



THE COMMISSIONER FOR SURVIVORS OF INSTITUTIONAL CHILDHOOD ABUSE

Audit and Risk Assurance Committee

Minutes

Meeting Overview	
Meeting:	Location
Audit and Risk Assurance Committee	via Zoom
Date:	Time:
14 December 2022	11.00 am

Attendees	
Name	Title
David Small	ARAC Chair
Fiona Ryan	Commissioner
Joy Hadden	ARAC Member
Tara Cunningham	Secretary to the Commissioner
Joanne McComb	Deputy Principal, Corporate Services
Lisa McCord	Accountant (Staff Officer)
Steven Lindsay	Partner, Cavanagh Kelly
Clare Lowe	Auditor, NI Audit Office
Linda Girvan	Deputy Principal, HIA/TEO
Note Taker	Title
Ruth Jordan	PA to the Commissioner



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Agenda Item		
1	APOLOGIES	Action
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Chair welcomed everyone present with no apologies noted.	
2	COMMISSIONER'S UPDATE	Action
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Commissioner, F Ryan gave a brief overview of the previous quarter highlighting two main areas of concern –<ol style="list-style-type: none">(1) Risk Register – (see point 7), with focus on the lack of a functioning assembly negatively impacting on services and increasing risk.(2) Recruitment – (see point 11), highlighting the challenges faced in a small organisation when staff leave and the issues with retention due to short term contracts and secondments.(3) The Chair recognised the timings involved with recruitment and the impact on staff. The Commissioner assured the committee that despite being understaffed that COSICA continued to fulfil the key elements of the legislation.(4) It was noted that T Cunningham would be returning to her media business and that Deputy Principal (Policy & Engagement), C Campbell had accepted a promotion back to Department of Justice. The Commissioner added that COSICA had successfully recruited a Policy & Research Officer who had completed a four-week handover preserving some legacy memory.	



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3	CHAIR'S BUSINESS	Action
	<p>(a) Conflicts of Interest</p> <p>None.</p> <p>(b) Fraud</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Chair asked if COSICA has a Fraud Register and if guidance and training had been circulated within the organisation? J McComb stated that there was a Fraud Policy with an online training course for staff. <p>(c) Register of Gifts and Hospitality; and (d) Whistleblowing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Chair asked if COSICA had a Gift and Hospitality Policy and a Whistleblowing register to track any potential Whistleblowing cases. J McComb advised that the above policies were all in draft with TEO and staff had access to all the policies currently under review. L Girvan advised that they were currently with Denis McMahon for approval. It was agreed that policies would be circulated to the ARAC when finalised. The Chair stated that he had recently completed training for ARAC members which he found very useful. J Hadden advised that she had completed training in the past. It was agreed that when the third ARAC member is appointed it would be beneficial for the full committee to complete ARAC training. J McComb informed that ARAC training was included in the internal audit tender. S Lindsay replied that Cavanagh Kelly could provide training if requested and that the Chief Executives Forum also had good ARAC training. It was agreed that training would be arranged before the March meeting. 	<p>JMcC/RJ</p> <p>JMcC</p> <p>SL/JMcC</p>



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4	MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING	Action
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">The Chair agreed minutes of ARAC meeting dated 21 September 2022 pending amendments which had been completed.J Hadden agreed minutes of previous meeting.	RJ
5	MATTERS ARISING	Action
	<p><i>Review Risk Register</i> – S Lindsay advised that Cavanagh Kelly had given a recommendation around the Residual Risk matrix. The commissioner agreed to review and split the column to show how the risk is calculated.</p> <p><i>Recruitment of ARAC Member</i> – F Ryan advised that a recruitment drive for the third member would commence in Q4 2023.</p>	FR/JMcC
6	BUSINESS PLANNING: OPERATIONAL & CORPORATE PLANS	Action
	<p><u>Corporate Plan</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">The Chair stated that the content of the Corporate Plan is primarily for discussion between COSICA and TEO. It did, however, provide important context for the work of ARAC. The role of ARAC is to ensure that clear targets are identified with progress measurable by year end. <p><u>Operational Plan</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">The Chair commented that there was a lot of detail in the Operational Plan which was split into four quarters and noted that COSICA had chosen to report and monitor on each quarter rather than having a target throughout the year. The Chair suggested colour coding green or red at end of the year to show achievements. It was agreed that the Operational Plan showed a solid programme of work covering COSCIA's identified 3 strands of work.	



