

**Wales Audit Office Board**  
**Minutes of the meeting on Tuesday 01 and Wednesday 02 October 2024**

**Members:**

Ian Rees	Chair and non-executive member
Adrian Crompton	Chief Executive and Auditor General for Wales
Alison Gerrard	Non-executive member and Chair of the Remuneration & HR Committee
Anne Beegan	Elected employee member
Chris Bolton	Elected employee member
Darren Griffiths	Appointed employee member
David Francis	Non-executive member, Senior Independent Director and Chair of the Audit & Risk Assurance Committee
Michael Norman	Non-executive member
Richard Thurston	Non-executive member

**Apologies:**

Owen Purcell	Independent member of the Audit & Risk Assurance Committee
Ann-Marie Royal	Audit Lead

**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)
Nicola Evans	Head of Finance (items 3 and 10)
Matthew Hockridge	Head of Planning & Reporting (Items 4, 13 and 14 - by Teams)
Derwyn Owen	Audit Director (item 5)
Gary Emery	Audit Director (item 5)
Richard Harries	Audit Director (item 5)
Aneesa Ali	Audit Lead (item 13)
Terry Jones	AD&G Manager Audit Quality & Policy (item 13)
Tom Haslam	AD&G Manager Performance Audit (item 13 - by Teams)
Laurie Davies	Head of Business Services (items 17 & 18 - by Teams)

Item	Agenda
1	Welcome and apologies
2	Declarations of interests
3	Estimate 2025-26
4	People Survey 2024
5	Audit Backlog
6	Review of minutes: Board meetings 30 and 31 July 2024; 19 August 2024
7	Review of action tracker
8	Chair's update
9	Report of the Chief Executive and Auditor General
10	Integrated Performance Report

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11	Audit and Risk Assurance Committee: Report from Chair
12	Audit Quality Annual Report
13	Equality Report 2023-24
14	Interim Report: structure and timetable
15	Designation of DPO
16	Documents and Records Management Policy
17	Contract Award: Consultancy Support Services
18	Code of Audit Practice
19	Review of the forward work programme
20	Any other business
21	Review of the meeting
22	Date of next meeting: 01 and 02 October 2024, Swansea

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.	
1.2	He noted apologies from Owen Purcell and Ann-Marie Royal who were unable to attend to observe the meeting. The Board Secretary would invite them to observe a future meeting.	BS
<b>2</b>	<b>Declarations of interest</b>	
2.1	Employee members and other staff present declared an interest in item 3 (the Estimate 2025-26) in so far as it related to pay. Chris Bolton explained his trade union committee role and assured the Board that he would recuse himself from any trade union committee discussions relating to pay or conditions. The Chair indicated that Executive Directors and employee Board members would be present for the discussion and decisions relating to the Estimate, save for pay related elements which would be taken in private by the non-executive members and the Auditor General. The Board Secretary would remain to maintain the record of the meeting.	
<b>3</b>	<b>Estimate 2025-26 (discussion and decision on pay elements taken in private)</b>	
3.1	The Head of Finance presented a paper: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• outlining the timetable for preparation, approval and laying the Estimate;</li> <li>• reminding the Board of the context for the Estimate, including the letter from the Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Constitution and Cabinet Office;</li> </ul>	

