

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, 30th September 2022**

PRESENT:

MEMBERS: Professor Dolores O'Reilly (DO'R) (Chair)
Joseph Campbell (JC)

IN ATTENDANCE

Sharron Russell (SR)	(Department for Communities)
Alison Stafford (AS)	(NIAO)
Rosemary Peters Gallagher (RPG)	(Moore NI)
Commissioner Eddie Lynch (EL)	(COPNI)
David Murray (DM)	(Interim Head of Corporate Services, COPNI)
Gary Carpendale (GC)	(Finance Officer, COPNI)

<p>Agenda Item 1: Apologies</p> <p>Apologies received from Evelyn Hoy, Chief Executive, COPNI.</p>	<p>Noted</p>
<p>Agenda Item 2: Chair's Business</p> <p>a. <u>Conflicts of Interest</u> No conflicts of interest were declared. DM stated that staff have to complete a register of interests annually. DM agreed to send a quarterly reminder to staff, reminding them of the need to update their declaration if necessary.</p> <p>b. <u>Compliance Paper</u> Committee noted this paper.</p> <p>c. <u>Register of Gifts and Hospitality</u> Three gifts were declared since the last ARAC meeting.</p> <p>d. <u>Register of International Conferences and Events</u> It was noted that the Commissioner was invited and attended the funeral of Queen Elizabeth II in London.</p> <p>e. <u>Direct Award Contracts</u></p>	<p>AP221</p>

<p>Two contracts were noted. SR noted that there was one contract in the ARAC's June DAC report which had not been reported to DfC.</p>	
<p>Agenda Item 3: Draft Minutes of Meetings & Action Tracker</p> <p>a. <u>Draft Minutes – 13.06 2022</u></p> <p>Those present accepted the accuracy of the minutes.</p> <p><u>Action Tracker</u></p> <p>ACT 211– DM advised that the contract into research of regional care home was put out to tender but had received no responses. DM confirmed that after obtaining CPD advice a DAC was awarded, contract award details were forwarded to DfC in June.</p> <p>ACT 212 – DM confirmed that the Staffing Business Case had been submitted to DfC. SR confirmed that DfC have received the Staffing Business case. SR advised that the DfC economist had reviewed and had raised several queries, including the need for role evaluations to be included to substantiate the Business Case, a wider strategic context, and evidence of need as part of the proposed staffing restructure. DM advised that he was working through the queries and would respond to the DfC economist.</p> <p>JC noted that he perceived the biggest risk to the new structure at present was that most members of the SMT are temporary members of staff, and that if a member of the SMT leaves then it leaves COPNI vulnerable. EL stated that COPNI cannot recruit permanently without Departmental approval of the Business Case.</p> <p>EL acknowledged that COPNI needed to have both qualified and permanent members of staff as part of the SMT. At present COPNI has no permanent members of staff apart from the Chief Executive who is currently on sick leave. EL advised that despite being filled by agency staff, COPNI have a strong SMT in place at present.</p> <p>JC said that it was critical that any questions which DfC have on the Business Case need to be resolved in a time critical manner.</p> <p>SR noted that there now a requirement for DfC and COPNI to meet with the DfC economist to discuss the Business Case for new the new staffing structure.</p> <p>DM advised that the funding this year (2022/23), covers just the current SMT structure. COPNI would need additional funding</p>	<p>ARAC APPROVED</p> <p>AP222</p>

<p>next year in 2023/24 year to implement the required organisational structure.</p> <p>ACT 213 – DM confirmed that the Risk Management training booklet had been compiled and a revised date for the training now needed to be agreed, preferably after appointment of the final ARAC member.</p> <p>ACT 214 – DM confirmed that budget figures has been included in the Business Plan and forwarded to DfC for approval.</p> <p>ACT 216– At present ARAC members are receiving their ARAC papers to their personnel emails. DM advised that there are two options available to remedy this, either to source computers for the ARAC members, which would require a capital budget which COPNI do not have in 2022/23, or to a form of meeting software which required a considerable financial outlay per annum. The advantage is that the software is password protected and could be used by staff for meetings in multiple settings. SR advised that another option was Dropbox. DM agreed to make further enquiries as to whether Dropbox was suitable for the purpose of sending ARAC papers securely.</p> <p>ACT 217 – DM confirmed that COPNI had received the Commissioners Appraisal from DfC.</p> <p>ACT 218– It was noted that the Budget report was more streamlined, and the accompanying narrative made the report clearer to understand.</p> <p>ACT 219– JC noted that the pay progression did not extend to before April 2020 and asked for the rational for this. EL advised that COPNI has received legal advice regarding the Pay Progression.</p> <p>JC asked if there was any update on the issue of back-pay, with concern previously raised about any reputational risk to COPNI, and DM confirmed that a business case was submitted to DfC for back-pay and COPNI were following up on additional requests for information.</p> <p>ACT 220 – DM confirmed that all available information in respect of the JEGS process in Autumn 2021 had been forwarded to DfC for review. SR confirmed that an assessment will be made in due course of any further actions required.</p>	<p>AP 223</p> <p>AP 224</p>
<p>Agenda Item 4: Matters arising not already on the agenda</p>	

