



**MINUTES OF THE AUDIT COMMITTEE HELD ON  
THURSDAY 13 MAY 2021 AT 10AM BY ZOOM  
(DUE TO COVID-19)**

**PRESENT:** Mr W Abraham Non-Executive Director (Chair)  
Mr D Ashford Non-Executive Director

**IN**

**ATTENDANCE:** Mr M Bloomfield Chief Executive  
Ms C Hagan ASM (External Auditors)  
Mr S Knox Northern Ireland Audit Office (left the meeting at 12 noon)  
Ms C McKeown Head of Internal Audit, BSO Internal Audit (left the meeting at 12.40pm)  
Mr D Charles BSO Internal Audit  
Mrs L Mitchell Independent Adviser to Committee  
Mr P Nicholson Interim Director of Finance  
Ms M Paterson Director of Planning, Performance & Corporate Services  
Mr A Phillips Assistant Director of Finance  
Ms F Slevin Financial Accounts Manager  
Mrs C Mooney NIAS Board Secretary  
Mr B McNeill Programme Director – CRM, Estates & Fleet (for agenda item 4 only)

**APOLOGIES:** Mr N Gray Northern Ireland Audit Office

**Welcome, introduction and format of meeting**

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

**1 Apologies**

Apologies were noted from Mr Gray.

## 2 **Declaration of Potential Conflict of Interest & Confirmation of Quorum**

The Chair confirmed that the meeting was quorate and asked those present to declare any conflicts of interest now or as the meeting progressed.

The Chair also stressed the confidentiality of information presented.

Referring to conflicts of interest, Mr Ashford advised that he was registered with the HSC Leadership Centre as a consultant.

## 3 **Previous Minutes (AC13/05/21/01)**

It was noted that the minutes of the previous meeting held on Thursday 18 March 2021 had been **APPROVED** by e-mail and reported to Trust Board on 6 May 2021.

## 4 **Matters Arising (AC13/05/21/02)**

Mr Nicholson explained that updates on the Standing Items, Direct Award Contracts and Fraud, had been provided at the March meeting and therefore were not included today. He reminded the meeting that reference had been made at the previous meeting to the impact of the discount rate. He acknowledged that, while this was a complex issue impacting across the HSC, there would be a limited direct impact on NIAS.

Referring to the action list from the March meeting, the Committee noted:

- the intention to bring the Committee Terms of Reference currently being revised to the next meeting;
- that work was ongoing to revise the Committee Annual Report;
- the report on the outstanding IA recommendations would be discussed later in the meeting; and
- details on the HFMA workshop had been shared with members.

The Chair referred to discussion at the previous meeting in relation to the heating system at Ballymena Station and asked Mr McNeill to update the meeting.

Mr McNeill indicated that, shortly after the station was due to be handed over to the Trust in 2016, an issue had been identified with its heating system resulting in a delay of 18 months in the handover. He said that the Trust entered into negotiations with the contractor, the design team and Construction Procurement and Delivery (CPD) branch of the Department of Finance who govern HSC building contracts. Unfortunately it had not been possible to resolve the issues. Mr McNeill said that, following discussions with CPD and the contractor, and due to the importance of the station in NIAS' operations, it had been decided to proceed with remedial work which had been scheduled to commence in 2020 but had to be paused due to Covid-19. He advised that, in order to progress the remedial works, the Trust had required a Direct Award Contract (DAC) totalling £40,000 which had been signed off by CPD as being appropriate. Mr McNeill clarified that this cost would be incurred by the Trust.

Mr Nicholson pointed out that CPD was the centre of expertise for the procurement and delivery of estates projects and had supported the Trust in relation to the build of Ballymena station as well as providing expert advice in relation to the heating issues which had been identified.

In response to a question from the Chair, Mr Nicholson advised that CPD had advised the Trust to incur the costs to resolve the matter.

Mr McNeill emphasised the importance of having a fully functional and operational station with no health and safety risks to staff and said that the CPD view had been that a litigation process could potentially cause further delay.

