

Audit and Risk Assurance Committee (ARAC)

Tuesday 21 October 2025 at 2.15pm
Microsoft Teams

Attendees

Members

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

Internal Audit

- Steen Gourlay, TIAA
- Elan Parry, TIAA

External Audit

- Jeremy Saunders, Audit Wales

Senior Leadership Team

- Rhian Bowen-Davies - Commissioner
- Kelly Davies – Chief Operating Officer
- Nia Halton – Head of Finance (agenda items 5-9 only)
- Rachel Bowen – Director of Policy (agenda item 11 only)
- Ruth Thomas – Senior Executive Assistant (Secretariat)

Apologies

No apologies were received.

Outstanding actions

Date	Details	Name	Completion Date
24 July 2025	To share further information / lessons learnt following the attempted cyberattack on another Commissioner's IT infrastructure.	TIAA	November 2025
24 July 2025	Circulate a copy of the Audit Wales report on unscheduled care.	Audit Wales	As and when report is published
21 October 2025	Circulate the Assurance Mapping document.	Chief Operating Officer	November 2025
21 October 2025	Include a cover paper for the Work Plan spreadsheet	Director of Policy	January 2026

Agenda item 1: Introductions and apologies

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting, noting that it was the final in-person meeting for Julia Evans as ARAC Member. The Chair thanked Julia for her contribution to Audit and Risk Assurance Committee over the previous six years.

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 2i: Review of minutes and matters arising from the last meeting on 24 July 2025 (Paper 2)

The minutes were confirmed as an accurate record of the meeting held on 24 July 2025. The following updates were provided:

Date	Details	Name	Completion Date	Update
24 July 2025	To provide a timeline for the implementation of the new digital portal for information sharing.	TIAA	October 2025	Steen Gourlay, TIAA advised Committee that a launch date of the new digital portal was not yet available and confirmed that

				progress updates would be provided in due course.
24 July 2025	To share further information / lessons learnt following the attempted cyberattack on another Commissioner's IT infrastructure.	TIAA	October 2025	TIAA informed Committee that an update will be shared outside of the meeting, following the finalisation of the relevant report.
24 July 2025	To update the SICA report with the full list of audits being undertaken in 2025/26.	TIAA	October 2025	See Appendix A, Paper 3i. Action complete.
24 July 2025	Circulate a copy of the Audit Wales report on unscheduled care.	Audit Wales	As and when report is published	Report not yet published. Action ongoing.
24 July 2025	To review the reporting mechanism of work programme delivery.	Director of Policy	October 2025	Reporting format reviewed – see Paper 11. Action complete.
24 July 2025	To update the Risk Management Strategy to include definitions of risk appetite.	Chief Operating Officer	July 2025	Policy updated. Action complete.

In response to a question from the Chair, the Chief Operating Officer confirmed that an assurance mapping exercise had taken place. It was agreed that the relevant document would be shared outside of the meeting.

It was confirmed that the Chief Operating Officer will now be responsible for the Procurement Policy. Legal advice is being sought regarding the implications of the Procurement Act (2023), and the Ordering Goods and Services policy will be updated if required. Members were directed to a useful video on the TIAA website which provides an overview of the Act.

ii) Review of minutes from the Extraordinary Meeting on 11 September 2025

The minutes were confirmed as an accurate record of the meeting held on 11 September 2025.

Agenda item 3i: Internal Audit – SICA Update Report

Elan Parry introduced Paper 3i, and assured Committee that the Annual Plan is on track as shown in Appendix A.

The audit on Key Financial Controls will take place in February 2026. There were no issues to report.

Chris Knight highlighted the 'Failure to Prevent Fraud offence' noted in the TIAA report. The Chief Operating Officer confirmed that no actions were required due to the size and budget of the organisation. TIAA confirmed that a number of good practice measures were referenced in the Act but that there were no requirements for OPCW.