<p>DM confirmed that the Risk Management training booklet had been compiled and a revised date for the training now needed to be agreed, preferably after appointment of the final ARAC member.</p>	
<p>Agenda Item 5: Commissioner’s Update</p> <p>a. <u>Engagements</u></p> <p>The Commissioner gave an update on various groups with whom he had met recently.</p> <p>The Commissioner recently attended a co-ownership event along with various business organisations and charities to discuss the need for more affordable and suitable housing as the population in NI gets older.</p> <p>The Commissioner also hosted a meeting with the Finance Minister, Conor Murphy MLA, to raise concerns about the impact the cost-of-living crisis is having on older people. He was joined by a number of older people to discuss their concerns about the challenges they are facing due to increased energy and food costs especially with the winter approaching.</p> <p>The Commissioner also recently had meetings with NIPSA to discuss the cost-of-living crisis and its effect on older workers.</p> <p>The Commissioner attended a facilitation event in which he participated in a “Virtual Dementia Tour” in which in which family members, carers and staff from the Western Health and Social Care Trust participated in a virtual experience of living with dementia. It was a very powerful experience of what it feels like for those suffering with Dementia, and gave the Commissioner a greater sense of the devastating impact this can have on the lives of older people.</p> <p>The Commissioner also met the Lisnagarvey41 Club to discuss their concerns on age-related issues. The meeting helped in establishing a better understanding of the issues facing older people.</p> <p>JC asked if there was any progress in his meeting with the Finance Minister in establishing support for older people. The Commissioner stated that the support agreed was £400 for electricity bills for all households which will be implemented in October/November 2022. Also support of a £100 per household would be made available for those households who use home heating oil.</p>	

<p>b. <u>Accounting Officer Matters</u></p> <p>The Commissioner had recently attended an update meeting following the recent review of COPNI, where some of the main findings of the review were discussed prior to a challenge meeting with DfC.</p> <p>The Commissioner attended the quarterly Accountability meeting which was held recently with DfC to discuss progress against COPNI's objectives to date, and any significant outstanding issues.</p> <p>The Commissioner stated that COPNI staff have returned to a Hybrid working model. All staff are required to attend the office one day per week. The policy has been benchmarked against other similar organisations, and will encourage collaborative working across the organisation, whilst continuing to offer flexibility to staff.</p>	
<p><u>Agenda Item 6: Chief Executive's Update</u></p> <p>The ARAC members wished the Chief Executive a speedy recovery from illness.</p> <p>a) <u>Staffing issues</u></p> <p>DM reported in the Chief Executive's absence.</p> <p>GC has been appointed to the role of Finance Officer and has been in post since August 2022. GC worked for NICCY and has public sector experience. The permanent Legal Officer post was also recently advertised an internal agency member of staff has been appointed to this post. The Finance Assistant role was recently advertised put no applications were received, with the current employment market making it difficult to fill this role at the current grade.</p> <p>DO'R asked how many agency staff were currently employed. DM replied that there were four members of the SMT, although one of these represented a maternity cover, as well as the Communications and Engagement Officer, and the Finance Assistant. The Legal Officer post, whilst still filled by an agency member of staff, will soon be permanently filled when all pre-employment checks have been completed.</p> <p>b) <u>Senior Management Team</u></p> <p>EL advised that the SMT has been meeting three times a week but had recently reduced this to once a week. DM informed that a formal monthly minuted SMT meeting is also now being</p>	

introduced, which was an important step from a governance perspective.

c) Finance and Expenditure

DM advised that COPNI had received an additional £359k as part of the opening budget allocation for 2022/23, mainly to cover the costs of the pilot staffing structure. There have also been a number of in-year financial pressures as outlined in the Finance and Expenditure update.

DM said that the original financial projections hadn't budgeted for maternity cover which is an additional £40k to £50k to employ an agency staff member. A further £43k was required to cover the Pay Progression cost. There is a need for two policy research pieces of work on Ageism and Prisons costing approx. £25k each which cannot be carried out due to funding restraints which will have an impact on the achievement of elements of COPNI's Business Plan 22/23.

