

**Wales Audit Office Board**  
**Minutes of the meeting on Monday 12 and Tuesday 13 February 2024**  
**Held in the WAO Llandudno Junction office and by Teams**

**Members:**

Kathryn Chamberlain	Chair and non-executive member
Adrian Crompton	Chief Executive and Auditor General for Wales (by Teams)
Alison Gerrard	Non-executive member and Chair of the Remuneration & HR Committee (R&HRC)
Anne Beegan	Elected employee member
Chris Bolton	Elected employee member
Darren Griffiths	Appointed employee member
David Francis	Non-executive member and Senior Independent Director
Elinor Gwynn	Non-executive member
Ian Rees	Non-executive member and Chair of the Audit & Risk Assurance Committee (A&RAC)

**Apologies:****In attendance:**

Anne-Louise Clark	Executive Director of Communications and Change (EDCC)
Ann-Marie Harkin	Executive Director of Audit Services (EDAS)
Kevin Thomas	Executive Director of Corporate Services (EDCS)
Katherine Drysdale	Board Secretary (minutes)
Andrew Doughton	Audit Manager (item 15)
Bethan Hopkins	Audit Lead (item 15) (by Teams)
Carwyn Rees,	Audit Manager (item 15) (by Teams)
Dave Thomas	Audit Director (item 15) (by Teams)
Fflur Jones	Audit Lead (item 15)
Gareth Lucey	Audit Director (item 15)
Matthew Edwards	Audit Director (item 15)
Matthew Hockridge	Head of Planning & Reporting (items 7 and 13) (by Teams)
Michelle Phoenix	Audit Manager (item 15)
Nicola Evans	Head of Finance (item 7) (by Teams)
Simon Monkhouse	Audit Lead (item 15)
Terry Jones	AD&G Manager Audit Quality & Policy (item 5) (by Teams)

**Observers:**

Bethan Smith	GPX Programme Manager (items 1 to 11)
Lora Williams	Senior Auditor Performance (items 1 to 11)

Item	Agenda
1	Welcome and apologies
2	Declarations of interests
3	Review of minutes: Board meeting 22 & 23 November 2023
4	Review of action tracker
5	Report of the Chief Executive and Auditor General
6	Chair's update
7	Integrated performance report
8	Review of decision to carry out accounts audit work in house

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Item	Agenda
9	Report from the Chair of the A&RAC (December meeting)
10	Insurance services contract award
11	Development day outputs
12	Report from the Chair of the R&HRC (January meeting) (taken in private)
13	Draft Annual Plan 2024-25 with KPIs
14	Staff survey: full results and management response
15	Audit Services presentation: 'Organisational Governance Failures'
16	Review of the forward work programme
17	Any other business
18	Review of the meeting
19	Date of next meeting: 20 and 21 March 2024, Cardiff

Item	Minutes	Action
<b>Standing Items</b>		
<b>1</b>	<b>Chair's welcome and apologies for absence</b>	
1.1	The Chair welcomed members and those in attendance to the Board's first meeting at the Llandudno Junction office.	
<b>2</b>	<b>Declarations of interest</b>	
2.1	Employee members, Executive Directors and staff present declared a pecuniary interest in item 12 (Report from the Chair of the R&HRC (January meeting) which related to pay and reward. The Board Chair declared a related interest in that item. Employee Board members, Executive Directors and observers would leave the meeting for item 12 to be taken in private. The EDCS would be available to answer questions, then leave. The Board Secretary would remain to maintain the record.	
<b>3</b>	<b>Review of minutes: Board meeting 22 &amp; 23 November 2023</b>	
3.1	The Board approved the minutes of its meeting on 22 and 23 November 2023 as an accurate record.	
<b>4</b>	<b>Review of action tracker</b>	
4.1	The Board received an update on delivery against actions on the Board action tracker.	
<b>5</b>	<b>Chair's Update</b>	
5.1	The Chair updated the Committee on work carried out and planned. She referred to her visit with the AGW to the National Audit Office to observe a Board meeting, from which she had noted similarities both in approach and agenda priorities. The Board briefly discussed the learning from the visit, and the need to arrange its meetings and work programme to ensure the Board was spending its time effectively.	
5.2	The Board noted the update.	
<b>6</b>	<b>Report of the Chief Executive and Auditor General</b>	

