

## **CCEA**

### **Audit & Risk Assurance Committee**

Minutes of the sixty-first meeting of the Audit & Risk Assurance Committee held on Wednesday 20 September 2023 via Hybrid arrangements.

**Present :** Mrs C Fitzsimons (Chair)                      Mr H McCarthy  
Professor P Hanna                                      Mrs D O'Connor  
Mrs P Leitch    Mrs A Kingsley

#### *Executive*

Mrs L Scott (Director of Finance & Corporate Services)  
Mrs C Latham (Temporary Director of Curriculum & Assessment)  
Ms A Swann (Temporary Director Examinations)  
Mr J Daly (Financial Services Manager)  
Mr D Wilson (Business Assurance Manager)  
Miss N Kennedy (Manager, Council Secretariat)

#### *In Attendance*

Mr R Falls, Cavanagh Kelly  
Mr D Anderson, Education Authority  
Ms F Magowan, NIAO  
Mr A Stevens, N/V Member

#### *Introduction*

The Chair welcomed members and officers to the meeting.

#### **Apologies**

Apologies were received from Mr R Caldwell (DE) and Mr G Campbell.

#### **Conflict of Interests**

Members confirmed there were no conflict of interest on any of the agenda items.

#### **Chair's Business**

##### *Appointment of External Auditors*

The Chair advised that Cavanagh Kelly had been appointed External Auditors on behalf of the Northern Ireland Audit Office and welcomed Mr Ryan Falls to the meeting.

##### *Officer and Representative Attendance*

The Chair welcomed Ms Finula Magowan NIAO representative to the meeting.

Mr John Daly (Financial Services Manager) and Mr David Wilson (Business Assurance Manager) were available to provide detail on various agenda items as required.

## **Ratification of the previous meeting held on Tuesday 20 June 2023**

The minutes of the previous meeting held on Tuesday 20 June 2023 were proposed by Mrs Paula Leitch and seconded by Professor Phil Hanna as a true and accurate record. A copy would be available for the Chair to sign.

### *Action Points*

The Director of Finance & Corporate Services drew attention to the status of the action points. She advised that the Action Plan in relation to the Governance Review would be presented to Council and members would be updated on progress as appropriate.

The Chair wished to note that the voluntary nature of Council/Committee members could present additional challenges to accommodating additional meetings of the committee should they be required. She asked that this be recognised.

Members noted the information provided.

## **Financial Risk Assurance and Control**

### ***Risk and Assurance in Awards and Purchases***

***AUD/61/1***

The DoFCS introduced this item.

The Financial Services Manager (FM) provided some background to the item for the purposes of informing new members of the Committee. He drew attention to the detail provided and was pleased to confirm no unauthorised purchases during this reporting period.

### *Direct Award Contracts*

The FM confirmed 1 direct award in relation to general purchases, detailed in Appendix 1. The overall summary was provided on page 2 of the paper.

The Chair welcomed the assurances provided to the Committee and Council. She suggested that the validity and length of the reports be reviewed to align with the CRR and to refresh some of the items which are now under control and monitor those that continue to be managed. This would be considered.

### ***National Fraud Initiative (NFI) 2022-23 Update***

***AUD/61/2***

The Chair reminded members of the mandatory nature of this item.

The FM drew attention to the information provided and gave some background for the purposes of informing the new members of the committee.

He confirmed the exercise had been completed with no instances of fraud identified. All deadlines had been met.

Members were satisfied with the information provided.

The DoFCS introduced this item and confirmed the report reflected the activity CCEA completed during the 2022/23 financial year. She advised that the RttCwG provided assurances in respect of the controlled environment and reliability of the information contained in the audit report.

The DoFCS was pleased to report an Unqualified set of accounts, laid before the NI Assembly on 5 July 2023. This completed the process for 2022/23.

The Chair commended this achievement given the challenging circumstances CCEA continued to operate under.

#### *Closed Meetings*

The report referenced Closed Meetings of Council and an assurance was provided that the appropriate scrutiny had been applied. The Chair confirmed that actions were in place to address these areas and placed on record the unique set of circumstances that Council worked under during 2022/23.

Members sought and received clarification on a number of matters and were content with the explanations provided. The link to the CCEA website was circulated to members to view Council and Audit & Risk Assurance Committee minutes. The exercise was completed in line with good governance.

