

COMMISSIONER FOR OLDER PEOPLE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND (COPNI)

AUDIT AND RISK ASSURANCE COMMITTEE

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE AUDIT AND RISK ASSURANCE COMMITTEE
HELD ON MONDAY 9 MARCH 2020 AT 9.50AM
IN EQUALITY HOUSE, BELFAST**

PRESENT:

MEMBERS

Gerard Campbell (Chair) *(Left meeting at 10.30am)*
Joseph Campbell
Professor Dolores O'Reilly *(In the Chair from 10.30am)*

IN ATTENDANCE

Eddie Lynch (Commissioner, COPNI)
Evelyn Hoy (Chief Executive, COPNI)
Joanna Gray (Department for Communities)
Melissa Barlow (Department for Communities)
Claire Lowe (Northern Ireland Audit Office)
(Left meeting at 10.10am)
Andrew Moore (Northern Ireland Audit Office)
Rosemary Peters Gallagher (Moore (N.I.) LLP – Internal Audit)
Helen Gault (Finance and Governance Manager, COPNI)
Eloise Gilmour (Office Manager, COPNI)

<p>Agenda Item 1: Apologies</p> <p>There were no apologies. The Chair welcomed J Gray and M Barlow to their first meeting of the Committee, and all present introduced themselves.</p>	<p>NOTED</p>
<p>Agenda Item 2: Chair's Business</p> <p>The Chair indicated some items on the agenda would be taken earlier than planned, as he and C Lowe each had to leave early.</p> <p>a) <u>Conflicts of Interest</u></p> <p>No conflicts of interest were declared.</p> <p>b) <u>Fraud</u></p> <p>No incidents were reported in this period.</p> <p>c) <u>Register of Gifts and Hospitality</u></p> <p>The 15 items were noted and it was signed by the Chair.</p>	<p>NOTED</p> <p>NOTED</p> <p>ARAC 03/20/2c APPROVED</p>

<p>d) <u>Register of International Conferences & Events</u></p> <p>There were no items for this period.</p> <p>e) <u>Direct Award Contracts</u></p> <p>The single item was noted.</p> <p>f) <u>Whistleblowing</u></p> <p>No incidents were reported in this period.</p>	<p>NOTED</p> <p>ARAC 03/20/2e NOTED</p> <p>NOTED</p>
<p>Agenda Item 3: Draft Minutes of Meetings & Action Tracker</p> <p>a) <u>Draft Minutes of 2nd December 2019</u></p> <p>Those present accepted the accuracy of the minutes, and they were signed by the Chair.</p> <p>b) <u>Action Tracker for 2nd December 2019</u></p> <p>The action (ACT 173) from the December meeting was complete.</p>	<p>ARAC 03/20/3a APPROVED</p> <p>ARAC 03/20/3b NOTED</p>
<p>Agenda Item 4: Matters Arising not already on the Agenda</p> <p>There were no matters arising.</p>	<p>NOTED</p>
<p>Agenda Item 5: Commissioner's Update</p> <p>a) <u>Engagement</u></p> <p>The Commissioner tabled a list of his engagements over the past three months. The Committee noted the variety and geographic spread of his recent engagements.</p> <p>b) <u>Accountability Meeting</u></p> <p>The Accountability meeting was held on 6 February.</p> <p>The Commissioner highlighted the recent changes in personnel in the DfC, and that Barry Holliday had left the sponsorship team. The Commissioner looked forward to working with Sharron Russell, Joanna Gray and Melissa Barlow.</p> <p>The Commissioner has requested a meeting with the new Minister for Communities.</p>	<p>NOTED</p> <p>NOTED</p>

