



**MINUTES OF THE GOVERNANCE, AUDIT AND RISK ASSURANCE
COMMITTEE HELD AT 9:30AM ON
MONDAY 12 MAY 2025 IN THE BOARDROOM, NIAS HQ**

PRESENT:	Dr P Graham	Committee Chair
	Mr D Ashford	Non-Executive Director
	Dr P Corrigan	Non-Executive Director
IN ATTENDANCE:	Mr S Mullen	Interim Director of Planning, Performance and Corporate Services
	Mr N Sinclair	Interim Director of Operations and Chief Paramedic Officer
	Ms L Donnelly	Interim Director of Finance
	Dr N Ruddell	Medical Director
	Ms B McCauley	Assistant Director of Finance
	Mr M Smyth	Temporary Assistant Director of Finance
	Mr N Henry	Assistant Director Governance
	Ms L Hill	Risk Management Co-ordinator
	Mr D Charles	Internal Audit, BSO
	Ms C McKeown	Internal Audit, BSO
	Ms C Hagan	ASM
	Mr P O'Sullivan	Northern Ireland Audit Office
	Ms H Rob	Senior Secretary

APOLOGIES: None

1. Apologies & Opening Remarks

There were no apologies noted.

The Chair welcomed members to today's meeting.

2. Procedure

2.1 Declaration of Potential Conflict of Interest

No declarations were made.

2.2 Quorum

The Chair confirmed that the Committee was quorate.

2.3 Confidentiality of Information

The Chair confirmed and emphasised the confidentiality of information.

3. Previous Minutes

The minutes of the previous meeting were **APPROVED**, subject to the following amendment: Mr David Charles should be noted as an attendee, instead of Ms Catherine McKeown.

ACTION: Ms Beggs

4. Matters Arising

The actions arising from the previous meeting were **NOTED** as having been progressed.

5. Chair's Business

There were no items of business discussed by the Chair.

6. Standing Items

6.1 NIAS Direct Award Contract Register

Ms Donnelly advised that NIAS has authorised 3 new DACs since the last meeting including Maintenance and Support for the Global Rostering System, Maintenance and Calibration of Fit Test Machines and the extension of the Vodafone contract. Ms Donnelly noted that there are two DACs pending relating to a Paperless Fleet Approval and Authorisation Platform (with a value of £26,000) and the Servicing, Maintenance and

Replacement of Suction Units (with a value of £400,000). Ms Donnelly explained that the latter covers a period of 7 years.

The Committee **NOTED** the update.

6.2 Fraud Update

Ms McAuley advised that there have been no new fraud allegations received. The two open cases which were discussed at the last Committee meeting remain under investigation.

The Committee **NOTED** the update.

6.3 Counter Fraud End of Year Report 2024-25

Ms McAuley provided a summary update on the HSC-wide Counter Fraud End of Year report 2024-25 provided by BSO. The Committee discussed the timeliness of Counter Fraud investigations and associated timescales. Ms McCauley advised that the Counter Fraud service is performing as expected in this regard.

The Committee **NOTED** the update.

7. Internal Audit

7.1 Progress Report

Ms McKeown discussed the Internal Audit progress report and advised that the 2024-25 audit work is now complete. Internal Audit are providing a Satisfactory Assurance on all financial reviews carried out with the exception of the review into the Management of Unsocial Payments which is of Limited Assurance.

Ms McKeown noted that one significant finding from the 2023-24 review into the Management of Unsocial Hours Payments remains outstanding, despite the significant progress which has been made by management to address the recommendations. Ms McKeown noted that the four key findings in the 2024-25 report have been accepted by NIAS management.

Mr Corrigan sought clarity on why the significant finding from the 2023-24 report remains outstanding and sought assurance in this regard. Ms McCauley explained the work that has been undertaken to investigate the issue, involving review of over 200 rotas and triangulation of all potential over and under payments. Ms McCauley advised that some aspects of the finding necessitate engagement with Trade Union colleagues and explained the significant amount of work involved in undertaking the review.

Mr Corrigan stressed the importance of maintaining a focus in this area and to ensure that reviews are carried out in a timely fashion and noted that the timeframe for completion has been delayed to the end of March 2026.

The Committee **AGREED** to include a progress report on the Management of Unsocial Hours Payments as a standing item for upcoming meetings.