Mr Ashford was of the view that, while he appreciated the need to rectify the heating problems in the station, he did not think that this would preclude the Trust from seeking to recover an element of the £40,000.

Mr Knox sought clarification on whether the full retention fee was paid at the time the station was handed over to the Trust. In response, Mr Nicholson said that he would need to revisit the 2016 financial information to confirm this point.

Mr McNeill said it would be important for the Committee to appreciate the role of CPD in such projects. He pointed out that

CPD was the expert body on which the HSC relied to provide good governance, quality and ensure value for money. He suggested that to ignore CPD advice would have left the Trust in a vulnerable position.

The Chair thanked Mr McNeill for his attendance and said that the Committee would appreciate further clarification around the retention payment; whether the decision to proceed through a DAC to fix the heating system represented value for money and whether advice from CPD or the Trust's legal representatives would support the commencement of recovery action or claim for losses to the Trust.

## **5 Committee Chair's Business**

### **5.1 Audit Committee Annual Report – update**

The Chair advised that a review of the format and content of the Audit Committee Annual Report had been completed and revised format would be presented to the Board in due course.

### **5.2 Audit Committee Self-Assessment – update**

The Committee noted that this work was ongoing.

## **6 Internal Audit**

### **6.1 Internal Audit Progress Report (AC13/05/21/03)**

At the Chair's invitation, Ms McKeown took members through the detail of the Internal Audit Progress Report and highlighted the salient points of the audits which had been undertaken in relation to:

- Financial Review
- ICT Procurement and Contract Management
- Information Governance
- Governance during Covid-19

**(i) Financial Review**

The Chair referred to work being taken forward to develop a strategy around the Trust's Charitable Funds and asked Mr Nicholson for an update.

Mr Nicholson acknowledged that, while charitable funds had increased over the last number of years, the 2020-21 year in particular had been an exceptional year with significant donations received. He indicated that the Trust's ability to develop an effective strategy around the expenditure of these funds had been impacted by Covid-19. However he assured the Committee that this work would be included in the work programme for the 2021-22 year.

Responding to a question from the Chair as to whether any plans had yet been put in place, Mr Nicholson advised that there were firm plans to utilise a significant proportion of the Charitable Funds. However he explained that there had not been a requirement for expenditure of charitable funds in the 2020-21 year because anything required had been met from public funds.

Mr Nicholson pointed out that £130,000 of the Charitable Funds had been committed in the 2021-22 financial year around health and wellbeing support for staff.

The Chair commended the management team for their acceptance of the Internal Audit findings within the audit reports.

Mr Ashford welcomed the fact that no Priority 1 findings had been identified. He referred to the overtime payments for staff at Agenda for Change Band 8 and above and the fact that there had been no cover for such during July and August and sought clarification around retrospective approval. Mr Ashford acknowledged that the progress towards closing off the outstanding Internal Audit recommendations had been significantly impacted by Covid-19 and said that he would be keen to see progress now that the Trust had returned to business as usual. He also referred to the Internal Audit recommendation around creating a register to record the Trust's use of HSC Leadership Associate Consultants and asked what oversight would be given to this.

Mr Bloomfield accepted that the Trust's progress towards addressing the outstanding recommendations had been impacted by Covid-19. Referring to the overtime issue, Mr Bloomfield advised that arrangements were being put in place to address this and he noted that a number of staff did not receive overtime payments but time off in lieu. He said he was unsure as to why the DoH did not provide cover for overtime during July and August but reintroduced cover in September. He indicated that, at the time, the priority for the Trust was to ensure service delivery and he added that this was progressed by the Trust at risk. Continuing, Mr Bloomfield said that arrangements would be made to engage with staff around their realignment with their terms and conditions.

Mr Bloomfield alluded to the audit findings relating to verification checks on travel claims and invoices. He confirmed that the priority for the Trust had been for Area Managers and Station Officers to support staff during the pandemic and therefore revised arrangements had been put in place.

Ms McKeown acknowledged the impact of Covid-19.