<p>c) <u>Budget 2019/20</u></p> <p>A budget of £960,000 has been confirmed, as well as additional money for pensions which will bring the total to £1 million. This increased budget will allow COPNI to better plan ahead and commission research as required to underpin statutory advice to government.</p>	<p>NOTED</p>
<p>Agenda Item 6: Update from Northern Ireland Audit Office</p> <p>a) <u>2019/20 Audit Strategy</u></p> <p>The audit fee remains at £8,750. No significant changes to risk had been identified. The overall account materiality set at 2% is £17,472. The audit timeline and the team will be similar to last year. Most fieldwork will be completed in September.</p> <p>The Committee endorsed the report and noted the good engagement with NIAO.</p> <p>C Lowe left the meeting at 10.10am.</p>	<p>ARAC 03/20/9a NOTED</p>
<p>Agenda Item 7: Risk Matters</p> <p>a) <u>Corporate Risk Register Quarter 4 2019/20</u></p> <p>E Hoy explained COPNI's schedule of risk management for the benefit of the new attendees from DfC.</p> <p><u>Risk 1: Staff Retention.</u> This is still scored as high, as the pay progression dispute has not been resolved. COPNI's business case is currently with DfC. The job description for the two Legal Officer posts has been reviewed as postholders need experience in family law. The two posts (currently filled by agency staff) will be advertised this month, with a view to recruitment in May. The Communications & Engagement Manager will commence one year's maternity leave at the end of this month, and the Communications & Engagement Assistant will act up to the Manager role. The Assistant's post will be filled by the front office Administration Officer, whose own post may be filled by agency staff. E Gilmour, Office Manager (job-share), will leave her post at the end of this month to take up a new job as a personal secretary at the DfC. Her post will be filled through open competition. E Hoy and G Campbell thanked E Gilmour for her five years' service and wished her well in her new role in DfC.</p> <p>There was a discussion on the various reasons staff have left post in the past year, and D O'Reilly highlighted that the fixed point salary should be explicit during recruitment exercises. E Hoy affirmed that the fixed point is always clearly stipulated in the recruitment of staff.</p>	<p>ARAC 03/20/7a NOTED</p>

J Campbell noted that the Budget had been removed as a risk from the Register. E Hoy confirmed the plan of work in the 2020/21 Business Case is affordable.

Risk 2: Reputational Risk – DMCH Investigation. The risk had decreased from medium to low. There had been an excellent response from families to ‘The Commissioner’s View’ report which concluded the investigation into Dunmurry Manor Care Home. The Minister for Health had given a very positive statement, including a commitment to “right the wrongs of the past”.

J Campbell requested an update on the Department of Health’s Independent Review Team. The Commissioner advised he had had several constructive meetings with the Team, who have been supportive of the Home Truths recommendations. The timescale for the publication of the Team’s report is unknown.

The Commissioner has been invited to the Assembly’s Committee for Health in May, to give a briefing on his findings in Home Truths.

D O’Reilly said the Committee viewed the above as a further endorsement of COPNI’s work on Home Truths, and congratulated the team.

Risk 3: Premises Move. The risk has decreased from medium to low, and will be removed from the register. Since the December meeting, the move of COPNI and other bodies from Equality House to another building in Belfast has been postponed to 2024. COPNI and others had raised concerns to the Project Manager regarding security of the other building and co-location with other bodies. The lease for Equality House has been extended accordingly. Agile working may be introduced throughout Equality House in preparation for any future move.

Risk 4: IT Security. The risk has decreased from high to medium and it was agreed to keep the risk on the register. The service level agreement with the Equality Commission continues to work well and is reviewed annually.

G Campbell left at 10.30am, and D O’Reilly took the Chair.

Risk 5: Organisation Structure. This risk remains as medium. While COPNI’s legislation was reviewed by OFMDFM three years after it was established, the recommendations were not actioned. The organisation structure is now 9 years old. The Home Truths investigation is complete and has provided a context for the use of investigatory powers. The Commissioner is refining a draft Corporate Plan for his second term in office and considers that a review of the organisation structure is necessary to establish and affirm the best use, and arrangement of human resources to fulfil a future plan. The HR manager and CEO will put forward proposals for any changes to current arrangements and

consult with staff and Unions as appropriate. Minimal changes are anticipated but some areas of work (i.e. Legal and investigatory) are under pressure. The review would then be submitted to DfC for comment or approval as necessary.

Risk 6: Staff Grievance. This new risk was medium. COPNI is in the process of dealing with a grievance by a former member of staff.

Coronavirus Outbreak. The Coronavirus outbreak will be included in the next Register. The Senior Management Team had planned to travel to London last week to attend a conference, however they cancelled this plan for specific reasons in relation to the Coronavirus outbreak. COPNI has advised DfC of the fruitless payment of around £3,500. The Management Team met last week regarding Business Continuity Planning, and guidance has been issued to staff. There will be a reduction in travel by the Commissioner and staff.

Agenda Item 8: Chief Executive’s Update – Emerging Issues

a) Staffing Issues

This was covered in item 7(a).

NOTED

b) Senior Management Team

The Team meets informally on a daily basis, and meets bi-monthly for formal approvals. During January it focused on the delivery of ‘The Commissioner’s View’ report.

NOTED

c) Finance and Expenditure 2019/20

At 31 January the budget was £13,000 behind however this was due to timing. As of today the budget is on track. It is expected the full allocation will be spent by 31 March, bar the depreciation.