#### *Timetable for 2023/24*

The DoFCS drew attention to the timetable for production of the Annual Report and Accounts for 2023/24 and confirmed that the process was on target.

Members noted the information provided.

### **Corporate Risk Management and Audit**

#### ***Corporate Risk Register (CRR) September 2023***

**AUD/61/4**

The DoFCS drew attention to the detailed information provided at paper AUD/62/4 and gave an update on the corporate risks and associated risk environment. Attention was drawn to the dashboard and heatmap which identified the level of risks at this time.

She advised on two critical issues that remained in the high-risk category. A report was provided on the risks in relation to the summer examinations series and the DoFCS confirmed that other risks had been updated as appropriate.

This concluded the assessment of the risk environment during this reporting period.

Members sought and received clarification on a wide range of issues, including the RSE risk. Concern was expressed that the risks were curriculum issues and should be mitigated accordingly. An assurance was provided that appropriate measures were being taken to mitigate the risks in relation to RSE.

The issue of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in education and the potential associated risks was highlighted. Following a wide-ranging discussion on this issue the Chair suggested that this be referred to the Education Committee to take forward in terms of widening the discussion in the area of AI and reviewing the potential risks taking into consideration AI as a threat to authentication of candidates' work. The DoFCS concurred with this suggestion.

The Chair asked the interim Director of Curriculum & Assessment to discuss the inclusion of this item on the next appropriate Education Committee with its Chair.

### *General*

In terms of the ARAC holding the executive to account on its performance on risk management in the absence of a business plan, the DoFCS provided an assurance that in developing the risk register, discussions had taken place with Directors and the Head of Regulation on high level objectives and high-risk areas which create a risk to CCEA in delivering its Corporate Plan. She stated that the Corporate Plan remained in draft, and this was outside of CCEA's control.

The Chair thanked the DoFCS for the clarification and was assured that detailed risk registers had been developed across the organisation to support the high-level Corporate Risk Register.

Members noted that the CRR would be reviewed in December 2023 with an update provided at the next appropriate ARAC meeting.

### ***Draft Mid-Year Governance Statement 2023/24***

***AUD/61/5***

The DoFCS introduced this item and explained the purpose of the statement. She advised on the areas of risk highlighted during this reporting period.

Members were content with the information provided.

### **Internal Audit Activity**

#### ***Update on Internal Audit Arrangements***

***AUD/61/6***

The DoFCS was pleased to confirm that the Education Authority had been appointed as the Internal Audit Service Provider for CCEA and welcomed Mr Derek Anderson, Head of Internal Audit, EA, to the meeting.

Mr Anderson welcomed the opportunity to provide the IA Service for CCEA and confirmed he had received detailed documentation to allow him to develop an Internal Audit Strategy over a 3-year period on a cyclical basis. He provided an assurance that the work would be built into his overall audit strategy and would be adequately resources to deliver the audit plan. Proposed audits would be presented to CCEA management in the coming weeks.

Clarification was sought and received that there was no conflict of interest in providing the IA service for CCMS and CCEA. Mr Anderson confirmed he would deliver the plan within his existing resources and would put in place appropriate mitigations through the EA Audit Plan to meet CCEA obligations.

The Chair thanked Mr Anderson and observed that the core business of CCEA did include Curriculum & Assessment however recognised that Examinations had been more prominent in previous years. She suggested that all key areas be considered including Cyber Security.

Clarification was sought and received that this arrangement had contributed positively to CCEA's savings plan for 2023/24 to allow other important services to be provided, given that CCEA has to work with a much more reduced allocation.

The Chair, on behalf of the committee, welcomed Mr Anderson as the Internal Audit Service provider for CCEA.

***Proposed Revised Internal Audit Strategy 2023-26***

***AUD/61/7***

Members noted the changes to the 2023/24 plan and were content to recommend the strategy to Council. This was formally proposed by Professor Phil Hanna and seconded by Mrs Carol Fitzsimons.

**Updates**

***NIAO Update***

The NIAO representative advised there were no further matters to report.

**Any Other Business**

The Chair, on behalf of the committee wished to congratulate Ms Amanda Swann on her new post and thanked her for the excellent work, dedication and commitment to CCEA.

**Date of Next Meeting**

The Chair confirmed the next meeting was scheduled for Thursday 14 December 2023 at 2pm.

She thanked members and officers for their input into the meeting.