



Partnership Agreement between Department for Communities and Armagh Observatory and Planetarium

April 2024



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Glossary of Terms	
The Armagh Observatory and Planetarium	AOP
The Armagh Observatory and Planetarium (Northern Ireland) Order 1995	1995 Order
Board of Governors of the Armagh Observatory and Planetarium	Board
Dear Accounting Officer letter	DAO
Department for Communities	DfC or the Department
Department of Finance	DoF
Programme for Government	PfG
Management Committee of the Armagh Observatory and Planetarium	Management Committee
Managing Public Money Northern Ireland	MPMNI
Minister of the Department for Communities	Minister
Public Sector Internal Audit Standards	PSIAS
The Comptroller and Auditor General	C&AG
The Director of the Armagh Observatory and Planetarium	Director

Introduction

1. The Partnership Agreement

1.1 This document sets out the partnership arrangements between Armagh Observatory and Planetarium (AOP) and the Department for Communities (DfC). In particular, it explains the overall governance framework within which AOP operates, including the framework through which the necessary assurances are provided to stakeholders. Roles/responsibilities of partners within the overall governance framework are also outlined.

1.2 The partnership is based on a mutual understanding of strategic aims and objectives; clear accountability; and a recognition of the distinct roles each party contributes. Underpinning the arrangements are the principles set out in the NI Code of Good Practice **‘Partnerships between Departments and Arm’s-Length Bodies’** which should be read in conjunction with this document. The principles which are laid out in the Code are:

Leadership

Partnerships work well when Departments and Arm’s Length Bodies demonstrate good leadership to achieve a shared vision and effective delivery of public services. Strong leadership will provide inspiration, instil confidence and trust and empower their respective teams to deliver good outcomes for citizens.

Purpose

Partnerships work well when the purpose, objectives and roles of Arm’s Length Bodies and the sponsor department are clear, mutually understood and reviewed on a regular basis. There needs to be absolute clarity about lines of accountability and responsibility between departments and Arm’s Length Bodies. In exercising statutory functions Arm’s Length Bodies need to have clarity about how their purpose and objectives align with those of departments.

Assurance

Partnerships work well when departments adopt a proportionate approach to assurance, based on Arm’s Length Bodies’ purpose and a mutual understanding of risk. Arm’s Length Bodies should have robust governance arrangements in place and in turn departments should give Arm’s Length Bodies the autonomy to deliver effectively. Management information should be what is needed to enable departments and Arm’s Length Bodies to provide assurance and assess performance.

Value
Partnerships work well when departments and Arm’s Length Bodies share knowledge, skills and experience in order to enhance their impact and delivery. Arm’s Length Bodies are able to contribute to policy making and departmental priorities. There is a focus on innovation, and on how departments and Arm’s Length Bodies work together to deliver the most effective policies and services for its customers.
Engagement
Partnerships work well when relationships between departments and Arm’s Length Bodies are open, honest, constructive and based on trust. There is mutual understanding about each other’s objectives and clear expectations about the terms of engagement.

A full copy of the NI Code can be found at Annex 8.

- 1.3 This document should also be read in conjunction with the extant guidance on proportionate autonomy which provides an outline of the principles and characteristics for proportionate autonomy. Guidance on proportionate autonomy has been considered in determining the extent of engagement and assurance to be established between AOP and DfC and this is reflected in this Agreement.
- Supporting and challenging each other on developing policy and delivery [when developing policy this may cut across more than one department];
 - Seeking to resolve issues quickly and constructively; and
 - Acting at all times in the public interest and in line with the values of integrity, honesty, objectivity and impartiality.
- 1.4 DfC and AOP are committed to:
- Working together within distinct roles and responsibilities;
 - Maintaining focus on successful delivery of Programme for Government (PfG) outcomes and Ministerial priorities;
 - Maintaining open and honest communication and dialogue;
 - Keeping each other informed of any issues and concerns, and of emerging areas of risk;
- 1.5 The effectiveness of the partnership and the associated Engagement Plan will be reviewed each year by DfC and AOP in order to assess whether the partnership is operating as intended and to identify any emerging issues/opportunities for enhancement. This can be carried out as part of existing governance arrangements. The Agreement document itself will be reviewed formally¹ at least once every three years to ensure it remains fit for purpose and up-to-date in terms of current

¹ Review will be initiated by DfC taking account of direction/guidance from DoF

governance frameworks. The formal review will be proportionate to the size and overall responsibilities of AOP with any revised Agreement published on DfC and AOP websites as soon as practicable following completion. Either party to the Agreement may request an amendment or update to it at any time.

- 1.6 Once complete DfC will be responsible for placing a copy of this Agreement in the Assembly Library.

AOP Establishment and Purpose

2. Statutory Purpose and Strategic Objectives

2.1 AOP is a non-departmental public body (NDPB). The Corporation created by the 1791 Act, 'An Act for settling and preserving a Public Observatory and museum in the City of Armagh forever', was re-named under the Armagh Observatory and Planetarium (Northern Ireland) Order 1995, (1995 Order), as the Governors of the Armagh Observatory and Planetarium, as amended by Schedule I, Paragraph 6 of the Audit and Accountability (NI) Order 2003. AOP does not carry out its functions on behalf of the Crown.

2.2 The 1995 Order states that the Board of Governors of AOP shall 'for the purpose of developing and improving the knowledge, appreciation and practice of astronomy and related sciences, maintain and manage the Armagh Observatory and Planetarium and may take such other action as the Governors may think proper for the purpose of acquiring or disseminating knowledge relating to astronomy and related sciences.' This includes:

- a) maintaining and managing the facilities;
- b) accepting gifts and bequests;
- c) giving assistance, including financial, to bodies with similar objectives;
- d) carrying out and assisting in carrying out research;
- e) charging for goods and services provided;
- f) providing information and advice; and
- g) allowing occupied/owned premises to be used by other persons.

2.3 AOP was designated as a registered charity on 1st April 2016.

2.4 The Minister for Communities is answerable to the Assembly for the overall performance and delivery of AOP.

2.5 The Executive's approach to delivery recognises the importance of Arm's Length Bodies and departments working collaboratively and together in a joined-up approach to improve overall outcomes and results. To that end there is strategic alignment between the aims, objectives and expected outcomes and results of AOP and DfC.

2.6 The vision and mission of AOP are stated in its Corporate Strategy 2021-2026:

“Our vision is to be recognised as an international centre of scientific excellence for the pursuit of astronomy and the public understanding of science, for our capacity for innovation and our extraordinary heritage, a place our community can be proud of.”

“Our mission is the pursuit of knowledge and understanding of the cosmos, and the sharing of that knowledge in order to inspire future generations and enrich the intellectual, economic, social and cultural life of all.”