Responding to Mr Ashford's earlier point in relation to the establishment of a register for HSC Leadership Associate Consultants, Mr Bloomfield expressed surprise at the Trust's inability to provide sufficient evidence on this. He suggested that the Audit Committee would be the appropriate Committee to oversee this register periodically and acknowledged the need to ensure robust arrangements were put in place.

**(ii) ICT Procurement and Contract Management**

Ms McKeown advised that a satisfactory level of assurance was provided with no significant findings and two key findings relating to the ICT procurement strategy and the use of DACs.

Ms Paterson undertook to provide the Committee with a briefing on the regional DHCNI and its oversight. She reminded that the Informatics Assurance Group (IAG) would report through to the Audit Committee to provide assurance around the Trust's control environment in relation to commissioning and how that information was secured.

### **(iii) Information Governance**

Ms McKeown referred to the Information Governance audit and highlighted the findings. Mr Ashford welcomed the fact that, while there were a number of Priority 2 findings within the audit, no Priority 1 findings had been identified. He said that the key issue for him was the identification of such findings. He acknowledged the difficulties in 2020-21 and said he was confident that the Trust would address these moving forward. Mr Ashford referred in particular to the recommendation for the Audit Committee to receive regular updates on information governance and he welcomed this.

Ms Paterson confirmed that her job description had been updated to include reference to the fact that she was the SIRO for NIAS. She assured the Committee that a programme of work had commenced to address the audit findings. She advised that, given the structure with regard to information security and governance as well as clinical information across the organisation, performance reporting in terms of the integrated quality and performance report would be presented to the next Committee meeting.

Ms Paterson acknowledged the need to ensure asset registers were updated and ensuring all staff were trained in information governance and understood their responsibilities within the organisation. She emphasised the importance of protecting information within the organisation both for staff and patients.

The Chair said he was encouraged by the focus on these issues. He noted that the Information Commissioner had highlighted the importance of such roles within organisations.

### **(iv) Governance during Covid-19**

Turning to the audit on Governance during Covid-19, Ms McKeown reported that there were no significant findings within this audit and added that management had accepted the recommendations made.

The Chair commended Mr Bloomfield for ensuring enhanced governance measures were put in place during this time. He acknowledged that, although it was difficult to maintain a

connection through remote working, the arrangements put in place were effective.

Mr Ashford referred to the Audit Committee meeting held at the time of the initial outbreak of the pandemic and said that the agreed priority had been to keep staff and patients safe. He was of the view that being able to maintain reasonable levels of governance at such a time was commendable.

Mr Bloomfield thanked members for their comments and alluded to the sense of teamwork within the organisation. He agreed with Mr Ashford's comment that the focus of the Trust had been to keep staff and patient safe and he added that a further focus was to deliver high quality ambulance services whilst doing so.

The Chair thanked those present for their comments and the Committee **NOTED** the Internal Audit Progress Report.

## 6.2 Shared Service Audits – Update (AC13/05/21/04)

Ms McKeown highlighted the salient points of the Shared Service Audits report. She reminded the meeting that Internal Audit had carried out a programme of Shared Service audit assignments as part of the BSO Internal Audit Plan. She pointed out that the recommendations in these reports were the responsibility of BSO Management to take forward and added that the final reports had been shared with NIAS management as a customer of BSO Shared Services.

In response to a question from the Chair, Mr Nicholson advised that the Trust continued to retain an element of payroll resourcing and added that the Trust was also participating in the improvement project.

The Chair welcomed this reassurance in that the Trust retained some resources which provided additional assurance.

Mr Ashford sought confirmation on whether any timescales had been identified for the completion of the improvement project.

Ms McKeown said that she was not in a position to respond to Mr Ashford's question but confirmed that those progressing the



improvement project had not yet identified action dates with clients.

Mr Nicholson advised that the HSC had commenced a systems replacement project which examine replacing both the finance and payroll systems within the next number of years.

The Committee **NOTED** the update on the Shared Service Audits.

