



**Northern Ireland
Assembly**

Applicant Information Booklet

**INDEPENDENT CHAIR AND MEMBER OF THE NORTHERN IRELAND
ASSEMBLY AUDIT AND RISK COMMITTEE**

Introduction

The Northern Ireland Assembly Commission (the Assembly Commission) is the body corporate of the Northern Ireland Assembly. It has the responsibility, under section 40(4) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, to provide the Assembly, or ensure that the Assembly is provided, with the property, staff and services required for the Assembly to carry out its work.

The Assembly Secretariat (the Secretariat), illustrated in Annex C, is headed by the Clerk/Chief Executive who is also the Accounting Officer for the Secretariat. It is made up of 4 Directorates – Corporate Services, Facilities, Legal and Governance Services and Parliamentary Services – as well as a Corporate Support Unit. It currently has a staffing complement of around 350.

The main purpose of the Audit and Risk Committee (ARC) is to support the Clerk/Chief Executive (in their role as Accounting Officer) and the Assembly Commission in monitoring their responsibilities for issues of risk, control and governance. ARC reviews the comprehensiveness of assurances in meeting the organisation's assurance needs and reviews the reliability and integrity of these assurances. Terms of Reference for ARC are provided in Annex A of this document. Please note the Terms of Reference are currently under review.

The Assembly Commission is seeking to appoint two independent members to ARC, one of whom will be appointed as Chair. It is anticipated that those applicants selected for interview will be invited to appear before a Selection Panel on 6th or 7th October 2016. Whilst requests for alternative interview dates will be considered on the basis of their individual merit, it is not the preference of the Selection Panel to hold interviews on any other dates.

It is hoped that the successful candidate for the post of Chair will take up appointment by November 2016, with the Member taking up appointment in September 2017. The merit list from this competition will remain in place for

12 months and may be used to fill vacancies, should they arise. Further details of the selection process are given at the end of this booklet.

This booklet provides information for applicants about the appointment process. It also contains important information on the role and eligibility criteria as well as details of how to apply for the positions. Prospective applicants should read this booklet carefully before completing an application form.

Application forms are available on the Northern Ireland Assembly website and should be completed online. Completed application forms demonstrating the skills and experience sought must be submitted by the closing date of midnight on Friday 9th September 2016.

Appointment Principles

The Assembly Commission is committed to providing equality of opportunity and welcomes applications from all suitably qualified applicants regardless of gender, age, marital status, disability, religion, race, political opinion, sexual orientation or whether or not the applicant has dependants.

Roles and Responsibilities

The appointment of an independent Chair and an independent Member to ARC will facilitate an objective assessment of the assurances provided to the Accounting Officer on the risk management, control and governance arrangements within the Secretariat. These assurances include stewardship statements from operational management, financial statements and reports from both Internal and External Audit.

The information provided to ARC will enable the independent Chair to advise the Accounting Officer on the adequacy and effectiveness of the assurances and on how well the assurance received meets the assurance need.

The ARC will meet at least four times per year. The independent Chair of ARC may convene additional meetings as they deem necessary.

The ARC Chair will be expected to attend meetings of the Assembly Commission as an observer. Should the Chair be unavailable to attend a Commission meeting, the independent Member will be expected to attend in his/her place.

The time commitment for both the independent Chair and Member is expected to be around eight days per year and remuneration will be £401 per day for the position of Chair and £337 per day for the Member. As the two members will be independent, they will not be employees of the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission under this arrangement.

Further information on the roles and responsibilities are available in the Terms of Reference for ARC (Annex A). Please note the Terms of Reference are currently under review.

Term of Appointment

The term of the appointment will be for a period of three years with the option of two one year extensions.

Person Specification

The person appointed will require a combination of appropriate skill and experience and a successful track record built on relevant professional knowledge and experience, good judgement and effective communication.

Essential Criteria

This section sets out the essential knowledge, experience and personal competencies which are necessary to undertake the work of the independent Member of ARC. At the closing date for applications, applicants must demonstrate on their application form and at interview, the following:

- i) Experience of promoting, implementing and ensuring good corporate governance, at a senior level*, in either public or private sector including a thorough understanding of internal and external audit and risk management;
- ii) Experience of remaining objective and independent, challenging supportively and working well as part of a team;
- iii) Experience of effective communication and engagement at a senior level*; and
- iv) Experience of promoting, implementing and ensuring good financial management including the ability to competently analyse financial statements and understand good financial management disciplines.

