

## **Departmental Response to NDNA Review of COPNI Recommendations**

### **Recommendation 1**

The statutory functions ascribed to the Commissioner meet the Cabinet Office requirements and therefore must be retained to satisfy the requirements of the Older People Act (Northern Ireland) 2011.

### **Departmental Comment and Action – Accepted**

The Department accepts the rationale for this recommendation and is cognisant that the integrity of the respective founding legislation remains intact.

### **Recommendation 2**

We recommend that TEO should continue to appoint the Commissioner which, by virtue of requiring the endorsement of the First and Deputy First Ministers, will confer added political legitimacy on the appointee.

### **Departmental Comment and Action – Accepted**

The Department accepts the rationale for this recommendation and has considered it noting that any change to the appointment process is a decision which lies with First and deputy First Minister.

### **Recommendation 3**

We recommend that the Department of Communities (DfC) should engage with TEO when Ministers and an Executive are in place to consider whether, in addition to appointing the Commissioner, TEO should also be the sponsor Department for COPNI. Whichever Department sponsors COPNI, the new Partnership Agreement should be focussed on governance, organisational strategy and demonstration of impact.

### **Departmental Comment and Action – Accepted**

The Department accepts, and is engaging with TEO on, this recommendation.

#### **Recommendation 4**

Notwithstanding decisions about sponsorship arrangements, we recommend that consideration is given to whether the Commissioner should remain as a freestanding Corporation Sole or become a Statutory Office of a Department.

#### **Departmental Comment and Action – Accepted**

The Department accepts the rationale for this recommendation and will give consideration to whether the Commissioner should remain as a freestanding Corporation Sole or become a Statutory Office of a Department.

#### **Recommendation 5**

In view of the importance of Audit and Risk Assurance Committee (ARAC), we recommend:

- action is taken as a matter of urgency to appoint a new ARAC;
- that the sponsor Department is included in the appointment arrangements for ARAC members;
- the Terms of Reference (ToR) are reviewed annually;
- an effectiveness review is undertaken annually;
- COPNI agrees an annual work programme with the Committee;
- there are regular meetings of the Internal Audit (IA), External Audit (EA) and the Department;
- DfC and COPNI consider using the NICS IA group to provide IA services when the current contract terminates; and
- DfC should have input into the appraisal of the ARAC Chair.

#### **Departmental Comment and Action – Accepted**

The Department accepts the rationale for these recommendations in relation to the importance and operation of COPNI's ARAC.

The Department as part of its response to these recommendations is providing additional support through the Chair of the Departmental ARAC to share best practice and learning with ARAC Chair counterparts in COPNI.

#### **Recommendation 6**

We recommend that COPNI establish an Advisory Board in consultation with the Department in order to provide the Commissioner with independent advice on strategy and impact.

### **Departmental Comment and Action – Accepted**

The Department supports the rationale behind, and will give further consideration to, the recommendation.

### **Recommendation 7**

We recommend that the Department give consideration to reviewing the senior management structure which currently has a Chief Executive post supporting the Commissioner.

### **Departmental Comment and Action – Accepted**

The Department accepts the rationale for this recommendation.

To ensure that the objectives of these recommendations are fulfilled the Department will work with partners to explore restructuring.

### **Recommendation 8**

There could also be the potential for efficiency savings if the Commissioner were to be designated a Statutory Office of a NI Department. While we would recommend that consideration is given to the Commissioner becoming a Statutory Officer of the Department, particularly in terms of efficiency, this could have implications for the Commissioner's independence and capacity to effectively hold government to account.

### **Departmental Comment and Action – Accepted**

The Department accepts the rationale for these recommendations in relation to the potential for efficiency savings; however, it also recognises the need for the Commissioners to maintain their independence when fulfilling their statutory duties.

### **Recommendation 9**

In the event of hybrid working becoming the norm, we recommend that opportunities are explored for finding efficiencies in COPNI's accommodation costs.

### **Departmental Comment and Action – Accepted**

The Department accepts these recommendations and supports exploration of opportunities for finding efficiencies.

### **Recommendation 10**

Looking ahead we recommend that COPNI revise and develop the outcome framework to inform a more pro-active (formative) approach to evaluation and impact reporting.

### **Recommendation 11**

This would involve COPNI clearly identifying and defining those outcomes that are within their remit and resource to deliver.

### **Recommendation 12**

In addition, identifying that good relationships with key decision makers can be a key factor affecting successful influence on policy/practice development, we would recommend that COPNI include the concept of 'relationship building' as a key outcome.

### **Departmental Comment and Action – Accepted**

The Department supports the rationale behind these recommendations.

The Department will work with the Commissioners and their staff to identify and develop an outcomes-based framework within the delivery remit and resources available