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6.1	<p>The Auditor General and Chief Executive presented his update and highlighted that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• his commentary on challenges for Welsh public services would be published week commencing 19 February 2024;</li> <li>• two additional independent members had been appointed to the Audit Quality Committee which would further strengthen audit quality arrangements; and</li> <li>• only eight staff had yet to return their acceptance of the change in terms and conditions relating to the designation of travel centres, some of whom were on long term absence.</li> </ul>	
6.2	<p>The Committee briefly discussed the proposed changes to notice periods for some staff which had been agreed with the trade unions under the collective agreement, and the progress made in the development and use of data analytics in the delivery of audits.</p>	
6.3	<p>The Board noted the report.</p>	
<b>7</b>	<b>Integrated Performance Report</b>	
7.1	<p>The EDCC presented the quarter three performance update covering the current areas of focus for the ELT, key strategic risks, the financial position to the end of December 2023 and delivery against the annual plan KPIs and the five-year strategy. She highlighted that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• resourcing and vacancies continued to be of concern and had impacted both audit delivery and finances;</li> <li>• however, risks relating to resourcing for delivery of the audit programme (risk 25) and fee income delivery (risk 34) had been de-escalated, taking account of mitigating activity including recruitment and workforce planning;</li> <li>• the risk relating to financial sustainability (risk 30) was expected to be de-escalated before year end, when savings for 2024-25 and beyond were identified; and</li> <li>• the ELT intended to focus on maximising the opportunity areas identified from the analysis of the staff survey results.</li> </ul>	
7.2	<p>The Head of Finance explained that the year-end surplus forecast at the end of December had reduced following agreement by the ELT to revise income forecasts, commit to in-year expenditure and increase the year end contingency.</p>	
7.3	<p>The Board discussed risk management including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the de-escalated risk relating to resourcing (risk 25), seeking assurance on the level of that risk and the basis for its de-escalation. The EDAS explained that resourcing remained a concern but that she had taken account of successful recruitment to Senior Auditor roles, the healthy level of applications for vacant trainee roles and the progress being made in the development of the workforce plan which was providing a clearer picture of supply and demand.</li> </ul>	

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the risk relating to financial sustainability (risk 30), noting the challenge for management to identify savings for 2024-25 to reach the £400,000 savings target set out in the Estimate for 2024-25.</li> </ul>	
7.4	<p>The Board noted that management was seeking to actively manage risks and adjust risk ratings to reflect mitigating action achieved through stronger controls, and that levels of risk could be adjusted dynamically to reflect changes. The Board asked that the A&amp;RAC review the de-escalated risks to satisfy itself that the controls contributing to the de-escalation directly mapped to those risks and were sufficient justification for the de-escalations reported.</p>	A&RAC
7.5	<p>The Board discussed finances, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the year end cost to complete contingency, and whether the TRM system meant this figure was more robust. The Head of Finance explained that the figure was an estimate, but certainty would increase towards year end, and would be supported by data from the TRM system.</li> <li>• the approach to billing, where the ELT had decided not to fully charge for overruns where forecasts for the implementation of ISA315 had been underestimated due to the uncertainty. The Head of Finance explained that this accounted for a relatively small sum and the change to the year-end contingency also reflected changes in audit delivery.</li> </ul>	
7.6	<p>The Board was satisfied that the ELT had revised internal budgets within the ambit of the Estimate to manage a matter of uncertainty and had appropriately made the Board aware of that. The Board noted that the TRM system was gradually supporting better budgeting with reliability of forecasts expected to improve, and overall a stronger stance on billing was being taken. The Head of Finance explained that she intended to conduct an exercise to review budgeting against actual figures and the underpinning assumptions.</p>	
7.7	<p>In response to a question, the ELT agreed to consider providing an update to staff on the financial position to celebrate positive steps and recognising the continuing hard work of staff to deliver.</p>	ELT
7.8	<p>The Board noted the report.</p>	
<b>8</b>	<b>Review of decision to carry out accounts audit work in house</b>	
8.1	<p>The EDAS presented a paper providing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a commentary on the validity of the rationale for the Board's 2019 decision to cease outsourcing work to private sector firms;</li> <li>• advice on the factors for the Board to consider in reviewing that decision; and</li> <li>• perspectives provided by the firms and the other UK audit agencies on the status of the contracting market.</li> </ul> <p>She summarised the recommendation from the ELT that the 2019 Board decision remained valid.</p>	
8.2	<p>The Board discussed:</p>	

