

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 7th SEPTEMBER 2020 AT 10.00AM
VIA ZOOM**

PRESENT:

MEMBERS

Gerard Campbell (Chair)
Joseph Campbell
Professor Dolores O'Reilly

IN ATTENDANCE

Eddie Lynch (Commissioner, COPNI)
Evelyn Hoy (Chief Executive, COPNI)
Melissa Barlow (Department for Communities)
Andrew Moore (Northern Ireland Audit Office)
Catriona McHugh (Moore NI – Internal Audit)
Helen Gault (Finance and Governance Manager, COPNI)
Patricia Maskey (Personal Secretary, COPNI)

Agenda Item 1: Apologies There were no apologies	NOTED
Agenda Item 2: Chair's Business	
a) <u>Conflicts of Interest</u> No conflicts of interest were declared	NOTED
b) <u>Fraud</u> No incidents were reported in this period.	NOTED
c) <u>Register of Gifts and Hospitality</u> The one item was noted by the Chair and it was signed by the Chair.	ARAC 09/20/2c APPROVED
d) <u>Register of International Conferences & Events</u> There were no items for this period.	NOTED
e) <u>Direct Award Contracts</u> The two items were noted.	ARAC 09/20/2e NOTED

<p>f) <u>Whistleblowing</u></p> <p>No incidents were reported in this period.</p> <p>g) <u>Annual Report on the Committee for 2019/20</u></p> <p>The report prepared by G. Campbell was noted.</p>	<p>NOTED</p> <p>ARAC 02/20/2g NOTED</p>
<p>Agenda Item 3: Draft Minutes of Meetings & Action Tracker</p>	
<p>a) <u>Draft Minutes of 1st June 2020</u></p> <p>Those present accepted the accuracy of the minutes.</p> <p>b) <u>Action Tracker for 1st June 2020</u></p> <p>The one action was completed.</p>	<p>ARAC 09/20/3a APPROVED</p> <p>ARAC 06/20/3b 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 advised that due to the COVID pandemic, face-to-face engagement with older people has not been able to happen. COPNI are looking at alternative ways of engaging with older people going forward. It is very unlikely that there will be any face to face engagements with older groups in the near future but we are looking at how we can use social media for engagement through Facebook, possibly a Facebook live session and also setting up regular zoom meetings. We have participated in a number of zoom meetings with older people's groups during lockdown. The business plan for this year has been reviewed given the current circumstances. Covid will change the focus of some issues.</p> <p>b) <u>Accountability Meeting</u></p> <p>The last accountability meeting was at the end of May 2020. The next accountability meeting has been scheduled for the 28 September 2020.</p> <p>c) <u>Budget 2020/21</u></p> <p>At present the budget is on track. We look very closely at the budget in relation to what can be done at this stage. We do not think there will be any easements at this stage. We will be commissioning some research. Given the current situation and the impact the pandemic is</p>	<p>NOTED</p> <p>NOTED</p> <p>NOTED</p>

<p>having on our work we are keeping the situation under review over the coming weeks and months ahead.</p>	
<p>Agenda Item 6: Chief Executive's Update – Emerging Issues</p>	
<p>a) <u>Staffing Issues</u></p>	<p>NOTED</p>
<p>Working from home - the Chief Executive reported a smooth transition to the new working arrangements. It has been a good test of the business continuity plan.</p>	<p>NOTED</p>
<p>We have one member of staff off on sick leave. The legal officer recruitment was completed successfully via Zoom. We had an excellent field of candidates and got two very good successful candidates who are now permanent and working well. They were our internal candidates so there was no concerns about induction as they were well established within the office already. The part-time Office Manager role is to be recruited. The candidates were contacted to confirm they are still available – there were 2 withdrawals. Interviews are planned to be scheduled for the end of this month.</p>	
<p>We are looking into providing some form of resilience activity or training to address the absence of getting together and working face to face. The Line Managers are continuing to have their 1:2:1's with their teams.</p>	
<p>b) <u>Senior Management Team</u></p>	<p>NOTED</p>
<p>The Senior Management Team are meeting every day to discuss ongoing and daily issues. There have been a lot of meetings with officials recently and also have a lot of interaction in relation to casework as a lot of it is very complex at the moment.</p>	
<p>c) <u>Finance and Expenditure 2020/21</u></p>	<p>ARAC 09/20/6c NOTED</p>
<p>H Gault advised at the end of July we had spent nearly £314k compared to a budget of £326k with £12k below budget. Salaries are on budget with a small underspend mainly to initial lower hourly rate for agency AO.</p>	
<p>On the Commissioned work we are behind budget which is mainly due to the lower requirement for Counsel advice at the minute.</p>	
<p>Non-discretionary costs are where they should be. The only difference is due to the cancellation of conferences.</p>	
<p>We are keeping a very close eye on overheads. They are behind budget at the minute by around £8k. That is due to lower office costs as we are working from home although we are now purchasing items to enable staff to have all the equipment they require to work from home. Professional fees are less than budget due to lower CPD fees this was discussed at August management accounts meeting and has been reallocated to Commissioned work.</p>	

