# MEETING MINUTES

Comisiynydd Pobl Hŷn Cymru
Older People's Commissioner for Wales

# Audit and Risk Assurance Committee (ARAC)

Thursday 24 July 2025 at 10.00am
Cardiff and Vale College

## Attendees

### Members

- Claire Bevan (Chair)
- Julia Evans
- Chris Knight
- David Powell
- Sian Richards

### Internal Audit

- Steen Gourlay, TIAA

### External Audit

- Jeremy Saunders, Audit Wales

### Senior Leadership Team

- Rhian Bowen-Davies - Commissioner
- Kelly Davies – Chief Operating Officer
- Delyth Evans – Head of Finance and Resources
- Rachel Bowen – Director of Policy
- Ruth Thomas – Senior Executive Assistant (Secretariat)

### Apologies

No apologies were received.

## Outstanding actions

| Date | Details | Name | Completion Date |
|---|---|---|---|
| 24 July 2025 | To provide a timeline for the implementation of the new digital portal for information sharing. | TIAA | October 2025 |
| 24 July 2025 | To share further information / lessons learnt following the attempted | TIAA | October 2025 |

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|---|---|---|---|
| | cyberattack on another Commissioner's IT infrastructure. | | |
| 24 July 2025 | To update the SICA report with the full list of audits being undertaken in 2025/26. | TIAA | October 2025 |
| 24 July 2025 | Circulate a copy of the Audit Wales report on unscheduled care. | Audit Wales | As and when report is published |
| 24 July 2025 | To review the reporting mechanism of work programme delivery. | Director of Policy | October 2025 |
| 24 July 2025 | To update the Risk Management Strategy to include definitions of risk appetite. | Chief Operating Officer | July 2025 |

## Agenda item 1: Introductions and apologies

Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting, noting that it was the final in-person meeting for Julia Evans' term as ARAC Member.  Formal introductions were made for those that had not met previously.

### i) Register of interests

Nothing to note.

### ii) Single Tender Actions for Declaration

Nothing to note.

### iii) Advice provided to the Commissioner or her staff since the last meeting

The Commissioner confirmed that no advice had been provided since the last meeting.

## Agenda item 2: Review of minutes and matters arising from the last meeting on 29 April 2025 (Paper 2)

The minutes were confirmed as an accurate record of the meeting held on 29 April 2025. The following updates were provided on actions outstanding from the last meeting:

| Date | Details | Name | Update |
|---|---|---|---|
| 29 April 2025 | To arrange a scoping meeting to discuss 2025/26 audit objectives. | Head of Finance and Resources | A meeting had been held with internal audit and the scope of the audit had been agreed. |
| 29 April 2025 | To establish the requirements regarding receiving an Annual Opinion from Internal Audit. | Chief Operating Officer | ARAC was informed that internal audit was not a condition of Welsh Government funding, but it was accepted that internal audit formed an important part of risk management and assurance. |

In response to queries from the Chair, it was confirmed that:

- The development session with Internal Audit would be scheduled for Quarter 4.
- An assurance mapping exercise was in progress and would be shared with ARAC Members in due course.
- Steen Gourlay would typically represent TIAA at ARAC meetings. Helen Cargill would attend one meeting a year as outlined in the internal audit contract.
- TIAA had purchased new software as part of efforts to improve digital channels for information sharing. Staff training was ongoing. Action: TIAA to update ARAC with the timeline once confirmed.
- External consultancy costs relating to the Covid Inquiry were noted on the Finance spreadsheet.
- The recent OPCW staff training, also offered to ARAC Members on Neuroinclusion, had been very well received.

## Agenda item 3: Internal Audit – SICA Update Report

TIAA presented the SICA report highlighting the 2025/26 planned audit reports in Appendix A.

Committee was asked to note the information and services available from TIAA relating to climate sustainability. The Chief Operating Officer confirmed that bespoke training for staff had already been developed in conjunction with One Earth Education. Committee noted their assurance in this area.

TIAA reported that there had been an attempted cyberattack on another organisation's IT infrastructure. Action: TIAA to share further information / lessons learnt when available.

The Chief Operating Officer updated Committee with the full list of internal audit reports to be undertaken by TIAA during 2025/26. Action: TIAA to update the SICA report with the latest list of audits being undertaken in 2025/26.

It was noted that a webinar on the Procurement Act had been held recently. The Head of Finance and Resources confirmed that work is ongoing to ensure compliance.

