

# MINUTE

Meeting date: **Tuesday 23 January 2024**

## IN ATTENDANCE ONLINE

- Suzanne Vestri (Chair)
- Anne-Marie O'Hara
- Lorna Johnston, Executive Director & Accountable Officer
- Sarah Nicholson, Office Manager
- Gillian McCreddie, Audit Manager, Audit Scotland
- Liz Maconachie, Senior Audit manager, Audit Scotland
- Andy Munro, Head of Internal Audit, Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body (SPCB)

ITEM	CONTENT	ACTION
<b>STANDING ITEMS</b>		
1.	<p><b>WELCOME, APOLOGIES and DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST</b></p> <p>Ms Vestri welcomed all attendees.</p> <p>No declarations of interest were made.</p>	
2.	<p><b>DRAFT MINUTE OF PREVIOUS MEETING</b></p> <p>The draft minutes of the meeting on 25 July 2023 were approved.</p>	
3.	<p><b>MATTERS ARISING</b></p> <p>The Committee noted that all matters arising had been completed.</p>	
<b>BUSINESS ITEMS</b>		
4.	<p><b>RISK REGISTER 2023/24</b></p> <p>The Committee reviewed the contents of the Risk Register for 2023/24 and agreed to recommend to the Standards Commission that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The probability score for risk <b>three</b> remains at 2 (with the overall score still 8). While the ESC has reduced their backlog, there are still avoidable delays (the ESC's website notes that it currently takes them an average 4.5 months to consider the complaint and complete the eligibility assessment).</li> <li>• The probability score for risk <b>five</b> be reduced to a 2 (with the overall score reducing to 8) as it is not anticipated that there will be time to schedule any further Hearings, in addition to the six arranged to date, even if new referrals are received in the next few weeks (as time is provided to allow the parties time to prepare). It should be noted the score was previously reduced from a 4 after the two new Members who commenced in post at the start of the year were successfully inducted.</li> <li>• The probability score for risk <b>six</b> be reduced to a 2 (with the overall score reducing to a 6). While the Standards Commission is expected to meet the difference (expected to be approximately £9,200) between the projected and likely actual staff costs (arising as a result of a higher than expected pay award) from cost savings, the number and location of Hearings scheduled in the remainder of the year is now known.</li> <li>• The probability score for risk seven be reduced to a 2 (with the overall score still 6) in light of progress made in quarter three on revising the Guidance on the Councillors' Code.</li> <li>• The probability score for risk <b>eight</b> be reduced to a 2 (with the overall score reducing to a 6) as refresher training for all members on conducting Hearings (including questioning witnesses, and identifying and managing issues around relevancy) was undertaken in August 2023.</li> </ul>	

	<p>The Committee asked the Executive Team to make the proposed amendments, via track changes, for consideration by the Standards Commission at its meeting on 30 January 2024.</p> <p>The Committee noted that the Executive Team would circulate a draft outline of the key risks it had identified for 2024/25 for comment. The Executive Team would then prepare a draft Risk Register for 2024/25 for consideration by the Standards Commission at its meeting in February, outlining any controls and proposed actions to mitigate the risks identified.</p>	<b>Executive Team</b>
<b>5.</b>	<p><b>ANNUAL ACCOUNTS 2023/24 – EXTERNAL AUDIT</b>  <b>Annual Audit Plan and Audit Fee</b></p> <p>Ms Maconachie advised that Audit Scotland were in the early stages of planning for 2023/24 audits and that it was anticipated that the Annual Audit Plan would be circulated to the Standards Commission by the end of March 2024. Ms Maconachie advised that the audit timetable is expected to be similar to last year, with the Standards Commission’s annual accounts being signed off in July 2024. The Executive Team will agree draft dates for the audit work with Audit Scotland. The Committee asked the Executive Team to forward the audit plan on receipt.</p> <p>The Committee noted and agreed to recommend acceptance of the proposed annual audit fee.</p>	<b>Executive Team</b>
<b>6.</b>	<p><b>INTERNAL AUDIT SERVICES</b>  <b>Internal Audit Plan 2023/24</b></p> <p>The Internal Auditor advised that, following discussions with the Executive Director and Office Manager (and in light of the two forthcoming member vacancies), he proposed the focus of the internal audit should be how the Standards Commission approached and undertook the training and induction of new members. This would include a review of the induction plan and feedback from the three members appointed in the last two years.</p> <p>The Committee agreed with the proposal and noted that the audit would not only review the current process, but would also ensure it identified any improvements that could be made to ensure best practice was achieved.</p> <p>The Internal Auditor advised that, following confirmation that the Standards Commission agreed with the proposal, he would prepare a scoping document for approval. The draft report will be presented to the Committee at the next meeting in May 2024.</p>	
<b>7.</b>	<p><b>UPDATE ON PAYROLL SYSTEM</b></p> <p>The Standards Commission has a contract with CGI UK to provide payroll processing services. This is a joint contract with three other officeholders (Children and Young People’s Commissioner Scotland, Scottish Information Commissioner and Architecture &amp; Design Scotland). The current contract was effective from 1 July 2021 and expires in July 2024.</p> <p>The renewal options available to the Standards Commission were discussed and it was agreed that further details would be provided to the Committee once the Officeholders group has made a decision on the preferred option.</p>	<b>Executive Team</b>
<b>ANY OTHER BUSINESS</b>		
<b>8.</b>	<p><b>UPDATE ON 2024/25 BUDGET BID</b></p> <p>The Executive Director and Officeholder Services held their quarterly governance meeting on 22 January. Officeholder Services have advised that they expect budget approval letters to be circulated in due course.</p> <p><b>NOTE OF THANKS</b></p> <p>The Committee noted that Ms O’Hara had resigned as a Member, although would remain in post until a replacement had been appointed. Ms Vestri thanked Ms O’Hara for her hard work and valuable support as a Committee member over the past year.</p>	

**NEXT MEETING**

9.	The Committee noted that it was next scheduled to meet online on Tuesday, 14 May 2024.	
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