The Chair must also demonstrate:

- a) Experience of successfully carrying out the role of a chair of a working group, committee or board in an organisation of 100 people or more.

**Senior level is defined as membership of a Board or a team at the highest level of organisational management who have the day-to-day responsibilities of managing an organisation or company.*

Shortlisting Criterion

The Selection Panel reserves the right to use shortlisting as part of the recruitment process for this appointment. Should shortlisting be required, the following shortlisting criteria will be applied:

- Detailed understanding of the public sector environment and the accountability structures within it

Pre-appointment Checks

A basic Access NI check and financial check will be completed before appointment as well as references sought.

Conflicts of Interest

It is essential that the person appointed is able to maintain public confidence at all times.

Applicants are required to declare whether they are aware of anything in their private or professional life that would undermine their ability to maintain public confidence or which could be a source of embarrassment to themselves or the Assembly Commission.

Further guidance on probity and conflicts of interest is contained in Annex B of this booklet.

Members of the ARC will record in the ARC Register of Interests any issues on which they might have a conflict or perceived conflict of interest.

Assistance for Individuals with Disabilities

The Assembly Commission operates a Guaranteed Interview Scheme (GIS). The GIS has been developed for applicants with disabilities or those with a long term impairment or health condition, that is expected to last for at least 12 months and which means that they cannot meet all of the shortlisting criteria. In these instances, provided that they have demonstrated in their application form that they meet the essential criteria for the post, the applicant

will be offered a guaranteed interview. An applicant does not have to have a registered disability to apply under the GIS. The application form will include a section on disability, and an applicant can indicate whether they wish to apply under the GIS for that particular role and the basis on which they qualify for the GIS.

Every effort will be made to provide whatever reasonable support applicants with disability/disabilities require in attending for interview and whatever reasonable support the successful applicant might need to help them carry out their duties.

Commissioner for Public Appointments – Code of Practice

Although the appointments to ARC do not fall within the remit of the Commissioner for Public Appointments, in the interests of good practice the appointment competition is being managed in accordance with the principles set out in the Code of Practice of the Commissioner for Public Appointments. The code can be viewed online at:

www.publicappointmentsni.org

Making an Application

Application forms are available on the Northern Ireland Assembly website (www.niassembly.gov.uk/jobs) and should be completed online. Completed application forms must be submitted by the closing date of midnight on Friday 9th September 2016. **Late applications will not be accepted.**

The application form is designed to ensure that applicants provide the necessary information to demonstrate how they meet the essential and shortlisting criteria for appointment.

The selection panel may decide to interview only those applicants who appear, from the information available, to be most suitable in terms of relevant experience and ability. It is therefore essential that applicants describe fully in the application form the extent to which they satisfy the above criteria. It is not appropriate simply to list the various posts that the applicants have held. The

selection panel will not make assumptions from the title of the applicants' posts about the skills and experience gained.

Applicants must use only the application forms provided and must not submit additional material in support of their application forms. **No supplementary documents will be accepted.**

In completing the application form and at interview, applicants might find it helpful to think of presenting their experience in terms of - what the issue/challenge was, how it was tackled, what their specific role was in dealing with it, and what result was obtained.

Selection Process

After the closing date for receipt of applications, the selection panel will consider applications against the essential criteria and only applicants who demonstrate that they meet the essential criteria will proceed to the next stage of the selection process. Selection of applicants will be based on merit i.e. on how an applicant's skills, knowledge, experience and qualities, as displayed in the relevant section of the application form, meet each criterion. If it is deemed necessary to shortlist, the shortlisting criteria will be used to decide who appear, based on the information available, to be most suitable in terms of relevant experience and skills to undertake the role and those applicants will be invited to interview.

Final selection of applicants will be based on performance at a criterion based interview(s) structured around the skills, knowledge, experience and qualities sought in the essential criteria section of the person specification listed above.

At interview, applicants should also be prepared to discuss any real, perceived or potential conflicts of interest which might impair their ability to perform the duties of an independent member of ARC with integrity and objectivity.

It is planned that interviews will be held on 6th and 7th October 2016, following which the panel will prepare a recommendation, based on assessment of the applicants and in order of merit, of those deemed most suitable for appointment.

Applicants attending for interview may be eligible for reimbursement of reasonable travel costs within Northern Ireland at rates agreed in advance of travelling with the NI Assembly HR Office.

**NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY
AUDIT AND RISK COMMITTEE**

TERMS OF REFERENCE (Currently under Review)

1 BACKGROUND

The Northern Ireland Assembly Secretariat Review Report of October 2007 dealt with a number of issues including the identification of the appropriate organisational and management structures, policies and governance arrangements necessary to provide the Assembly with the property, staff and services required and to the standards expected.

In particular, recommendations relating to the Audit Committee structure and membership were made in order to ensure compliance with the HM Treasury “Audit Committee Handbook”, as relevant to the context of the Assembly Secretariat. (The “Audit and Risk Assurance Committee Handbook (NI)” was issued by the Department of Finance and Personnel in March 2014, with which the Audit and Risk Committee is also compliant.)

Therefore, in order to support the revised governance arrangements within the Assembly Secretariat (which include delegated authority from the Assembly Commission to the Clerk/Chief Executive, an enhanced system of business planning and risk management, stewardship reporting and clear management structures) it was agreed to improve upon the existing Audit Committee arrangements.

The appointment of an independent Chair and an independent Member to the Audit and Risk Committee (ARC) will facilitate an objective assessment of the assurances provided to the Accounting Officer on the risk management, control and governance arrangements within the

Secretariat. These assurances include stewardship statements from operational management, financial statements and reports from both Internal and External Audit.

The information provided to the Committee will enable the Chair to advise the Accounting Officer on the adequacy and effectiveness of the assurances and on how well the assurance received meets the assurance need.

2 ROLE

The Assembly Commission has established the Audit and Risk Committee (ARC) to support the Clerk/Chief Executive (in his/her role as Accounting Officer) and the Assembly Commission and Secretariat Management Group in monitoring their responsibilities for issues of risk, control and governance by reviewing the comprehensiveness of assurances in meeting the organisation's assurance needs and reviewing the reliability and integrity of these assurances.

3 MEMBERSHIP

The members of the ARC include:

- One member of the Assembly Commission;
- Two independent members;
- The ARC will be chaired by one of the independent members.

The ARC will be provided with a secretariat function by the Directorate of Legal and Governance Services.

4 REPORTING

The ARC will provide the Assembly Commission, Accounting Officer and the Secretariat Management Group with an Annual Report, timed to support the finalisation of accounts and the Governance Statement, summarising its conclusions from the work it has done during the year. The report will summarise the ARC opinion regarding:

- (a) the comprehensiveness of assurances in meeting the Assembly Commission's and Accounting Officer's needs;
- (b) the reliability and integrity of these assurances;
- (c) whether the assurance available is sufficient to support the Assembly Commission and Accounting Officer in their decision taking and their accountability obligations;
- (d) the implication of these assurances for the overall management of risk;
- (e) any issues the ARC considers pertinent to the Governance Statement and any long-term issues the Committee thinks the Assembly Commission and/or Accounting Officer should give attention to;
- (f) financial reporting for the year;
- (g) the quality of both Internal and External Audit and their approach to their responsibilities;
- (h) the ARC view of its own effectiveness, including advice on ways in which it considers it needs to be strengthened or developed;

- (i) the manner in which issues involving best use of resources/value for money have been addressed.

The Chair of the ARC should attend at least one meeting of the Assembly Commission each year to report in private, without the presence of members of the Secretariat.

The minutes of each ARC meeting should be made available to the Assembly Commission.

The Independent Chair and Member of the ARC will undergo an annual appraisal.

5 RESPONSIBILITIES

The ARC can help the Assembly Commission to formulate its assurance needs and then advise on how well assurance received actually meets the assurance need. Assurance will help the Assembly Commission to judge whether or not its agenda is focussing on the issues that are most significant in relation to achieving the Secretariat's objectives and whether best use is being made of resources.

The ARC will advise the Assembly Commission, the Accounting Officer and the Secretariat Management Group on:

- the strategic process for risk control and governance and the Governance Statement;
- the accounting policies, the accounts and the annual report of the Assembly Secretariat, including the process for review of the accounts prior to submission for audit, levels of error identified

and management's letter of representation to the Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO);

- the adequacy of management response to issues identified by audit activity including the Report to those charged with Governance from the NIAO;
- assurances relating to the corporate governance requirements for the Assembly Secretariat;
- assurance relating to the adequacy and effectiveness of both Internal and External Audit, the definition of future audit requirements and assist where required in deciding the best means of procuring these services;
- the extent to which anti-fraud policies, whistle-blowing processes and arrangements for special investigations comply with best practice.