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• outlining the bids for funding and the activities that were expected to be funded via the WCF and fees respectively;</li> <li>• explaining the impact of the draft Estimate on the WCF and fee rates, the anticipated change in fee rates between 2024-25 and 2025-26 and the forecast increase in income delivery;</li> <li>• summarising the responses received to the fee scheme consultation;</li> <li>• explaining how the draft Estimate had been developed to address the recommendations made by Finance Committee following consideration of the Estimate for 2024-25;</li> <li>• outlining the scenarios for the pay budget within the approved pay strategy for 2025-26;</li> <li>• outlining the impact of achieving up to date audit delivery on the Medium-Term Financial Plan and early options for managing the potential impact on fee rates; and</li> <li>• seeking the Board's input on any further changes.</li> </ul>	
3.2	<p>The Board reviewed the draft Estimate and discussed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the audit services bids for funding, the rapid changes in the audit environment and the efficiencies that were being made to allow an evolutionary approach to keeping pace with change;</li> <li>• fee rates, fee income and fee scales, noting that the impact of ISA315 efficiencies would see a reduction in fee scales for some bodies, and while the skills mix employed on some audits might change, overall chargeability would not;</li> <li>• the potential future capacity to do more work and develop additional streams of work, noting that the detail of a vision for the future of audit would be developed and tested over the coming year to inform future Estimates; and</li> <li>• the additional costs that would arise from Senedd reform.</li> </ul>	
3.3	<p>The Board reflected that the Estimate appeared prudent, allowing for a period of stability to deliver Audit Wales current priorities and setting the scene for its future ambitions. The EDCC assured the Board that the ELT had reviewed progress against delivery of the five-year strategy and was satisfied that the work to bring audit delivery up to date was not impeding delivery of the strategy.</p>	
3.4	<p>Save for the pay related elements and subject to developing the narrative to reflect its discussions and set the scene for the future, the Board:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• approved the basis for the preparation of a final draft Estimate for 2025-26; and</li> <li>• authorised the Board Chair and the Auditor General to approve and sign the Estimate for 2025-26 for laying before Finance Committee by the end of October 2024.</li> </ul>	
3.5	<p>The Employee Board Members, Executive Directors and Head of Finance left the meeting.</p>	

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3.6	The Board discussed the proposals relating to pay and agreed that the Estimate should reflect the approved pay strategy but would not incorporate specific detail as that could compromise discussions with the trade unions. The Board noted the impact of alternative pay awards and that the Remuneration and HR Committee would make a recommendation to the Board in November on the negotiating parameters for the 2025-26 pay award.	
3.8	The Employee Board Members and Executive Directors rejoined the meeting.	
<b>4</b>	<b>People Survey</b>	
4.1	The Head of Planning and Reporting updated the Board on the timetable for delivering and reporting on the 2024 staff survey. He explained that the content of the questionnaire was largely the same as the previous year, save for clarification of the comments, questions and the reintroduction of questions relating to equality, diversity and inclusion and whistleblowing.	
4.2	The Board considered extending the questions relating to discrimination, bullying and harassment to include specific coverage of sexual harassment in the workplace in light of the new legal duty on employers to take reasonable steps to prevent sexual harassment of their workers (the 'preventative duty') which would take effect later in October. The EDCC explained that an update on the new duty would be provided to the Remuneration and HR Committee in October and management would be considering the requirements of the new duty, how to raise awareness and mechanisms to monitor reporting. Management did not propose extending the current questionnaire to cover this area to avoid a delay in its issue but it might be used in the future.	
4.3	The EDCC outlined the process for reviewing and reporting on the survey results and explained that the ELT would work with Heads of Service and Directors to identify the key themes from the survey and plan activity in response both at organisational and local levels.	
4.4	The Board confirmed that it was content with the format and timetable for the administration and reporting of the annual staff survey.	
<b>5.</b>	<b>Audit Backlog</b>	
5.1	<p>The EDAS, the Audit Directors and Anne Beegan provided an update to the Board, explaining to and discussing with the Board:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• how the backlog had arisen;</li> <li>• its impact on both stakeholders and across Audit Wales;</li> <li>• the steps being taken to address the backlog in financial and performance audit across the sectors of delivery;</li> <li>• the timescale for getting back on track with audit delivery;</li> <li>• risks and mitigating activity; and</li> <li>• the development of plans and options for 2026-27 when delivery was expected to be up to date.</li> </ul>	