2.7 The AOP Corporate Strategy is built around four interlocking themes:

<p>Enduring Relevance</p>	<p>“Our extraordinary heritage makes us a valued asset in terms of tourism and education, and a much-cherished presence in our community. We will continue to deepen and enhance that unique combination, ensuring that AOP’s continued role in promoting science retains local, national and international significance.”</p>
<p>National and International Standing</p>	<p>“AOP enjoys a reputation as a distinguished national and international research institute. That reputation is key to our goals of developing new research partnerships, securing research funding and contributing to scientific knowledge and engagement. We will continue to create opportunities and partnerships to enhance our standing as an education provider and a key contributor to the goal of giving children the best start in life.”</p>
<p>Offering More</p>	<p>“Science and technology go hand in hand. Throughout history, so-called ‘pure’ scientific research has given birth to technology that was hitherto unimagined. For AOP to pursue its mandate of public engagement, we are committed to an ambitious plan for state-of-the-art data visualisation facilities. These will allow us to explain and explore ideas in stunning new and engaging ways. For us, technology is not the goal: it is the means to deliver, share and inspire.”</p>
<p>Pursuing Our Priorities</p>	<p>“Our institution was founded on a pioneering spirit, a restless curiosity. With that desire to know comes an equal impetus: a desire to share. We have followed those twin pursuits across four centuries. To realise our plans and achieve the goals articulated here strengthens the rationale for three key priorities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • state of the art Research and Planetarium facilities • the need to grow our capacity • the need to add skills across the organisation. <p>Together these will help us broaden our reach, deepen our resilience and enhance our economic sustainability.”</p>

- 2.8 In developing its Strategic Plan 2021-2026 AOP took into account its statutory responsibilities, the January 2021 Draft Programme for Government (PfG) Outcomes Framework and the Department’s core purpose (namely Supporting People, Building Communities and Shaping Places) particularly in its public-facing activities. The Plan includes diagrams that illustrate how each theme maps to multiple PfG Outcomes, how AOP activities are cross-departmental, and also how AOP objectives contribute to DfC core values.
- 2.9 To that end there is strategic alignment between the aims, objectives and expected outcomes and results of AOP and DfC.

AOP Governance Arrangements

3. Organisational Status

- 3.1 AOP is a legal entity in its own right, employing its own staff and operating at arm's-length from the Department. As a legal entity it must comply with all associated legislation including that relating to its employer status and charitable status.

4. Governance Framework

- 4.1 AOP has an established Corporate Governance Framework which reflects all relevant good practice guidance. The framework includes the governance structures established within AOP and the internal control and risk management arrangements. This includes the AOP Board, Management Committee and subcommittee structures. The Department is satisfied with the framework.
- 4.2 An account of this is included in the AOP annual Governance Statement together with the AOP Board's assessment of its compliance with the extant Corporate Governance Code of Good Practice (NI). Any departure from the Corporate Governance Code must be explained in the Governance Statement. The extant Corporate Governance Code of Good Practice (NI) is available on the DoF website.

- 4.3 AOP is required to follow the principles, rules, guidance and advice in Managing Public Money Northern Ireland (MPMNI). A list of other applicable guidance and instructions which AOP is required to follow is set out in Annex 6. Good governance should also include positive stakeholder engagement, the building of positive relationships and a listening and learning culture.

5. AOP Board Specifics

- 5.1 AOP is led by a Board. Paragraph 2(1) of Schedule 1 of the 1995 Order states the Board shall consist of:
- a) the Church of Ireland Archbishop of Armagh who shall be Chair of the Governors;
 - b) the Dean of the Chapter of the Church of Ireland Cathedral of Armagh;
 - c) the other members of the Chapter of the Church of Ireland Cathedral of Armagh;
 - d) one person appointed by the Department in line with the Code of Practice issued by the Commissioner for Public Appointments for Northern Ireland;
 - e) one person appointed by the Queen's University of Belfast;
 - f) any persons for the time being appointed under sub paragraph (2).

Sub paragraph 2 of Schedule 1 of the 1995 Order states ‘the Governors referred to in sub-paragraph (1)(a) to (e) may appoint not more than 3 other persons to be members of the Governors.

5.2 Paragraph 4 of the 1995 Order places a statutory duty on the Board to maintain and manage AOP with the purpose of ‘developing and improving the knowledge, appreciation and practice of astronomy and related sciences, maintain and manage the Armagh Observatory and Planetarium ...’.

5.3 Whilst the Chair of the Board of Governors is responsible to the Minister for matters relating to AOP, and shares with other Board members the corporate responsibilities, in accordance with paragraph 8 of the 1995 Order, the Board has delegated primary responsibility for the governance and management of AOP to a Management Committee.

5.4 The Board has retained a role to ensure that the culture and character, history and patrimony embodied in AOP are protected and preserved and that the institution is managed in line with the statutory purpose outlined in the 1995 Order. This role is normally fulfilled through an Annual Review meeting (visitation) where the Board receives assurance as to the management and performance of AOP from the Management Committee.

5.5 At its Annual Review meeting (visitation), the Board will:

- consider the formal report of the Chair of the Management Committee on the work of the Committee; (and any other committees or sub committees);
- consider the formal report of the Director on the management and performance of the organisation, ensuring objectives have been met;
- assure itself that the culture, character, history and patrimony of AOP are being protected and preserved; and
- assure itself that AOP is being governed and managed in accordance with the statutory purpose set out in the Order.

5.6 When appropriate the Board will:

- appoint a Chief Executive Officer/ Director to AOP in partnership with the Department;
- make appointments to the Management Committee including the Chair position;
- appoint all nominees to the Management Committee proposed by the Department;
- by exception, seek approval from the Department for three additional co-optees to be appointed to the Management Committee for a specific purpose; and
- amend the terms of reference of the Board and the Management Committee.

6. Management Committee Specifics

- 6.1 The Management Committee consists of up to 13 members made up of the following;
- a) A Chair;
 - b) 3 nominees from the AOP Board;
 - c) 6 nominees from DfC (Public/ Ministerial Appointees);
 - d) 1 nominee from QUB;
 - e) 1 nominee from Science and Technology Facilities Council (STFC); and
 - f) 1 nominee from Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies (DIAS).
- 6.2 The purpose of the Management Committee is to provide effective leadership and strategic direction to the organisation and to ensure that the policies and priorities set by the Board and the Minister for Communities are implemented. It is responsible for ensuring that the organisation has effective and proportionate governance arrangements in place and an internal control framework which allow risks to be effectively identified and managed. The Management Committee, acknowledging the direction set by the Board, will define the culture and values of the organisation, and set the tone for the organisation's engagement with stakeholders and customers.

6.3 The Management Committee is responsible for holding the Director to account for the management of the organisation and the delivery of agreed plans and outcomes. The Management Committee also provides support to the Director as appropriate in the exercise of their duties.

6.4 The Management Committee is responsible for setting the terms of reference for its sub committees.

7. Board and Management Committee Arrangements

7.1 The appointment process for the public appointments made by the Department to the Board and Management Committee complies with the Code of Practice on Public Appointments for Northern Ireland with appointments made, in line with the 1995 Order, for a period of 5 years.