### **6.3 Year End – Follow Up On Outstanding Internal Audit Recommendations 2020-21 (AC13/05/21/05)**

Ms McKeown explained that this paper linked with the Annual Report and advised that the overall assurance had been primarily based on the implementation of the previous audit recommendations. She reported that, at 31 March 2021, the position was that 62% of recommendations had been fully implemented; 36% partially implemented and 2% not implemented. She said she very much appreciated that progress on the implementation of the previous year's recommendations had been delayed as a result of the impact of Covid-19.

Ms McKeown then handed over to Mr Charles who took members through the detail of the paper.

In response to a question from the Chair, Mr Bloomfield reminded the meeting that the Trust had asked Internal Audit to look at Patient Care Services and, as a result of this, the Trust had decided to undertake a complete review of how the service was delivered and the governance around it. He explained that, during Covid-19, the lead on the review was redeployed to Silver Command, resulting in the review being paused. Mr Bloomfield advised that a significant element of the review was engagement with staff and he said that it would not have been appropriate to proceed with this in the circumstances. He undertook to revisit the timetable for completion of the review.

The Chair referred to the backlog of complaints and said he appreciate the position was being monitored by the Safety Committee.

Mr Bloomfield advised that significant progress was being made to address the backlog of complaints which had been reduced from 142 to 49. He reminded the meeting that Ms Charlton was the lead Director and advised that the recent recruitment exercise for the Trust's Complaints Manager had proved successful.

Mr Ashford felt that the impact of Covid-19 had significantly hampered the Trust's ability to address the recommendations. He welcomed the focus on the PCS review and believed that addressing the recommendations within this areas of work would contribute to an overall improvement in the audit findings. He commended the proactive approach taken by the Trust's Chief Executive to identify issues of concern. Mr Ashford enquired whether it would be possible for the Committee to receive more regular updates on the outstanding recommendations from Internal Audit.

Responding, Ms McKeown indicated that Internal Audit provided reports in September and March. However Mr Bloomfield suggested that the Committee would receive updates on the progress being made to address the outstanding recommendations at each meeting.

The Committee agreed that it would be helpful to receive more regular reporting on this issue, particularly over the next six months and agreed that regular meetings between the Chair, Chief Executive and Director of Finance in the first instance would be established. At the Chair's request, Mr Bloomfield and Mr Nicholson agreed to further consider if other Directors should be involved. Mrs Mooney undertook to make the necessary arrangements.

Ms Mitchell indicated her agreement with this approach. She referred to the role of the Committee in terms of scrutiny and focus to maintain the momentum in order to influence the Internal Audit opinion.

Ms McKeown also advised of her agreement to the approach suggested.

Mr Nicholson thanked Internal Audit for their support to the Trust in progressing the recommendations to date.

Following this discussion, the Committee **NOTED** the Year End – Follow Up on Outstanding Internal Audit Recommendations – 2020-21.

#### **6.4 HIA Annual Report for the year ended 31 March 2021 (AC13/05/21/06)**

At the Chair's invitation, Ms McKeown took members through the detail of her annual report. She acknowledged the Trust's disappointment at the overall limited audit opinion on the adequacy and effectiveness of the Trust's framework of governance, risk management and control. She explained that this opinion had been based on the Trust's inability to progress the previous audit recommendations.

Ms McKeown acknowledged that there had been increasing improvement in controls over the past year despite the impact of Covid-19. She explained that it was primarily the outstanding prior year recommendations not being sufficiently addressed that had resulted in a limited audit opinion on the controls operating during the year. However she said that she had every confidence that the Trust would address these issues.

The Chair expressed his disappointment at the limited audit opinion due to the weighting that appeared to have been given to the previous year's audit findings. The Chair stated that these could not have been addressed in the past year given the impact of Covid-19 on management capacity which had delayed the ability of NIAS to address these issues. The Chair also expressed his hope that the limited audit opinion did not act as a disincentive to management in its ongoing use of IA as there could be a disincentive to ask IA to look at an area until it had been 'tidied up'.