Chair thanked TIAA for the update.

## Agenda item 4: Audit Wales update

Jeremy Saunders, Audit Wales, tabled paper 4, noting that the annual audit is in progress with no issues to report to Committee. Committee was informed that the Annual Accounts and Annual Report will be submitted in August for approval at an extraordinary ARAC meeting in September.

It was noted that additional figures relating to pensions will be submitted as supplementary information only.

Jeremy Saunders reported that Audit Wales had recently published its annual report and accounts.

The Commissioner informed Committee that OPCW staff had recently attended Audit Wales good practice events and provided positive feedback. The Commissioner requested to receive a copy of the forthcoming report on unscheduled care. Action: Jeremy Saunders.

Chair thanked Audit Wales for the update.

## Agenda item 5: Audit Enquiries to those charged with governance and management (Paper 5)

The Audit Enquiries letter to those charged with governance and management was introduced by Jeremy Saunders, outlining the queries sent to the Senior Leadership Team.

The OPCW response sent to Audit Wales was included in the paper.

ARAC approved the content of the 2024-25 response.

## Agenda item 6: Strategic Risk Register

i) **Risk Register**

ii) **Risk cover paper**

The Chief Operating Officer introduced the Strategic Risk Register, highlighting the staff changes in recent months and the mitigatory steps taken. Committee were assured by the announcement that two members of staff had been appointed following successful recruitment campaigns.

The launch of the Commissioner's strategy and workplan was noted in addition to the support provided to the former Commissioner in advance of the Covid-19 Inquiry evidence session.

The Chief Operating Officer assured ARAC Members that each risk on the Strategic Risk Register was discussed and challenged at SLT monthly.

Sian Richards commented that it was pleasing to see the strategic approach to risk and the inclusion of risk appetite on the risk register following discussions at a recent ARAC Development Session.

A discussion was held on the political landscape and the upcoming Senedd elections. Committee was informed that the Commissioner's team had attended all party-political conferences for the parties in office in Spring 2025 and enquiries/meetings are ongoing in advance of party manifesto launches.

Following a question from David Powell, the Commissioner stated that she was satisfied with the Risk Register as a clear document which reflects the risks and mitigation controls in place.

The Chief Operating Officer informed Committee that Development Sessions will be held following each formal Committee meeting where future challenges / horizon scanning will be discussed.

Committee welcomed the assurance that the report provided, and Chair thanked the Chief Operating Officer for the papers.

## Agenda item 7: Work plan update

The Director of Policy provided an overview of recent work, highlighting the publication of the Commissioner's strategy and work programme for 2025-2028 during Quarter 1. A number of projects had commenced with others scheduled for later in the year.

The reintroduction of the Winter Fuel Allowance was welcomed. It was noted that there had been a good level of media coverage on this issue in addition to the importance of ensuring that older people's voices were heard as part of the Bus Services (Wales) Bill.

A conference on Ageism and Employment is being considered for Spring 2026.

OPCW is working closely with the Open University on an Ageism module, due for completion in November. A number of organisations had been approached to pilot the module.

Several consultation responses were being drafted / had been submitted, including a Welsh Government consultation on Reform of NHS general dental services.

Committee was informed that a Roundtable on Sexual Violence and a webinar on Ageing Without Children would be held in September.

Following a suggestion from Sian Richards, the Director of Policy agreed to review the report format to align the work plan update to the Commissioner's strategy and priority areas.

The Director of Policy confirmed that the work plan budget was discussed monthly at SLT to review expenditure and project progress.

The Director of Policy was thanked for the comprehensive update and Chair noted the significant amount of activity that had taken place in recent months.

## Agenda item 8: Quarterly Governance Report:

The Chief Operating Officer presented the highlights of the quarterly reports.

### i) Governance Report

Nothing to report.

### ii) Organisational Health Report

It was confirmed that the new Head of Finance would commence employment on 1 September 2025.

Committee was informed that the Communications Officer started in post on Monday 30 June 2025 and induction was ongoing. Following a question from the Chair regarding new staff starting in post and hybrid working, Committee was informed that induction plans are followed and all new members of staff meet the team and colleagues individually in person. It was confirmed that daily contact takes place between the staff member and line manager with open communication channels. The hybrid working policy of the organisation, which was developed in conjunction with staff, has enabled the recruitment of skilled staff from across Wales.