7.2 Board and Management Committee members are office holders rather than employees, they are not subject to employee terms and conditions. Public appointee appraisal arrangements are set out in paras 19.1 and 19.2. Matters for consideration in dealing with concerns/complaints in respect of all members are provided in Annex 5.

7.3 The Board and Management Committee's terms of references provide further detail on roles and responsibilities and are supplementary to this Agreement.

- 7.4 Board and Management Committee members act in the interests of AOP and must not use their positions as a platform to champion their own interests or pursue personal agendas. They occupy a position of trust and their standards of action and behaviour must be exemplary and in line with the seven principles of public life (Nolan principles). AOP has a Code of Conduct for members and there are mechanisms in place to deal with any disputes/conflicts to ensure they do not become wider issues that impact on the effectiveness of the Board/Management Committee. A Register of Interests is maintained, kept up to date and is publicly available to help provide transparency and promote public confidence in AOP.
- 7.5 Communication and relations within the Board/Management Committee are underpinned by a spirit of trust and professional respect. The Board/Management Committee recognises that using consensus to avoid conflict or encouraging members to consistently express similar views or consider only a few alternative views does not encourage constructive debate and does not give rise to an effective dynamic.
- 7.6 It is for the Board/Management Committee to decide what information it needs, and in what format, for its meetings/effective operation. If either is not confident that it is being fully informed about the organisation this will be addressed by the Chair as the Board/Management Committee cannot be effective with out-of-date or only partial knowledge.
- 7.7 In order to fulfil their duties, Board/Management Committee members must undertake initial training. The Board will review its collective strategic performance annually which will include identifying any training requirements. The Management Committee's annual self-assessment of its effectiveness will include identifying any skills and development requirements.
- 7.8 AOP and DfC have agreed arrangements in respect of the Board/Management Committee which includes:
- attendance, if requested, by departmental representatives in an observer capacity at meetings or sub committee meetings; and
 - access to the AOP Board/Management and subcommittee papers and draft minutes.
- 7.9 Information will be provided by the AOP Board/Management Committee if requested by DfC.
- 8. Audit and Risk Assurance Committee**
- 8.1 A further important aspect of the AOP governance framework is its Audit and Risk Assurance Committee (ARAC), established in line with the extant Audit and Risk Assurance Committee Handbook (NI).

- 8.2 The ARAC's purpose/role is to support the Accounting Officer, Board, and Management Committee on governance issues. In line with the Handbook the ARAC focuses on:
- assurance arrangements over governance; financial reporting; annual reports and accounts, including the Governance Statement; and
 - ensuring there is an adequate and effective risk management and assurance framework in place.
- 8.3 AOP and DfC have agreed arrangements in respect of the AOP ARAC which includes:
- attendance by departmental representatives in an observer capacity at ARAC meetings; and
 - access to the ARAC papers and draft minutes.
- 8.4 Information will be provided by the ARAC if requested by DfC.
- 8.5 Full compliance with the Handbook is an essential requirement. In the event of significant non-compliance with the Handbook's five good practice principles (or other non-compliance) discussion will be required with the Department and a full explanation provided in the annual Governance Statement.
- 8.6 The extant Handbook is available on the DoF website.

9. AOP Board of Governors Chair

- 9.1 The Church of Ireland Archbishop of Armagh is designated as the Chair under paragraph 2(1)(a) of the 1995 Order. The Chair is responsible for ensuring that the culture, character, history and patrimony of AOP are protected and that the institution is managed in line with the statutory purpose outlined in the 1995 Order. The Chair is responsible to the Minister on matters relating to AOP and for ensuring that AOP fulfils the aims and objectives set by the Department and approved by the Minister. In accordance with paragraph 8(1) of Schedule 1 of the 1995 Order, the Governors have delegated primary responsibility for the governance and management of AOP to a Management Committee.
- 9.2 In addition to an annual meeting of the Board of Governors (visitation) to receive assurance on the performance and development of AOP, the Chair meets periodically throughout the year with the Chair of the Management Committee to receive updates.
- 9.3 The Chair is responsible for setting the agenda and managing the Board to enable collaborative and robust discussion of issues. To achieve this, the Chair should ensure:
- Board members are fully briefed on terms of appointment, duties, rights and responsibilities;
 - Board members receive and maintain appropriate training;

- The Minister is advised of the needs of AOP when Board public appointment vacancies arise;
- There is a Board terms of reference in place which sets out the roles and responsibilities of the Board, which are consistent with relevant guidance; and
- Members abide by the extant DoF code of practice for governance.

9.4 The Chair role requires the establishment of an effective working relationship with the Management Committee Chair and the AOP Director that is simultaneously collaborative and challenging. It is important that each act in accordance with their distinct roles and responsibilities as laid out in MPMNI and where applicable appointment letters.

9.5 The Chair has a presence in the organisation and needs to cultivate external relationships which provide useful links while being mindful of overstepping boundaries and becoming too involved in day-to-day operations, Management Committee, or executive activities.

10. AOP Management Committee Chair

- 10.1 The Chair is responsible to the AOP Board.
- 10.2 The Chair is responsible for setting the agenda and managing the Management Committee to enable collaborative and robust discussion of issues. The Chair's role is to develop

and motivate the Management Committee and ensure effective relationships in order that the Management Committee can work collaboratively to reach a consensus on decisions. To achieve this, the Chair should ensure:

- The Management Committee has an appropriate balance of skills appropriate to its business;
- Management Committee members are fully briefed on terms of appointment, duties, rights and responsibilities;
- Management Committee members receive and maintain appropriate training;
- The Minister is advised of the needs of AOP when Management Committee public appointment vacancies arise;
- There is a Management Committee Operating Framework in place, which along with the terms of references, sets out the roles and responsibilities of the Management Committee, which are consistent with relevant guidance; and
- Members abide by the extant DoF code of practice for governance.

10.3 The Chair's role requires the establishment of an effective working relationship with the Chair of the Board and the AOP Director that is simultaneously collaborative and challenging. It is important that each act in accordance with their distinct roles and responsibilities as laid out in MPMNI and where applicable appointment letters.

10.4 The Chair has a presence in the organisation and needs to cultivate external relationships which provide useful links while being mindful of overstepping boundaries and becoming too involved in day-to-day operations, Board, or executive activities.

10.5 The Chair will conduct the AOP Director's annual appraisal and will advise the Department when this has been completed, ensuring that any improvements identified will be addressed.

11. AOP Director

11.1 The role of the Director is to run the business to fulfil the statutory functions of the Board, alongside undertaking scientific and educational activities within AOP. The Director is responsible for all executive management matters affecting the organisation and for leadership of the Senior Management Team (SMT).

11.2 The Director is designated as the AOP Accounting Officer by the Departmental Accounting Officer (see section 15). As Accounting Officer, they are responsible for safeguarding the public funds in their charge, which in addition to grant in aid which must only be applied to the purposes for which it was voted, also includes any other funds falling within the stewardship of AOP, to ensure efficient and economical administration.

