

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 5 DECEMBER 2016 AT 1.30PM IN EQUALITY HOUSE, BELFAST**

PRESENT:

MEMBERS Gerard Campbell (Chair)
Don Mackay
Breidge Gadd

IN ATTENDANCE Eddie Lynch (Commissioner, COPNI)
Evelyn Hoy (Chief Executive, COPNI)
Noel Griffin (Department for Communities)
Jonathan Buick (ASM – Internal Audit)
Helen Gault (Finance and Governance Manager, COPNI)
Eloise Gilmour (Office Manager, COPNI)

<p>Agenda Item 1: Apologies</p> <p>The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting, and J Buick was introduced to those present.</p> <p>Apologies were received and noted from Julie Erskine (Member) and Kathy Doey (Northern Ireland Audit Office).</p>	<p>NOTED</p>
<p>Agenda Item 2: Chair's Business</p> <p>a) <u>Conflict of Interests</u></p> <p>No conflicts of interests were declared.</p> <p>b) <u>Fraud</u></p> <p>No incidents of fraud were reported in this period.</p> <p>c) <u>Register of Gifts and Hospitality Received</u></p> <p>The Commissioner informed Members about the entry and the Chair signed the register.</p> <p>d) <u>Register of Gifts and Hospitality Given</u></p> <p>The Commissioner informed Members about the six items on the register, and the Chair signed the register.</p>	<p>NOTED</p> <p>NOTED</p> <p>ARAC 12/16/2c NOTED</p> <p>ARAC 12/16/2d NOTED</p>

<p>The Chair asked N Griffin to ask the Department for Communities whether catering costs that are integral to engagement events should be recorded on the register. N Griffin to report to the next ARAC meeting.</p> <p>e) Register of International Conferences and Events</p> <p>The single item on the register was noted.</p> <p>f) Direct Award Contracts</p> <p>The two items in the record were noted.</p> <p>g) Whistleblowing</p> <p>Nothing to report for the quarter.</p>	<p>ACT 131</p> <p>ARAC 12/16/2e NOTED</p> <p>ARAC 12/16/2f NOTED</p> <p>NOTED</p>
<p>Agenda Item 3: Draft Minutes of Meetings & Action Tracker</p> <p>a) 5th September 2016</p> <p>The minutes were approved by Members and signed by the Chair.</p> <p>b) 31st October 2016</p> <p>The minutes were approved by Members and signed by the Chair.</p> <p>c) Action Tracker</p> <p>All actions were reported as complete.</p>	<p>ARAC 12/16/3a NOTED</p> <p>ARAC 12/16/3b NOTED</p> <p>ARAC 12/16/3c NOTED</p>
<p>d) Assurance Letter from Equality Commission for NI</p> <p>The letter was noted.</p>	<p>ARAC 12/16/3d NOTED</p>
<p>Agenda Item 4: Matters arising not already on the Agenda</p> <p>There were no matters arising.</p>	
<p>Agenda Item 5: Commissioner's Update</p> <p>a) Engagement</p> <p>The Commissioner referred to the positive feedback received for his draft priorities at the six engagement events held in August and September.</p>	<p>ARAC 12/16/5 NOTED</p>

The Commissioner has engaged with older people from the deaf community in Belfast and Derry to hear about their specific issues. He has met the Minister for Infrastructure regarding transport, and also leaders of the opposition. He had also met with the Children's, Victims' and Civil Service Commissioners.

The Commissioner had spoken at several events including Age Friendly conferences, Silverline's launch in Northern Ireland, Women's Aid, and the Scamwise launch. The Commissioner will be launching COPNI's research on scams at an event in Coleraine on 14th December.

The Commissioner will be hosting an event on 13th December on the absence of older peoples' issues in the Programme for Government. This will be attended by older people and age sector representatives, with a political panel, and guest speakers from The Executive Office, University of Ulster and Scottish Older People's Assembly. COPNI will respond to the consultation which closes on 23rd December. The content, purpose, and anticipated outcomes of the event were discussed by Members and Attendees. The Chair requested that ARAC members be given a copy of COPNI's response to the consultation.

ACT 132

b) In Year Additional Funding

NOTED

COPNI will receive additional funding of £50,000 from the Department for Communities in January 2017 following a successful bid. It will be spent by the end of March 2017 on engagement, publications and improving the COPNI website and communications. Members welcomed this additional funding, and the Chair thanked the Department.

c) Corporate Plan

**ARAC 12/16/5c
NOTED**

E Hoy referred to the 'At A Glance' two page Corporate Plan document circulated to the ARAC, explaining this was a work in progress. The first draft of the Corporate Plan 2016/20 would be complete by the end of December, with the final version going to the Minister for Communities by 31 January 2017.

