



AUDIT RISK & ASSURANCE COMMITTEE
Minutes of Meeting
Friday 7 November 2025 10.00am
Video Conference

Present:

Terry McGonigal (Chair)
Laura O'Neill (Member)
Conor Minnis (Member)

In Attendance:

Andrew Sloan (Commission Chief Executive)
Stephen Moore (Head of Finance and Corporate Affairs)
Marie Neill (Secretariat)
Elicia Erasmus (Cooper Parry Internal Auditor)
Caroline Laird (Northern Ireland Audit Office Senior Auditor)
Julie Shirlow (The Executive Office)

1.0 Introduction and Apologies

1.1 The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

1.2 There were no apologies.

2.0 Declaration of Interests

2.1 There were no conflicts of interests declared.

3.0 Minutes of Meeting on 22 September 2025 and Action Points

3.1 The minutes of the meeting on held on 22 September 2025 were agreed.

3.2 All actions from previous meetings were complete.

4.0 Policy Development, Research and Engagement Update

- 4.1 The paper on the Policy Development, Research and Engagement was presented by the Commission Chief Executive, who advised that the Commissioner had given evidence at the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee in Westminster, on The Government's new approach to addressing the legacy of the past in Northern Ireland.
- 4.2 It was noted that the PEACEPLUS Research Programme continued to progress and the procurement phase was underway. The Commission Chief Executive confirmed that engagement would take place with Construction and Procurement Delivery (CPD) to ensure compliance with public procurement legislation. The ARAC Chair highlighted the importance of maintaining effective governance and taking into consideration proportionate project management.
- 4.3 The Audit and Risk Assurance Committee Members appreciated the update on work currently being undertaken.
- 5.0 Northern Ireland Audit Office Update**
- 5.1 The Northern Ireland Audit Office Senior Auditor noted that the Report to Those Charged with Governance had been presented to ARAC on 22 September 2025.
- 5.2 The Annual Report and Accounts 2024-25 were certified on 2 October 2025.
- 5.3 The Commission Chief Executive advised that the final Report to Those Charged with Governance would be considered at the Board meeting which was due to take place on 10 November 2025.
- 6.0 Internal Audit Update**
- 6.1 The Head of Finance and Corporate Affairs presented the Audit Recommendations paper and provided an update.
- 6.2 The Internal Auditor presented the Financial Controls Report with an overall satisfactory assurance and no recommendations. ARAC members commended commission staff on a very good report.
- 6.3 The Commission Chief Executive presented a Terms of Reference for an IT Health Check to address the NIAO Audit recommendation on the recent Report to those Charged with Governance. It was noted that this was based on the guidance provided on the UK Government website.
- 6.4 It was noted that the Commission are one of a number of organisations availing of IT Support through a contract with Cyber Security (NI) Ltd, with the Equality Commission acting as the Contracting Authority. The commission have had sight of the suite of reports that will be produced on a regular basis and will provide assurance that reporting standards are being explored.

- 6.5 Following discussion, it was agreed that the suite of reports would be presented to ARAC to determine if this would be sufficient to meet the NIAO recommendation. The ARAC Chair highlighted the importance of avoiding duplication of cost in bringing in an independent IT company to assess what Cyber Security (NI) Ltd are obliged to provide under the terms of the new contract and which the Equality Commission have primary responsibility of communicating to all parties involved.
- 6.6 In addition, the Internal Auditor presented the Terms of Reference for the Procurement Audit.
- 6.7 ARAC members asked clarification questions to ensure all relevant areas would be covered during the Audit.
- 6.8 The Commission Chief Executive confirmed he was content with the Terms of Reference for the Procurement Audit.

7.0 **Corporate Risk Register**

- 7.1 The Commission Chief Executive presented the Corporate Risk Register and Action Plan, noting minor changes including the addition of a Senior Responsible Owner and timeframes for completion of actions.
- 7.2 ARAC Members recommended the following amendments:

- If possible to amalgamate into one document.
- Include the 'risk manager'
- Review dates to indicate month and year instead of quarters
- In risk 3 the Actions Planned should include reference to the IT Health Check that is noted in the Report to Those Charged with Governance.

ACTION - Amendments to be completed by the Head of Finance and Corporate Affairs and approved.

- 7.3 ARAC members approved the Corporate Risk Register.

8.0 **Corporate Assurance Report to 30 September 2025**

- 8.1 The Corporate Assurance Report for quarters 1 and 2 was noted. It was highlighted that there was a discrepancy between the statement made in 2.3 Business Continuity Plans and the Audit Recommendation Update. The Head of Finance and Corporate Affairs advised that this was due to a 'timing issue' that is the Assurance report was correct at the time of submission to Executive Office but has subsequently been updated in the Audit Recommendations to reflect the current position.