11.3 The Director is accountable to the AOP Board and Management Committee for performance and delivery of outcomes and targets and is responsible for implementing the decisions of the Board and its Committees. They are required to maintain a dialogue with the Chairs on the important strategic issues facing the organisation and for proposing Board/Management Committee agendas to the Chairs to reflect these. They need to ensure there is effective communication with stakeholders and communication on this to the Board and Management Committee. They also need to ensure the Chairs are alerted to forthcoming complex, contentious or sensitive issues, including risks affecting the organisation.

11.4 The Director acts as a role model to other SMT personnel by exhibiting open support for the Chairs, Board and Management Committee members and the contribution they make. The Chairs and Director have agreed how they will work together in practice, understanding and respecting each other's role, including the Director's responsibility as Accounting Officer.

11.5 Further detail on the role and responsibilities of the Director are as laid out in the AOP Operating Framework, MPMNI and their Accounting Officer appointment letter.

- 11.6 The Director is the Principal Officer for handling cases involving the NI Public Sector Ombudsman. They shall advise the Departmental Accounting Officer of any complaints about AOP accepted by the Ombudsman for investigation, and about the proposed response to any subsequent recommendations from the Ombudsman.
- 11.7 The Director is responsible for the day-to-day management of AOP staff, and for determining the staffing structure to meet operational needs and to carry out its statutory functions. In doing this the Director will have regard to the principles of economy, efficiency and effectiveness, the need for forward planning within the parameters of any running cost limits or efficiency measures that may be set by the Department.
- 11.8 AOP staff are aligned to the Northern Ireland Civil Service pay structure and are eligible to join the NI Local Government Officers Superannuation Committee (NILGOSC) Pension Scheme.
- Travel and subsistence for AOP staff and Board/Management Committee members are aligned to Civil Service rates.
- 11.9 The Director has the authority to re-grade staff or create posts below the Northern Ireland Civil Service Grade 6 and analogous grade subject to sufficient budget cover being available (subject to any specific conditions set by the Department). At Grade 6 or above Departmental approval is required to create or to re-grade posts. In creating and re-grading posts the Director will ensure consistency with established employment practice and legislation.
- 11.10 The Director is responsible for employee and industrial relations within AOP. The Director is committed to fostering good employee and industrial relations as an important aid to achievement of AOP objectives and will ensure effective communication and consultation with all staff and trade union representatives.

Role of DfC

12. Partnership Working with AOP

12.1 DfC and AOP are part of a total delivery system, within the same Ministerial portfolio. The partnership between DfC and AOP is open, honest, constructive and based on trust. There is mutual understanding of each other's objectives and clear expectations on the terms of engagement.

12.2 In exercising its functions AOP recognises the requirement for its purpose and objectives to align with those of DfC. There is also a shared understanding of the risks that may impact on each other and these are reflected in respective Risk Registers.

12.3 There is a regular exchange of skills and experience between DfC and AOP and where possible joint programme/ project delivery boards/ arrangements. AOP may also be involved as a partner in policy/strategy development and provide advice on policy implementation/ the impact of policies in practice.

12.4 The Department of Finance (DoF) has established, on behalf of the Assembly, a delegated authority framework which sets out the circumstances where prior DoF approval is required before expenditure can be occurred or commitments entered into. The DfC Accounting

Officer has established an internal framework of delegated authority for the Department and its ALBs which applies to AOP. <https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/communities/dfc-corporate-governance-framework.pdf>. Other specific approval requirements established in respect of AOP are as set out at Annex 3.

13. Lead Official

13.1 DfC has appointed the Director of Culture as the lead senior official to manage the relationship with AOP and ensure effective partnership working. Engagement between the Department and AOP will be co-ordinated, collaborative and consistent. A clear sense of collaboration and partnership will be communicated to staff in both the Department and AOP in order to promote mutual understanding and support. The Culture Director will be supported by staff within the Sponsor Branch. Other key contacts within DfC will include Finance, Governance and Economist colleagues.

13.2 The lead senior official is the policy lead for the policy area relating to the business and has a clear understanding of responsibilities of AOP for policy implementation/ operational delivery and the relevant audiences/stakeholders involved.

13.3 The lead senior official will ensure that where there are departmental staff changes, time is taken to ensure they have a full understanding of the business and challenges of AOP.

14. Annual Engagement Plan

14.1 The Department and AOP will agree an engagement plan before the start of each business year. The Annual Engagement Plan (Annex 2) will set out the timing and nature of engagement between AOP and the Department. The engagement plan will be specific to AOP and should not stray into operational oversight.

14.2 Engagement between the Department's lead official/their teams and AOP will be centred on partnership working, understanding of shared risks and working together on business developments that align with policy objectives.

14.3 In line with relevant guidance,² AOP will work in collaboration and partnership with the Department to prepare corporate and business plans. There should be strategic alignment between departmental and AOP plans. Once approved by the Minister it will be the Board through the Management Committee of AOP that primarily holds the Director to account for delivery and performance. The Department will engage with AOP on areas of strategic interest, linking departmental policy and AOP delivery of policy outcomes.

14.4 The Annual Engagement Plan will also reference the agreed management and financial information to be shared over the course of a year. The aim will be to ensure clear understanding of why information is necessary and how it will be used. Where the same, or similar information is required for internal governance, information requirements will be aligned so that a single report can be used for both purposes. In addition, the engagement plan should consider opportunities for learning and development, growth and actions which could help achieve better outcomes.

15. Departmental Accounting Officer

15.1 The Departmental Accounting Officer is accountable to the NI Assembly for the issue of grant in aid to AOP. The Departmental Accounting Officer has designated the Director of AOP as the AOP Accounting Officer and respective responsibilities of the Departmental Accounting Officer and the AOP Accounting Officer are set out in Chapter 3 of MPMNI. The Departmental Accounting Officer may withdraw the AOP Accounting Officer designation if he/she concludes that the AOP Accounting Officer is no longer a fit person to carry out the responsibilities of an Accounting Officer or that it is otherwise in the public interest that the designation be withdrawn. In such circumstances the AOP Board and Management Committee will be given a full account of the reasons

² Guidance issued by The Executive Office on NICS Work Programme which includes guidance on business planning for an outcomes-based PFG/ODP

for withdrawal and a chance to make representations. Withdrawal of AOP Accounting Officer status would bring into question employment as Director and either Chair should engage with the Department should such circumstances arise.

- 15.2 As outlined in section 11, the AOP Director is accountable to the AOP Board through the Management Committee for their stewardship of AOP. This includes advising the Management Committee on matters of financial propriety, regularity, prudent and economical administration, efficiency and effectiveness.
- 15.3 The Departmental Accounting Officer must be informed in the event that the judgement of the AOP Accounting Officer (on matters for which they are responsible) is over-ridden by the AOP Board/Management Committee. The AOP Accounting Officer must also take action if the AOP Board/Management Committee is contemplating a course that would infringe the requirement for financial propriety, regularity, prudent and economical administration, efficiency or effectiveness. In all other regards, the Departmental Accounting Officer has no day-to-day involvement with AOP or its Director.
- 15.4 In line with DoF requirements, the AOP Accounting Officer will provide an annual declaration of fitness to act as Accounting Officer to the Departmental Accounting Officer.

