gave an overview of the following:</p> <p><u><i>Internal Audit of arrangements to establish an Advisory Panel</i></u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Page 3 – Reviewed Individual audit reports, research, discussions and legal advice and overall was satisfied with the approach to the project and progression. There were 3 recommendations which were all accepted and plans in place for taking these forward. <p>The Chair referred to the Office's intention to initiate recruitment of the Advisory Panel in September 2024. The Services consultation will inform the work of the Advisory Panel.</p>	

6	INTERNAL AUDIT continued	Action
	<p><u>Internal Audit of Monitoring Arrangements</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ VSS – C McHugh referred to the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in place between COSICA and VSS noting that it was an appropriate framework and good working relationship for the benefit of victims and survivors. C McHugh said it should be commended and was working very well. One minor recommendation was around reviewing the frequency of meetings and updating MoU. ➤ HIA Redress Board – as with the monitoring responsibilities for VSS, the Commissioner’s responsibilities have been legally defined as “to observe and assess”. It should be noted that legally there is no positive obligation on the party being monitored to be monitored or provide information. Internal Audit were content that COSICA had done all that could be done to discharge the Commissioner’s legal obligations with regards to monitoring the operation of the Redress Board as per legislation. There was one recommendation which had been accepted. <p><u>Prior Year Recommendations</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ In total, 6 recommendations had been implemented and 2 would shortly be implemented. <p>The Chair remarked that COSICA was in a good place and C Gartley acknowledged that 2 priorities were soon to be completed and was content with same.</p> <p><u>Annual Internal Audit Report 2023-24</u></p> <p>The Report summarised the effectiveness of work carried out by Cavanagh Kelly and recorded the External Quality Assessment of their internal audit service with the overall assurance statement, satisfactory. The Chair stated that this gave the ARAC assurance that there was good governance and internal controls.</p>	SH
7	BUSINESS PLANNING	Action
	<p>The Chair advised he had no issues and that progress appeared good. J McComb advised that the Office was waiting on TEO approval on the Business Plan.</p>	

8	RISK REGISTER	Action
	<p>The Chair referred to an email received from J McComb prior to the meeting referring to ARAC consideration in relation to Risks 5,7,8 and 9 dropping off the register as complete and Risk 10 moved to Risk 1 due to the reducing timescale and the issues facing staff retention.</p> <p>It was agreed that –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Risk 2 was to be updated in colour to green. ➤ Risk 5 be changed in colour from green to amber as this was an ongoing risk due to the potential or possibility of loss of data. ➤ Risks 7,8 and 9 could be removed and closed as the- risks have been managed. ➤ Risk 10 should move to become Risk 1. <p>CG advised that the Office should ensure version control is maintained.</p>	SH
9	FINANCE UPDATE	
	<p>L McCord talked through the Finance update for Quarter 1 FY2024/25.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Budget Position</u> - An additional £84k has been requested at the June monitoring round to cover the inescapable pressure of salary increase due to a full complement of staff. D Hall advised that TEO were waiting on a decision for the 2024-25 budget and the request for additional funds would be taken onboard. • <u>Grant in Aid</u> – Grant in Aid breach of £7k in FY2023/24 highlighted a flaw in COSICA’s cash drawdown process. Following discussions with TEO RFF, TEO sponsor branch and AccountNI Cash Management team, mitigating actions were agreed. L McCord to train staff and produce SOP on running financial reports as a contingency. The Chair stated that the process should not rely on an individual but that the early alert and discussion between COSICA/NIAO and ARAC were helpful. CG concurred that it was a unique system with no input from COSICA on the drawdown amounts. It was agreed that the mitigating actions were necessary. • <u>Annual Report</u> – due for submission to NIAO on 5 August 2024. On target and will be finalised soon. • <u>Pay Remit</u> – currently with TEO Corporate Governance Branch for approval. 	

9	FINANCE UPDATE	
	<p>9.1 <u>TEO Consolidated Accounts</u></p> <p>L McCord advised that the TEO Consolidation pack had been completed and issued to TEO on 23 April 2024.</p>	
10	EXTERNAL AUDIT	Action
	<p>C Lowe referenced the NIAO Audit Strategy and noted a revised timetable on page 8 of the document. Audit testing would commence September/October 2024 and be complete in line with the timetable and COSICA delivering the ARAC approved Annual Report and Accounts by 5 August 2024. The Audit fee was £15,600 which had been agreed with the Commissioner.</p> <p>C Lowe advised ARAC that NIAO and COSICA had a good working relationship and extended thanks to L McCord on her work and the early alert on the Grant in Aid breach. The Chair also extended his gratitude to L McCord on her early alert and her positive working relationship with NIAO/ARAC. The Chair and C Gartley agreed with the Strategy and timeline.</p>	
11	DAO LETTERS	Action
	<p>15 April 2024 – Letter not relevant to this meeting but good to note.</p>	
12	AOB	Action
	<p>No other business noted.</p> <p><u>Date of next Meeting:</u> Wednesday, 18 September 2024 at 2.00 pm (MS Teams)</p>	

ARAC ACTIONS

Action Point	Agenda Item	Action	Responsible	Status
1	2 - Commissioner's Update	TEO to keep COSICA updated re review of Office, including, Terms of Reference.	D Hall	Complete
2	3 - Chair's Business	ARAC self-assessment sent to internal Auditor's Cavanagh Kelly.	D Small	Complete
3	4 - Minutes of Previous Meeting	Pg 2, Redress Scheme - Date amended to April 2025.	R Jordan	Complete
4	5 - Matters arising	Risk Management Training booked.	L McCord	Complete
5	6 - Internal Audit	Cavanagh Kelly to share the 2024-25 Internal Audit Plan	C McHugh	Complete
6		Updated Audit Recommendation Tracker circulated.	L McCord	Complete
7		MoU review re frequency of meetings.	S Harper	In Progress
8	8 - Risk Register	Risks updated as discussed.	S Harper	Complete