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5.2	<p>The Board also considered:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• learning from the events surrounding the development of the backlog and the activity to get back on track, and how this could be used to improve audit planning and delivery;</li> <li>• the impact of drawing on staff from outside core teams, noting the importance of continuing to deliver impactful, and often high profile, national studies in line with the planned work programme;</li> <li>• the impact on audited bodies, the importance of clear communications and strong relationships with stakeholders in seeking the timely delivery of accounts and information for audits;</li> <li>• the impact of cancelling and refunding performance audit work that, due to the time lapsed, would have less value;</li> <li>• stakeholder feedback and how that was taken into account in planning and delivering of audits; and</li> <li>• developing a more positive narrative as progress was made in returning to the timetabled delivery of audits.</li> </ul>	
5.3	<p>The Board:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• thanked the EDAS, Directors and Anne for the update which provided valuable insight and assurance that actions were in place to enable Audit Wales to return to a position where deadlines were being consistently met;</li> <li>• expressed its gratitude to staff and resource managers for the work they had done, and continued to do, to plan and deliver high quality audits; and</li> <li>• noted that delivery updates would be provided in the Integrated Performance Reports for ongoing monitoring.</li> </ul>	
<b>6</b>	<b>Review of minutes: meetings 30 and 31 July 2024; 19 August 2024</b>	
6.1	The Board approved the minutes of its meetings on 30 and 31 July 2024, and 19 August 2024 (subject to a minor correction) as an accurate record.	
<b>7</b>	<b>Review of action tracker</b>	
7.1	The Board received updates against actions which the Board Secretary would reflect on the tracker.	
<b>8</b>	<b>Chair's update</b>	
8.1	The Chair presented his written report which outlined his activity since the last meeting and provided a verbal update on his meeting with the Chair of the Senedd Finance Committee. He outlined amendments to the Board's communications plan to clarify expectations around Board members' internal engagement activity and asked that the Board Secretary provide links to the Learning and Development and GPX Hub pages.	BS
8.2	The Chair highlighted his activity as Board link for audit quality and proposed that it would be useful for the full Board to receive an information	

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	session on Audit Wales's audit platforms. The Board Secretary would liaise with the EDAS to arrange a session.	BS
8.3	The Board noted the update.	
<b>9</b>	<b>Report of the Chief Executive and Auditor General</b>	
9.1	The Auditor General and Chief Executive presented his update and highlighted: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the impact of recent publications which had attracted significant media interest;</li> <li>• the value of external engagement activities, including the recent CEF-CIPFA conference in Slovenia, in fulfilling Audit Wales's ambition of having increased visibility and influence;</li> <li>• the messages from his recent meeting with the Chair of the Senedd Finance Committee; and</li> <li>• his forthcoming attendance at the Society of Welsh Treasurers' Development Day, which offered an opportunity to engage with an important stakeholder group.</li> </ul>	
9.2	The Auditor General updated the Board on the delivery of Town and Community Council audits, where the employment of interns over the summer months had supported progress. He updated the Board on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the level of correspondence received from Town and Community Councils, often in respect of fees which could be high in relation to the turnover of an organisation, and the additional work this generated; and</li> <li>• the Senedd Local Government and Housing Committee review of the role, governance, and accountability of town and community councils to which he would provide written and oral evidence.</li> </ul>	
9.3	The EDCS provided a brief update on the North Wales office where discussions with the landlord were underway regarding the potential installation of a soundproofed wall to provide privacy. He explained that a quotation was being obtained and alerted the Board to the potential financial impact for Audit Wales.	
9.4	In response to a question regarding the COVID enquiry the Auditor General confirmed that he had submitted detailed evidence which had been prominent in the early sessions of the enquiry, as had the work of the previous Auditor General on preparedness for civil contingencies. The Auditor General would provide a link to the submission to members. The Board was keen that the impact of both this and other work was recorded.	AGW
9.5	The Board otherwise noted the update.	
<b>10</b>	<b>Integrated Performance Report</b>	
10.1	The EDCC presented the integrated performance report which provided a mid-period update on finances, risk and the ELT's strategic priorities.	