Actions taken by the ARC in order to discharge its responsibilities will include:

- approval of the planned activity and results of both internal and external audit;
- the commissioning of specific audits;
- the identification (where appropriate) of sources of expert advice;
- advising the Accounting Officer on the skills, experience and competency requirements for the Head of Internal Audit (HIA) post;
- the ARC Chair having the opportunity to comment in relation to any review of the grading of the HIA post;
- the ARC Chair having the opportunity to provide input into the performance appraisal of the HIA.

6 RIGHTS

The ARC may:

- co-opt additional members for a period not exceeding one year to provide specialist skills, knowledge and experience;
- procure specialist ad-hoc advice at the expense of the Assembly, subject to budgets agreed by the Assembly Commission.

7 ACCESS

The Chair of the ARC should have right of access to the Speaker in his role as Chair of the Assembly Commission.

The Head of Internal Audit and the representative of the Northern Ireland Audit Office will have free and confidential access to the Chair of the ARC.

8 MEETINGS

The ARC will meet at least four times a year. The Chair of the ARC may convene additional meetings, as he/she deems necessary.

A minimum of two Members of the ARC will be present for the meeting to be deemed quorate. In the absence of the Chair, the Independent Member will preside.

ARC meetings will normally be attended by the Accounting Officer, the Director of Corporate Services, the Head of Internal Audit and a representative from the Northern Ireland Audit Office.

The ARC may ask any other officials of the Assembly to attend to assist it with its discussions on any particular matter.

The ARC may ask any or all of those who normally attend but who are not members to withdraw to facilitate open and frank discussion of particular matters.

The Assembly Commission, the Accounting Officer or Secretariat Management Group may ask the ARC to convene further meetings to discuss particular issues on which they want the Committee's advice.

At the discretion of the Chair, minor matters which require attention between scheduled meetings of ARC may be dealt with by correspondence and reported to the next scheduled meeting.

9 INFORMATION REQUIREMENTS

For each meeting the ARC will be provided with:

- A report summarising any significant changes to the Assembly Secretariat's Corporate Risk Register and any issues of concern relevant to ARC regarding the delivery of the Corporate Plan;
- A progress report from the Head of Internal Audit summarising:
 - Work performed (and a comparison with work planned)
 - Key issues emerging from Internal Audit work
 - Management response to audit recommendations
 - Changes to the Periodic Plan
 - Any resourcing issues affecting the delivery of Internal Audit objectives
- A progress report from the NIAO representative summarising work done and emerging findings.

As and when appropriate, or when requested, the ARC will also be provided with:

- Proposals for the Terms of Reference of Internal Audit;
- The Internal Audit Strategy;
- Head of Internal Audit's Annual Opinion and Report;
- Quality Assurance reports on the Internal Audit function;
- The draft accounts of the Assembly;
- The draft Governance Statement;
- A report on any changes to accounting policies;
- A report from the Accounting Officer summarising progress against the Secretariat's Business Plan, highlighting any issues that may be relevant to the work of the ARC;
- The NIAO's Report to those charged with Governance;
- A report on any proposals to tender for audit functions;
- A report on co-operation between Internal and External Audit;
- The NIAO audit strategy;
- Information on any impending changes (as identified by Internal or External Audit) that may impact upon the work of the ARC.

10 REGISTER OF INTERESTS

Members of the ARC will record in the ARC Register of Interests any issues on which they might have a conflict or perceived conflict of interest. The ARC as a whole should consider how matters on which a member may have a conflict of interest will be handled.

11 SECRETARIAT

The Directorate of Legal and Governance Services will provide secretariat services to the ARC. The secretariat will be responsible for ensuring compliance with procedures and maintenance of a Register of Interests. An agenda and papers will be circulated one week in advance

of each meeting. A summary of action points will be sent to the Chairperson within three working days of each meeting. Approved action points will be issued to relevant staff within one working day of receipt. Draft minutes will be sent to the Chairperson within five working days of the meeting. The formal minutes will be posted on the Assembly website within three working days of their approval.

The Secretariat will prepare an induction pack for new members.

INTEGRITY AND CONFLICTS OF INTEREST INFORMATION

In 1995, the Committee on Standards in Public Life defined seven principles, which should underpin the actions of all who serve the public in any way. These are:

Selflessness Holders of public office should take decisions solely in terms of the public interest. They should not do so in order to gain financial or other material benefits for themselves, their family, or other friends.

