



## Audit and Risk Assurance Committee (ARAC)

Tuesday 27 January 2026 at 1.30pm  
Microsoft Teams

### Attendees

#### Members

- Claire Bevan (Chair)
- Chris Knight
- Sian Richards

#### Internal Audit

- Elan Parry, TIAA

#### External Audit

- Jeremy Saunders, Audit Wales

#### Senior Leadership Team

- Rhian Bowen-Davies - Commissioner
- Kelly Davies – Chief Operating Officer
- Rachel Bowen – Director of Policy (agenda items 8-13)
- Nia Halton – Head of Finance (agenda items 1-7)
- Ruth Thomas – Senior Executive Assistant (Secretariat)

#### Apologies

- David Powell, ARAC member
- Steen Gourlay, Internal Audit

## Outstanding / Arising actions

Date	Details	Name	Completion Date
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	Share further information / lessons learnt following the attempted cyberattack on another Commissioner's IT system.	TIAA	April ARAC meeting
27 January 2026	Record the impact of work programme activity in future Work Programme updates.	Director of Policy	April ARAC meeting

## Agenda item 1: Introductions and apologies

The Chair welcomed attendees to the online meeting and thanked the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) for preparing the papers.

### 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 21 October 2025 (Paper 2)

The minutes of the meeting held on 21 October 2025 were confirmed as an accurate record.

### Updates on Matters Arising:

Date	Details	Name	Update
24 July 2025	To share further information / lessons learnt following the attempted cyberattack on	TIAA	Elan Parry, TIAA to discuss with Steen Gourlay and share outside of the meeting.

	another Commissioner's IT infrastructure.		
24 July 2025	Circulate a copy of the Audit Wales report on unscheduled care.	Audit Wales	Awaiting publishing date.
21 October 2025	Circulate the Assurance Mapping document.	Chief Operating Officer	The Chief Operating Officer confirmed that the document had been circulated and would be maintained as a live reference source.
21 October 2025	Include a cover paper for the Work Plan spreadsheet	Director of Policy	Action completed.

**Additional updates provided:**

- TIAA confirmed that there were no significant updates to share on the new Digital Portal.
- Legal advice had been received on the new Procurement Act.
- An internal audit of procurement is scheduled for early February.

The Chair congratulated OPCW on the recently published Digital Ageism report.

Committee noted that a people survey would take place in March 2026, following an 18-month cycle.

The Commissioner reported that 1-1 meetings had been completed with all staff prior to Christmas, and that these meetings would take place annually to support workforce insight and planning. This engagement had provided an opportunity for staff to share their experiences of working in the organisation. Feedback had been positive and staff shared a variety of suggestions for improvements.

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

Elan Parry introduced Paper 3, and informed ARAC that whilst no final reports had been issued since the previous meeting, the Annual Plan is on track as shown in Appendix A.

It was noted that the Key Financial Controls audit is in progress, with an audit of Procurement and Contract Monitoring due in early February. Both reports, together with the annual report, are expected by the April meeting. Internal Audit confirmed that risk management and staff well-being/absence audits completed earlier in the year had provided substantial assurance, with the latter including helpful observations rather than formal recommendations.

Committee discussed the Health and Safety advisory note included in Appendix B. TIAA clarified that while specialist Health and Safety reviews can provide enhanced insight into regulatory compliance, proportionality should be considered given the organisation's size. The Chief Operating Officer informed Committee that robust policies are in place for home and office working, along with clear mechanisms for staff to access support and advice, if required.

Committee acknowledged the progress made against the internal audit Annual Plan and looked forward to receiving the remaining reports.

The Chair thanked TIAA for the update.

## **Agenda item 4: Audit Wales update**

Jeremy Saunders tabled Paper 4 to Committee providing an update on the recruitment process for the next Auditor General for Wales.

The Auditor General's recent podcast series which aims to reflect on the current state of the public sector in Wales was discussed. The Commissioner provided positive feedback on the series and noted the alignment between topics and the Commissioner's priorities, particularly around digital development with a person-centred focus.

Committee discussed a reported 77% increase in complaints and whistleblowing to Audit Wales.

Sian Richards highlighted the upcoming Audit Wales review of digital transformation across the NHS, and the link to OPCW work on digital exclusion and ageism.

Committee noted forthcoming Audit Wales reports on rebalancing care, urgent and emergency care, and planned care.

The Chair thanked Audit Wales for the update.

## **Agenda item 5: Finance Report**

The Head of Finance presented the organisation's financial position as at December 2025:

- A £28,000 variation to the grant award for 2025/26 had been confirmed by Welsh Government to cover national insurance and pay award pressures.
- As a result of prudent budget management for this potential shortfall, OPCW had declared a £30,000 underspend to Welsh Government.
- The remainder of the work programme budget had now been fully allocated.

Committee welcomed the additional monitoring information, included in Appendix C.

The Head of Finance confirmed that SLT is considering the optimal balance between staff costs, programme costs, and engagement activity to decide on future years budgets whilst ensuring deliverability and sustainability.

In response to a query from Chris Knight, the Head of Finance agreed to include a balance sheet in future reports. Cashflow monitoring and forecasting have been strengthened to address an issue reported in last year's external audit.

The Head of Finance assured Committee that all externally commissioned work has now been contracted and that there were no concerns about utilising the remaining work programme budget.

Committee noted the report and the associated risks highlighted.

The Chair thanked the Head of Finance for the assurance provided and welcomed the new enhancements to the report.

## **Agenda item 6: Commissioner's Expenses**

Committee noted the items listed in the Expenses Register.