ACTION: Mr Henry

Ms McKeown advised that Internal Audit were providing Limited Assurance in respect of the recently completed review of Resource and Rota Management and noted three key findings regarding the age of the rotas used within NIAS, the lack of documented process for the use of Bank and the management of requested annual leave.

The Chair noted that there is a significant amount of activity underway with regards to rota restructure. Mr Sinclair advised that rota management is an important priority and the way forward on this will be informed by the upcoming capacity and workforce review exercise being carried out by ORH which is due to report in June. Any rota redesign will have to be informed by the needs of the service, as well as ensuring staff are receiving meal/rest breaks and are provided with sufficient education and training days throughout the year.

Mr Sinclair noted that discussions on rota redesign will have to be taken forward with Trade Union colleagues. Mr Corrigan queried whether new recruits could be commenced on new, more flexible rotas. Mr Sinclair advised that this has been

explored but it is challenging because newly qualified staff need to be paired with more experienced staff who will be on a fixed rota pattern.

Mr Ashford highlighted concern regarding the 10% absence rate and that reducing this would support reduced reliance on bank/overtime to cover shift gaps. Mr Sinclair advised that a draft SOP had been prepared regarding the utilisation of bank, but there is a need to revisit this and to have input from HR to formalise and embed this.

The Committee discussed the importance of monitoring where staff are taking sick leave if annual leave is rejected, and that this should be being managed through extant disciplinary processes, and robust absence management.

The Chair suggested that a representative from HR could be invited to attend the next GARAC meeting to discuss this matter and provide assurance in respect of absence management. Mr Corrigan offered to raise the issue at the next People, Culture and Organisational Development Committee. The Committee **AGREED** for Mr Corrigan to raise the issue at PCOD, and for a report to subsequently be provided at the next GARAC meeting.

ACTION: Mr Corrigan

Mr Corrigan highlighted the Internal Audit finding that NIAS is currently paying staff overtime for a late finish in addition to providing compensatory rest and noted the extension in compensatory rest entitlement that has been put in place by NIAS: this is in effect leading to a “double payment.”

Mr Corrigan stressed the need to revisit the issue and potentially stand down the compensatory rest entitlement extension. Mr Sinclair advised that this is a complex issue and that measures were put in place historically to try and help manage ASOS, and that reversing those decisions will likely be exceptionally challenging. The prospect of rota design should go some way to address late finishes and mitigating the impacts.

Mr Corrigan acknowledged the difficulties in addressing these issues, and highlighted that the timescale for introducing new rotas, two years, is very lengthy, and there is a need to address these matters before then. Mr Sinclair noted that two years would be the worst case scenario, and that the aspiration would be to have new rotas in place before then.

7.2 Internal Audit follow up of Recommendations

Ms McKeown noted that 92% of Internal Audit recommendations at year end had been implemented by NIAS management which was an excellent result. Ms McKeown highlighted the recommendations which remain outstanding.

The Chair acknowledged the efforts and hard work by all in achieving the result, particularly given the range of demands on the service. The Chair praised all the Directors and their teams who were all an important part in implementing the recommendations.

Mr Corrigan noted the outstanding recommendation in respect of fleet and explained that fleet is one of the areas which has historically not been brought to Committee/Board level, but that the intention is that the Strategic Performance and Finance Committee will start to receive briefings on this.

The Committee **NOTED** the update.

7.3 Shared Services Update

Ms McKeown advised that Internal Audit were providing Satisfactory Assurance in respect of the three Shared Service audits that had been carried out: Business Services Team (BST), Payroll Service Centre and Recruitment Shared Service Centre.

The Committee **NOTED** the update.

7.4 Head of Internal Audit Annual Report 24/25

Ms McKeown spoke to the tabled paper and the Committee acknowledged the progress which has been made but stressed

the importance of a continual focus on implementing Internal Audit recommendations.

The Committee **NOTED** the update.

7.5 Internal Audit Strategy and Annual Plan 2025/26

Ms McKeown presented the Internal Audit plan for 2025-26 which is the final year of the 3-year cycle and sought Committee approval on same.

Mr Ashford highlighted concern at the potential deferral of an Internal Audit on the HART service to 2026-27, as this would be over two years since the concerns regarding the HART service were raised to Committee level. Mr Ashford advised of an upcoming meeting with AACEs regarding their peer assessment of the implementation of recommendations they have made previously regarding NIAS's HART service.

