

NIPSO AUDIT AND RISK COMMITTEE MINUTES

MEETING 26th October 2023, NIPSO, Progressive House

Members Present:

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

In Attendance:

Margaret Kelly – Accounting Officer/Ombudsman; (MK) Sean Martin –Deputy Ombudsman; (SM) Gary Currie – NIAO; (GC) Brian Clerkin - ASM (BC) Sarah Sherry – NIPSO; Secretariat (SS) Andrew Ruston – Head of Communications, NIPSO (AR)

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1.	Apologies
	No Apologies
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 30 th August 2023 were agreed upon.
4	Update on Action Points
	SM updated on the following:
	Financial Review
	Finance Manual
	Advisory Committee/Effectiveness Review (ARC) – Work is almost complete, accessing other Ombuds offices is causing slight delay.
	HR Support Tender – Tender awarded

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	<i>Remuneration of Chairpersons and Members of Public Bodies and other fee rates</i> – NIPSO is currently considering and comparing with other bodies.
	<i>Training for ARC members</i> – to be reviewed annually.
5	Ombudsman Update (verbal)
	Complaints continue to rise with a 9% increase in the year to date. In terms of LGES, a full review has been undertaken and actions arising from this are now being progressed.
	There have been several meetings with MPs and MLAs. A meeting is arranged with all the Health spokespersons and associated researchers to consider an overview of accountability and complaint issues in the health and social care system.
	Two full staff briefings have taken place.
	<i>Engagement</i> – SM in partnership with NIAO spoke at the NICON Conference. MK spoke at the Housing Rights event, along with the Housing Executive Chief Executive.
	The Regulation and Oversight Forum continues to meet.
	<i>Media</i> – Significant consistent presence in the media. Positive feedback, specifically, on the report on the Causeway Coast and Glens report
	At the recent AGM MK was elected as the Vice Chair of the Ombudsman Association Validation Committee.
6	Financial Management
	SM updated the meeting on finance for both NIPSO and Commissioner for Standards functions. A pay award of possibly 2.5% has been factored into the full year predictions.
7	Case Performance Management
	SM reported there had been a considerable improvement in performance with all KPI's being met, but pressure is on KPI1 and 2. KPI3should stay within target.
	DC queried how quality is monitored and asked for a paper on quality control to be brought to ARC. MK advised that the Engagement and Impact team undertakes customer satisfaction surveys when cases in KPI1 and 2 are closed.
8	Internal Audit
	BC reported that ASM will undertake the following reviews.
	 Complaint Standards High Level Review of Financial Systems Follow Up review of previous internal audit recommendations.
9	Schedule of Progress Against Audit Recommendations Database Update
	SM provided an update on the outstanding actions:

	- Finance Manual - People Strategy
	- Website - Policies
	Discussion took place regarding the challenging nature of some interactions which staff deal with. NIPSO have arrangements in place for managing this and are looking at other measures which could be implemented. NIPSO are also working on a best practice guide for public bodies. DC stressed the importance of having systems and procedures to protect staff.
	GC advised that they have a policy on Unacceptable Actions on the NIAO website
10	External Audit – NIAO Update
	GC reported that the 22/23 audit is completed and the 23/24 report will be starting early next year.
11	Business Plan – Q2
	SM reported that there is some delay of actions completed, however he can't see any that won't deliver before Q4.
12	Risk Register – Q2
	SM commented that a full review of the risk register took place in September with some minor changes. Key risks remain valid.
13	Communications Update to ARC
	AR outlined the approach taken to communicate the role of the office. He commented that the media respect and understand the work NIPSO undertakes.
	While some investigation reports are brought directly to their attention, others are picked up by the media while monitoring the NIPSO website.
	DC suggested a Communications Policy to be written focusing on promotion, communication, and accountability of the office.
	AR confirmed that he does communicate regularly with the Communication Managers within the Ombudsman Association, and they share good practices. AR offered to circulate to the members the most recent Communication Strategy, which will need to be updated in 2024.
	PS complimented the new website.
14	Comment on Information Items
	<i>Policies</i> – The attendance policy is completed.

	<i>Phishing Report</i> – BC queried in terms of the risk register assessment, what is the likelihood of being exposed to information security leakage, after the recent Phishing Campaign? SM replied that it did not remove the risk and the plan is to do it again. DC emphasised the importance of a no blame culture to improve compliance.
15	AOB
	No AOB
16	Date of next meeting
	Friday 19 th January 2023 – Progressive House, Pre-Meet at 9.30am for Chairperson, Committee Members, Ombudsman and Deputy Ombudsman
	Main Meeting 10.00am