

**Minutes of Audit & Risk Assurance Committee Meeting No. 65  
Held on Tuesday 13 May 2025 at 10.00am, Conference Room,  
Marlborough House**

**Present:**

Hugh McKeag, Commissioner (chair)  
Alan Hunter, Commissioner  
Leanne McCullough, Commissioner

**In Attendance:**

Frances McCandless, Chief Executive  
Aubrey McCrory, Head of Corporate Services  
Ian Croskery, Finance & Admin Manager  
Ciara McCann, Finance & Admin Officer (minutes)  
Curtis Fleming, Northern Ireland Audit Office  
Amanda McMaw, Sumer NI  
Michael Woods, DfC Internal Audit  
Peter Murchan, DfC Internal Audit  
Conor McCaughey, DfC Internal Audit  
Karen Mills, DfC Voluntary and Community Division (observer)

**Apologies:** Caron Alexander, Independent member

The meeting commenced at 10.00 am.

**1. Minutes of Meeting No 64**

The minutes of the Audit & Risk Assurance (ARAC) Committee meeting number 64 held on 11 March 2025 were previously agreed by correspondence. The Head of Corporate Services gave an update on action items.

**AP1 – Minutes of meeting No 64 to be recommended to the Board for publication.**

**2. Conflicts of Interest**

The Chair reminded all present of the need to raise any conflicts of interest. None recorded at the outset of the meeting.

### **3. Chair's Comments**

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and highlighted the main agenda items for decision. He noted some items for discussion including the new Guide on Effective Audit and Risk Assurance Committees.

### **4. Draft Accounts 2024/25**

The Chair welcomed Ian Croskery to the meeting and commended staff for the turnaround on the draft 2024-25 accounts. Details of the basis of the account's preparation and an overview of financial position and cash flows was provided. Committee members noted reduction in staff costs due to delays in filling some posts during the year and legal spend was down due to a number of legal cases being settled. Following a query the Finance and Admin Manager confirmed that Commissioner travel expenses were covered under note three. It was agreed to recommend the draft accounts to the Board as proposed by Leanne McCullough and seconded by Alan Hunter.

**AP2 – Draft Accounts to be recommended to Board for approval.**

### **5. Draft Governance Statement**

The CEx introduced the draft statement and highlighted the development of the statement over the past few years. Several queries were discussed before it was agreed to recommend the draft governance statement, subject to minor amendment, to the Board as proposed by Leanne McCullough and seconded by Alan Hunter.

**AP3 – Amended draft governance statement to be recommended to Board for approval.**

### **6. Review of the Risk Management Policy and Assurance Framework**

The Head of Corporate Services introduced the review report and highlighted the three parts to the policy. Following discussion, the Committee agreed recommendation one ie the policy remained unchanged with work to scope a risk event-based approach progressed in quarter three, and recommendation two ie risk appetites for the 2025-26 business plan as proposed by Alan Hunter and seconded by Leanne McCullough.

**AP4 – Outcome of review of the Risk Management Policy and Assurance Framework to be recommended to the Board.**

**7. Draft 2025-26 Corporate Risk Register & Action Plan**

ARAC noted the new register risks were based on previous Committee and Board discussions and reflected core regulatory work and governance. During discussion of the relocation risk committee members concerns were noted around timely sign off of the business case, lack of support with technical aspects and potential slippage. It was agreed the Commission needed mitigations such as support from sponsor department and contingency plans for temporary accommodation. Following a request the DfC observer undertook to liaise with colleagues about support with technical aspects. Committee members noted there was overlap between the first two risks but agreed to recommend the draft to the Board for further discussion as proposed by Alan Hunter and seconded by Leanne McCullough.

**AP5 – Draft 2025/26 Corporate Risk Register & Action Plan to be recommended to the Board.**

**8. ARAC Committee Schedule**

The Committee noted two minor changes reflecting recent Internal Audit recommendations under agenda item 10, as proposed by Leanne McCullough and seconded by Alan Hunter.

**AP6 – Updated ARAC Committee Schedule to be recommended to the Board.**

**9. ARAC Committee Annual Report**

The Chair introduced the report and highlighted key aspects. The report was agreed, subject to minor amendments, as proposed by Leanne McCullough and seconded by Alan Hunter.

The Committee endorsed the Chair's thanks to the Finance and Admin team for all their hard work throughout the year.

