

Minutes of Senior Management Team (SMT) Meeting held on 17 August 2021 @ 10am

In attendance: Kieran Donnelly, Chair (C&AG)
Neil Gray (Director)
Brian O’Neill (Director)
Suzanne Walsh (Director)
Conor McGeown (Audit Manager) – agenda item 5
Louise Donnelly (Secretary)
Tanya McNally (Secretary)

Apologies: Rodney Allen (COO)
Patrick Barr (Director)
Colette Kane (Director)
Tomas Wilkinson (Director)

| No. | Topic |
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| 1. | <p>Apologies Apologies were accepted as noted above.</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 15 June 2021 were agreed and the matters arising updated.</p> |
| 4. | <p>Equality Commission NI (ECNI) – Section 75 Statutory Equality and Good Relations Duties Acting on the evidence of public authority practices The C&AG briefed members on a recent meeting he and Rodney Allen had with Evelyn Collins from ECNI. Papers received subsequent to the meeting were shared with SMT :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A summary of the report of ECNI review of public authority practices on the s75 duties (June 2018); • ECNI Leadership guidance and its associated self-audit checklist; and • ECNI report about Department of Finance and its breach of its Equality Scheme commitments. <p>All agreed both parties have a mutual interest in a number of key areas. Looking ahead the C&AG and COO will continue to engage with ECNI in these areas and it was agreed to invite Evelyn Collins to give a presentation to our staff on the work of ECNI and what impact this might have on our work.</p> |
| 5. | <p>Contract Management Conor McGeown joined the meeting to update members.</p> <p>In June the Operational Management Team (OMT) provided approval for the contract management engagement team to seek external expert support for the procurement exercise. After liaison with providers and consideration of the budgetary position it was</p> |

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| 1. | <p>Apologies Apologies were accepted as noted above.</p> |
| | <p>agreed the best route for procuring these services was through the utilisation of BrowneJacobson.</p> <p>Next Steps</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BrowneJacobson are aiming to draft a contract and Invitation to Tender (ITT) by 20 August 2021; • BrowneJacobson will draft a provisional timetable up to contract award, which will assist in focusing all stakeholder attentions and aid SMT's oversight of this project going forward. • ITT's will be issued mid-September to have appointments made pre-Christmas 2021. • BrowneJacobson have also been asked to prepare a more detailed timetable to assist SMT's consideration re the resourcing of this exercise. <p>The C&AG commended the engagement team for their progress on this exercise.</p> |
| 6. | <p>MLA and Raising Concerns Quarterly Update Brian O'Neill presented a report to inform SMT on progress regarding Raising Concerns and MLA cases. Discussion followed concerning the drafting of replies for raising concerns cases and the timescales and status of live cases.</p> |
| 7. | <p>Management Information Report A link to the interactive performance report detailing key performance outturns for the public reporting and financial audit programmes to 10 August 2021 was presented. Suzanne Walsh advised the data analytics team had met with relevant staff over the summer months to refine the information gathering process and to reiterate the need to keep all relevant information up to date. Members welcomed the new report format.</p> |
| 8. | <p>Corporate Report Brian O'Neill provided an overview on the current position with regard to Finance, HR and Business Support:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finance 2020-21 Forecast - Members were asked to note the current budgetary position. Refurbishment of 106 University Street – progress is ongoing, the next meeting of the Project Board meeting is scheduled for 1 September 2021. • HR Recruitment – Recruitment exercises for various posts are ongoing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Offers have been made and accepted for the recent recruitment exercises for Auditor and Senior Auditor posts. - A further Auditor recruitment process will commence in early September 2021. - Annual recruitment for Trainee Accountants will commence at the beginning of October 2021. - An additional Auditor recruitment exercise will commence mid-December 2021. • Business Support |

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| 1. | <p>Apologies Apologies were accepted as noted above.</p> |
| | <p>Complaints - There are no complaints currently open with NIAO. Single Tender Action - There were no single tender actions in the reporting period. Remuneration Committee – A meeting has been scheduled for 1 September 2021.</p> |
| 9. | <p>Technical Report Suzanne Walsh briefed members on the following key areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Audit certificates - the Technical Team have worked with the Data Analytics and Visualisations Team to develop a tool to prepopulate audit certificates with engagement specifics. The audit certificate tool was released to all staff at the start of August. • Review of Financial Processes - audit procedures and training will be developed over the coming weeks and rolled out to staff. • ISO 315/International Standards on Quality Management (ISQM 1) <p>Data Analytics The Data Analytics Unit recently started to develop self-serve applications for the completion of financial audit analytics. Members were advised that the Office lacks the software licences needed to permit the sharing of these applications with audit teams. Consideration was given to four possible solutions and the purchase of R Studio Team licences was identified as the optimal solution. SMT considered the cost of the licenses and gave approval for the purchase to proceed.</p> |
| 10. | <p>Risk Management Corporate Risk Register No observations or comments on the paper provided were noted.</p> |
| 11. | <p>Papers to Note:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DAO (DoF) 03/21 - Guidance on NI Public Audit process including PAC scrutiny of public spending • Audit and Risk Assurance Committee draft minutes of 24 June 2021 |
| 12. | <p>AOB</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Next meeting 14 September 2021 @10am. |