Chair thanked TIAA for the update.

ii) Assurance Review of Absence Management and Staff Wellbeing (Paper 3ii)

Elan Parry confirmed that 'substantial assurance' was noted on the audit on Absence Management and Staff Wellbeing, and that there were no recommendations to action.

The Chair congratulated OPCW on the substantial assurance received.

David Powell queried how the audit would be used in the context of staff health and wellbeing. The Chief Operating Officer noted that the result of the audit aligned with the results of the recent staff survey but welcomed the external assurance.

Following a question from the Chair, the Chief Operating Officer informed Committee that internal coaching and mentoring of line managers is an ongoing process. External training is also being considered.

Committee was informed that whilst that there was no active campaign to encourage staff to receive a flu vaccination, that information would be posted on the health and wellbeing Teams channel.

The Chair congratulated OPCW on behalf of Committee for the substantial assurance received on the Absence Management and Staff Wellbeing audit.

iii) Risk Management – Mitigating Controls (Paper 3iii)

TIAA tabled Paper 3ii, noting the substantial assurance outcome for the audit, and expressing confidence in the effectiveness of the ongoing risk management processes.

The Commissioner reflected positively on the audit process and the discussions held.

The Chair welcomed the assurance provided and thanked the staff who had contributed to the audit.

Agenda item 4: Audit Wales update

Jeremy Saunders tabled paper 4 on behalf of Audit Wales and informed Committee that the Accounts were laid before the Senedd in September.

Committee was notified that the current Auditor General's term ends in July and the post is currently being advertised.

It was confirmed that the Fee consultation had closed and would be laid before the Finance Committee at the Senedd in the coming months. Jeremy Saunders reported that a 5.5% increase in fees was being considered.

Following the recent Audit Wales publication of *Digital Health and Care Wales – Review of Stakeholder Engagement Arrangements*, the Chief Operating Officer confirmed that OPCW had not been asked to contribute to the review.

Chair thanked Audit Wales for the update.

Agenda item 5: Assessment of Performance of External Auditors (Paper 5)

(Audit Wales and TIAA left the meeting whilst Paper 5 was presented and discussed).

The Chief Operating Officer tabled the review of External Audit for 2025 which had been written by the former Head of Finance and Resources. The paper summarised the positive and flexible working relationship with Audit Wales.

Committee noted the assurance received from the report and agreed that Audit Wales provide a good service and that there is a positive contribution by auditors to Committee meetings.

Audit Wales and TIAA representatives returned to the meeting and the Chair advised that Committee was grateful for the work of Audit Wales and valued the experience, flexibility and responsiveness provided by External Audit.

Agenda item 6: Finance Report

The Chair welcomed the Head of Finance to the meeting to present the Finance Report (Paper 6).

The Head of Finance outlined the key points during Quarter 2:

- A cost-of-living uplift of 3.75% had been awarded in September (backdated to April).
- Expenditure on the work programme is due to increase in Q3 and Q4.
- Additional funding for the increase in NI contributions and cost of living payments has not yet been confirmed by the Welsh Government.

The Chief Operating Officer informed Committee that Finance papers would be classified as 'Confidential' as part of the organisation's data management and information security policy.

The Head of Finance confirmed that the position on the Medium-Term Financial Plan would be reviewed and scrutinised on a regular basis.

The Commissioner confirmed that detailed planning meetings have taken place regarding the expenditure of work programme budget.

The Chief Operating Officer confirmed that there were no immediate plans to procure a new case management system. Changes had been made to the existing system to improve reporting functionality and an exercise to identify organisational requirements is ongoing. It is anticipated that a case for capital funding could be made to the Welsh Government in 2026-27.

Committee acknowledged the report and the associated risks highlighted.

The Chair thanked the Head of Finance for the assurance provided to Committee on the financial management in place.

Agenda item 7: Policies: Anti-Fraud, Bribery and Money Laundering

The Head of Finance tabled the updated policy for approval, noting the minor changes marked on the report.

Committee was informed that the Head of Finance would attend regular meetings with peers in public sector bodies to gather best practice and share learning across the sector.