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6	BUSINESS PLANNING: OPERATIONAL & CORPORATE PLANS (contd)	Action
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • J McComb replied that internally it is split into four quarters which provides a systematic update on that quarter. Updating each quarter assists with the Assurance Report and Assurance Statement returns to the Department • J Hadden added that for a new organisation like COSICA, it is good to have a quarterly review as a good monitoring exercise. • The Chair asked if the Operational Plan had been agreed by TEO. L Girvan advised that it still had to go to Denis McMahon, Permanent Secretary for approval. • The Chair queried if the Corporate Plan and Operational Plans would be published and was informed that the Corporate Plan would be published but the Operational plan was for internal use only. • The Chair recognised the difficulty and nature of COSICA in terms of legislation, advocacy and time constraints, with no other Commission of its type for reference. 	
7	RISK REGISTER	Action
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • S Lindsay advised that Cavanagh Kelly had reviewed the document and sent through recommendations to COSICA. • The Chair suggested the addition of tracking mitigations to add further detail. The Commissioner agreed that the mitigation column should be split and would update to include the reformatting of numbers in the first column from 9 on for the next meeting. • The Chair referred to Strategic Risk 6: Organisational Capacity/Staffing and Strategic Risk 10: Current Political Situation and asked if there was anything more to add? • The Commissioner advised that COSICA had ongoing issues with recruitment and retention, resulting in continued understaffing. 	<p>FR</p> <p>FR</p>



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- There was a discussion on the lack of a functioning assembly negatively impacting on the progress with memorial and campaign. For S10, it was agreed that the residual risk of 12 was correct. The Commissioner reiterated that COSICA was attempting to fulfil its programme with MLA's, TEO, Survivor Group leaders and taking mitigating actions as appropriate.
- Discussion took place around the appropriateness of residual risk numbers in S6 and S10. It was noted that the residual risk of 4 set at S6 may be a bit low. COSICA was leveraging every opportunity along with external expertise via Think People. The Chair advised that the risk register should demonstrate the risks and actions being taken. The Commissioner agreed that the document may have been drafted before the organisation's recent vacancies.
- The Chair stated that COSICA should flag the risks to acknowledge them fully and show how they are being managed. It would provide recognition of risk and that something was being done to manage them.
- J Hadden agreed that the residual risk column should be formatted and referred to S6 and the inability to meet staffing levels. She expressed concern for the remaining staff with work life balance. The Commissioner assured J Hadden that COSICA had an employee assistance programme in place for frontline staff in addition to a hybrid working model and HR experts on hand if required.
- J Hadden raised the importance of trauma-informed training for staff due to the nature of the work in COSICA and was assured that appropriate training was in place.
- Discussion took place around the new budget for 2023/24 and J Hadden raised the possibility, if required, of bidding for additional budget.
- L Girvan advised that there was new legislation coming through regarding each organisation having a starting budget in April 2023. The Commissioner asked if COSICA would have the same starting budget? L Girvan said that there may be a percentage saving per organisation, however there had been no confirmation issued by TEO to date.
- The Chair replied that a percentage saving would be minimal due to the size of the organisation and added that J Hadden raised an important point on bidding for additional funding.



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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Chair reiterated the point about Trauma-Informed training and asked that ARAC be included in such training. • The Commissioner advised that VSS had provided training and J McComb replied that COSICA had a programme of training in place for the new year for Adult Safeguard Training in addition to Trauma-Informed training for staff. It was noted that this training should also be rolled out to ARAC members. • The Chair reiterated that if a task was complete, it should be marked as such. J McComb said she would colour-code to make clearer. The Chair advised that the Risk Register was a good document and was taking shape. 	<p>JMcC</p> <p>JMcC</p>
8	FINANCE UPDATE	Action
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • L McCord gave a verbal update informing the Committee that currently 70% of the budget was spent on salaries. It was noted that with current vacancies, there would be savings. • It was noted that there would be a potential underspend, but the Commissioner advised that this additional money would be targeted at the TEO's projected campaign at the end of February 2023. COSICA was seeking to amplify TEO's efforts and reach into Britain and ROI. • The Chair suggested that if the posts were filled, COSICA may want to bid for additional funding for the campaign. • It was agreed that a short financial paper should be presented with the ARAC papers going forward. 	<p>LMcC</p>