16. Attendance at Public Accounts Committee

- 16.1 The AOP Director/Accounting Officer may be summoned to appear before the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) to give evidence on the discharge of their responsibilities as Accounting Officer (as laid out in their Accounting Officer appointment letter) on issues arising from the C&AG's studies or reports following the annual audit of accounts.
- 16.2 The Chair of the Board/Management Committee may also, on occasion, be called to give evidence to the PAC on such relevant issues arising within the C&AG's studies or reports, in relation to the role and actions taken by the Board or Management Committee, where appropriate.
- 16.3 In addition, the DfC Accounting Officer may be summoned to appear before the PAC to give evidence on the discharge of their responsibilities as Departmental Accounting Officer with overarching responsibility for AOP. In such circumstances, the Departmental Accounting Officer may therefore expect to be questioned on their responsibilities to ensure that:
- there is a clear strategic control framework for AOP;
 - sufficient and appropriate management and financial controls are in place to safeguard public funds;
 - the nominated Accounting Officer is fit to discharge their responsibilities;

- there are suitable internal audit arrangements;
- accounts are prepared in accordance with the relevant legislation and any accounting direction; and
- intervention is made, where necessary, in situations where the AOP Accounting Officer's advice on transactions in relation to regularity, propriety or value for money is overruled by the Board, Management Committee or either Chair.

Assurance Framework

17. Autonomy and Proportionality

17.1 DfC will ensure that AOP has the autonomy to deliver effectively, recognising its status as a separate legal entity which has its own Board, Management Committee and governance arrangements. Guidance on proportionate autonomy has been considered in determining the extent of engagement and assurance established between AOP and DfC and is reflected in this agreement.

17.2 A proportionate approach to assurance will be taken based on overall purpose, business and budget of AOP and a mutual understanding of risk. The approach will include an agreed process³ through which the AOP Accounting Officer provides written assurance to the Department that the public funds and organisational assets for which they are personally responsible are safeguarded, have been managed with propriety and regularity, and use of public funds represents value for money.

17.3 Recognising the governance arrangements in place within the organisation, the AOP Accounting Officer will arrange for their written assurance to be discussed at the AOP ARAC and presented to the AOP Management Committee prior to submission to the Department where possible. If not possible, or practicable,

the Chair of the AOP Management Committee should have sight of the assurance statement, prior to it being submitted to the Department.

17.4 The AOP Chair of the Management Committee will provide written confirmation that the AOP Accounting Officer's formal assurance has been considered by the Management Committee and is reflective of the current position of AOP.

17.5 In addition to the AOP Accounting Officer's written assurance, the Department will take assurance from the following key aspects of the AOP governance framework:

- annual review of the collective strategic performance of the Management Committee (in the form of the Board Annual Assurance Statement);
- annual review of Management Committee effectiveness;
- external review of Management Committee and subcommittee effectiveness carried out every 3 years;
- completion of Board and Management Committee public appointment appraisals which confirms public appointees' effectiveness;
- Internal Audit assurance;
- Annual Assurance Statement (internal AOP process, signed off by Chair of Management Committee);

³ As stated in the Bi-Annual Assurance Statement

- External Quality Assessment of the Internal Audit function; and
- Externally audited Annual Report and Accounts, reviewed and considered by the AOP ARAC.

18. Board and Management Committee Effectiveness

- 18.1 The Management Committee Chair will ensure that an annual review of Committee Effectiveness⁴ which encompasses committees established by the Management Committee is undertaken.
- 18.2 The Management Committee Chair will discuss the outcome of the annual review of Management Committee Effectiveness with the Department to ensure a partnership approach to any improvements identified. This will inform the annual programme of Management Committee training/development and discussions in respect of Management Committee composition and succession.
- 18.3 In line with any parameters set out in founding (or other) legislation, the Chairs of the Board and Management Committee, in conjunction with the Department, and Ministers where appropriate, will consider the size and composition of the AOP Board and Management Committee, proportionate to the size and complexity of AOP and keep this under review.

- 18.4 In addition to the annual review of Management Committee Effectiveness AOP will undertake an externally facilitated review of Management Committee Effectiveness at least once every three years covering the performance of the Management Committee, its Committees and individual Management Committee public appointed members. The Chair will liaise with the Department to identify a suitably skilled facilitator for the review (this can be a peer review and should be proportionate) and will share the findings/outcome report with the Department on completion of the review.

19. Board and Management Committee Appraisals

- 19.1 The Chair of the Board of Governors will conduct the Management Committee Chair's annual appraisal and will advise the Department when this has been completed.
- 19.2 The Management Committee Chair will conduct an annual appraisal in respect of each Board and Management Committee public appointee and will advise the Department when these have been completed.
- 19.3 Each Chair will engage with the Director/lead official as appropriate on improvements identified through the appraisal process which will inform the annual training/development programme.

⁴ NIAO Good Practice Guide on Board Effectiveness

20. Internal Audit Assurance

- 20.1 AOP is required to establish and maintain arrangements for an internal audit function that operates in accordance with the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS) and be able to satisfy the Department of such.
- 20.2 AOP will provide its internal audit strategy, periodic audit plans and annual audit report, including the Internal Audit's opinion on risk management, control and governance to the Department. AOP will ensure DfC's Internal Audit team has complete right of access to all relevant records.
- 20.3 AOP will liaise with the Department on the External Quality Assessment (EQA) of the internal audit function which (in line with PSIAS) is required to be conducted at least once every five years by a qualified independent assessor.
- 20.4 AOP will alert the Department to any less than satisfactory audit reports at the earliest opportunity on an ongoing basis. AOP will also alert the Department to a less than satisfactory annual opinion from Internal Audit at the earliest opportunity. AOP and the Department will then engage closely on actions required to address the less than satisfactory opinion in order to move AOP to a satisfactory position as soon as possible.

- 20.5 The Department will take assurance from the fact that AOP has met the requirements of PSIAS and has a satisfactory annual opinion from Internal Audit as part of its overall assurance assessment.

21. Externally Audited Annual Report and Accounts

- 21.1 AOP is required to prepare an Annual Report and Accounts in line with the extant Government Financial Reporting Manual (FRM) and the specific Accounts Direction issued by DfC in accordance with the deadlines specified and the extant Charities Statement of Recommended Practice.
- 21.2 The Comptroller & Auditor General (C&AG) will arrange to audit the annual accounts of AOP and will issue an independent opinion on the accounts. DfC will then lay them before the NI Assembly together with the annual report of AOP.
- 21.3 The C&AG will also provide a Report to Those Charged with Governance (RTTCWG) to AOP which will be shared with the Department.
- 21.4 AOP will alert the Department to any likely qualification of the accounts at the earliest opportunity. In the event of a qualified audit opinion or significant issues reported in the RTTCWG the Department will engage with AOP on actions required to address the qualification/significant issues.