Integrity Holders of public office should not place themselves under any financial or other obligation to outside individuals or organisations that might influence them in the performance of their official duties.

Objectivity In carrying out public business, including making public appointments, awarding contracts, or recommending individuals for rewards and benefits, holders of public office should make choices on merit.

Accountability Holders of public office are accountable for their decisions and actions to the public and must submit themselves to whatever scrutiny is appropriate to their office.

Openness Holders of public office should be as open as possible about all the decisions and actions that they take. They should give reasons for their decisions and restrict information only when the

wider public interest clearly demands.

Honesty Holders of public office have a duty to declare any private interests relating to their public duties and to take steps to resolve any conflicts arising in a way that protects the public interest.

Leadership Holders of public office should promote and support these principles by example.

All successful candidates must uphold the principles and values of public service.

What is a conflict of interest?

The highest standards of propriety, involving impartiality, integrity and objectivity are required of the committee. This means that any private, voluntary, charitable or political interest which might be material and relevant to the work of the committee should be declared.

There is always the possibility for real or perceived conflicts of interest to arise. Both are a problem, as the perceived inference of a conflict may, on occasions, be as damaging as the existence of a real conflict.

It is important, therefore, that you consider your circumstances when applying for appointment and identify any potential conflicts of interest, whether real or perceived.

Surely a perceived conflict is not a problem, as long as I act impartially at all times?

The integrity of the individual is not in question here. However, it is necessary for the standing of the committee that members of the public have confidence in their independence and impartiality. Even a

perceived conflict of interest on the part a committee member can be extremely damaging to the committee's reputation and it is therefore essential that these are declared and explored, in the same way as an actual conflict would be. The fact that the committee member acted impartially may be no defence against accusations of potential bias.

What should I do if I think I have a conflict of interest?

You will find a section on the Application Form entitled '*Integrity and Conflicts of Interest*' for you to complete. This section of the form requires you to consider and declare whether or not you have a real, or perceived, conflict. If you are unsure if your circumstances constitute a possible conflict, you should still complete this section, in order to give the Selection Panel as much information as possible.

If I declare a conflict, does this mean I will not be considered for appointment?

No – each case is considered individually. If you are selected for interview, the Selection Panel will explore with you how far the conflict might affect your ability to carry out the functions of the committee effectively and impartially and how this might be handled, if you were to be appointed. However, if, following the discussion with you, the Selection Panel believes that the conflict is too great and would call into question the integrity of the appointment they can withdraw your application from the competition.

What happens if I do not declare a known conflict, which is then discovered by the Assembly Commission after my appointment?

Again, each case would be considered on its merits, but the Assembly Commission may take the view that by concealing a conflict of interest, you would have deemed to have breached the Seven Principles of Conduct Underpinning Public Life and may terminate your appointment

What happens if I do not realise a potential conflict exists?

This situation may arise where the applicant is not familiar with the broad range of work which a body covers and therefore does not realise that a conflict might exist. In some cases, the Panel, with their wider knowledge of the body, might deduce that there is a potential conflict issue, based on the information on employment and experience provided by the candidate in the application form.

What happens if a conflict of interest arises after an appointment is made?

This could arise for two main reasons. The first is that the member's circumstances may change, for example, they may change jobs and in

doing so, a conflict with their work on the committee becomes apparent. The second is where a member is unfamiliar with the range of the work of the committee, but after appointment, it becomes clear that a conflict exists where none had been envisaged during the appointment process.

In both cases, the issue should be discussed with the Chair of the committee and the Clerk/Chief Executive to decide whether or not the member can continue to carry out their role in an appropriate manner and each case is considered individually.

It may be that the conflict is such that it would be impractical for the member to continue on the committee, if they would have to withdraw from a considerable amount of the committee's routine business. In such cases, the member may be asked to stand down from the committee.

Areas where a conflict could arise

There are a number of issues, which could lead to real, or apparent, conflicts of interest. These include:

- Relevant pecuniary or other interests outside the organisation
- Relationships with other individuals/parties/organisations which could lead to perceived or real split loyalties
- Perception of rewards for past contributions or favours
- Membership of some societies or organisations

The above list of issues is not exhaustive, so you should consider carefully your own circumstances to gauge whether or not a real, or perceived, conflict might exist.

THE NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY SECRETARIAT