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9	EXTERNAL AUDIT UPDATE (NI Audit Office)	Action
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • C Lowe introduced herself as Auditor within the NI Audit Office and advised that: • The Audit was going well and L McCord had provided good quality information and a year-end workbook which had been very useful. The Audit fee is £12,300. • New NIAO Audit Managers expected in the New Year, COSICA will be formally notified. • The Chair asked if there were any particular points for the Audit Committee and if an additional ARAC meeting would be needed before the next planned ARAC meeting. • C Lowe said the actions were in the Audit Strategy and further information would be identified through the Report to those charged with Governance, with no additional meeting required. • The Chair and J Hadden advised that they were content with the progress to date. 	
10	INTERNAL AUDIT UPDATE (Cavanagh Kelly)	Action
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • S Lindsay stated that as per the last meeting, within the 3-year Internal Strategy there were 3 key areas: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Financial Management and Reporting; 2. GDPR; 3. Statutory Function – Advisory Panel (agreed to leave to 2023). • It was noted that the findings of each risk are rated as Priority 1-3 (High, Medium, Low) and Assurance Ratings levels are Satisfactory, Limited and Unacceptable. • The controls reviewed are: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Financial Reporting and Monitoring arrangements; 2. Budgetary Management; 3. Purchases and Procurement activities. • COSICA used the NICS system for finance and procurement which ensured competency control. 	



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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overall Cavanagh Kelly were content with small housekeeping measures cited. • The Advisory Panel would be reviewed in January/February 2023 and a report given at the March meeting • Concluded with thanking L McCord and J McComb adding that it is not easy in a start-up organisation. He stated that it was a very good, positive first audit with queries answered promptly. • J Hadden thanked the staff involved and reiterated that housekeeping issues are always there. • The Chair praised all staff involved and said it was good to get reassurance from internal audit. 	
11	HR	Action
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Commissioner advised that two EO2 contracts had been offered through internal recruitment. • Recruitment for the G7 and DP vacancies would be advertised through NICS Recruitment and Interchange. If unsuccessful the recruitment will go external. • The Chair acknowledged the frustration and time involved in recruiting. • J Hadden commented that all sectors are experiencing issues with recruitment and retention of staff. • The Commissioner stated that in a small organisation, it can be very challenging due to the work being very intense and appreciated that ARAC were aware of the challenges. 	
12	AOB	Action
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trauma-Informed training to be rolled out for staff and ARAC. • Date of next Meeting: <u>15 March 2023</u> via Zoom. • The Chair advised that it would be good practice for ARAC and Internal Audit to meet 10 minutes before the next meeting. 	<p>JMcC</p> <p>DS/JH/CK</p>



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AGENDA ITEM	ACTION	RESPONSIBLE	STATUS
1 Apologies	None.		
2 Commissioner's Update	None.		
3 (c) Register of Gifts and Hospitality; and (d) Whistleblowing	Hospitality and Whistleblowing Policies circulated to ARAC.	JMcC/RJ	Ongoing
3 Chair's Business	ARAC Training for members.	SL/JMcC	Ongoing
4 Minutes of Previous Meeting	Minor amendments.	RJ	Complete
5 Matters Arising	Risk Register formatted.	FR/JMcC	Complete
6 Operational & Corporate Plans	None.		
7 Risk Register	Addition to Risk Register (column split).	FR/JMcC	Complete
	Detail added to Risk 6 & Risk 10.		
8 Finance Update	Financial Paper for March Meeting.	LMcC	N/A
9 External Audit Update	None.		
10 Internal Audit Update	None.		
11 HR	None.		
12 AOB	Trauma-Informed Training for ARAC and COSICA Staff.	JMcC	Ongoing
	ARAC & Internal Audit to meet prior to next ARAC.	DS/JH/CK	Complete

Signed:
Chairperson

Date:

23/12/23