21.5 The Department will take assurance from the external audit process and an unqualified position as part of its overall assurance assessment.

21.6 The C&AG may carry out examinations into the economy, efficiency and effectiveness with which AOP has used its resources in discharging its functions. The C&AG may also carry out thematic examinations that encompass the functions of AOP.

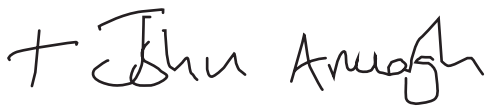
21.7 For the purpose of audit and any other examinations, the C&AG has statutory access to documents as provided for under Articles 3 and 4 of the Audit and Accountability (Northern Ireland) Order 2003.

21.8 Where making payment of a grant, or drawing up a contract, AOP should ensure that it includes a clause which makes the grant or contract conditional upon the recipient or contractor providing access to the C&AG in relation to documents relevant to the transaction. Where subcontractors are likely to be involved, it should also be made clear that the requirements extend to them.

Signatories

AOP and DfC agree to work in partnership with each other in line with the NI Code of Good Practice '**Partnerships between Departments and Arm's-Length Bodies**' and the arrangements set out in this Agreement.

Legislative provisions shall take precedence over any part of this Agreement.



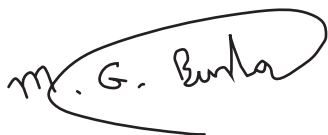
Signed (AOP Board Chair)

Date: 8 May 2024



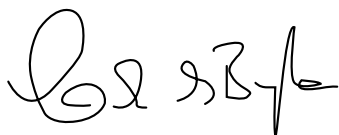
Signed (AOP Chair of Management Committee)

Date: 8 May 2024



Signed (AOP Director)

Date: 8 May 2024



Signed (DfC Accounting Officer)

Date: 22 May 2024

Annex 1 - Applicable Legislation

Founding legislation and other key statutes which provide AOP with its statutory functions, duties and powers:

The Armagh Observatory and Planetarium (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 as amended.

Annex 2 – DfC and AOP Annual Engagement Plan

Good engagement is one of the key principles in the Partnership Code, underpinning the other principles of: Leadership; Purpose; Assurance; and Value.

As laid out in the Code, partnerships work well when relationships between departments and ALBs are open, transparent, honest, constructive and based on trust and when there is mutual understanding of each other's objectives and clear expectations about the terms of engagement. This engagement plan has therefore been prepared after taking account of AOP performance and governance, and to be proportionate in this context. The plan will be reviewed annually to ensure that it remains proportionate and fit for purpose, with relevant amendments agreed.

Strategic and Business Planning

During 2024/25 the Department and AOP will work closely together to ensure close and ongoing alignment of strategic and business planning. There are some specific events in the annual processes that are set out in the table below.

Beyond those particular activities, AOP will be included in all relevant Departmental Forums (including a regular forum chaired by the Permanent Secretary, a Finance Directors Forum, and an Audit Chairs Forum). The Department keeps the frequency, attendance and content of these Forums under review in light of experience and feedback.

AOP will extend invitations to appropriate Departmental officials to relevant planning and other strategic forums that it convenes. The precise nature of the forums, and appropriate Departmental attendance, will be agreed taking account of relevant factors. In all cases, departmental attendance will be to assist alignment of AOP and Departmental strategic work, recognising the governance structures already in place in AOP.

Strategic and Business Planning		
Activity	Frequency	DfC/AOP Officials
The AOP Corporate Strategy (Developing and approving)	Not due until 2026	Branch (Ministerial approval required) AOP Board/Management Committee & SMT
The AOP Business Plan for 2024/25 (Developing and approving)	December 2023 to April/May 2024	Branch (Ministerial approval required) AOP Management Committee & SMT
Redevelopment of AOP	Monthly and Ad hoc	Branch AOP SMT (as applicable)

Governance and Assurance

This is an important area for the Department and AOP. Engagement will be close and ongoing, to avoid any surprises for either organisation. It will however also be proportionate given the high standards of corporate governance displayed by AOP on a consistent basis.

The table below includes standing engagement meetings. The Department will explore with AOP senior staff whether it is appropriate to make a clearer distinction between strategic and operational matters covered by the Partnership Meetings, with potentially different attendees involved in meetings for each area.

Departmental officials will attend AOP ARAC meetings as appropriate, and the Sponsor Branch will be provided with minutes for all such meetings and Board and Management Committee meetings in a timely manner.

Governance and Assurance		
Activity	Frequency	DfC/AOP Officials
Review meeting with Minister	Annual	Minister for Communities Chairs of AOP Board and Management Committee
Meeting between senior departmental official and AOP	Annual; to include results of annual Board Effectiveness Survey	DfC Permanent Secretary or Deputy Secretary Chair of AOP Management Committee and Director
Biannual Assurance Statement (Bi-AAS)	Biannually	Branch AOP Chair of Management Committee and SMT
Partnership Meetings	Biannual (following receipt of Bi-Annual Assurance Statement)	Director of Culture & Branch AOP Director and SMT (as applicable)
Presentation to the Management Committee on DfC priorities and discussion on AOP's contribution	Annually	Director of Culture & Branch AOP Chair of Management Committee and SMT
Planning for the externally facilitated Review of Management Committee and sub committees Effectiveness in respect of identifying a facilitator	External (every 3 years. Not due until 2025)	DfC Head of Governance DfC Director of Culture AOP Chair of Management Committee
Board/Management Committee public appointee appraisals feeding into training/ development plans	Annually	As set out in Agreement
Board/Management Committee public appointments Induction Training	As required (within 6 months of appointment)	Branch AOP Chair of Management Committee & SMT
Departmental attendance at ARAC as observers	Quarterly	Branch
Annual Report and Accounts which includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Governance Statement • Report to those Charged with Governance 	Annually	Branch AOP Chair of Management Committee & SMT

<p>Internal Audit:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reports • Annual Report • Strategy and Plans • External Quality Assessment 	<p>At ARAC meetings</p> <p>Annually</p> <p>Annually</p> <p>Every 5 years (not due until 2026)</p>	<p>Branch</p> <p>AOP SMT</p>
<p>Papers and draft minutes of Board; Management Committee and ARAC meetings provided to Branch</p>	<p>Papers in advance and minutes within 15 working days of meetings</p>	<p>AOP SMT</p>

Board Appointments

The Department will lead the appointment of six members to the AOP Management Committee, and one member of the Board of Governors, as set out in the Public Appointments process. The Department will engage with the AOP Management Committee Chair and Director on the skill needs from Board members.

AOP will undertake the non-public appointments to the Management Committee.

The Department will be included in induction sessions for new Board/ Management Committee members to share information on strategic matters and governance requirements.

Director Recruitment

The AOP Board and Management Committee will have lead responsibility for the recruitment of a Director as and when required, and will engage with the Senior Sponsor and others in the Department as required to ensure Departmental input to requirements, recognising the Director’s role as Accounting Officer.