**10. Internal Audit 2<sup>nd</sup> Assignment Report 2024/25**

Conor McCaughey introduced the report and outlined the overall satisfactory opinion with one priority three recommendation. ARAC noted the assignment covered payroll, Freedom of Information record management, and previous internal audit recommendations which

were all implemented. The Committee noted the publication scheme was reviewed and Internal Audit advised in line with the Cabinet office Code of Practice, publication of the gifts and hospitality register should not include small items like refreshments. The Chair thanked the auditors and noted the support from staff.

#### **11. Internal Audit – Annual Report and Opinion 2024/25**

Michael Woods introduced the report and noted the overall satisfactory assurance over the course of the year and audit were not aware of any issues from stakeholders. He noted discussions were underway around the Internal Audit charter going forward and a new three-year audit strategy would be developed with the ARAC chair and CEx.

**AP7 – The CEx, ARAC Chair and Head of Internal Audit to develop a new three-year strategy.**

#### **12.a Annual Expenditure Report 2024/25**

Ian Croskery introduced the paper and the Committee noted the spend down achieved at year end which was within the 1% business plan target subject to audit and finalisation.

#### **12.b Draft budget 2025/26**

The Head of Corporate Services introduced the budget based on an indicative allocation for the first quarter. The Committee discussed the budget lines which reflected a focus on contractual spend only. Concerns were noted around the lack of training, communications and other programme budget at this time.

**Ian Croskery left the meeting at 10.30am**

#### **13. NIAO Good Practice Guide – Effective Audit & Risk Assurance Committees**

The CEx introduced the guide and noted it included a number of useful templates that are being used by the Committee already, and others to be adapted throughout the year.

#### **14. Report of Board and SMT Expenses**

Noted.

## **15. Review conditions attached to business case approvals**

Noted.

## **16. Audit recommendations implementation report**

Noted.

**AP8: CEx to update the Board on gifts and hospitality reporting.**

## **17. DAO and FD letters summary**

Noted.

## **18. Fraud and Concerns about Commission report**

The Head of Corporate Services confirmed there had been no internal frauds or Concerns about the Commission raised.

## **19. AOB**

No items were raised.

## **20. Issues for next meeting 9 September 2025**

In addition to standing items:

- NIAO Report to those charged with Governance.
- Committee Self-Assessment
- Meeting of ARAC members and auditors without staff present.
- Review of Finance procedures.
- DoF Annual Fraud Report.
- Cyber security update.

**AP9 - Internal Audit to circulate agenda for meeting of ARAC members and auditors without staff present**

Meeting ended at 11.20pm.

**Audit & Risk Committee**  
**Register of Outstanding Action Points**

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<b>Committee Meeting and Action Point Number</b>	<b>Date Raised</b>	<b>Agenda Item</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>Owners</b>	<b>Status</b>
65 (1)	13/05/25	1	Minutes of meeting No 64 to be recommended to the Board for publication.	HoCS	Complete
65 (2)	13/05/25	4	Draft Accounts to be recommended to Board for approval.	HoCS	Complete
65 (3)	13/05/25	5	Amended draft governance statement to be recommended to Board for approval.	HoCS	Complete
65 (4)	13/05/25	6	Outcome of review of the Risk Management Policy and Assurance Framework to be recommended to the Board.	HoCS	Complete
65 (5)	13/05/25	7	Draft 2025/26 Corporate Risk Register & Action Plan to be recommended to the Board.	HoCS	Complete

65 (6)	13/05/25	8	Updated ARAC Committee Schedule to be recommended to the Board.	HoCS	Complete
65 (7)	13/05/25	11	The CEx, Chair and Head of Internal Audit to develop a new three year strategy.	CEx	Underway
65 (8)	13/05/25	16	CEx to update the Board on gifts and hospitality reporting.	CEx	Complete
65 (9)	13/05/25	20	Internal Audit to circulate agenda for meeting of ARAC members and auditors without staff present.	NIAO	Underway
64 (1)	11/03/25	1	Identify fraud and financial crime trainer	Chair	Complete
64 (2)	11/03/25	3	CEF governance training slide pack to be circulated.	HoCS	Complete
63(3)	26/11/24	4	Ideas for new 2025/26 risk register to be developed for March meeting.	HoCS	Complete
59 (5)	12/03/24	6	Further training for staff and Commissioners on fraud, bribery and money laundering to be arranged.	HoCS	Underway
54 (6)	24/11/22	7	Commission to write to all MOU partners updating them on current	HCS	Postponed until intro of potential

			arrangements and future developments.		scheme of delegation
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