**ARAC 03/20/6c
NOTED**

d) Quarterly Performance Report October – December 2019

The report was noted.

**ARAC 03/20/6d
NOTED**

e) Quarterly Assurance Statement October – December 2019

The report was noted. E Hoy highlighted the costs charged by CPD were a concern, however DfC has advised that COPNI must use CPD (for expenditure over £5,000). CPD costs are therefore now built into relevant business cases.

**ARAC 03/20/6e
NOTED**

<p>f) <u>Business Plan 2019/20 – Progress on Objectives</u></p> <p>E Hoy reported on the three objectives which will not be completed this year as follows: ‘Financial Abuse – Final Phase – The Trusted Person’ was deprioritised for 2019/20; ‘Recruitment of a 3rd Policy Officer and a legal support administrator’ lacked funding to proceed; ‘Procure and implement a media bid and stakeholder management system’ was deprioritised for 2019/20. The report was noted.</p> <p>g) <u>Complaints</u></p> <p>There were no complaints in the period. E Hoy explained while the number of live cases has decreased slightly, the complexity of casework and increase in family law cases has increased.</p> <p>h) <u>Premises Move</u></p> <p>This was covered in item 7(a), and will be removed from the standard agenda.</p>	<p>ARAC 03/20/6f NOTED</p> <p>NOTED</p> <p>NOTED</p>
<p>Agenda Item 9: Update from Department for Communities</p> <p>J Gray explained her background in the NI Civil Service, and that her new role includes oversight of the sponsorship of COPNI and NICCY. She reports to Sharron Russell who is the senior sponsor. DfC is moving into a new era of partnership arrangements in sponsorship, whereby it has more conversational relationships with Arm’s Length Bodies. DfC now has a Partnership Agreement Template, and is awaiting a template for Corporate Sole. She highlighted DfC has an observer role at the Committee, and COPNI still needs to use the reporting mechanisms.</p>	<p>NOTED</p>
<p>Agenda Item 10: Update from Internal Audit</p> <p>The fieldwork for the Case Management internal audit is complete, with no major findings. The report will be circulated to the next meeting, along with the Follow Up report.</p>	<p>NOTED</p>
<p>Agenda Item 11: Audit Recommendations – Progress to date</p> <p>The report was noted.</p>	<p>ARAC 03/20/11 NOTED</p>
<p>Agenda Item 12: Accountability and Financial Management Guidance Update</p> <p>The five items in the report were noted.</p>	<p>ARAC 03/20/12 NOTED</p>
<p>Agenda Item 13: COPNI Updated Policies</p> <p>(a) <u>COPNI Updated Policies</u></p>	<p>ARAC 03/20/13a NOTED</p>

<p>The three policies listed in the report were noted.</p> <p>(b) <u>Whistleblowing Policy – Internal (February 2020)</u></p> <p>J Campbell indicated the wording in section 4 is too strong, and suggested rewording this. E Hoy explained the policy was based on DfC’s Whistleblowing Policy for staff. She agreed to benchmark, review and amend section 4.</p> <p>E Hoy explained a new policy for external whistleblowing to COPNI is being drafted, and will be brought to the Committee for noting.</p>	<p>ARAC 03/20/13b NOTED</p> <p>ACT 174</p>
<p>Agenda Item 14: Business Continuity Plan</p>	
<p>(a) <u>Business Continuity Plan Review (February 2020)</u></p> <p>The review was noted. E Hoy indicated COPNI would welcome any points of good practice from other organisations the Members or Attendees are familiar with.</p>	<p>ARAC 03/20/14a</p>
<p>(b) <u>Business Continuity Plan (Revised February 2020)</u></p> <p>The revised plan was noted.</p>	<p>ARAC 03/20/14b</p>
<p>Agenda Item 15: Schedule of Meetings for 2020/2021</p>	
<p>The schedule of meetings for the coming year was noted. The annual assessment meetings for 2019/20 for the Chair and Members are scheduled for late April.</p>	<p>ARAC 03/20/15 NOTED</p>
<p>Agenda Item 16: Any Other Business</p>	
<p>The Committee thanked E Gilmour for her excellent support to the Committee during the past five years, and wished her well in her new role.</p>	
<p>Agenda Item 17: Date of next meeting</p>	
<p>The next meeting will be held on Monday 1st June 2020 at 1.30pm.</p> <p>The meeting closed at 11.30am.</p>	<p>NOTED</p>

Signed:
Chairperson



Date: _____ 01.06.2020 _____