



**Northern Ireland
Assembly**

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

THURSDAY, 12 MARCH 2020, THE SENATE CHAMBER,
PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS

Present: Mr William Humphrey MLA (Chairperson)
Mr Roy Beggs MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Cathal Boylan MLA
Ms Órlaithí Flynn MLA
Mr Harry Harvey MLA
Mr David Hilditch MLA

Apologies: Mr John Dallat MLA
Mr Trevor Lunn MLA
Mr Maolíosá McHugh MLA

In Attendance: Ms Lucia Wilson, Assembly Clerk
Ms Gillian Barker, Assistant Assembly Clerk
Ms Karen Barry, Clerical Supervisor
Mr Sean O’Rawe, Clerical Officer

The meeting moved into open session 2.06 pm

1. Apologies

Apologies noted from Mr John Dallat MLA, Mr Trevor Lunn and Mr Maolíosá McHugh MLA.

2. Minutes of meeting on 5 March 2020

The draft minutes of 5 March 2020 were agreed.

3. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

4. Declaration of Members' Interests

There was no declaration of members' interests declared at the commencement of the meeting.

5. Correspondence

Agreed: The Committee noted correspondence from Mr Edward Cooke dated 2 & 3 March 2020.

Agreed: The Committee note a memo from the Audit Committee dated 6 March 2020 regarding details of the NIAO budget 2020-21.

The meeting moved into open session at 2.09 pm

6. Inquiry into 'Managing Legal Aid' – Memorandum of Reply

Mr Kieran Donnelly CB, Comptroller and Auditor General; and Mr Tomas Wilkinson, Director, Mr Kyle Bingham, Assembly Support joined the meeting

The Clerk briefed the Committee on a previous PAC's inquiry on 'Managing Legal Aid' which was published in February 2017. The Committee noted the Memorandum of Reply (MOR) from Peter May, Accounting Officer for Department of Justice dated 25 February 2020.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to Peter May, Accounting Officer for the Department of Justice, requesting a six-month update on implementing PAC's recommendations.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Justice Committee regarding the 5 recommendations and to ask what legislative changes are required to support the recommendations.

The meeting moved into closed session at 2.22 pm

7. Inquiry into Major Capital Projects – First Issues Paper

Mr Kieran Donnelly CB, Comptroller & Auditor General; Mr Kyle Bingham and Mr Tomas Wilkinson, Director, joined the meeting.

The Committee noted the email from the Department of Finance DALO, Ciara McKay to Colin Pidgeon, Research Officer, RaIse on the efficiency saving figures in relation to other jurisdictions.

The Committee discussed the first issues paper on the inquiry into Major Capital Projects.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the first issues paper accurately reflected the issues raised and should form part of the first draft of the committee report for consideration.

The meeting moved into Closed Session at 2.52 pm

8. Inquiry into Major Capital Projects – Preparation Session

The Committee noted correspondence from Mr Mike Brennan, Accounting Officer for the Department for Economy.

The Committee discussed the evidence session on 26 March 2020 in relation to three Major Capital Projects' case studies: Casement Park, the A5 linking Londonderry, Strabane, Omagh and Aughnacloy; and the A6 Randlestown to Castledawson Dualling Scheme.

Committee noted the witnesses for the evidence session:

- Ms Tracy Meharg – Department for Communities, Accounting Officer;
- Ms Jacqueline Fearon – Director of Regional Stadia Programme and Head of Capital Delivery, DfC;
- Ms Katrina Godfrey – Department for Infrastructure, Accounting Officer; and
- Mr John Irvine – Director of Major Projects and Procurement with in Road Division, DfI.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to Ms Katrina Godfrey, Accounting Officer for the Department for Infrastructure to invite Mr Angus Kerr, Chief Planner and Director of Regional Planning to attend the meeting of 26 March 2020.

9. Draft Forward Work Programme

The Committee noted the following NIAO reports recently published:

- Continuous improvement arrangements in policing – dated 3 March 2020;
- Injury on duty schemes for officers in the Police Service for Northern Ireland and the Northern Ireland Prison Service – dated 10 March 2020; and
- Governance issues in Sports Northern Ireland – dated 11 March 2020

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to Tracy Meharg, Accounting Officer for the Department for Communities for an update on the implementation of the recommendations coming out of the NIAO Report, Governance issues in Sports Northern Ireland – 11 March 2020.

The Clerk briefed the Committee on the current draft forward work programme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the draft forward work programme and to publish it on the website.

10. Any Other Business

The Committee noted a letter from Mr Derek Baker, Accounting Officer for Department of Education, and that he is unable to attend an evidence session on 18 June 2020 on the Inquiry into Special Needs Education.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to Mr Baker to invite his deputy and other officials to attend in his place.

Meeting was suspended at 3.15 pm

Meeting resumed at 3.22

Mr Roy Beggs re-joined the meeting at 3.23 pm.

The Committee discussed correspondence from Mr T I McManus dated 26 February 2020.

Agreed: The Committee noted a letter has been sent to Mr McManus for his permission to forward his correspondence on to the NIAO, but to date there has been no response.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write again to Mr McManus requesting his permission to forward his correspondence to the NIAO to enable the committee to investigate his concerns more fully.

11. Date, time and place of next meeting

The next committee meeting will be held, on Thursday 19 March 2020 at 2.00 pm in the Senate Chamber.

The meeting was adjourned at 3.33 pm

Mr William Humphrey

Chairperson

Public Accounts Committee

12th March 2020