Committee approved the updated policy.

Agenda item 8: Commissioner's Expenses

Committee noted the items listed in the Expenses Register.

Agenda item 9: Gifts and Hospitality Register

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

Chair thanked the Head of Finance for the updates. (The Head of Finance left the meeting following this agenda item.)

Agenda item 10: Strategic Risk Register

- i) **Risk Register**
- ii) **Risk cover paper**

The Chief Operating Officer introduced the Strategic Risk Register, highlighting the reduction in risk relating to staffing and capacity following the appointment of two members of staff.

Committee was informed that the Welsh Government planned to announce the 2026-27 budget in November, significantly earlier than usual. Risk 12 would be reviewed following the announcement.

Risk 7 had been increased due to the timetabling of the work programme deliverables, but it was anticipated that this would decrease next month.

The upcoming Senedd election was discussed and Committee acknowledged that there was likely to be a period of uncertainty following the 2026 Senedd elections.

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

Agenda item 11: Work plan update

The Chair welcomed the Director of Policy to the meeting for agenda item 11. The Director of Policy introduced the Work plan update and gave an overview of the revised format.

Committee were informed that:

- the ageism module in conjunction with the Open University would be launched in March 2026.
- A variety of incoming work, not included on the published work programme, has been completed and continues to have impact, including contributions to Senedd's Health and Social Care Committee on the Assisted Dying Bill.

- Committee was informed that Wrexham had recently been awarded WHO Global Network of Age-friendly Communities and Cities status, resulting in 50% of all counties in Wales being members.
- A literature review on digital ageism report would be published next week.
- A paper summarising the OPCW priorities for the next Welsh Government has been published and shared with political parties.

Committee welcomed the new format however a cover paper, similar to the Risk Register overview document, was suggested. Action: Director of Policy.

The Chair thanked the Director of Policy for the comprehensive update and the assurance provided by the work programme update.

Agenda item 12: Quarterly Governance Report:

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

i) Governance Report

One minor accident was logged during Quarter 2, and two FOIs had been received.

ii) Organisational Health Report

- A handover period had taken place with the new Head of Finance prior to the departure of the Head of Finance and Resources.
- There were no concerns with annual leave.
- Sickness absence for Q2 was very low.
- Several staff development and learning opportunities had been offered to staff and ARAC Members in recent months including a session on Neuroinclusion, which had been very well received.
- A staff survey would take place during 2026-27.

iii) Communications Report

The Chief Operating Officer tabled the report, written by the Head of Communications, as an overview of Quarter 2.

The report demonstrated the reach of the Commissioner and the link with engagement activity and Advice and Assistance enquiries will be explored.

The Chief Operating Officer updated Committee that a revised Political Engagement Strategy was tabled by the Director of Policy at SLT in October. An OPCW Engagement Strategy was in development to ensure a coordinated, strategic approach to activity.

iv) Balance Scorecard

Committee noted the Balance Scorecard.

Following a question from the Chair, the Chief Operating Officer confirmed that data will be used to target engagement activity in areas where a lower number of Advice and Assistance enquiries are received. A targeted advertising campaign will support this.

The Chief Operating Officer emphasised the responsiveness of the organisation to adapt the work plan and Commissioner's priorities to patterns and trends seen in enquiries to the Advice

and Assistance Service. An example will be shared and discussed in more detail at the upcoming ARAC Development Session.

Chair confirmed that the Quarterly Governance reports provide the Committee with assurance in this area.

Agenda item 13: 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 14: Any Other Business

There were no additional items of business to discuss.

Agenda item 15: Review of meeting, including discussion of future agenda items, development days and focus meetings

The Chair thanked everyone for the useful and interesting discussions and expressed appreciation to OPCW staff for the quality and timeliness of Committee papers.

The Chair thanked Julia for her commitment and support over the years and wished her well for the future.

Date and time of next meeting: The next ARAC meeting will take place online on Tuesday 27 January at 1.30pm.