The Chair also referred to the fact that many of the issues which had resulted in the limited audit opinion had existed before the current Chief Executive took up post during periods where there was no limited assurance. He noted that the limited assurance related to these issues of long-standing and not to issues arising during the year. He welcomed Mr

Bloomfield's commitment to continue to address the outstanding historic recommendations.

Mr Ashford agreed with the Chair's comments and said he accepted the fact that it had proved difficult to address a number of audit findings in the context of Covid-19. However he was of the view that there was a maturity developing within the Senior Management Team in terms of being proactive in identifying issues and he believed that Ms McKeown's annual report had alluded to this. He was keen to ensure that this finding did not act as disincentive to the management team in its work.

At the Chair's invitation, Mr Bloomfield restated his and the Senior Management Team's resolve to address the outstanding recommendations. He said that he very much appreciated the wording used by Ms McKeown in her previous report which acknowledged the proactive approach taken by the Trust. Mr Bloomfield acknowledged his disappointment at the limited finding over the last three years despite the most recent findings in the five audits undertaken.

The Chair commented that he welcomed Ms McKeown's reiteration that the Trust's management team had adopted an appropriate approach.

Ms McKeown said she appreciated the comments made by the Chair and that she expected the Trust to move towards a satisfactory audit opinion next year if it continued to make improvements on a sustained basis.

Mr Bloomfield thanked Ms McKeown for her comments and thanked members for their continued support.

The Committee **NOTED** the HIA Annual Report for the year ended 31 March 2021.

Ms McKeown left the meeting at this point.

## **6.5 IA Annual Internal Audit Plan 2021-22 (AC13/05/21/07)**

In Ms McKeown's absence, Mr Charles presented the Annual Internal Audit Plan 2021-22 for the Committee's approval. He

advised that the Service Level Agreement (SLA) with the BSO included provision for 155 internal audit days each year and explained that these would be allocated between individual planned assignments, management time, follow up time and contingency.

Mr Charles advised that audits would be conducted under the headings of Finance; Corporate Risk; Governance and other audit time, eg follow-up, and highlighted the specific areas to be audited and the days allocated against each audit.

At the Chair's request, Mrs Mooney undertook to circulate to members a copy of the Board Governance Self-Assessment Tool.

Mr Bloomfield confirmed that the Trust's Senior Management Team had discussed the proposed IA plan for 2021-22 and its linkages to the Corporate Risk Register.

Mr Ashford acknowledged that the proposed Audit Plan was in keeping with previous years and sought confirmation that management were content with the number of proposed audit days. Mr Bloomfield confirmed that the Senior Management Team was content.

The Committee **APPROVED** the IA Annual Internal Audit Plan 2021/22.

## **7 Annual Report and Accounts**

### **7.1 Submission Letter and Draft, Unaudited, Uncertified, Consolidated Annual Report & Accounts for the Year Ended 31 March 2021 (AC13/05/21/08)**

The Chair explained that he would like to accommodate Mr Knox's attendance at another meeting and invited him to comment on the Trust's Annual Report and Accounts.

Mr Knox suggested a number of amendments to the Governance Statement in particular in relation to Cyber Security, the 2021-22 financial position and the conclusion of the Governance Statement. He also highlighted the issue

discussed earlier in the meeting in relation to the heating system in Ballymena.

Mr Nicholson and Mr Bloomfield undertook to revisit this.

Commencing his presentation of the Trust's Annual Report and Accounts, Mr Nicholson clarified that before the Committee for its consideration were the draft, unaudited, uncertified accounts. He added that this was across both the consolidated accounts (Public or Exchequer funds plus Charitable) and also the Charitable Trust Fund's Trustees' Annual Report and Accounts.

Mr Nicholson explained that today's meeting provided an opportunity for the Audit Committee to review the accounts before completion of the audit.

Continuing, Mr Nicholson referred to the exceptional year of 2020-21 and explained that there had been significant additional income and a number of technical accounting issues which would not normally be part of the NIAS accounts, for example stock valuation, recognition payments, goods provided free of charge from suppliers and BSO as well as grants and donations.

