



NIPSO AUDIT AND RISK COMMITTEE MINUTES

MEETING 19th January 2024, NIPSO, Progressive House

Members Present:

Dónall Curtin – Chair; (DC)
Terry McGonigal – Independent Member; (TM)
Patricia Snell - Independent Member, (PS)

In Attendance:

Margaret Kelly – Accounting Officer/Ombudsman; (MK)
Sean Martin –Deputy Ombudsman; (SM)
Kirsty McCool – Director of Governance and Support Services (KM) – via webex
Kathy Doey – NIAO; (KD)
Philip Whitehead - ASM (PW)
Sarah Sherry – NIPSO; Secretariat (SS)

Item	Minute
1.	Apologies No Apologies DC welcomed both KM and KD to the committee and introductions were provided.
2.	Conflicts of Interest DC invited those present to register any actual or perceived conflicts of interest relevant to the agenda. No conflicts were noted.
3.	Minutes Minutes from 26 th October 2023 were agreed upon.
4	Update on Action Points SM updated the following: <i>Financial Review</i> – Financial team to look at the current coding structure <i>Finance Manual</i> – Contract awarded <i>Case Performance Management</i> – SSt and CN are be invited to the April meeting

	<p><i>Advisory Committee/Effectiveness Review (ARC)</i> – A draft report was received this week. Still waiting on the ARC report</p> <p><i>HR Support Tender</i> – Tender awarded</p> <p><i>Service Standards</i> – Overview Report of the 1st year to be tabled at April ARC</p> <p><i>Remuneration of Chairpersons and Members of Public Bodies and other fee rates</i> – further work is to be done.</p> <p><i>Corporate Governance Framework</i> – Work on-going</p>
5	<p>Ombudsman Update (verbal)</p> <p>MK advised that it has been particularly busy in November and December.</p> <p>Two reports had received significant media coverage – a report on the use of Tree Preservation Orders, and a complaint investigation report into concerns about the transition of a young person from Children to Adult Services.</p> <p>MK recently was interviewed by the ‘On your Behalf’ programme on the range of issues covered by the office.</p> <p>NIPSO is heading towards between 1100 and 1200 complaints this year.</p> <p>RQIA held a conference around Speaking Up, in the Health and Social Care Systems, and MK was invited to participate.</p> <p>On the 20th March NIPSO is running a Patient Safety Conference and the keynote speaker will be Sir Robert Francis QC.</p> <p>Robert Thomas is coming over in January for two days of engagement and learning. He will meet with SMT, OI staff and a roundtable with external stakeholders.</p> <p>MK spoke this week at the International Ombudsman Institute about NIPSOs’ work with vulnerable groups along with the Scottish Ombudsman, and this is a topic that will be expanded as they both will be speaking at the International Ombudsman Conference in The Hague.</p> <p><i>Vulnerability Projects</i> – The joint application with Chris Gill has been awarded funding and this will broadly focus on the role of the Ombudspersons in supporting refugee and asylum seekers.</p> <p>The Covid Inquiry is coming to Northern Ireland and will have oral evidence sessions relating to module 2C in April/May 2024. MK has been requested to submit a statement for a later module which has involved a large amount of analysis by a number of staff.</p>
6	<p>Financial Management</p> <p>SM updated the meeting on the current budgetary position.</p>
7	<p>Case Performance Management</p> <p>SM reported there had been considerable pressure on KPI 1 and 2 at the end of quarter 2, and with the progression of cases this has moved to KPI 3. Options being considered on best way to deal with the pressure.</p>

<p>8</p>	<p>Internal Audit</p> <p>PW summarised the ASM findings of the Internal Financial Controls, which received a satisfactory assurance regarding the effective and efficient achievement of NIPSO objectives about internal financial controls.</p> <p>In total 6 recommendations were made.</p> <p>TMcG queried that the review identified that there were two bank reconciliation procedures. PW confirmed that he has no concerns over this once the procedures are rationalised into a single procedure.</p> <p>PW continued that the review of the Complaints Standards will be commencing shortly along with the review of outstanding recommendations. Reports should be available for the April ARC meeting</p>
<p>9</p>	<p>Schedule of Progress Against Audit Recommendations Database Update</p> <p>SM provided an update on the outstanding actions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Finance Manual - Health and Safety Policy - Financial Procedures Manual
<p>10</p>	<p>External Audit – NIAO Update</p> <p>KD advised that planning will start soon to discuss the timetable, but hoping to keep to the same timetable as last year. KD to meet with KM to discuss this further. KD will bring the audit strategy to the April meeting</p>
<p>11</p>	<p>Business Plan – Q3</p> <p>SM focused on the comments in red.</p> <p><i>Complaints Standard Conference</i> – has not taken place and will be deferred until next year.</p> <p>MK highlighted options for a NIPSO peer review exercise – there is a delay in this as IOI is developing their peer review process and MK considers it is better to wait until their process has been completed.</p>
<p>12</p>	<p>Risk Register – Q3</p> <p>SM commented that a full review of the risk register took place in January with some minor changes. Key risks remain valid.</p> <p>SM did highlight the following:</p> <p><i>Budget</i> – Lack of clarity on budget setting in the absence of NI Assembly</p> <p><i>Recruitment and Retention</i> – review to be completed to ensure the best use of new methods of recruitment and review of reward and recognition to ensure retention. SM continued to advise that there have been 5 recruitment exercises in the past 3 years for Investigating Officers.</p>

	TMcG advised that the Treasury has published a new updated Orange book.
13	Comment on Information Items No comments
14	AOB No AOB
15	Date of next meeting Thursday 25th April 2024 – Progressive House, Pre-Meet at 9.30am for Chairperson, Committee Members, Ombudsman and Deputy Ombudsman Main Meeting 10.00am