

AGENDA

**C&AG's Advisory Group Meeting
Thursday 2nd March 2017 at 11:30am
Conference Room 2nd Floor**

SECTION 1 – PRELIMINARY/ADMINISTRATION

1. Apologies
2. Declaration of conflicts of interest
3. Minutes of meeting held 24 November 2016 and matters arising (Paper 1)

SECTION 2 – Workforce Strategy and Planning

1. External Audit Report on Workforce Strategy and Planning (Paper 2)

SECTION 3 – AOB

1. Interim Impacts Paper (Paper 3)

MINUTES OF C&AG'S ADVISORY GROUP MEETING THURSDAY 2 MARCH 2017

Present Paul Douglas (Non Executive Member - Chair)
Kieran Donnelly (Comptroller & Auditor General)
Pat Cumiskey (Non Executive Director)
Áine Gallagher (Non Executive Member)
Louise Mason (AAG)
Janet Sides (AAG)

Apologies None

In Attendance Joe Campbell (Secretary)

1. Preliminary/Administration

Declaration of Interest - There were no issues declared by members which would be in conflict with the agenda for the meeting.

Minutes of meeting held 24 November 2016 –The minutes were considered and agreed.

Matters Arising – In matters arising, it was agreed that progress relating to the interim impact assessment would be dealt with as a substantive issue within the meeting.

2. Value for Money Study of Workforce Strategy and Planning at NIAO

C&AG briefed members on the report, setting out both its legislative context and how the subject matter had been agreed in consultation with the NI Assembly Audit Committee. He confirmed that it had already been considered by the Senior Management Team in its meeting of 16 February 2017, who had welcomed its findings, conclusions and recommendations. He informed members that he considered it to be an excellent report, which would form a significant element of the Chief Operating Officer's (COO) remit post appointment.

In welcoming the report, the Chair enquired if any traction could be made prior to the COO appointment. C&AG confirmed that it was intention to proceed with a skills audit, potentially using external consultancy, as and when required. In this exercise he would be seeking a focus on, not only the technical skills of his staff, but also on the wider softer skills essential in running the Office. Members encouraged the development of the skills audit and agreed that external consultancy may be required. They agreed that the Office needed to develop an evidence-based CV culture with a view to identifying what it has as against what it needs. Miss Gallagher offered to provide papers for this exercise which she considered would be a firm foundation in moving the Office forward.

In addressing the shortfall on public reporting skills, C&AG informed members that this had arisen as a result of a combination of the VES exercise together with a deficit in experienced staff. To tackle this issue, C&AG explained that directors had been allocated a multi disciplinary portfolio to ensure that the value for money study programme continued to progress. This was supported by his confidence in his staff who he believed have the necessary transferable skills to perform both financial audit and public reporting. In support of this assertion, he also informed the meeting of the establishment of the Technical Training Unit which had been conducting excellent work across all disciplines.

The actions taken to date were welcomed by the Chair who encouraged the Office to continue to recognise the ever changing demands on Office resources, not only for the present, but in addressing future needs. Members suggested that this might not always be in-house but may, where the need arose, be addressed through buying in consultancy and expertise. C&AG explained that the Office had already commenced such a process, engaging with NICS “fast track” staff, one of whom had conducted the VES study during his secondment. He suggested that this was one avenue that he would like to pursue further in addressing office resourcing needs.

The meeting was also informed that the Office was conducting an exercise to gain a better oversight of the public reporting programme and enhance project management.

Members sought clarity on how IT would be progressed in the foreseeable future. They were informed that a Digital Services Strategy had just been completed and endorsed by SMT, which set out the way forward for the Office. Members welcomed the paper and encouraged the Office to embrace technology to ensure that it kept abreast of new developments within the industry, such as data analytics. If and when skills gaps arise, the Office was encouraged to buy in the necessary services or second staff.

In addressing the issue of workforce planning, members noted both the age profile and the staff “bulge” in middle management grades. C&AG explained that in order to engage all staff on this issue, workforce planning is being addressed across the Office rather than solely through corporate services to ensure widespread ownership.

Members also sought an update on recruitment of graduate trainees. They were informed that there had been fewer applications in the current year than previous years, a trend that the Office understood was pervasive throughout the accounting field. To address this, the Office was considering its marketing strategy to determine how best to sell the office to new high calibre graduates in an increasingly challenging recruitment arena. In discussing this issue, members proposed a number of options including, the offer of secondments (national, international, public and private sector), greater focus on the service the Office provides to the public, the promotion of our higher profile work and the potential the Office has to make a difference and impact on the lives of all NI citizens.

In closing on this issue, members enquired if the report, its findings and conclusions would be addressed in the risk register. C&AG confirmed that this was already being taken on board as part of the wider review of the register currently being conducted by the Office.

3. AOB

Members were updated on the findings of the interim impact exercise. C&AG informed members that he considered this interim review to be worthwhile as it has identified not only the potential financial impacts that we will be seeking to claim, but also other reports and recommendations which, to date, have not been identified and/or pursued. In conducting this review, it has provided the Office with the necessary breathing space to ensure that it can maximise its claim on these financial impacts.

The next meeting will be held on **Thursday 2nd May 2017** in the NI Audit Office Conference Room, starting at **11:30AM**.