



**Northern Ireland  
Assembly**

## **PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE**

### **MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS**

THURSDAY, 15<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER 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 – attended remotely  
Mr Harry Harvey MLA  
Mr David Hilditch MLA  
Mr Andrew Muir MLA  
Mr Maolíosa McHugh MLA  
Mr Matthew O’Toole MLA

Apologies: None

In Attendance: Ms Lucia Wilson, Assembly Clerk  
Ms Gillian Barker, Assistant Assembly Clerk  
Ms Karen Barry, Clerical Supervisor  
Mr Darren Weir, Clerical Officer

*The meeting moved into public session 2.05 pm.*

#### **1. Apologies**

None

#### **2. Minutes of meeting on 8<sup>th</sup> October 2020**

The draft minutes of 8<sup>th</sup> October 2020 were agreed and to be published.

### **3. Declaration of Members' Interests**

- Mr Roy Beggs MLA declared he was a Governor of Roddensvale School, Larne;
- Mr Cathal Boylan MLA declared he was a Governor of Clea Primary School, Keady and Vice Chair of the NIA All Party Autistic Group;
- Mr William Humphrey MLA, declared he was a Governor of Edenbrooke Primary School and Governor of Belfast Model School for Girls;
- Mr Andrew Muir MLA declared he was a Governor of Priory Integrated College, Holywood;
- Mr Maolíosa McHugh MLA declared he was Chairman of pre-school Naíscóil na Deirg;

### **4. Matters Arising**

None

### **5. Correspondence**

The Committee noted correspondence dated 8 October from Mrs Marie McCue regarding the Charity Commission for NI and the ramifications of the High Court rulings of May 2019 and February 2020.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward her letter to NIAO and to write to Mrs McCue informing her of this.

The Committee noted correspondence from Mr TI McManus dated 8 October 2020 and 19 July 2020.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to Mr TI McManus informing him that his correspondence has been forward to NIAO.

*The meeting moved into public session at 2.09 pm*

### **6. Evidence on NIAO Report Special Educational Needs**

*Mr Kieran Donnelly C&AG and Mr Stuart Stevenson, TOA attended remotely for the evidence session.*

*Mr Derek Baker, AO DfE and Mr Ricky Irwin, Deputy of Inclusion and Wellbeing DfE, joined the meeting*

The Committee noted that the Department is currently conducting two consultations regarding Special Educational Needs - draft SEN Regulations and draft SEN Codes of Practice. Both consultations are closing on 22 December 2020. The departmental officials then briefed the Committee on the 2017 & 2020 NIAO reports on Special Educational Needs, followed by a question and answer session.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to the Department for Education on a range of issues which arose from the evidence session.

The Chair thanked Mr Baker and Mr Irwin for attending the meeting; and, on behalf of the Committee, wished Mr Baker all the best for his pending retirement.

*The meeting was suspended at 3.40 pm*

*The meeting recommenced in closed session at 3.47 pm*

The Committee agreed to issue its press release that day on Landweb and Digital Transformation to be issued 19 October 2020.

*The meeting recommenced in public session at 3.57 pm*

*Ms Sara Long, Chief Executive for Education Authority and Ms Una Turbitt, Interim Director of Children and Young People, joined the meeting.*

Ms Sara Long Chief Executive for EA and Ms Una Turbitt, Interim Director of Children and Young People briefed the Committee on the 2017 & 2020 NIAO Reports on Special Educational Needs. There then followed a question and answer session.

*Andrew Muir left the meeting at 2.43 pm*

*Andrew Muir re-joined the meeting at 2.46 pm*

*Matthew O'Toole left the meeting at 3.24 pm*

*Matthew O'Toole re-joined the meeting at 3.29 pm*

*Matthew O'Toole left the meeting at 4.46 pm*

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to the Education Authority on a range of issues which arose from the evidence session.

The Chair thanked Ms Sara Long and Ms Una Turbitt for attending the meeting.

*The meeting moved into closed session at 5.30 pm*

## **7. Inquiry into Special Educational Needs**

*Mr Kieran Donnelly CB, Comptroller and Auditor General; and Ms Collette Kane Director, joined the meeting. Ms Suzanne Murphy and Ms Karen Armstrong, Senior Auditor joined the meeting remotely.*

The Committee discussed the evidence it had taken from the departmental officials regarding NIAO reports 2017 ‘Special Educational Needs’ and 2020 ‘Impact Review of Special Educational Needs’ with the Audit Office Officials.

*Mr David Hilditch left the meeting at 5.40 pm*

*Mr David Hilditch re-joined the meeting at 5.42 pm*

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education and the Education Authority to request further information.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to the Board of the Education Authority inviting the Chair of the Board to give evidence to the Committee.

*The meeting remained in closed session 5.49 pm*

## **8. Draft Forward Work Programme**

*Mr Kieran Donnelly CB, Comptroller and Auditor General remained at the table.*

The Committee noted the departmental officials would be returning to the Committee on 5<sup>th</sup> November 2020 regarding Ulster University Greater Belfast Development; and on the 12<sup>th</sup> November 2020 regarding further information on the Casement Park Project Grant Award from DfC’s.

The Clerk agreed to liaise with Mr Kieran Donnelly, C&AG on any new NIAO Value for Money Reports and report back to the Committee.

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

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

*The meeting remained in closed session at 5.54 pm*

## **9. Any Other Business**

The Committee agreed a draft press release regarding the publication of Report on Major Capital Projects on 22 October.

*Agreed:* Committee agreed the press release on its Report on Major Capital Projects and to publish it on Monday 19 October 2020.

The Committee noted the details of a planned professional development workshop on Effective Questioning / Questioning Skills.

*Agreed:* The Committee noted the Members who would be attending the workshop.

The Committee noted the First Stage: Budget (No. 3) is to be debated in the Chamber on Monday 19 October 2020 this will include debate on PAC's Report on Excess Votes (Northern Ireland) 2016-2017.

## **10. Date, time and place of next meeting**

The next committee meeting will be held, on Thursday 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2020 at 2.00 pm in Room 30.

*The meeting was adjourned at 5.57pm.*

**Mr William Humphrey**

**Chairperson**

**Public Accounts Committee**

**22<sup>nd</sup> October 2020**