Budget Management

Recognising that AOP finances form part of overall Departmental spend, there will be close engagement between finance staff in the Department and AOP, facilitated as appropriate by Sponsorship Branch, to ensure that accurate, robust and timely information on budgets, consequences and outturn projections are provided and tested. This will include monthly cash forecasts and returns for Monitoring Rounds.

Other requirements

A number of returns which do not fit clearly in any of the above categories are set out in the Table below.

Details of action / activity / meeting	Frequency / Timing	DfC/AOP Officials
Fitness to Act as Accounting Officer	Annually	DfC Permanent Secretary AOP Director
Fraud Reporting/ Whistle blowing/ Raising Concerns	Immediate (all frauds proven or suspected including attempted)	AOP SMT in line with established procedures DfC Governance to report to DoF and C&AG
Relevant AOP press announcements	Ad hoc	Branch AOP SMT (as applicable)
Right of access to documentation (including 3rd party) held by AOP for audit, investigation and other purposes	Ad hoc	DfC AOP SMT

Review of the Partnership Agreement

Details of action / activity / meeting	Frequency / Timing	DfC/AOP Officials
Annual review of the Partnership Agreement	Annually - following the end of each Business/Financial Year	Branch AOP SMT (as applicable)
Conduct a formal review of the Partnership Agreement	Once every three years	Director of Culture / Head of Sponsor Branch Branch AOP SMT (as applicable)

Intermediate reviews, to address specific points, can be initiated as required outwith the cycle above.

Annex 3 - Delegations

Delegated authorities

AOP shall obtain the Department's prior written approval before:

- entering into any undertaking to incur any expenditure that falls outside the delegations or which is not provided for in the annual budget for AOP as approved by the Department;
- incurring expenditure for any purpose that is or might be considered novel or contentious, or which has or could have significant future cost implications;
- making any significant change in the scale of operation or funding of any initiative or particular scheme previously approved by DfC;
- making any change of policy or practice which has wider financial implications that might prove repercussive or which might significantly affect the future level of resources required; or
- carrying out policies that go against the principles, rules, guidance and advice in Managing Public Money Northern Ireland.

i. Specific Delegated Authorities for AOP

The Director of AOP shall have delegated authority of £150,000 for resource and capital expenditure/contributions. Resource or capital expenditure/contributions above this amount require the approval of the Department. Business cases for capital or resource expenditure/contributions above £150,000 should be submitted to the Department to support the proposed expenditure. However, any novel and/or potentially contentious projects, regardless of the amount of expenditure, require the approval of the Department and where applicable DoF.

ii. Economic Appraisal

The principles of economic appraisal should be applied in all cases where expenditure is proposed, whether the proposal involves capital or resource expenditure, or both. The effort put into economic appraisal should be commensurate with the size/importance of the expenditure under consideration. Spending commitments should not be entered into until a proportionate business case/economic appraisal has been completed and the appropriate approvals are in place.

A full business case should be prepared and submitted to the Department for approval for all external consultancy assignments expected to exceed £10,000. A proportionate business case should be prepared for all assignments below this threshold. The most recent guidance on completing business cases must be followed, (currently FD (DFP) 07/12 refers), which advises of the need for an evaluation of the consultancy expenditure.

AOP should ensure compliance with the relevant Procurement Guidance Notes when purchasing all Goods and Services.

iii. Disposal of Surplus Equipment

In all cases disposal must be at current market value by public auction or another public process unless otherwise agreed with the Department. Prior approval of DfC is required for disposal of an asset/surplus equipment with a value in excess of £5,000.

Any proceeds from the disposal of assets/surplus equipment, or an appropriate proportion of them if the grant provided by the Department was for less than the whole cost of acquisition or improvement, must be declared to the Department as soon as possible.

iv. Lease and Rental Agreements

AOP shall not enter into any new land or property leases or modify an existing land or property lease arrangement without the prior approval of the Department. The NICS Asset Management Strategy should be referred to prior to considering any lease.

v. Approval of Information Technology Projects

The appraisal of Information Technology/Information Communication Technology (IT) projects should include the staffing and other resource implications.

The principles of appraisal, evaluation and management apply equally to proposals supported by IT to all other areas of public expenditure. IT enabled projects should be appraised and evaluated according to the general guidance in the Northern Ireland Guide to Expenditure Appraisal and Evaluation (**NIGEAE**) and managed using the most recent **Successful Delivery (NI) guidance**, (current version issued June 2009).

The purchase of IT equipment and systems should be in line with the guidance on Procedures and Principles for Application of Best Practice in Programme/Project Management (PPM) and be subject to competitive tendering unless there are convincing reasons to the contrary. The form of competition should be appropriate to the value and complexity of the project, and in line with the relevant Procurement Guidance Notes.

vi. Engagement of Consultants

AOP shall adhere to the Department's Guidance on The Use of Consultants and the delegation limits therein. AOP has delegated authority on external consultancy spend up to £10,000 (excluding VAT). External consultancy spend above £10,000 requires Departmental approval. AOP shall, on request from the Department, provide a statement on the status of all consultancies completed and/or started in each financial year. Care should be taken to avoid actual, potential, or perceived conflicts of interest when employing consultants.

vii. Losses and Special Payments

The Director has delegated authority to write off losses and make special payments up to:

- a) Cash losses – up to £1,000 per case/incident;
- b) Stores/Equipment losses –
 - i) £10,000 per case
 - ii) £5,000 per case
 - i because of fraud, whether or not it has been possible to charge anyone with an offence, or proven or suspected theft, arson or sabotage, or any other deliberate act (including repairable damage caused maliciously to buildings, stores, etc..., which is not the subject of an identifiable legal claim against some person); wherever possible recovery must be effected and prosecution mounted;
 - ii losses arising from other causes. In each case the amount of the loss would be the repair or replacement cost less recoveries from insurance etc...;
- c) Constructive losses and fruitless payments – up to £2,500 per case;
- d) Compensation payments
 - i. Made under legal obligation, e.g. by Court Order – up to £2,500 per case plus reasonable legal expenses;
 - ii. For damage to personal property of staff – no delegated authority; and
 - iii. Where written legal advice is that AOP should not fight a court action because it is unlikely that it would win – no delegated authority;
- e) Claims abandoned or waiver of claim – up to £2,500 per case;
- f) Extra contractual payments – no delegated authority;
- g) Ex gratia payments – up to £2,500 per case (Pensions payments are not covered by this threshold); and
- h) Extra statutory and extra regulatory payments – no delegated authority.