The Chair highlighted COPNI was now in the ninth month of the first year of the Corporate Plan, which had not yet gone to the Department for Communities. N Griffin confirmed the Department viewed this as a practical approach, due to the Commissioner starting his term during the year, after which he held an engagement process regarding his priorities.

The Commissioner indicated the budget to be allocated to COPNI will determine the detail of work that can be achieved in some projects in the plan. His office would also need capacity for new matters that arise during the term of the plan.

There was a discussion on how COPNI will demonstrate the outcomes of the plan, and the wording to be used. It was confirmed they will be linked to the Programme for Government so far as possible given the absence of older people's issues in the current draft Programme for Government. B Gadd suggested reference to the UK's withdrawal from the European Union should be included in the plan and this was noted.

N Griffin indicated the Corporate Plan would be discussed at the Accountability Meeting on 15th December, and the Department was awaiting confirmation of departmental budgets.

Agenda Item 6: Chief Executive's Update – Emerging Issues

**ARAC 12/16/6
NOTED**

a) Recruitment and Induction

E Hoy reported the Communications and Engagement Manager had resigned following a period of long-term sickness. There were no other suitable candidates from the previous recruitment exercise, therefore the post would be advertised early next year. The Communications and Engagement Assistant would formally act up to the Manager's role until a new Manager is recruited, as there were no other suitably skilled staff to act up. The Administration Officer would backfill the Assistant's post as of 3rd January 2017, and her own post would be filled by an agency worker.

The Office Manager job share partner who commenced in October had also resigned. A meeting has been arranged to discuss the post with a suitable candidate from the previous recruitment exercise. D Mackay indicated he knew the candidate on a professional basis.

The Chair extended the ARAC's thanks for the work of the two staff who had resigned. E Hoy confirmed exit interviews would be carried out.

The vacant Legal Officer post was being covered by an agency worker, and the application process would close on 16th December.

E Hoy indicated the recruitment of the new ARAC Chair and Members would commence in January 2017. The Commissioner has approved the reduction of the number of committee members from four to three for the new term, and the new Committee would have its first meeting in June 2017. The current Committee will meet for a final time in March 2017.

b) 2016/17 Finance and Expenditure

**ARAC 12/16/6b
NOTED**

E Hoy referred to the Management Accounts for the period to 31st October 2016. These showed a pressure of almost £8,000. However, due to the additional funding of £50,000 that COPNI will receive in January 2017, the financial situation has significantly changed.

COPNI was permitted to spend £6,000 on IT capital. It was anticipated COPNI would spend the total amount of £867,000 in full by 31 March 2017. The report was noted.

c) Quarterly Performance Report

**ARAC 12/16/6c
NOTED**

E Hoy referred to the report and indicated projects were on track with the exception of one which was delayed to the absence of the Communications and Engagement Manager.

N Griffin gave an update on governance guidance, and confirmed that for the moment quarterly assurance reports and quarterly Accountability Meetings were adequate. He indicated the assurance statement should come to the ARAC for noting. This was agreed.

ACT 133

The Chair highlighted that COPNI's governance was robust, as demonstrated by no recommendations in the Report To Those Charged With Governance.

d) Senior Management Team

NOTED

The Team continued to meet monthly, and there were no matters arising.

e) Complaints

NOTED

No new complaints were received by COPNI. E Hoy gave an update on a closed complaint.

f) 2016/17 Business Plan – Progress on Objectives

**ARAC 12/16/6f
NOTED**

E Hoy referred to the report and explained the four amber items. The Continuing Healthcare project should soon be on target. COPNI intends to meet with the Department for Communities regarding the Active Ageing Strategy. There had been no political movement on Age Goods, Facilities and Services. The Digital Inclusion of Older People project has been delayed due to staff sickness and may therefore be included in the 2017/18 Business Plan.

g) Staff Salaries

NOTED

This was a new agenda item. E Hoy reported the Department for Communities has declined her request that COPNI staff are moved from fixed point salaries to a scale. It is anticipated staff will discuss this with their union, and revert to E Hoy in due course.

N Griffin indicated the new pay settlement will be confirmed in February 2017. E Hoy indicated staff will in effect receive a 1% uplift, and COPNI will send its pay remit return to the Department for 2016/17 when requested.

