

MINUTE Meeting date: Tuesday 20 May 2025

IN ATTENDANCE ONLINE

- Helen Donaldson (Chair)
- Malcolm Bell
- Lorna Johnston, Executive Director & Accountable Officer
- Sarah Nicholson, Office Manager

ITEM	CONTENT	ACTION
STANDING ITEMS		
1.	<p>WELCOME, APOLOGIES and DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST</p> <p>Ms Donaldson welcomed all attendees. In particular, Ms Donaldson welcomed Mr Bell to his first meeting of the Committee.</p> <p>The Chair thanked Ms Stewart for her contributions to the Committee in the prior year.</p> <p>Apologies were noted from Gillian McCreddie and Liz Maconachie from Audit Scotland and from Andy Munro, the Scottish Parliament’s Head of Internal Audit.</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 21 January 2025 were approved.</p>	
3.	<p>MATTERS ARISING</p> <p>The Committee noted that matters 1 and 2 had been completed and item 3 would be discussed under agenda item 6.</p>	
BUSINESS ITEMS		
4.	<p>RISK REGISTER 2025/26</p> <p>The Committee reviewed the contents of the Risk Register for 2025/26 and agreed to recommend to the Standards Commission that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No change be made to the score for Risks 1, 2 and 5 (‘Promotion’, ‘Education’ and ‘Improving Standards’). This was because the Executive Team had not been able to progress some of the planned actions due to time constraints and other work being given priority. • The probability score for Risk 3 (‘Training’) be reduced from a 3 to a 2, with the overall score then becoming a 6. This was because the Standards Commission had been able to meet all the requests for training received in the year to date. • No change be made to the score for Risk 4 (‘Decision-Making’). The induction of the new Member has been completed successfully. The Standards Commission continued, however, to disagree with the Ethical Standards Commissioner’s reasoning and conclusions in a number of cases, which created additional work (with Members being required to take a more inquisitorial approach) and also caused some difficulties in terms of the engagement with parties and expectation management. 	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No change be made to the score for Risk 6 ('Budget'). This was because a number of Hearings have been scheduled and could result in appeals. In addition, the Standards Commission submitted a business case in quarter one for contingency funding to cover the re-grading and an increase in hours of the Case Manager role, that was yet to be considered by the Scottish Parliamentary Body. This was to help the Standards Commission deal with the significant upturns in case referrals, enquiries and requests for training. • No change be made to the risk score for Risk 7 ('Availability'). This was because while there had been no issues with Members' knowledge, time and availability in the year to date, staff were working at full capacity and had been unable to achieve some of objectives identified in the Business Plan. • No change be made to the risk score for Risk 8 ('Governance'). While Members had been provided with refresher training on various governance matters at a development day on 28 April 2025, both the internal and external audits were yet to be completed. <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 26 May 2025.</p>	Executive Team
5.	<p>ANNUAL ACCOUNTS 2024/25 – EXTERNAL AUDIT</p> <p>The Committee reviewed the draft Annual Accounts prepared by the Executive Team. The Committee agreed a few minor changes to be made to the accompanying commentary. The Committee noted that the financial information to be included in the Annual Accounts had now been received from Scottish Parliament's Finance Office. The Executive Team would work to complete the draft Annual Accounts by the end of this month and would circulate an updated copy to the Committee.</p> <p>The Committee noted that the audit would commence on Monday, 2 June 2025 with the audit clearance meeting scheduled for Tuesday, 24 June 2025.</p> <p>It was noted that the final draft of the Annual Accounts would be considered at the Audit & Risk Committee at its meeting on Tuesday, 22 July 2025 and would be presented thereafter to the Standards Commission for approval at its meeting on Monday, 28 July 2025.</p>	Executive Team
6.	<p>INTERNAL AUDIT SERVICES Internal Audit Plan 2024/25</p> <p>The Executive Director advised that the internal audit review for 2024/25 would involve a review of the Standards Commission's section 16 policy, process and related key performance indicators (being the provision in the Ethical Standards in Public Life etc. Scotland Act 2000, which outlined the options available to the Standards Commission following receipt of a referral from the Ethical Standards Commissioner).</p> <p>The Committee agreed that the final report should be shared with Committee members in advance of the next meeting on Tuesday, 22 July 2025.</p>	
7.	<p>COMMITTEE TERMS OF REFERENCE AND PERFORMANCE</p> <p>The Committee reviewed the Audit & Risk Committee's Terms of Reference. The Committee agreed the Chair should recommend that the Terms of Reference be adopted by the Standards Commission at its meeting on 26 May 2025.</p> <p>It was noted that the Committee's activities during 2024/2025 included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reviewing the draft Annual Accounts for approval by the Standards Commission; • Reviewing the Risk Register and identifying and reviewing actions to be taken to mitigate risks; • Recommending changes to the Risk Register and the individual risk scores in light of developments and actions taken; • Suggesting risks and mitigating actions to be included in the Risk Register for 2025/26; 	Chair

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reviewing and recommending the external audit plan (including the timetable and fee); • Reviewing internal and external audit reports and any management responses; • Reviewing the budget bid for 2025/26; and • Reviewing the structure and frequency of Standards Commission meetings. <p>The Committee agreed that the Chair should advise the Standards Commission of this performance report at its meeting on 26 May 2025 and, as a Commission Member and the Committee’s Chair, could also confirm that she was confident that the Committee had discharged its duties effectively in 2024/25, in accordance with the Terms of Reference.</p>	Chair
ANY OTHER BUSINESS		
8.	<p>ANY OTHER BUSINESS</p> <p>The Executive Director advised that the Executive Team would review and update the travel expenses policy for staff and members. This would then be circulated to the Standards Commission for review.</p>	Executive Team
NEXT MEETING		
9.	<p>The Committee noted that it was next scheduled to meet online on Tuesday, 22 July 2025.</p> <p>Apologies for the next meeting were received from Mr Bell. The Committee noted that Ms Stewart had been co-opted to attend in place of Mr Bell for that meeting only.</p>	