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the impact of losing Agricultural Funds work in 2024, noting that in the short to medium term there would be sufficient work for staff deployed on that work due to the backlog in audits and the ELT anticipated that as the backlog reduced, staff levels would adjust appropriately through normal processes.</li> <li>• the potential for the AGW to bid to audit the accounts of other organisations, for example, the Welsh Government owned Development Bank for Wales or Cardiff Airport, noting that this was unlikely due to the specialist expertise that would be needed for such audits but, that the AGW had powers to carry out value for money work at such organisations.</li> </ul>	
8.3	The Board thanked the EDAS and AD&G Manager Audit Quality & Policy for their thorough review and confirmed its previous decision not to seek to contract audit work to the firms at this point in time.	
<b>9</b>	<b>Report from the Chair of the A&amp;RAC</b>	
9.1	<p>The Chair of the A&amp;RAC presented his report of the Committee’s meeting on 07 September. He highlighted that the Committee had been pleased to note progress against delivery of the DPO’s recommendations in her update to the Committee in December. The EDCS briefly updated the Board on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the work underway to achieve Cyber Essentials Plus re-accreditation and the potential barriers to achieving a full accreditation,</li> <li>• his discussions with the Welsh Government Head of IT Security who was satisfied with Audit Wales approach to and arrangements for cyber security; and</li> <li>• work being conducted by the Head of IT to explore the Gov Assure cyber security accreditation (that the Welsh Government was pursuing) to establish whether this assurance-based approach could offer a viable alternative to Cyber Essentials Plus.</li> </ul>	
9.2	The Board briefly discussed the difficulties in achieving full Cyber Essentials Plus accreditation, noting that an ‘except for’ style of accreditation was increasingly prevalent, but the EDCS and HoIT advised against that approach. The Board asked that an options appraisal for the respective cyber security accreditations be presented to A&RAC to inform any future decisions.	EDCS
9.3	<p>The Board noted the report, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the DPO progress report;</li> <li>• the revised timetable for Cyber Essentials Plus re-accreditation, which had been set before Audit Wales had been made aware of the potential for GovAssure accreditation;</li> <li>• the Internal Audit Reports; and</li> <li>• that the Committee had endorsed the updated the Counter Fraud, Bribery and Corruption Strategy and Plan in accordance with its Terms of Reference.</li> </ul>	

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9.4	On the recommendation of the Committee the Board approved: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• consequential revisions to the Financial Management Handbook and Scheme of Delegations to reflect the changes in responsibilities outlined in the Counter Fraud, Bribery and Corruption Strategy and Plan; and</li> <li>• the addition of Artificial Intelligence to the risk appetite statement with a 'cautious' rating.</li> </ul>	
9.5	The Board supported the Committee's proposal to carry out a strategic deep dive into the risks and opportunities of artificial intelligence at Audit Wales, noting that members who were not appointed to the Committee could contact the Committee Chair to seek an invitation to the meeting for that discussion.	
<b>10.</b>	<b>Insurance Services: contract award</b>	
10.1	The EDCS presented a paper outlining the process for, and outcome of, the insurance services procurement exercise and making a recommendation for the contract award. He explained that Board approval was sought in accordance with the Scheme of Delegations due to the lifetime value of the contract.	
10.2	The Board noted that lot 4 of the contract had received only one bid from a supplier who would only enter a contract if all 4 lots were awarded.	
10.3	The Board approved: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the award of Lots 1, 2 and 3 for insurance services to Travelers Insurance UK for a period of three years, with the option to renew annually for a further two years; and</li> <li>• re-procurement of Lot 4 of Audit Wales insurance services requirement through a broker-led quotation exercise.</li> </ul>	
<b>11</b>	<b>Development Day Outputs</b>	
11.1	The Board Secretary presented a paper summarising the work carried out after the Board development day and presenting the Board Development Plan and Board Priorities documents for input and approval. She explained that she had also reviewed the Board's work programme, and proposed changes to the Board Terms of Reference to reflect the Board's discussions of link and champion roles.	
11.2	The Board briefly discussed the draft priorities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• suggesting that it would be helpful for the paper cover sheet template to be extended to reference the Board business plan, so authors could outline the way in which their paper linked or contributed to the Board's priorities; the Board Secretary would extend the paper cover sheet;</li> <li>• asking that the Board business plan (priorities) be annexed to each Board pack as a reminder for members;</li> <li>• considering whether the priorities gave sufficient coverage to the Board gaining overall assurance on risk management; the Chair of A&amp;RAC , supported by the Board Secretary, would consider how to provide such</li> </ul>	BS BS BS / IR



