

Minutes of Senior Management Team (SMT) Meeting held on 19 May 2020 @ 10am

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)
 Neil Gray (Director)
 Colette Kane (Director)
 Tomas Wilkinson (Director)
 Suzanne Walsh (Director)
 Louise Donnelly (Secretary)

1.	<p>Apologies No apologies were noted.</p>
2.	<p>Declaration of Conflicts of Interest There were no issues declared by members.</p>
3.	<p>Minutes of Previous meeting and Matters Arising Minutes of the previous meeting held on 24 April 2020 were agreed and matters arising updated.</p>
4.	<p>Risk Management Annual Assurance Statement Colette Kane presented the draft assurance statement covering 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020. Members endorsed the Assurance Statement for presentation to the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee (ARAC) on 23 June 2020.</p> <p>Sub Risk Register for COVID 19 Colette Kane advised the Sub Risk Register had been updated to reflect comments made by ARAC at their meeting on 5 May 2020. Matters highlighted by ARAC were considered in detail by the Corporate Risk Register Working Group (CRRWG) at their meeting on 7 May and as a result an additional risk was added.</p> <p>In response to a point issued by ARAC the CRRWG produced a list of possible risks associated with the transition from lockdown these risks were passed to the COVID 19 working group for consideration.</p> <p>The CRRWG are currently reviewing a revised version of the Orange Book – ‘Management of Risks – Principles and Concepts’ issued by the Department of Finance and will update the Risk Management Strategy accordingly. The CRRWG will also prepare a presentation on the Orange Book and its implications to SMT and ARAC.</p>
5.	<p>Finance Report 2019-20 Rodney Allen briefed members on the following key points:</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finance The 2019-20 year-end position was discussed. Members noted the 2020-21 budget position. • Accommodation Project Members were briefed on the current position and advised that a dedicated folder will be set up on the intranet for staff to access, in the absence of the physical project room, to keep up to date with the project. SMT noted the current position and the risks associated with COVID 19 and the need to keep the potential implications for the workplace of the future closely under review. • IT Staff are successfully hosting and attending online meetings using various software packages supported by the Office. IT support for upcoming exams and exam preparation is currently being explored and tested.
<p>6.</p>	<p>Corporate Report 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 and a new auditor have taken up post and another GTA will take up post in September 2020 – The temporary promotion for the Senior Auditor post has been filled and the successful candidate took up post on 28 April 2020. – Recruitment is progressing for the following roles : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Training and Development Officer ▪ Apprenticeship intake for 2020 ▪ Auditor ▪ Audit Manager • Attendance Management Members noted absence figures per employee in the rolling period 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020, the breakdown between short term and long term and the numbers of staff with no absences. • Performance Management Members noted the high compliance rates for 2019 year end assessments and 2020 objectives setting. • Equality Compliance We have completed our article 55 equality monitoring assessment which is required every three years and no necessary additional actions have been identified. We have also completed and submitted our annual monitoring return to the Equality Commission. <p>Business Support</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tendering Exercises Members were updated on the current external quality assurance, legal services and temporary staff tendering exercises. • Governance The next meeting of the Advisory Board will be 26 May 2020. The next meeting of ARAC is scheduled for 23 June 2020 but may change. • Internal Audit

	<p>The audits for 2020-21 as agreed in the Internal Audit Strategy have been identified and a timetable discussed with Internal Audit.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual Report and Accounts Work is progressing on the Annual Report and Accounts and a draft will be available for members to consider before the next SMT scheduled for 16 June 2020. • Communications The media coverage report on Reducing Costs in PSNI was welcomed. It was agreed the comms team will provide a report summarising media coverage of each report to SMT following publication and also a stocktake report perhaps every six months that also takes account of qualitative considerations.
7.	<p>Internal Audit Annual Report Members noted the healthy position with overall assurance levels assessed as satisfactory with a number of minor recommendations made. No issues or questions were raised by SMT.</p>
8.	<p>Public Reporting Update In response to COVID 19 the C&AG and SMT agreed a revised plan which identifies a realistic schedule of public reporting work to be progressed. The schedule has been prioritised to ensure that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • all outstanding studies carried forward from the 2019-20 programme are ready for publication; and • the 2020-21 public reporting programme progresses carefully considering the timing of publications given the current situation and sensitivities around some of topics. <p>The Advisory Board will be updated on these developments at their meeting scheduled for 26 May 2020.</p>
9.	<p>Annual Report and Accounts, Governance Statement - Update Rodney Allen advised members that work is progressing on the production of the Annual Report and Accounts with an anticipated delay of approximately three weeks to the normal timetable. Members would receive the draft document later for consideration. ARAC was informed of the potential delay at their meeting on 5 May 2020.</p>
10.	<p>Communication and Engagement Strategy - update on progress of actions Rodney Allen presented a report providing an overview of progress on the delivery of the Communications and Engagement Strategy. He highlighted actions completed but also advised that due to competing priorities with the return of the Assembly and the Office's response to COVID 19, new timelines have also been proposed and where relevant some additional actions have been added.</p> <p>SMT acknowledged the current position and advised they were content with the revised plans, timelines and actions proposed.</p>
11.	<p>Staff Survey – Communications and action plan Following the analysis of the staff survey data a decision was taken to carry out a number of workshops for staff to explore the key themes identified by the survey. The workshops were facilitated by Colin Smith, Head of Performance and Development from Inspire. A</p>

	<p>report outlining the findings from the workshops was produced by Colin. In addition an action plan detailing actions arising from the survey and progress to date has been produced. Staff were advised on 18 May that these reports will be made available on Friday 22 May 2020. SMT were asked to consider the reports and provide any feedback to Rodney Allen before Friday 22 May 2020.</p> <p>A new staff survey will be scheduled for later in the year.</p>
12.	<p>SMT Self-Assessment Report</p> <p>Pamela McCreedy briefed members on the results of the SMT self-assessment exercise. The overall conclusion is that SMT is performing effectively with some scope for further improvement.</p> <p>Members endorsed the following actions to be taken forward:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Development of the quality of management information presented, to help with more focus on the vision, values and strategic direction of the Office; 2. Development of SMT reflection, in the first instance as part of developing the new corporate plan; and 3. Explore the opportunity for more interaction between SMT members and the Advisory Board.
13.	<p>Technical Update</p> <p>Suzanne Walsh provided an update on the following key technical matters and advised that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DoF will issue guidance to Departments on COVID 19 related changes to the annual report and accounts later this week; • DoF has now confirmed that 2019-20 accounts should be signed electronically; • Technical training updates have been provided on journal risk assessment, GTA induction, sampling and error evaluation. Further training on audit evidence will be issued in the coming weeks; and • The QCR process has now concluded and results will be issued to all staff via an APC next week.

14.	Papers noted - Draft ARAC minutes of meeting 5 May 2020.
15.	AOB <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Next meeting 16 June 2020