The Committee discussed the prospect of deferring an alternative audit scheduled for 2025-26 to allow the HART review to take place in-year. Mr Ashford and Mr Sinclair agreed to have a discussion about the potential deferral of the HART review in light of the AACE peer assessment.

Following discussion with AACE, Mr Ashford agreed to discuss outcomes of the meeting with the Chair, who in turn would discuss with Internal Audit the potential to keep HART within the 2025-26 programme and reallocate the total Internal Audit days to include it.

The Committee **APPROVED** the Internal Audit plan for 2025-26, subject to confirmation about potential deferral of the HART review.

ACTION: Mr Ashford/Mr Sinclair

7.6 Global Internal Audit Standards

Ms McKeown advised the Committee of the updates to the standards that will be incorporated into the Internal Audit team's work going forward.

The Committee **NOTED** the update.

8. **External Audit**

8.1 NIAO Handover Report

Ms Hagan provided a brief summary on key issues contained within the NIAO Handover Report. The Committee discussed the process for ensuring there is governance around the implementation of the actions which are relevant to NIAS, and it was agreed that this would be discussed at Trust Board later in the week.

The Committee **NOTED** the update.

9. **Draft Annual Report and Accounts 2024-25**

Mr Mullen provided a brief overview on the Draft Annual Report narrative, which follows the same format as previous reports. Mr Mullen noted the timescales involved in compiling the report and the need to ensure early forward planning for next year.

Ms Donnelly highlighted the key aspects of the Draft 2024-25 Annual Accounts and discussed the details of the Consolidated Statement of Financial Position as at 31 March 2025. Ms Donnelly explained that the final Annual Report and Accounts will be tabled at Trust Board in June.

The Committee **APPROVED** the Draft Annual Report and Accounts.

10. **Draft Charitable Trust Funds Trustees Annual Report 2024-25**

Ms McAuley discussed the salient aspects of the Draft Charitable Trust Funds Trustees Annual Report including income and expenditure throughout the year.

Mr Corrigan suggested including reference to the establishment of the Charitable Trust Funds Advisory within the Report. The Committee **APPROVED** the draft report, subject to this addition.

ACTION: Ms McCauley

11. Review of Corporate Risk Register

Mr Henry provided an overview of the updated Corporate Risk Register and proposals to escalate and de-escalate risks.

The Committee agreed that risk 825 pertaining to PCS capacity and risk 455 on Safeguarding were appropriate for de-escalation to the Directorate risk register. The Committee also agreed with the proposed additions to the Corporate Risk Register regarding recruitment and retention of senior roles (848), response to mental health calls (727) and consultation about HSC service changes (486).

Mr Ashford queried the proposal to de-escalate risk 833 regarding the ability to respond to a High Consequence Infectious Disease (HCID), in the context of limited HART capacity at NIAS. Mr Henry noted that the issues pertaining to HART capacity are recorded separately on the Corporate Risk Register and that the proposal to de-escalate 833 was due to the de-classification of Clade II Mpox as an HCID and the agreements put in place with other HSC Trusts to maintain safe systems of work for HART should they respond to a confirmed/probable HCID.

The Committee **APPROVED** the updated Corporate Risk Register, subject to the proposal to de-escalate risk 833 being discussed at the next Patient Experience, Quality and Safety Committee.

12. Corporate Governance Code of Good Practice NI (2025)

Mr Henry highlighted the review which has been undertaken of the revised Corporate Governance Code of Good Practice NI and two proposals which are made in respect of establishing de minimis level of approval for business cases at Committee/Trust Board level and oversight of corporate risks.

The Committee **APPROVED** the proposal in respect of business case approval levels and suggested that this be tabled at the

next Trust Board meeting, and subsequently be reflected in the revised SPF Terms of Reference.

The Chair advised that he is content with the extant arrangements for managing corporate risk and the frequency of discussion of corporate risks at Trust Board. The Committee noted previous discussions about having “deep dives” of Directorate risks at future GARAC meetings.

13. DOH Correspondence

There were no items of correspondence tabled.

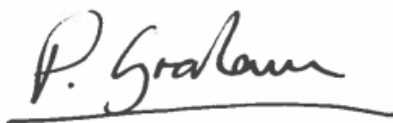
14. Date of Next Meeting

24 June 2025, 9.30am, Microsoft Teams

15. Any Other Business

There were no items of business raised.

THIS BEING ALL THE BUSINESS, THE CHAIR DECLARED THE MEETING CLOSED



SIGNED: _____

DATE: 24/06/24