<p>The other area that is behind budget is staff training and recruitment as we have not had any need for recruitment advertising to date this year. Overheads are under constant review and if needed will be reallocated.</p> <p>Depreciation is less than budget due to the capital budget not yet being spent. The annual budget has been reduced from £10k to £6K in June monitoring.</p> <p>d) <u>Quarterly Performance Report April-June 2020</u></p> <p>The report was noted.</p> <p>e) <u>Quarterly Assurance Statement April-June 2020</u></p> <p>The report was noted.</p> <p>f) <u>Business Plan 2020/21 – Progress on Objectives</u></p> <p>E Hoy advised that earlier in the year we did a review of the business plan in relation to the effect Covid may have on it. We then notified the Department that we weren't going to make changes to the business plan but some objectives may be effected by scope or size. E Hoy confirmed the Department has approved the business plan.</p> <p>g) <u>Complaints</u></p> <p>There were no complaints in the period.</p>	<p>ARAC 09/20/6d NOTED</p> <p>ARAC 09/20/6e NOTED</p> <p>ARAC 09/20/6f NOTED</p> <p>NOTED</p>
<p>Agenda Item 7: Draft Annual Report and Financial Statements 2019/20</p> <p>E Hoy presented the draft Annual Report and Financial Statements. She highlighted that the format was as the same as in previous years and highlighted the work that had been carried out in the year.</p> <p>J Campbell commended the comprehensive report which provides an opportunity to highlight the good work by the Commissioner, E Hoy and team. He also commended H Gault for the financial statements, subject to audit, but like other years there will not be too many adjustments to be made.</p> <p>D O'Reilly echoed JC's comments about the report and statements.</p> <p>J Campbell enquired if the audit timetable and draft report to those charged with Governance would be available by 16.10.20 and the next meeting 19.10.20. E Hoy advised that at present we were working to the current timetable and if there were any changes members would be advised.</p>	<p>ARAC 09/20/7 NOTED</p>

<p>J Campbell asked if the overspend had been funded by the department. H Gault advised that the capital overspend had been funded but the resource amount had not. This would be discussed with DfC at the next accountability meeting.</p> <p>J Campbell also asked what action was going to be taken regarding the negative reserves. E Hoy advised that this would be discussed at the accountability meeting. The options include funding/part funding by DfC, underspend in the current year or maybe over two or more years.</p> <p>J Campbell asked for clarification on the special payment of salary to a member of staff. H Gault explained it related to incorrect information being provided to a staff member regarding the calculation of the final salary.</p>	
<p>Agenda Item 8: Risk Matters</p> <p>a) <u>Corporate Risk Register Quarter 2 2020/21</u></p> <p>E Hoy outlined each risk included in the register. The new reputational risk was discussed and the Covid-19 risks were highlighted and discussed.</p> <p>D O'Reilly welcomed the detail in the Covid-19 risks which she thought was excellent and should remain as a standing item. J Campbell was happy to endorse comments.</p>	<p>ARAC 09/20/8a NOTED</p>
<p>Agenda Item 9: Update from Department for Communities</p> <p>M Barlow confirmed the Business Plan had been approved and the other ongoing issues would be discussed at the Accountability Meeting at end of September.</p>	<p>NOTED</p>
<p>Agenda Item 10: Update from Northern Ireland Audit Office</p> <p>A Moore confirmed that the audit had commenced and he had received information from H Gault. He also confirmed that he was currently working to the audit timetable but there may be delays and if so this would be discussed and communicated.</p>	
<p>Agenda Item 11: Update from Internal Audit</p> <p>a) External Quality Assurance Review</p> <p>C McHugh confirmed that the overall assessment is that they are in full compliance with the public sector internal audit standards.</p>	<p>ARAC 09/20/11a NOTED</p>

<p>Agenda Item 12: Audit Recommendations – Progress to date</p> <p>The two audit recommendations were noted: one was implemented and one was still within their target period.</p>	<p>ARAC 09/20/12 NOTED</p>
<p>Agenda Item 13: Accountability and Financial Management Guidance Update</p> <p>The ten items in the report were noted.</p>	<p>ARAC 06/20/13 NOTED</p>
<p>Agenda Item 14: COPNI Updated Policies:</p> <p>a) Whistleblowing Policy Internal</p> <p>E Hoy a significant change to policy which separates external and internal whistle blowers. This change to the policy makes it much clearer for members of staff. Staff were consulted and no objections were received. E Hoy highlighted the change in relation to way to contact the chair of the ARAC.</p>	<p>ARAC 06/20/14a NOTED</p>
<p>Agenda Item 15: Any Other Business</p> <p>There was no other business.</p>	
<p>Agenda Item 16: Date of next meeting</p> <p>The next meeting will be held on 19th October 2020 at 9.30</p> <p>The meeting closed at 11.35am.</p>	

Signed:
Chairperson



Date:

14/12/2020