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10.2	<p>The Board discussed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the rate of income delivery which was forecast to reduce in the second half of the year, whereas expenditure was increasing. The Head of Finance explained that the increased expenditure reflected the recruitment completed in July and August. There was potential for income to increase (subject to receipt of detailed information from Audit Services) but the forecasts recognised the maximum income that could be delivered within the limits of the current Estimate and a Supplementary Estimate would be required in order to recognise income above that.</li> <li>• the overall financial position and whether the green rating was appropriate. The Head of Finance explained that the surplus forecast provided a contingency within normal parameters and she was currently satisfied with the assessment.</li> <li>• the quantum of work delivered using WCF funding to satisfy the Senedd Public Accounts and Public Administration Committee, noting that while the planned use of WCF funding was outlined this was deficit funding and not specifically hypothecated.</li> <li>• the improvements shown in the pulse survey results, noting that scores relating to celebrating success remained low. The EDCC explained that recognition took different forms, management was seeking to ensure that robust processes were in place to manage performance and the full survey results were expected to provide deeper insight.</li> <li>• the positive approach to resolving staff concerns relating to the implementation of the Time and Resource Management (TRM) project. The EDCC explained that a post project learning exercise had been carried out and she would be looking to capture the learning from the more recent phase, in tandem with the Internal Audit review of the project implementation.</li> </ul>	
10.3	<p>More generally, the Board discussed change management processes and the value of applying learning from recent process change such as performance management and TRM in future developments. The EDCC explained that despite some early resistance, there was increasing recognition of the value that the Change Team could bring in supporting projects. The Board noted that the staff survey included questions on change management and it would review any issues identified from the results.</p>	
10.4	<p>The Board otherwise noted the report.</p>	
<b>11</b>	<b>Audit &amp; Risk Assurance Committee Report</b>	
11.1	<p>The Chair of the A&amp;RAC presented his report of the Committee's meeting on 12 September. He highlighted that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the Committee had considered the post project learning review of the Annual Report and Accounts process and audit, and was encouraged by the response received from the External Auditor to concerns raised;</li> </ul>	

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the report on anti-money laundering arrangements indicated a low level of reporting and the Committee had asked the Head of Law and Ethics to benchmark reporting levels against those of other public audit bodies;</li> <li>• the Committee had received an update on cyber security and expected to receive a recommendation for accreditation and an implementation timetable at its meeting in December;</li> <li>• one internal audit report had been presented on corporate governance and the Committee had asked that the internal auditor provide clarification on the context and scope of the review and re-present it in December;</li> <li>• subject to the views of the Board, the Committee proposed conducting a deep dive into the year-end position in respect of balance sheet movements.</li> </ul>	
11.2	In response to a question on deep dive reviews, the A&RAC Chair explained that the purpose was to provide assurance and understanding of how specific risks were being managed through the three lines of assurance and risk mitigation plan. The Board Secretary would circulate the template for risk deep dives.	BS
11.3	The Board discussed the proposed subject for the Committee's next deep dive and supported the proposed review into year-end balance sheet movements. The Board suggested that the Committee consider a future deep dive into the application of learning outcomes from post project learning reviews to new projects. The A&RAC Chair would scope the deep dive for consideration in December with the EDCS, EDAS and Head of Finance.	A&RAC Chair
11.4	The Board otherwise noted the report.	
<b>12</b>	<b>Audit Quality Annual Report</b>	
12.1	The Audit Lead presented the annual Audit Quality Report, which was not a legal requirement but demonstrated commitment to and transparency around audit quality. She outlined the outcomes of the independent reviews and confirmed that the targets in the annual plan had been achieved with Audit Wales measuring favourably against its counterparts.	
12.2	In his role as Chair of the Audit Quality Committee, the EDCS commented that the report reflected how strongly audit quality was embedded at Audit Wales and he was pleased with the outcomes reported. He indicated that the Audit Quality Committee recognised the pressures on the Audit Development and Guidance (AD&G) team and he was pleased that the Board had supported the bid for additional resource for the team. The Board noted that the Communications Team was developing an interactive version of the Report for the Audit Wales website.	
12.3	The Board discussed the impact of the implementation of revised auditing standards, which had seen staff move to a more risk-based approach, with	