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	<p>assurance (or not) through the reports following the meetings of the A&amp;RAC; and</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>seeking confirmation from the ELT that they were content with the priorities; the Chief Executive confirmed that the priorities would provide a useful framework to help the Board fulfil its role.</li> </ul>	
11.3	The Board Chair asked that members maintain a record of time spent on Board activities so this could be taken account of in planning meetings and other Board work to ensure best use could be made of the time available.	All
11.4	<p>The Board:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>approved its development programme for 2024-25;</li> <li>approved the ongoing appointment of the Board Chair as Board link for audit quality, and removal of other Board link roles for the present time, reminding the ELT that Board members were available on request to contribute as link members where this would add value to a project or piece of work;</li> <li>approved the revision of its Terms of Reference to remove reference to Board champions and update the description and responsibilities of the Board link role;</li> <li>approved its business plan (priorities) 2024-25; and</li> <li>noted the review of its work programme.</li> </ul>	
<b>12</b>	<b>Report from the Chair of the R&amp;HRC (January meeting) (confidential - taken in private)</b>	
12.1	The Chair reminded the meeting that due to a conflict of interest employee members, Executive Directors and observers would leave the meeting for the discussion and decision on the Report from the Chair of the R&HRC (January meeting). The EDCS would remain to answer questions, then leave for the decision to be taken. The Board Secretary would remain to maintain the record.	
12.2	Anne Beegan, Chris Bolton, Darren Griffiths, Anne-Louise Clark, Ann-Marie Harkin, Lora Williams and Bethan Smith left the meeting.	
12.3	[Text redacted]	
12.4	[Text redacted]	
12.5	Kevin Thomas left the meeting.	
12.6	[Text redacted]	
12.7	Anne Beegan, Chris Bolton, Darren Griffiths, Anne-Louise Clark, Ann-Marie Harkin and Kevin Thomas rejoined the meeting.	
<b>13</b>	<b>Draft Annual Plan with KPIs</b>	
13.1	By way of context for the discussion of the draft Annual Plan, the Auditor General explained that more work was needed to refine the number of priority areas and make them more specific, to provide clarity on what was planned for 2024-25 and how that would move Audit Wales towards achievement of the five-year strategy.	
13.2	The EDCC briefly outlined the process for the development of the draft Annual Plan and the Head of Planning and Reporting explained the	

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	purpose of the Annual Plan, the expected format and the requirement for the Annual Plan to be laid before the Senedd by the end of March 2024.	
13.3	<p>The Board discussed the draft plan and was content with the clear structure and the longer-term context provided. The Board made suggestions:</p> <p>(a) for the plan to be developed to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• improve overall clarity and impact;</li> <li>• show what the plan was expected deliver in 2024-25 and how it would support achievement of the five-year strategy, with timelines for delivery of the priorities;</li> <li>• meet the needs of multiple external stakeholders, including Finance Committee, audited bodies and the wider public, and demonstrate the value of the work delivered by Audit Wales;</li> <li>• meet the needs of and inspire staff;</li> <li>• clarify where stakeholders could find more detail on the priority areas, eg, staff could access internal business plans; and</li> <li>• reference KPI baselines to provide an idea of what is good / bad.</li> </ul> <p>(b) for management to consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• KPI targets and tolerances; and</li> <li>• the wording and meaning of the vision statement.</li> </ul>	
13.4	The Board noted that The Head of Planning and Reporting would further develop the plan with a view to presenting a final version to the Board for approval in March 2024.	
<b>14</b>	<b>Staff Survey: Full Results and Management Response</b>	
14.1	<p>The EDCC presented a paper outlining:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the key messages from the 2023 staff survey, highlighting areas of strength and opportunities for improvement; and</li> <li>• management's response, which proposed a focus on communicating a compelling vision for the organisation and ensuring equity and fairness around performance management.</li> </ul>	
14.2	<p>The Board considered:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the gap between strong line manager scores and low organisational engagement;</li> <li>• the role of line managers in providing consistent messaging and coherent collective leadership;</li> <li>• the impact of changes in the performance management system, from an annual performance appraisal to a coaching approach; and</li> <li>• the nuances of neutral scores and the value of seeking to address those, noting that the civil service benchmarking information might help understand whether this prevalence was specific to Audit Wales or more widespread.</li> </ul>	
14.3	In discussing performance management, employee member feedback suggested that following the move to a coaching style of performance	



