

Concise Minutes – Senedd Commission Audit and Risk Assurance Committee

Meeting Venue:

Video Conference via MS Teams

Meeting date: Friday, 10 July 2020

Meeting time: 09.30 – 11.00

Attendance

Category	Names
Members:	Robert (Bob) Evans (Chair), Independent Adviser and Committee Chair Ann Beynon OBE, Independent Adviser and Committee Member Suzy Davies MS, Senedd Commissioner and Committee Member Dr Aled Eirug, Independent Adviser and Committee Member
Officials:	Manon Antoniazzi, Chief Executive and Clerk, and Accounting Officer Arwyn Jones, Director of Communication and Engagement (Item 2) Siwan Davies, Director of Senedd Business (Item 2) Dave Tosh, Director of Senedd Resources Nia Morgan, Director of Finance Gareth Lucey, Audit Wales Kathryn Hughes, Committee Clerk and Risk and Governance



	Manager Buddug Saer, Deputy Committee Clerk
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1 Introductions, apologies and declaration of interests

- 1.1 The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and noted apologies had been received from Gareth Watts and Ann-Marie Harkin.
- 1.2 No interests were declared.

2 Minutes of 15 June, actions and matters arising

ARAC (04-20) Paper 1 – Minutes of 15 June 2020

ARAC (04-20) Paper 2 – Summary of actions

- 2.1 The minutes of the 15 June meeting were agreed.
- 2.2 In response to a question from the Committee, Arwyn Jones advised that there had been little press coverage from the publishing of the Commission's Annual Report and Accounts. Manon Antoniazzi added that the hybrid plenary had been covered extensively on ITV Wales which was extremely positive.
- 2.3 The Chair welcomed Siwan Davies to the meeting who would update the Committee on action point 6.4 relating to Senedd reform, specifically around the future funding arrangements for the Electoral Commission. Siwan explained that Welsh Government had advised of its intention to bring forward further legislation which was needed to make the Electoral Commission accountable to the Senedd and for it to be funded directly from the Welsh Consolidated Fund; however this would not be in place in time for the 2021 elections. She added that agreement had been reached for an interim arrangement whereby the Welsh Government would administer payments to the Electoral Commission.
- 2.4 Siwan described the process to make this happen which included changes to the Senedd's Standing Orders (to be done the following week) to establish a Llywydd's Committee (to be appointed in the Autumn term) and set out new finance and financial control processes. She added that inter-institutional agreements on how the Electoral Commission would be funded, and be

accountable to the Senedd (via the Llywydd's Committee), the House of Commons (via the Speaker's Committee) and the Scottish Parliament would need to be set out by September.

- 2.5 Nia Morgan reminded the Committee of the Commission's strong opposition to the initial proposals for the Electoral Commission to be funded through the Senedd Commission in this interim period. This new agreement would remove the implications for the Senedd Commission's budget arrangements. The Committee agreed this was a good outcome, noted the Commission's efforts to drive this forward within tight timescales through ongoing dialogue and asked to be updated on progress in due course.
- 2.6 As a matter arising the Chair asked to discuss how the Committee could play a constructive part in the ongoing management of the Commission's corporate risk on Constitutional Change. He advised that he had received an updated report, for his information, out of committee which he had subsequently circulated to Ann and Aled for information. Siwan provided assurance to the Committee on the Commission's management of the Constitutional Change risk, including through scenario planning and engagement with the Senedd Commission and Business Committee as well as through political channels including an inter-parliamentary group.
- 2.7 In response to questions from Ann about the potential impact of the volume of last minute Brexit legislation and its impact on scrutiny of the Welsh Government's existing legislative programme, Siwan provided further assurance that ongoing scenario planning and discussions with the Welsh Government would try to pre-empt this as much as possible to allow the Senedd to maintain legislative scrutiny. Suzy Davies highlighted the potential for issues around the relationship between the Senedd and the Welsh Government, as well as the UK Government in terms of legislative competence.
- 2.8 The Committee welcomed Suzy's perspective on these issues and the insightful update from Siwan. As constitutional issues would have moved forward significantly before the next Committee meeting in November, the Chair asked for an update early in the Autumn suggesting this could be combined with an

update on new ways of working to support Senedd Committee and Plenary business in the Covid-19 environment.