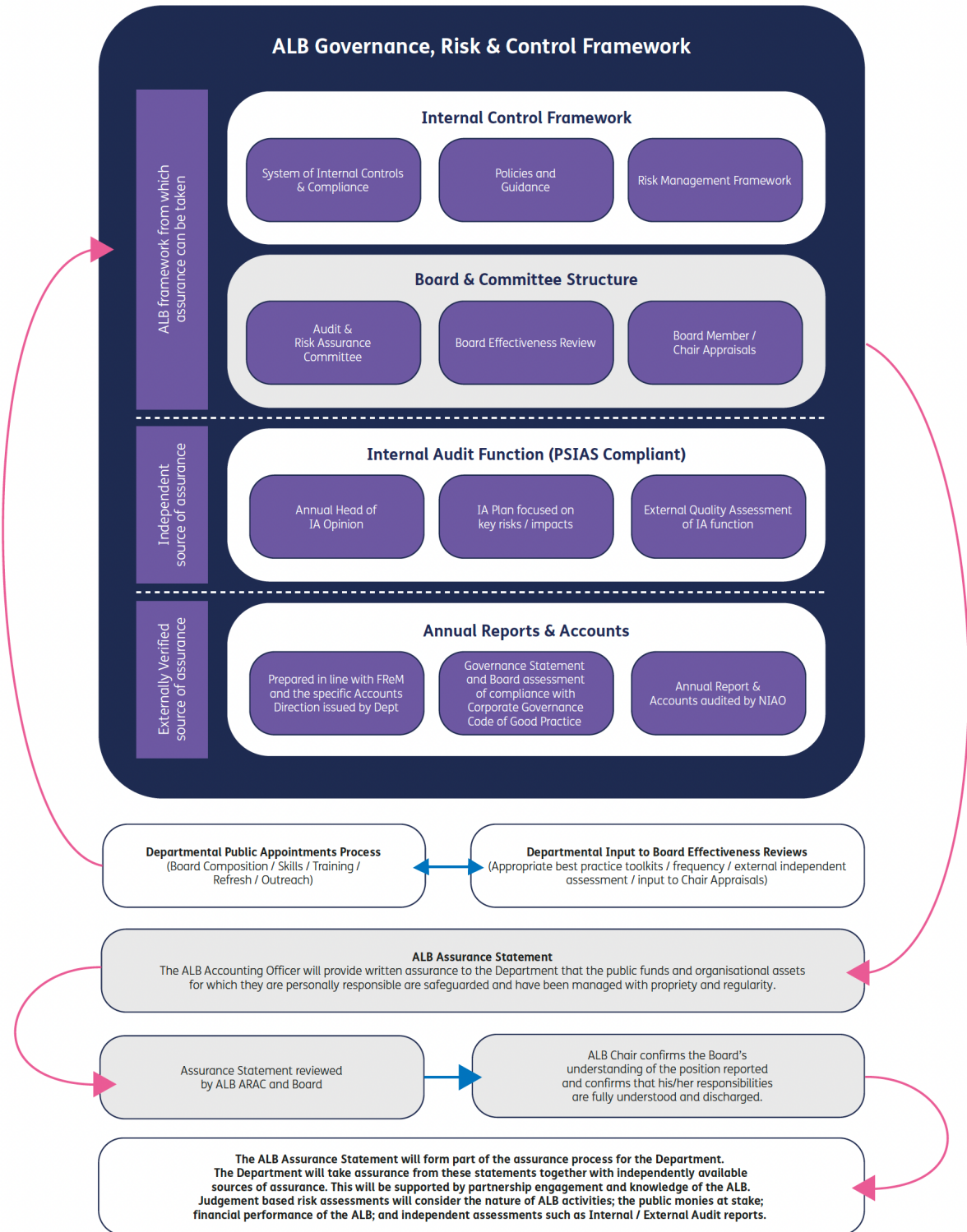
Where there is no delegation or the amount exceeds the delegated authority prior approval from the Department must be obtained.

Where total losses exceed £5,000 in any financial year, an explanatory note should be included in the AOP accounts.

Details of all losses and special payments should be recorded in a Losses and Special Payments Register, which will be available to auditors. The Register should be kept up-to-date and should show evidence of the approval by the Director, and the Department, where appropriate.

These delegations shall not be altered without the prior agreement of DfC and, where applicable, DoF.

Annex 4 –Overview of the System of Assurance



Annex 5 - Concerns/Complaints in respect of Board and Management Committee Members

In line with the NI Code of Good Practice and the arrangements in this Partnership Agreement the approach to concerns/complaints raised in respect of AOP Board and Management Committee members should be transparent and collaborative. The principle of early and open engagement is important, with DfC made aware of any concerns/complaints as soon as practicable.

While Board and Management Committees Members are not AOP employees an AOP employee may utilise the AOP grievance procedure/other HR procedure to raise a complaint against a Board or Management Committee member. The AOP employee raising the grievance should expect this to be handled in line with the AOP HR procedures.

Concerns/complaints might also be raised through:

- raising Concerns/Whistleblowing arrangements;
- complaints processes;
- grievance/other HR process
- directly with AOP or the Department.

The Board/Management Committee will assess the substance of matters raised and the appropriate policy/processes to be used to address them.

Differences of view in relation to matters which fall within the Board or Management Committee's responsibilities are a matter for the Board or Management Committee to resolve through consensus based decision making in the best interests of AOP.

Annex 6 - Applicable Guidance

The following guidance is applicable to AOP, the most up to date versions should be adhered to.

Guidance issued by the Department of Finance

- Managing Public Money NI
- Public Bodies – A Guide for NI Departments
- Corporate Governance in Central Government Departments – code of good practice
- DoF Risk Management Framework
- HMT Orange Book
- The Audit and Risk Assurance Committee Handbook
- Public Sector Internal Audit Standards
- Accounting Officer Handbook – HMT Regularity, Propriety and Value for Money
- Better Business Cases NI
- Dear Accounting Officer Letters
- Dear Finance Director Letters
- Dear Consolidation Officer and Dear Consolidation Manager Letters
- The Consolidation Officer Letter of Appointment
- Government Financial Reporting Manual (FReM)
- Guidance for preparation and publication of annual report and accounts
- Procurement Guidance

Other Guidance and Best Practice

- Specific guidance issued by the Department
- EU Delegations
- Recommendations made by the NI Audit Office/NI Assembly Public Accounts Committee
- NIAO Good Practice Guides
- Guidance issued by the Executive's Asset Management Unit
- NI Public Services Ombudsman guidance

Annex 7 – Role of the Minister

Role of the Minister

Communication between the Board, Management Committee and the Minister will normally be through the Chairs of the Board/Management Committee as relevant.

The Departmental Accounting Officer is responsible for advising the relevant Minister on a number of issues including the AOP objectives and targets, budgets and performance.

In addition to being answerable to the Assembly as laid out in paragraph 2.4, the Minister is also responsible for:

- Approving the AOP strategic direction and overall policies and priorities to reflect the PfG;
- Approving the AOP annual Business Plan;
- Approving the AOP grant in aid; and
- Approval of Board and Management Committee Public Appointees.

Annex 8 – Partnerships between Departments and Arm’s Length Bodies: NI Code of Good Practice

NI Code of Good Practice

Partnerships between Departments and Arm’s Length Bodies

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