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	<p>staff using their judgement to identify higher risk areas. The Auditor General explained that while QAD had observed a focus at the lower and higher ends of the risk spectrum, this was not highlighted as a concern but auditors were encouraged to consider the full range of risk. The Auditor General highlighted the complexity and scale of the change and that he was pleased to see an increase in confidence in applying the approach in the current year. The AD&amp;G Manager Audit Quality &amp; Policy explained that this was a major cultural change and staff were supported with training and discussion in practitioner groups as well as ongoing support from the AD&amp;G team.</p>	
12.4	<p>In response to a question regarding how the quality of work of non-audit teams was appraised, the Board was assured that there were processes in place for this purpose. The Chair would follow this up with the AD&amp;G team.</p>	Chair
12.5	<p>The Board also discussed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the introduction of INTOSAI standard in performance audit which provided the structure of a standard methodology while also requiring auditors to exercise a high level of judgement in their work; and</li> <li>• the engagement activity with other inspectorate bodies which helped prevent duplication of work, suggesting that this could be referenced in future reports.</li> </ul>	
12.6	<p>The Board welcomed and noted the report, which reflected Audit Wales's commitment to audit quality.</p>	
<b>13</b>	<b>Equality Report 2023-24</b>	
13.1	<p>The Head of Planning and Reporting presented the draft Equality Report and outlined:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the context for the report;</li> <li>• progress against each of the equality objectives,</li> <li>• the outcome of impact assessments conducted; and</li> <li>• the analysis of employment information in respect of workforce diversity and pay gaps.</li> </ul> <p>He explained that a data tool would support the report which he was keen to finalise and publish ahead of the statutory deadline to reflect Audit Wales's commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion.</p>	
13.2	<p>Darren Griffiths, as Chair of the Audit Wales Equality Interest Group (Pawb) commented that the report offered a fair and balanced reflection of Audit Wales's performance and progress in the year. Pawb recognised that there was more to be done but was content with progress. He suggested that comments from staff could strengthen future reports.</p>	
13.3	<p>The Board thanked the Head of Planning and Reporting for developing a clear report, noting that it was, in some areas, difficult to draw conclusions due to the impact that small changes or numbers could have in a relatively small organisation.</p>	
13.4	<p>The Board discussed the work that was being done to attract and retain a diverse workforce, noting that outreach work appeared to have generated</p>	

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	a higher volume of applications from ethnic minority candidates but these were not reflected in appointments made following assessment. The Board was keen to understand potential barriers in the recruitment process and how these could be addressed. The EDCS explained that recruitment training was being rolled out to all recruiting managers with a view to ensuring consistency in recruitment and raising awareness of any potential unconscious bias. A review of the recruitment process was also underway.	
13.5	The Board noted that while information relating to employee Board members would be covered in the report, it might be appropriate to refer to Board diversity in the report. The Head of Planning and Reporting would consider whether to cover that in the foreword.	HoP&R
13.6	The Board briefly discussed: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the overall composition of the organisation, noting that this was expected to change over time as staff progressed to more senior roles; and</li> <li>• whether Audit Wales could promote diversity in audit leadership by inviting an external speaker to speak to the organisation at a future event.</li> </ul>	
13.7	The Board approved the Equality Report for 2023-24 for publication.	
<b>14</b>	<b>Interim Report: structure and timetable</b>	
14.1	The Head of Planning and Reporting outlined the proposed structure and timetable for delivering the interim report which provided an assessment of progress against the 2024-25 annual plan.	
14.2	The Board was content with the structure and timetable, subject to building in an opportunity for Board members to be sighted of the draft report and authorised the Chair and Auditor General to approve and sign the final version of the Interim Report.	
<b>15</b>	<b>Designation of DPO</b>	
15.1	The EDCS presented a paper proposing the designation of the Head of Planning and Reporting as Data Protection Officer (DPO) during a career break agreed for the current DPO. The Head of Planning and Reporting held a data protection certification and would be supported by members of the Law and Ethics team.	
15.2	In response to a question on whether career breaks could be used more widely to retain staff, the EDCS explained that staff could apply for a career break but there was no guarantee of a job at the end of the period, so there was a level of uncertainty.	
15.3	The Board approved the designation of the Head of Planning and Reporting as DPO for the Wales Audit Office and noted the appointment of Kathleen Job as Deputy DPO.	
<b>16</b>	<b>Documents and Records Management Policy</b>	

