

Minutes of Senior Management Team (SMT) Meeting held on 6 April 2020 @ 2.30pm

In line with official Government advice all Northern Ireland Audit Office staff are currently working from home until further notice. This meeting was conducted remotely online.

In attendance: Kieran Donnelly, Chair (C&AG)
Pamela McCreedy (COO)
Rodney Allen (Director)
Patrick Barr (Director)
Colette Kane (Director)
Tomas Wilkinson (Director)
Neil Gray (Director)
Suzanne Walsh (Director)
Louise Donnelly (Secretary)

1.	Apologies No apologies were noted
2.	Declaration of Conflicts of Interest There were no issues declared by members.
3.	Minutes of Previous meeting and Matters Arising Minutes of the previous meeting held on 18 February 2020 were agreed and matters arising updated.
4.	COVID 19 Working Group In response to the Coronavirus Pandemic the Office established an internal COVID 19 Working Group that met for the first time on 11 March 2020. The group is chaired by the COO. The welfare of staff is the foremost consideration of the group and members will continue to monitor PHA guidelines and to ensure the Office is complying with official advice.
5.	<p>Risk Management Sub Risk Register for COVID 19 Colette Kane presented a first draft of the COVID 19 risk register to SMT and advised it had previously been considered by the Corporate Risk Register Working Group (CRRWG) and the Operational Management Team (OMT). A detailed discussion took place led by the C&AG. Members welcomed the draft and agreed it provided an excellent focus on the current highest risk areas affecting the Office. Going forward SMT agreed to monitor the COVID 19 risk register at monthly meetings for the time being.</p> <p>The C&AG encouraged staff to maintain engagement with stakeholders to provide support and guidance in ensuring governance standards are maintained in light of the ongoing crisis.</p> <p>Members expressed their thanks to the CRRWG for producing the risk register under the current challenging circumstances.</p>

	<p>Corporate Risk Register (CRR)</p> <p>Following SMT on 18 February 2020 the Corporate Risk Register (CRR) was reviewed and updated to reflect higher level key issues affecting the Office. After discussion members agreed that as a result of the current adverse risks facing the Office the revised Corporate Risk Register (CRR) would be stepped down temporarily due to the continually changing and challenging circumstances surrounding COVID 19 and the CRR should be revised at a later date on return to a 'normal' working environment.</p>
6.	<p>Finance Report 2019-20</p> <p>Rodney Allen briefed members on the following key points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finance The 2019-20 budgetary position and the anticipated year end position was discussed. Members were asked to note the 2020-21 budget position. • Accommodation Project <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – An initial design has been agreed and is in place. – SMT will be briefed on the budget position after the next Project Board Meeting scheduled for 29 April. • Annual Report and Accounts <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Work has commenced on the production of the Annual Report and Accounts currently in line with the original agreed timescales. This will continue to be monitored.
7.	<p>Corporate Report</p> <p>Rodney Allen briefed SMT members on the following key points:</p> <p>HR</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruitment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – A new GTA commenced employment today – A further new GTA and an auditor will take up employment in the coming weeks • Planned upcoming recruitment – It was noted that a Training and Development Officer is a priority alongside employment of an audit manager • Attendance Management Members noted absence figures per employee in the rolling period 1 February 2019 to 31 January 2020. <p>Business Support</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tendering Exercises Members were updated on the current External quality assurance and Legal tendering exercises.
8.	<p>Accounts Preparation and Certification Revised Dates</p> <p>Suzanne Walsh and the C&AG have been liaising with the Treasury Officer of Accounts (TOA) to discuss the year end position for Departments. It has been agreed the deadline for the 2019-20 Annual Report and Accounts should be deferred for two months. Departments will still be encouraged to provide their accounts for audit as soon as possible but should aim to submit their Annual Report and Accounts to the C&AG together with a signed letter from the Accounting Officer no later than 3 August 2020. Suzanne will continue to monitor this position with the TOA and update SMT as required.</p>

	Colette Kane provided an update on the year-end position for Local Government Accounts and advised that due to potential legislative change a change of date had not been agreed yet. Colette will update SMT when confirmation of the year-end position has been obtained. Members noted that performance improvement work in Local Government may be deferred in 2020-21, which would have financial implications for the Office.
9.	<p>Public Reporting Stocktake Department overview After discussion a proposed template to be used for each departmental analysis was agreed by SMT. OMT will discuss resourcing at their next meeting.</p> <p>RHI Members discussed the recommendations arising from the RHI Report and it was agreed that a separate meeting would be scheduled to discuss the scope, timeline and resourcing required by the office to track and report on the implementation of all recommendations made.</p> <p>Public reporting – re-prioritisation schedule Pamela McCreedy provided an overview on the revised summary schedule detailing the re-prioritisation of the public reporting programme. The revised schedule was agreed and will be communicated to relevant Departments and the NIAO website will be updated to reflect the revisions.</p>
10.	<p>Data Analytics and GOVTECH Update Suzanne Walsh updated members on recent developments and advised that the GOVTECH Board had decided to proceed to phase two on the public reporting part of the project. Suzanne is currently communicating with the other audit agencies to ascertain interest in independently progressing the financial audit part of the challenge separately. Members welcomed this news. Understandably both projects are now on hold due to the ongoing COVID 19 pandemic.</p>
11.	<p>Impacts Update A paper detailing the current impacts position was presented to SMT. The C&AG agreed the impacts proposed and it was noted that no further meeting was required to discuss.</p>
12	<p>Papers to note</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advisory Board draft minutes of 11 February 2020 meeting - Members noted the paper.
13.	<p>AOB</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Next meeting 24 April 2020