At present COPNI can make the budget balance within a very tight margin, although this will involve difficult decisions, including being unable to progress the policy work on Ageism and Prisons. DM advised that if additional funding is made available any later than December 2022 it would be difficult to complete the necessary procurement for work to be delivered before the end of the financial year.

JC asked about the £128k not drawn down in the previous financial year. DM explained that this represented cash that was not drawn down in the 2021/22 year. DM advised that assurances have been received in writing that these funds will be made available to COPNI in the 2022/23 year.

d) Quarterly Performance Report

It was noted that one of the Legal Officer's who was on long term sick leave has since returned to work.

A new Safeguarding policy has been circulated to both staff and the union. Once confirmed it will be signed off by the Commissioner.

Also, the Recruitment and selection policy has also been updated.

<p>e) <u>Assurance Statement</u></p> <p>An independent review had been undertaken on recruitment processes by DfC. A limited assurance rating had been received by COPNI. COPNI had accepted the recommendations of the review and responded to the Action Plan for improvement. SR stated that COPNI's response to the independent review was received at Easter however there was a delay in DfC's response which was forwarded to COPNI in August. The findings of the independent report have been noted in the Governance statement of the Annual Report and Accounts. This matter is ongoing, with COPNI closing out any residual actions within the recommendations, which will be subject to review by DfC.</p> <p>JC stated that with the Internal Audit contract going out to tender next year it was important to ensure that there are sufficient Internal Audit days assigned. This would give assurance to both the ARAC and the Commissioner as Accounting Officer. It was noted that an evidence-based review had be undertaken by DfC's accountability and governance team of recruitment processes, and COPNI were closing out the remaining actions. The Commissioner stated that all recommendations of the review have been accepted by COPNI.</p> <p>f) <u>Annual Report and Accounts</u></p> <p>The Annual Audit has now been substantially completed.</p> <p>SR noted that the section referring to the Internal Review of Governance read as a historic, rather than ongoing review, and that the wording should be considered.</p>	<p>AP 225</p>
<p><u>Agenda Item 8: Risk matters</u></p> <p>Whilst the Risk Register was referred to throughout the meeting, this agenda item was not covered substantially as the meeting had to be adjourned due to the Commissioner having to be present at another engagement.</p>	
<p><u>Agenda Item 9: Comment from Department for Communities.</u></p> <p>SR advised that there were a number of changes within DfC which would hopefully assist COPNI</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The position of Head of the sponsorship team has been transferred to a full-time G7. • DfC will offer 1 day a month support session to COPNI as opposed to email requests. 	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DfC will offer a member of the Support Team to set on the recruitment panel. <p>The Commissioner thanked SR for the support from DfC and support with COPNI's budget. The Commissioner said that he appreciated the input and wanted to give assurances that outstanding areas of concern would be addressed.</p>	
<p><u>Agenda Item 10: Update from Internal Audit</u></p> <p>No work had been undertaken since the last ARAC meeting. DM advised that he would be in contact RPG regarding the Internal Audit Plan.</p>	<p>AP 226</p>
<p><u>Agenda Item 11: Update from External Audit</u></p> <p>AS advised that the Annual Audit had been largely completed there were a few minor recommendations (Priority 3) as a result of the Audit which will be issued shortly in the Report to those Charged with Governance (RTTCWG).</p>	
<p><u>Agenda Item 12: Audit Recommendation Tracker</u></p> <p>This agenda item was not covered as the meeting had to be adjourned due to the Commissioner having to be present at another engagement.</p>	
<p>Agenda Item 13: Accountability and Financial Management Guidance Update</p> <p>This agenda item was not covered as the meeting had to be adjourned due to the Commissioner having to be present at another engagement.</p>	
<p>Agenda Item 14: Schedule of meetings for coming year.</p> <p>This agenda item was not covered as the meeting had to be adjourned due to the Commissioner having to be present at another engagement.</p>	
<p>Agenda item 15: AOB:</p> <p>a) Recruitment of vacant ARAC post</p> <p>DM confirmed that applications had been received and a date was needed for shortlisting. DO'R agreed to advise of her availability for shortlisting by email.</p>	<p>AP 227</p>

b) Internal Audit discussion for new tender – DM discussed, and agreed, with the Committee the number of days to be included in the upcoming tender exercise.	
Agenda Item 16: Date of Next Meeting DM confirmed that the next ARAC meeting would be held on Monday 24 th October at 10.30 in Equality House.	

Signed: _____
Chairperson

Date: _____