He acknowledged that a significant element of the Annual Report focussed on performance overview and analysis. Mr Nicholson said that, in the context of the pandemic, he would like to draw members' attention to these achievements and associated challenges through the year.

Mr Nicholson referred to page 50 which provided an overview of the financial performance as to how those resources available to NIAS had been applied. He commented that it included some further detail as to the resources received by the Trust in relation to Covid-19.

Mr Nicholson indicated that, subject to the completion of audit, review by Audit Committee, approval by Trust Board and certifications by the Comptroller and Auditor General, the Trust had achieved the three financial duties required of it in relation to revenue, capital and prompt payment. He said that further detail on these aspects were contained within the annual report

and accounts, including the £123 million of revenue resources; the £4.7 million of capital and the over 32,000 invoices paid within the 30 day target.

Mr Nicholson referred to the Non-Executive Director report on page 70 and the Governance Statement starting on page 72 which, he explained, wove together some of the information provided by Internal Audit earlier in the meeting. He commented that the Governance Statement made reference to Covid-19 as well as providing an update on resolved, ongoing and new internal governance issues.

Mr Nicholson acknowledged the challenge in collating the document in the available timeframe and said he wished to place on record his appreciation to those involved in this process as well as those who had worked towards these results across the year. He commented that the document before the Committee for consideration was the culmination of planning and efforts by all staff across the year.

He asked Committee members to note the accounts ahead of the next version of draft audited accounts which would come to Audit Committee and subsequently Trust Board on 24 June 2021.

Mr Nicholson explained that he would now move to present the Charitable Trust Funds Trustee's Annual Report for the year ended 31 March 2021 and respond to members' questions/comments following this presentation.

## **7.2 Submission Letter and Draft, Unaudited, Uncertified, Charitable Trust Funds Trustee's Annual Report for the Year Ended 31 March 2021**

Mr Nicholson referred to the fact that the Committee had also received the Charitable Trust Fund Trustee's Annual Report and Accounts for consideration. He explained that expenditure had been low in the year largely because of the Trust's limited capacity through the year and due to the fact that anything required was provided through public funds. Mr Nicholson acknowledged the wave of generosity shown to the Trust in the year and said that this had been reflected in the accounts in a number of areas from grants to goods such as free fuel to

emergency services provided by British Petroleum (BP). He also referred to the generosity and kindness of individuals, groups, organisations and businesses through the year.

Mr Nicholson advised that the Trust had established plans to expend these resources on health and wellbeing resources to support Trust staff in the current year and beyond. He noted that the Trust would also continue to look to avail of additional income and grants which might be available in the current year.

The Chair enquired whether the Trust's Gifts and Hospitality Policy had been updated and circulated to staff.

In response, Mr Nicholson acknowledged the challenge in maintaining the register due to the public's generosity over the last year. He explained that it had not been possible to update the policy but this work would be included in the work programme for the 2021-22 year.

Mr Philips advised that, while the policy had not formally been reviewed and updated, he did not believe it required any significant changes. However he assured the Committee that all donations that had been identified were reflected in the accounts currently before the Committee.

The Chair commended all involved in reaching this point. He sought clarification about the timescales involved.

Mr Nicholson invited all comments, questions and suggestions from members on both sets of accounts and explained that the public annual report and accounts would be updated and improved ahead of the Trust Board meeting in June.

It was agreed that the documentation would be shared with Non-Executive Directors for comment by 27 May 2021. This would allow members the opportunity to suggest changes which would be reviewed by the External Auditors prior to consideration at the June Audit Committee and subsequent Trust Board meeting.

The Chair congratulated the finance team on achieving the prompt payment target which had eluded the team for a number of years. He acknowledged the control for achieving



this target did not lie solely with the finance team and was dependent on a number of external elements, thereby making its achievement more commendable.

Mr Ashford welcomed the opportunity for Non-Executive Directors to comment on the annual report and accounts. He echoed the Chair's congratulations on achieving the prompt payment target as well as closing the financial year with a small surplus of £12,000.