<p>E Hoy advised that new NI Civil Service pay scales came into effect on 1st August 2016 and the bottom step in some scales had been removed. All COPNI staff were fixed on the minimum point of their grade, therefore they will be affected.</p> <p>E Hoy indicated there was no funding to carry out job evaluations of staff, and she is exploring options for completing some elements of a staffing review in-house.</p>	
<p>Agenda Item 7: Update from Department for Communities</p> <p>N Griffin confirmed the Department was content with the Annual Report and Financial Statements and that all queries had been satisfactorily resolved. The 2016/17 Business Plan has finally been approved by the Department, and it hopes to have a more timely approval next year. The next Accountability meeting will be held on 15th December. The Department has given written confirmation that COPNI may spend the additional £50,000 prior to January 2017.</p>	<p>NOTED</p>
<p>Agenda Item 8: Draft Annual Business Plan 2017/18</p> <p>E Hoy advised the Draft Business Plan 2017/18 must be submitted to the Department for Communities by 31st January 2017. COPNI's planned activity in 2017/18 would cost £810,000 therefore significant cuts will have to be made to bring it in line with the £787,000 opening 2016-17 budget allocation. The impact of this could include introducing a waiting list for new cases, the Senior Management Team not being able to travel on COPNI business, and a significant reduction in the Commissioner's engagements. The Commissioner would not be able to fulfil his statutory duties or deliver the programme. COPNI's baseline funding remains inadequate.</p> <p>The Chair indicated the ARAC's support on this matter.</p> <p>The content of the plan was discussed. It was agreed to retitle 'Lead Officer' within the document. Some key performance indicators would be made more specific.</p> <p>B Gadd highlighted it was a good ambitious plan, and suggested the outputs in the plan should form a roadmap linking to the outcomes of the Corporate Plan. The Chair highlighted the impact of COPNI's work should be clear to an independent reader.</p>	<p>ARAC 12/6/8 NOTED</p> <p>ACT 134</p>
<p>Agenda Item 9: Draft ARAC Terms of Reference</p> <p>E Hoy referred to the draft Terms of Reference which would be reviewed prior to the recruitment of the new ARAC Membership. The open competition will commence in January 2017, and the ARAC will be kept up to date on the process.</p>	<p>ARAC 12/6/9 NOTED</p>

<p>The new Committee will be reduced to three i.e. a Chair and two independent Members. The Commissioner and Chief Executive wish to consider the skill mix likely to be most beneficial to the Commissioner during the new Corporate Plan period. Job descriptions will reflect this.</p>	
<p>Agenda Item 10: Update from Northern Ireland Audit Office</p> <p>There was no one present from the Audit Office.</p> <p>H Gault reported the Accounts were laid before the NI Assembly by the Department for Communities on 18th November. COPNI will not have the Accounts professionally printed due to the cost. They will be published on COPNI's website once the Audit Office has reviewed the final document.</p>	<p>NOTED</p>
<p>Agenda Item 11: Audit Recommendations – Progress to Date</p> <p>The priority 3 recommendation from the Case Management System audit was complete.</p> <p>J Buick reported COPNI had responded with management comments on the draft Performance Management Audit report, and there will be a satisfactory audit opinion. ASM will present the final report as well as its internal audit annual report in March 2017.</p> <p>E Hoy confirmed this was the second year of the internal audit contract, and there was provision for extension.</p>	<p>ARAC 12/6/11 NOTED</p>
<p>Agenda Item 12: Risk Matters</p> <p>a) Corporate Risk Register 2016/17 Quarter 3</p> <p>E Hoy referred to the five risks in the report and noted risk 4 was now green so would be removed from the register. She highlighted the key risk for the Commissioner was what he was unable to do due to inadequate funding e.g. litigation. COPNI was therefore taking lower cost action such as mediation and supporting families at meetings.</p> <p>B Gadd suggested that COPNI should write to the Minister for Communities each time it should but cannot take litigation for financial reasons. E Hoy confirmed COPNI has a record of when it has not been able to fulfil its statutory duties, and noted B Gadd's comments.</p>	<p>ARAC 12/16/12a NOTED</p>
<p>Agenda Item 13: Update on Dear Accounting Officer and Finance Director Guidance</p> <p>The four items were noted.</p>	<p>ARAC 12/16/13 NOTED</p>

<p>Agenda Item 14: Summary of Key Issues from Public Accounts Committee Reports</p> <p>The two items were noted.</p>	<p>ARAC 12/16/14 NOTED</p>
<p>Agenda Item 15: COPNI Updated Policies</p> <p>The list of five updated policies was noted, as were the copies of the Financial Manual (version no. 3) and the Whistleblowing Policy (version no. 3).</p>	<p>ARAC 12/16/15 NOTED</p>
<p>Agenda Item 16: Any Other Business</p> <p>There was no other business.</p>	
<p>Agenda Item 17: Proposed Date of Next Meeting</p> <p>The next meeting would be held on Monday 5th March 2017 at 1.30pm in Equality House.</p> <p>The meeting closed at 3.45pm.</p>	<p>ARAC 12/16/17 NOTED</p>

Signed:
Chairperson



Date:

6/3/17