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	management, some line managers were focussing on agreeing developmental objectives with their staff notwithstanding policy guidance for a mix of delivery and development objectives.	
14.4	The Board discussed the implications of an inconsistent approach to policy implementation and emphasised the importance of reinforcing expectations of line managers and outlining the consequences of failing to meet them. The Board suggested that management also consider how staff could be empowered to take individual responsibility and actively manage upwards. The Board asked the R&HRC to explore how consistently performance management processes were working, and whether suitable combinations of delivery and developmental objectives were being set.	R&HRC
14.5	The Board also considered how staff could be engaged at a corporate level and the potential value of establishing a cycle of engagement such as an annual all staff event supported by spring and autumn roadshows, where messages could be reinforced. In engaging with staff the Board also suggested that expectations for attendance be articulated.	
14.6	The EDCC briefly outlined her proposed approach to using the CultureAmp platform for future surveys which would include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• an autumn survey on the elements of employee experience that were not included in the 2023 survey (eg whistleblowing and matters relating to equality, diversity and inclusion), supported by a selection of engagement questions; and</li> <li>• a late spring survey following the all-staff event and spring road shows to evaluate whether there was increased confidence in the communication of the vision for Audit Wales.</li> </ul>	
14.7	The Board: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• endorsed the areas of focus and the approach, suggesting leveraging line manager contributions and setting out clear expectations for staff to develop a culture of greater accountability, expectations and monitoring;</li> <li>• asked for an annual employee engagement survey to be maintained to provide ongoing insight, as well as comparative information which could be reported to the Finance Committee; and</li> <li>• asked that the EDCC would review the timing and content for additional in year surveys to cover any gaps.</li> </ul>	EDCC
<b>15</b>	<b>Audit Services Presentation: Organisational Governance Failures</b>	
15.1	Audit teams joined the meeting to provide their reflections on work carried out in North Wales, their learning and the impact of that work. Each team spoke to a presentation outlining the background to the audits, the work carried out, the key findings and the impact of both carrying out the work and the outcomes of the work.	
15.2	In discussing the presentation the Board was keen to understand:	

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• how and when information could be shared between Audit Wales and other agencies where issues relevant to them were picked up;</li> <li>• the emotional challenges and resilience required to carry out this work, and how individuals and teams coped and supported each other;</li> <li>• the impact on staff at audited bodies, and how audit teams coped with the reactions and emotions of those staff;</li> <li>• whether Audit Wales had sufficient 'surge capacity' to deal with unexpected issues which led to additional unplanned work, noting that this was being considered as part of workforce planning;</li> <li>• the potential that early identification of problems could prevent escalation of problems and so protect public money; and</li> <li>• the speed with which such governance failures could emerge.</li> </ul>	
15.3	The Auditor General expressed his pride in the work produced and the professionalism demonstrated by the teams involved and hoped that the presentation had given a flavour of the scale, significance and impact of that work. He suggested that there might be potential to consider seeking funding to enhance capacity to carry out more of this type of work, noting the value that Audit Wales could provide.	
15.4	In response to a question, the Auditor General explained that work was being done with bodies such as Estyn, Healthcare Inspectorate Wales and Care Inspectorate Wales to identify the warning signs of failures occurring. The Audit Directors also highlighted the importance of developing and maintaining good relationships with audited bodies so that they willingly shared information from which such warning signs could be identified. They explained that there was a strong appetite for Audit Wales to share its learning, and they had spent time with other audited bodies doing so.	
15.5	The Board Chair thanked the audit teams for their presentations and for finding the time to meet the Board and share experiences that provided valuable and real context for the Board's discussions on matters such as finances, resourcing and planning.	
<b>16</b>	<b>Any other business</b>	
16.1	The Chair of the A&RAC invited members to advise him of any specific areas that they considered should be looked at by the Committee or reported more fully to the Board to ensure there were no gaps in Board assurance.	All
<b>17</b>	<b>Review of the forward work programme</b>	
17.1	The Board discussed its forward work programme which the Board Secretary would update	
<b>18</b>	<b>Review of the meeting</b>	
18.1	<p>The Board noted feedback from members of staff observing the meeting, who commented on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the good relationship between the ELT and the Board, the balanced contributions and strong but helpful challenge; and</li> </ul>	

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the welcoming atmosphere, how the Board demonstrated its wish to be a model organisation, good scrutiny and challenge and effective chairing.</li> </ul>	
18.2	<p>Board members commented that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• that they had both enjoyed and felt the value of holding a meeting in the North Wales office, in particular meeting and engaging with staff;</li> <li>• the audit team presentations had been highly valuable, providing insight into audit work and giving a sense of what was happening in different spheres of the organisation; and</li> <li>• they would be happy to consider the feasibility of holding a Board meeting involving South / West Wales teams.</li> </ul>	
<b>19</b>	<b>Date of next meeting</b>	
19.1	Board meeting – Wednesday 20 and Thursday 21 March 2024, Cardiff	