

MINUTE

Meeting date: **Wednesday 26 January 2022**

IN ATTENDANCE ONLINE

- Mike McCormick (Chair)
- Paul Walker
- Lorna Johnston, Executive Director & Accountable Officer
- Sarah Nicholson, Office Manager
- Andrew Munro, Head of Audit, Scottish Parliament

ITEM	CONTENT	ACTION
STANDING ITEMS		
1.	<p>WELCOME, APOLOGIES and DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST</p> <p>Mr McCormick welcomed all attendees.</p> <p>Apologies for absence were received from Claire Gardiner, Senior Audit Manager, Audit Scotland.</p> <p>No declarations of interest were made.</p>	
2.	<p>DRAFT MINUTE OF PREVIOUS MEETING</p> <p>The draft minutes of the meeting on 19 July 2021 were approved.</p>	
3.	<p>MATTERS ARISING</p> <p>The Committee noted that there were no outstanding matters. The Committee noted that the proposal that a 'catch all' type category should be included in the Standards Commission's Members' registers of interest, requiring Members to record the interest of any close family members, had been accepted by the Standards Commission. The category had also been included in both the revised Councillors' and Model Codes of Conduct issued in December 2021.</p>	
EXTERNAL AUDIT: STANDARDS COMMISSION - ANNUAL AUDIT PLAN AND FEE 2020/21		
4.	<p>The Committee noted and agreed the proposed annual audit fee, which had increased in line with inflation.</p> <p>The Committee noted that Mrs Gardiner had explained, by email, that the ongoing coronavirus pandemic had meant that some 2020/21 audits had been delayed. This had led, as a result, to delays in planning for the 2021/22 audits. Mrs Gardiner advised that the audit timeline had, therefore, been amended and that audit plan would now be issued in March 2022. The Committee noted that it was not anticipated that this would lead to any delay in the signing-off of the Standards Commission's annual accounts.</p>	
INTERNAL AUDIT PLANNED ACTIVITIES 2022/23		
5.	<p>Internal Audit Plan 2022/23</p> <p>The Internal Auditor advised that, following discussions with the Executive Director and Office Manager, he proposed the focus of the internal audit should be on the Standards Commission's governance arrangements. The Internal Auditor noted that, in light of the findings as outlined in Audit Scotland's Section 22 report on the Ethical Standards Commissioner, published in December 2021, it was likely the Scottish Parliamentary</p>	

	<p>Corporate Body would be seeking assurances from other officeholders about the strength and resilience of their own arrangements. The Internal Auditor suggested that, as part of a review of the scrutiny arrangements, the audit would cover how Members and staff of the Standards Commission exchanged information and how Members' time was recorded and monitored. The Committee agreed with the proposal and noted that the audit would not only ensure the Standards Commission was prepared to respond to any requests for assurance, 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.</p>	Chair / Internal Auditor
RISK REGISTER 2021/22: REVIEW		
6.	<p>The Committee conducted a review of the 2021/22 Business Risk Register and, in particular, agreed to recommend to the Standards Commission that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The probability score for risk two be reduced to a 1 (with the overall score decreasing to 4) given that policies and processes had been developed, circulated and published in respect of Section 16 decisions made under the outcome of investigations Direction and in light of the ongoing discussions and joint working arrangements with the Acting Ethical Standards Commissioner (ESC). • The probability score for risk three be reduced to a 1 (with the overall score decreasing to 3), given that revised Guidance, Advice Notes and standard presentations on the revised Codes had all been issued and published, and given work undertaken by the Executive Team to engage with stakeholders (including Council Monitoring Officers) about the changes. • The probability score for risk nine be reduced to a 2 (with the overall score decreasing to 8), as sufficient Members were available for the one Hearing to be held before the new member commenced in post on 7 February 2022. The Committee agreed that the risk score should not be reduced further until the new Member was in post and their availability and training requirements were known. • The probability score for risk four be reduced to a 1 (with the overall score decreasing to 4) in light of the key dependency risk analysis review that had been undertaken recently, and the successful induction and training of the two members of staff. • The probability score for risk five be reduced to a 2 (with the overall score decreasing to 6) given the expenditure to date and likelihood that the Standards Commission would continue to hold its Hearings online for the remainder of quarter four. The Committee agreed that the risk score should not be reduced further until the number of Hearings to be held and costs associated with the appeal to the court of Session on case LA/R/2257 & 3262 was known. • The impact score for risk six be reduced to a 2 (with the overall score decreasing to 6) as while the Acting ESC had confirmed that his office still has a small backlog at the investigation stage, it was considered that any impact this would have on confidence in the framework would be mitigated by work undertaken by the Standards Commission in respect of the revised Guidance and Advice Notes and on decisions made under the Outcome of Investigations Direction. <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 31 January 2022.</p>	Executive Team
ANY OTHER BUSINESS		
7.	Payroll Services	

	<p>The Committee noted that the project to put in place a new payroll processing service had been completed, with the contract with the new provider being effective from 1 August 2021.</p> <p>The Committee noted that the Office Manager and Administrative Assistant had both attended training sessions on completing the monthly payroll template and administration of the online payslip facility. All staff and Members had been provided with login details for the online payslip facility.</p> <p>The Committee further noted that monthly processing for Hearing claims, staff expense claims and annual pay awards have been completed on time, with all staff and Members having been paid as expected. The Committee agreed that as the project had been completed, there was no requirement for it to continue to monitor progress. The Committee thanked the Office Manager for her work in delivering the project successfully.</p>	
NEXT MEETING		
<p>8.</p>	<p>The Committee noted that it was next scheduled to meet online on 24 May 2022. The Chair noted that as Mr Walker was now the Standards Commission's Convener, he would not be on the Committee going forward. The Chair thanked Mr Walker for his work and support as a committee member.</p>	