Action

(2.8) Provide an update on the ongoing management of risks around Constitutional Change early in the Autumn.

3 Review the Commission's overall Assurance Framework

ARAC (04-20) Paper 3 – Assurance Framework Update

ARAC (04-20) Paper 3 Annex A – Commission Assurance Map

ARAC (04-20) Paper 3 Annex B – ARAC coverage of Assurance Framework – June 19 to June 20

- 3.1 The Chair invited Dave Tosh to introduce this item. Dave assured the Committee that the Assurance Framework remained firmly bedded in the organisation and that it was used at an operational and directorate level and remained fit for purpose. He added that Directors had scrutinised and updated the Commission's overall assurance map earlier in the year, informed by evidence through individual assurance maps produced by each Head of Service.
- 3.2 Dave advised that the Governance and Assurance team would review the process as well as the format of the assurance maps and statements ahead of the next assurance gathering exercise in the Autumn but did not foresee any major changes.
- 3.3 In response to a question from the Chair around comparing the framework to other organisations, Kathryn reminded the Committee that an independent internal audit review carried out two years ago had taken into account different models for assurance mapping and had concluded that the process was robust, not overly bureaucratic, and provided the necessary assurances at all levels. She added that the Commission's process had been shared with other organisations who had used it to inform implementation of similar frameworks and that it had been cited widely as good practice.

- 3.4 The Committee welcomed this update on the use of the Assurance Framework and the continual review to ensure it remained fit for purpose. The Chair urged officials to ensure external assurances were appropriately captured when the framework was reviewed and to look again at approaches adopted in other organisations.
- 3.5 Committee members expressed an interest in being aware of the forward work programmes of the Commission (provided at this meeting), REWAC and also the Remuneration Board.

Action

- (3.5) Circulate details of the forward work programmes of REWAC and the Remuneration Board.
- (3.5) Dave to arrange to discuss governance of the Remuneration Board with Suzy.

4 Strategic horizon–scanning to inform the Committee's forward work programme

ARAC (04–20) Paper 4 – Forward Work Programme

ARAC (04–20) Paper 5 – draft Commission work programme

- 4.1 The Chair led a discussion on future meeting dates and items for the Committee's forward work programme.
- 4.2 In terms of dates it was agreed that meetings should follow the usual pattern of November, February, April, June and July. The clerking team would circulate meeting dates to check availability, avoiding clashes with other commitments outlined by Committee members.
- 4.3 In terms of the content of the forward work programme the Chair outlined a number of items he thought should be included in addition to the regular items outlined in the Committee's Terms of Reference, some of which had been identified in the Committee's Annual Report. These included: an update in

November on planning and communications around the 2021 Senedd Elections; a detailed update in February on management of cyber security risks; an update in November on constitutional change and Brexit; regular updates on discussions at the Commission's Remuneration, Engagement and Workforce Advisory Committee; consideration in February of the post Covid-19 environment (including economic downturn, social and human elements); and sustainability and climate change.

- 4.4 It was also agreed that updates would be provided to the Committee on issues relating to the Commission's budget and accounts out of committee at appropriate points in the year, for example, ahead of the budget being laid.
- 4.5 In response to concerns raised around compliance with Official Languages Act due to the likely prolonged period of remote working and the lack of bilingual options available, Manon and Dave assured the Committee that this was being considered under the plans for return to the estate and that alternative technologies would continue to be explored.

5 Any other business

- 4.1 The Chair would be presenting the ARAC Annual Report to the Commission on Monday 13 July and there was a discussion around key messages to convey. He would report back to the Committee in the Autumn.
- 4.2 The Chair also agreed to give further consideration to arranging an informal meeting early in the Autumn term and would circulate details to Committee members.

Action

- (5.2) The Chair to circulate details of an informal meeting to Committee members.

Next meeting is scheduled for 20 November 2020.