There were no concerns in relation to sickness absence.

It was confirmed that the latest staff survey took place in September. SLT to discuss the date of the next staff survey.

### iii) Communications Report

The Chief Operating Officer tabled the report, written by the Head of Communications, as an overview of Quarter 1.

The post of Communications Officer had been vacant for much of Q1 and a decrease in engagement on social media was noted. The new Communications Officer was now in post and focussing efforts on enriching OPCW social media presence and building a relationship with the Engagement Officer for future content production.

Committee were reminded that the website had been updated and rebranded last September and had been structured in line with the Commissioner's priorities.

A discussion was held on the variety of marketing methods and channels used to reach older people. Committee was advised that traditional advertising campaigns consistently resulted in increased Advice & Assistance enquiries and a variety of new local and national in-person engagement opportunities were being considered.

The Commissioner and team were complimented on their proactive approach to communications.

Chair thanked the Chief Operating Officer for the comprehensive report and noted the significant activity that had taken place during the quarter.

### iv) Finance Report

The Head of Finance and Resources presented the report to Committee, summarising the main changes in the last quarter. It was confirmed that the budget expenditure for the 2025/26 financial year had been agreed by SLT in June.

Committee was informed that the end of year accounts had been finalised pending external audit. A special Committee meeting had been arranged for 11 September to approve the accounts. The Head of Finance and Resources conveyed their thanks to the Audit Wales team for their cooperation during the financial audit.

Committee was notified that any uplift in staff salaries agreed in the coming months would be backdated to April 2025.

The Commissioner highlighted the projected budget shortfall for 2026/27 and 2027/28. Committee noted the potential impact this would have on the organisation.

A 100% compliance with 30-day invoice payments was noted and welcomed by Committee.

The Commissioner highlighted the changes made to the coding of expenditure relating to engagement work on the finance report. This had been introduced to understand the cost implications and benefit of engagement activity.

Following a question from Julia Evans, the Chief Operating Officer updated Committee that enhancements had been made to the functionality of the Case Management System within the current contract price to access improved reporting features. A Business Case for a new casework management system would be considered in due course.

Committee noted the report and the associated risks highlighted.

Chair thanked the Head of Finance and Resources for the paper and for the assurance from the overall report.

### v) Balance Scorecard

Committee noted the Balance Scorecard. The Chair confirmed that the Quarterly Governance reports provide the Committee with assurance in this area.

## Agenda item 9: Cyber Resilience report

The Chief Operating Officer provided an update to Committee about the recent independent cyber audit.

Due to the associated security risks, this agenda item is not minuted.

## Agenda item 10: Risk Management Strategy

The Chief Operating Officer presented the updated policy for approval noting the changes in the risk register and new additions on risk appetite.

Committee welcomed the changes to the strategy. The Chief Operating Officer assured Committee that risk / risk appetite is discussed with staff on an ongoing basis as part of day-to-day project work.

It was suggested that the definitions of risk in the Risk Management Strategy should match those listed in the Risk Register.  Chief Operating Officer to action.

The Commissioner confirmed that there was no overall risk appetite statement for the organisation, but that risk appetite depended on the issue under consideration.

Committee approved the policy.  Chair thanked the Chief Operating Officer for the paper.

## Agenda item 11: Commissioner's Expenses

Committee noted the items listed in the Expenses Register.

## Agenda item 12: Gifts and Hospitality Register

Committee noted the items listed in the Gifts and Hospitality Register.

## Agenda item 13: Any Other Business

David Powell requested feedback on the former Commissioner's recent contribution at the Covid-19 Inquiry.  The Chief Operating Officer gave an overview of the session and confirmed that there would be no further calls for evidence.
Chair thanked the Chief Operating Officer for providing support to the former Commissioner during the preparation and evidence submission stages of the Inquiry.

## Agenda item 19: Review of meeting, including discussion of future agenda items, development days and focus meetings

Chair thanked everyone for the useful and interesting discussions.

Audit Wales were satisfied with the discussions held and had no additional advice / suggestions.

The Commissioner and Chair thanked the Senior Leadership Team for the preparation and quality of the papers and assurance provided from the openness and depth of answers given.

**Date and time of next meeting:  A special meeting will be held online on Thursday 11 September to discuss the Financial Accounts.  The next formal Committee meeting will take place online on Tuesday 21 October at 2.15pm.**