## **Agenda item 7: 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 8: Strategic Risk Register**

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

The Chief Operating Officer introduced the Strategic Risk Register for Quarter 3, highlighting that overall, the organisational risk profile remained stable.

Risk 7, relating to the strategic plan and work programme delivery, remained at its existing score due to external support dependencies, however following agreement of all external contracts, this risk is expected to decrease at the February SLT meeting.

The Chief Operating Officer confirmed that an externally facilitated, scenario-based Business Continuity Planning exercise would take place March, focused on noncyber operational incidents.

Committee discussed organisational risks associated with AI adoption and usage and noted that whilst the organisation had not purchased Copilot licenses, staff were making good use of the free version. The Chief Operating Officer assured Committee that clear parameters were set within the organisation's ICT and Acceptable Use policy, with a standalone AI policy under development. Committee noted that a number of staff had recently attended AI training led by Cardiff University and the Centre for Digital Public Services.

Sian Richards recommended an ongoing review of AI and evaluation of the paid Copilot option for defined roles where there is justification.

During a discussion relating to Risk 9 and the Commissioner's political links and influence, the Director of Policy acknowledged the evolving Senedd election context and ministerial turnover and assured Committee that the situation is being actively monitored. The Commissioner assured Committee that active engagement continues across all Senedd parties, with a recent email to party leaders and key individuals setting out priorities and an overview of 2025 reports. The Commissioner also confirmed that new Senedd member packs are being prepared to support continuity of engagement post-election.

Following a question from the Chair, the Chief Operating Officer confirmed that internal audit had conducted an in-depth audit into two of the risks on the register and emphasised that risk management is embedded across the organisation in day-to-day meetings and conversations.

The Commissioner confirmed that Welsh Commissioners meet twice a year and that she would be requesting an additional standing item of 'Emerging Risks' to be added as a standing item to future agendas.

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

## **Agenda item 9: Work plan update and RAG spreadsheet**

The Director of Policy introduced the Work plan update, noting that:

- It had been an exceptionally busy Quarter with the publication of several major reports
- The Future Care Planning Guide had been launched on 26 January 2026 and received positive feedback from individuals and organisations.

- The possible webinar on older people, work and skills will not go ahead due to partner scheduling difficulties, but engagement continues with key organisations such as Prime Cymru, Welsh Government employability teams, and National Training Federation Wales.
- The social care survey is currently live and 220 responses had been received to date.
- Work on the age discrimination training module had been delayed due to staff absences within the Open University, who are hosting the module. The bilingual module would be completed by end of March, with a launch planned for Quarter 1 2026/27.
- Complaints and Advocacy work will be progressed through a Section 5 review, supported by expert input from Cardiff University.

Committee welcomed the breadth of activity undertaken.

Sian Richards suggested including a section on 'impact / value' of work programme activity. The Director of Policy welcomed this suggestion. The Commissioner highlighted plans to establish a recommendation tracking process for major reports to provide better assurance of changes made in response OPCW work from 2026/27.

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

## **Agenda item 10: Quarterly Governance Report:**

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

### **i) Governance Report**

One complaint was received relating to Welsh Language Standards and corrective actions were implemented promptly. Following an initial assessment, the Welsh Language Commissioner determined that a full investigation would not be required. Committee noted the outcome and emphasised the importance of learning and proactive process improvements, as had been demonstrated in this case.

### **ii) Organisational Health Report**

One member of staff had successfully completed probation during Quarter 3, with another due to complete probation at the end of February.

Annual leave usage remained within expected ranges, with proactive communication taking place with those with higher balances.

The Chief Operating Officer noted that sickness absence in Q3 was higher than in previous quarters, largely due to short-term seasonal illness affecting the team. The Chief Operating Officer confirmed that the organisation's sickness absence policy included escalation thresholds for frequent sickness absences, none of which had been triggered in Quarter 3.

The Commissioner provided a summary of themes from the one-to-one meetings with all staff prior to the Christmas break. Staff reported feeling well-supported, listened to, and empowered, with strong appreciation for flexible policies and robust governance processes.

In-person staff group meetings had taken place in recent weeks, and an organisation-wide Team Away Day had been held on 11 December and scheduled for 2 February.

### **iii) Communications Report**

The Chief Operating Officer tabled the report, written by the Head of Communications, as an overview of Quarter 3.

Committee noted the high level of activity during the quarter with proactive communications and media hits as a result of the major reports. The COVID-19 Inquiry Module 2 response received limited coverage, with more extensive coverage expected later in the year when Module 6 (regarding care homes) is published.

Sian Richards suggested that linking communications activity to stakeholder understanding of OPCW priorities would enhance the report and contribute to mitigating strategic risks.

#### **iv) Balance Scorecard**

An advertising campaign had run last quarter and this quarter, generating the highest level of monthly advice and assistance enquiries to date. An awareness raising campaign with professional bodies was also in progress, led by the Head of Advice and Assistance.

Committee welcomed the deeper qualitative data being provided to SLT on enquiry themes.

It was confirmed that the forecast learning and development budget would be fully utilised in 2025/26.

Committee noted the Balance Scorecard.

Chair confirmed that the Quarterly Governance reports provide strong assurance in these areas.

### **Agenda item 11: Cyber Resilience report**

The Chief Operating Officer provided an update to Committee about the recent activity relating to cyber resilience.

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

### **Agenda item 12: Any Other Business**

There were no additional items of business to discuss.

### **Agenda item 13: 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.

Members concurred that they were satisfied with the papers and the responses provided.

**Date and time of next meeting: The next ARAC meeting will take place on Tuesday 28 April 2026 at Cardiff and Vale College.**