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16.1	<p>The Head of Business Services presented a revised draft Documents and Records Management Policy. She explained that the policy had been updated to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• align with the Information Governance and Security Policies;</li> <li>• provide full and updated guidance for managing both digital and paper records; and</li> <li>• incorporate updated retention schedules.</li> </ul>	
16.2	<p>In response to a question on whether a change in risk profile had triggered the review, the Head of Business Services explained that there had been no incidents which would impact the risk profile and the review had been driven by a need to align the policy with other updated policies. She briefly explained the retention policy for final reports and their subsequent deposit as a public record.</p>	
16.3	<p>The Board approved the revised Documents and Records Management Policy.</p>	
<b>17</b>	<b>Contract Award: Consultancy Support Services</b>	
17.1	<p>The Head of Business Services presented a paper summarising the outcome of the procurement exercise for consultancy support to Audit Wales's Microsoft 365 audit platforms and seeking Board approval for the contract award, which could exceed the threshold for ELT approval due to the cumulative value over the term of the contract.</p>	
17.2	<p>The Board approved the award of the contract for consultancy support for Audit Wales's Microsoft 365 audit platforms to Transparency for a period of up to 4 years.</p>	
<b>18</b>	<b>Code of Audit Practice</b>	
18.1	<p>The Board Secretary outlined the process for review of the Auditor General's Code of Audit Practice and highlighted the substantive changes which:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• strengthened the emphasis on proportionality;</li> <li>• included a specific requirement for the application of professional scepticism; and</li> <li>• strengthened provisions on independence in line with the Financial Reporting Council's Ethical Standard.</li> </ul> <p>She explained that other changes had been made to update terminology, emphasise a risk-based approach and refer to handling of correspondence and challenge items.</p>	
18.2	<p>The Board Secretary indicated that Board members were welcome to provide their comments on the revised draft Code as part of the consultation. She indicated that there was no requirement for the Finance Committee to approve the Code but would have an opportunity to provide comments as part of the consultation, which the Board Secretary would draw to the attention of the Finance Committee clerking team.</p>	
18.3	<p>The Board noted the proposed changes to the Code and the process and timing for the consultation process.</p>	

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<b>19</b>	<b>Review of the forward work programme</b>	
19.1	The Board discussed the forward work programme and agreed that discussions to cover audit modernisation, digital developments and future audit development would be valuable. The Chair and Board Secretary would meet with members of the ELT to scope and plan the timing for such items.	Chair / BS
19.2	The Board confirmed that the Integrated Performance Report should be provided quarterly and a review of the TRM implementation would be tabled for March 2025. The Board Secretary would update the work programme.	BS
<b>20</b>	<b>Any other business</b>	
20.1	The EDCS reported that Audit Wales had again achieved top ten status as a Working Families employer.	
20.2	Richard Thurston extended an invitation for Board and ELT members to attend an event to mark the 30 <sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Evaluation Society.	
20.3	The EDCC reported that the Communications Team had been shortlisted for a CIPR award in relation to the Audit Wales conference, and the Board offered its congratulations.	
<b>21</b>	<b>Review of the meeting</b>	
21.1	The Chair invited feedback on the meeting, and attendees commented on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the high quality of the papers;</li> <li>• the effective presentation and handling of the Estimate item; and</li> <li>• the warmth of the welcome and hospitality offered by staff in the Penllergaer office.</li> </ul>	
<b>22</b>	<b>Date of next meeting:</b>	
22.1	Board meeting 13 and 14 November 2024, Cardiff	