9.0 **Corporate Performance Report to 30 September 2025**

- 9.1 The Corporate Performance Report for quarters 1 and 2 was noted.

9.2 ARAC members recommended the following be included in the next quarterly return:

- A narrative to report update on vacancies.
- Review presentation of sickness stats table.

10.0 Outcome Delivery Plan 2025-26 (Progress Report to 30 September 2025)

10.1 The Commission Chief Executive present the Outcome Delivery Plan 2025-26 (Progress Report to 30 September 2025), and reported that all objectives were currently on target to be achieved.

10.2 The Executive Office confirmed that the Outcome Delivery Plan 2025-26 had been approved by Ministers and could be published on the Commission's website.

10.3 The Commission Chief Executive advised that a Corporate Planning Day would take place in December 2025 to begin drafting a new Corporate Plan for 2026-30 and Outcome Delivery Plan for 2026-27.

10.4 It was noted that interviews had been completed for the recruitment of a Head of Communications and Public Relations, and it was anticipated that the successful candidate would be in post early 2026.

11.0 CVS Partnership Agreement

11.1 The Commission Chief Executive presented the signed Partnership Agreement.

11.2 ARAC members made the following observation:

- Date ARAC appointment is 2022 (noted at 7.2 as 2023)

12.0 Management Accounts and Report to 31 October 2025

12.1 The Commission Chief Executive presented the management accounts to 31 October 2025. The commission had submitted an easement of £80k in the October Monitoring Round, in respect of salaries due to the delay in appointment of Commissioner and Head of Communications and Public Relations.

12.2 It was noted that the October and January monitoring rounds would be combined into one exercise in December 2025.

13.0 Business Case and Procurement Update

13.1 The update paper on Business Cases, Procurement and Post Project Evaluations was reviewed and noted.

13.2 The Commission Secretariat advised that there were no outstanding Post Project Evaluations.

14.0 Freedom of Information Requests

14.1 No Freedom of Information Requests had been received since the last meeting.

15.0 Subject Access Requests

15.1 No Subject Access Requests had been received since the last meeting.

16.0 Complaints

16.1 No Complaints had been received since the last meeting.

17.0 Data Breaches

17.1 No Data Breaches had been reported since the last meeting.

18.0 Gifts and Hospitality

18.1 The Commission Chief Executive advised that no exceptional gifts or hospitality had been received or provided since the last meeting.

19.0 Fraud and Whistleblowing

19.1 No instances of Fraud or suspected Fraud had been reported since the last meeting.

20.0 Policies for Review

20.1 Fraud Prevention and Response Plan. ARAC members recommended the following amendments:

- Title should be 'Anti-Fraud and 'Anti Bribery Policy'
- Provide clarity around the reporting to NIAO and include HR involvement
- Include section for the responsibilities of the ARAC and Internal Audit
- Reporting responsibilities for suspected Frauds and other irregularities to The Executive Office, Department of Finance and NIAO
- Review wording in section 4.13 around "absolute" confidence to reflect narrative in section 10.2

ACTION - Amendments to be completed by the Finance and Corporate Affairs Manager and approved.

20.2 Raising Concerns (Whistleblowing) Policy. ARAC members recommended the following amendments:

- Review list of protected disclosure to ensure in line with legislation and guidance and Public Interest Disclosure.
- Review wording in section 5.5 as it refers to seeking recourse through an Employment Tribunal and this would not apply to member of the public.

ACTION - Amendments to be completed by the Finance and Corporate Affairs Manager and approved.

ARAC member Conor Minnis left the meeting at 11.45am

21.0 Guidance Received

21.1 The schedule for guidance issued by Department of Finance since the last meeting was noted.

21.2 The ARAC Chair requested that more narrative be included around what actions if any were required and more detailed explanation of guidance issued.

22.0 Effectiveness of Meeting

22.1 The ARAC Chair advised that Effectiveness of Meeting would be a standing item on the agenda going forward, in accordance with the NIAO Good Practice Guide.

22.2 All in attendance were content with the effectiveness of the meeting and had no further comments.

22.3 It was agreed going forward to add a separate agenda item for Chief Executive's Update.

23.0 Any Other Business

23.1 None

13.0 Date of Next Meeting

13.1 It was noted that the next Audit and Risk Assurance Committee meeting would take place on 5 February 2026.

Signed:

Name:


Terry McGonigal (Chair)

Date:

5/2/2026