Mr Nicholson thanked the Chair and Mr Ashford for their comments and noted that the accounts had yet to be audited to confirm that the Trust had achieved a surplus.

Mr Bloomfield agreed with the comments made by Committee members and conveyed his personal thanks to Mr Nicholson, Mr Philips and Ms Paterson for their significant contribution in pulling the documentation together. He noted that the format of the annual report was heavily prescribed by the DoH and referred in particular to page 92 which set out the internal control divergences as well as providing an update on those identified in the previous year. He added that this section of the Governance Statement also identified any new issues and asked members, in their view, to ensure they were content that all issues had been identified.

Responding to a question from the Chair in relation to the increase in Salaries and Wages, Mr Nicholson confirmed that a significant proportion of this related to Agenda for Change as well as increased staff costs around Covid-19. He added that the annual pay award had also been included in these figures as well as the Staff Recognition Payment which had not yet been paid to staff.

Members referred to the increase in the purchase of care from non-HSC bodies on page 149 of the accounts and sought further detail.

Mr Nicholson explained that the increase was the result of increased VAS/PAS provision and assured the Committee that this had been subject to the normal procurement rules and included a number of DACs. He said that members would be

aware of the reliance placed upon the use of VAS/PAS during the pandemic.

The Chair invited Ms Mitchell to comment.

Ms Mitchell indicated that the accounts provided a good reflection of Trust business over the past year and commended the Trust for achieving a breakeven position. She commented that by living within its Resource Revenue Limit (RRL) and Capital Revenue Limit (CRL), the Trust had demonstrated good financial performance in what had been a difficult year.

Ms Mitchell congratulated Mr Nicholson and his team on the quality of the documentation and believed the documentation was well set out, was clear and well-written.

Ms Hagan advised that external audit had commenced its review of the annual report and accounts and said she would liaise with Mr Nicholson around a number of comments at today's meeting. She explained that, as the External Auditor, she would have to review any changes made to the documentation with a view to finalising the accounts for presentation to the Audit Committee and Trust Board in June.

She referred to the discount rate which was discussed at the previous Committee meeting and noted that the Department of Justice's confirmation at the end of March that the rate would move to -1.75% might need to be reflected within the accounts. Ms Hagan acknowledged that, while this would not result in a material change to the figures, it may require a disclosure point which she would discuss in more detail with Mr Nicholson and Mr Philips.

The Chair was of the view that as negligence claims had been low, it would not have a material effect from an accounts perspective.

Ms Hagan agreed that, although not material, it might require an additional note within the accounts. She commented that the accounts had been well drafted and would only require some minor amendments to ensure today's discussion was reflected. Ms Hagan agreed to discuss this with Mr Nicholson.

At the Chair's request, Mr Nicholson undertook to share his brief on the discount rate with Mr Ashford.

Following discussion, the Committee **NOTED**:

- the Draft, Unaudited, Uncertified, Consolidated Annual Report & Accounts for the Year Ended 31 March 2021 and
- the Draft, Unaudited, Uncertified, Charitable Trust Funds Trustee's Annual Report for the Year Ended 31 March 2021

**8 Closed Meeting**

Following a close meeting session involving Committee members, Ms Mitchell and Internal and External Audit, the Chair confirmed that there were no actions arising.

**9 Any Other Business**

The Chair referred to the need to take account of the potential impact of inflation over the coming year and alluded to the economic impact of Covid-19. He advised that he had asked Mr Nicholson to assess the potential impact on the Trust and maintain a watching brief. The Chair suggested that this could be discussed further at a future meeting.

**10 Date, time and venue of next meeting**

The next meeting of the Audit Committee will take place on Thursday 24 June 2021 at 10am (venue and arrangements to be confirmed)

**THIS BEING ALL THE BUSINESS, THE CHAIR CLOSED THE MEETING AT 1.00PM**

**SIGNED:** 

**DATE:** 17 June 2021