



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Public Accounts Committee

Minutes of Proceedings

Thursday, 18 February 2021

Meeting Location: Room 30, Parliament Buildings, Belfast

Present:

Mr William Humphrey MB MLA (Chairperson)
Mr Roy Beggs MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Harry Harvey MLA
Mr David Hilditch MLA

Present by Video or Teleconference:

Mr Cathal Boylan MLA
Ms Órlaithí Flynn 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)



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In Attendance by Video or Teleconference:

Ms Karen Barry (Clerical Supervisor)

Mr Darren Weir (Clerical Officer)

The meeting commenced at 2.06 pm in Open Session

1. Apologies

None

2. Draft Minutes of 11th February 2021

Agreed: The draft minutes of the meeting of 11th February 2021 were agreed as amended and to be published.

3. Declaration of Interest

Mr Andrew Muir MLA declared his mother would benefit from the Ministerial Direction 'Bonus Scheme for Health and Social Care Staff' that is being discussed at Agenda Item 6.

4. Matters Arising

Location of Ulster University Students

The Committee considered a draft letter to the Ulster University regarding the relocation of 800 students.



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Agreed: The Committee agreed to issue the letter to the Ulster University.

Agreed: The Committee noted further correspondence dated 12, 15, 16 & 17 February 2021 from Edward Cooke.

5. Correspondence

The following Officials joined the meeting:

Mr Kieran Donnelly CB Comptroller & Auditor General (C&AG) for Northern Ireland Assembly (NIAO);

Ms Colette Kane Director, NIAO; and

Mr Kyle Bingham Assembly Support Worker, NIAO joined the meeting remotely.

Charity Commission for Northern Ireland (CCNI)

The Committee noted correspondence dated 12 February 2021 from Trevor McKee regarding a review of CCNI. His correspondence included correspondence dated 9 February 2021, from Ms Nicole Lappin, Chief Commissioner for CCNI. The Committee noted that Mr McKee has been invited to participate in the review to outline his concerns.

Agreed: The Committee noted Mr McKee's correspondence and agreed to forward to NIAO.

Agreed: The Committee noted the C&AG is keeping this matter under review.

Memo from Committee for Finance



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The Committee noted a memo dated 12 February 2021 from the Committee for Finance relating to PAC's report on 'LandWeb and Digital Transformation' and a letter from Mr Paul Murnaghan, Regional Director NI, BT Enterprises, to the Committee for Finance.

Agreed: The Committee considered and agreed a draft response to Mr Paul Murnaghan regarding this issues he raised in his correspondence to the Committee for Finance and his letter of 2 February 2021 to PAC.

The meeting remained in Open Session at 2.15 pm

6. Ministerial Directions

The following Officials remained in the meeting:

Mr Kieran Donnelly CB Comptroller & Auditor General (C&AG)
Ms Colette Kane NIAO Director; and
Mr Kyle Bingham, Assembly Support Officer remotely.

The Committee noted correspondence from the DoH Perm Sec, dated 4 February 2021, outlining the Ministerial Directions 'Acknowledgement Payments to Students' and 'Bonus Scheme for Health and Social Care Staff'.

Acknowledgment Payments to Students

The Acknowledgment Payments of £2,000 will be made to healthcare students who have undertaken clinical placements in the HSC during the pandemic. It is estimated that more than 3,800 students will be eligible and the total cost is projected to be in the region of £7.7 million, and payment will be received in May 2021.

Bonus Scheme for Health and Social Care Staff

The Bonus Scheme is up to the value of £500 per individual, to be made to health and social care staff. The payment will be paid pro rata to all staff who have one



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month's employment across the relevant period (17 March 2020 to 31 January 2021). A broad range of staff and carers are eligible.

The Committee noted the relevant correspondence from the Minister of Health dated 17th January and 25th January 2021, and the briefing paper for the two separate ministerial directions.

Agreed: The Committee noted both Ministerial Directions – The 'Acknowledgement Payments to Students' and 'The Bonus Scheme for Health and Social Care Staff'.

Agreed: The C&AG agreed to follow up with the Permanent Secretary, DOF on publishing the list of all Ministerial Directions.

The meeting was suspended at 2.21 pm

The meeting reconvened in Open Session at 2.33 pm

7. Inquiry into 'Vehicle and Driver Agency 2019-20': Evidence Session

The following departmental officials joined the meeting remotely:

Ms Katrina Godfrey, Accounting Officer, Department for Infrastructure; and
Mr Jeremy Logan, Chief Executive for Vehicle and Driver Agency.

In attendance:

Mr Kieran Donnelly CB C&AG; and
Mr Stuart Stevenson, Treasury Officer of Accounts (TOA) attended remotely.

The Committee welcomed the Departmental Officials, Ms Katrina Godfrey, AO DfI and Mr Jeremy Logan, Chief Executive, DVA.

The Committee noted the relevant papers for the evidence session:

NIAO Report Drive and Vehicle Agency 2019-20;
Witness Biographies; and
NIAO restricted briefing paper and suggested areas of questioning paper.

Ms Godfrey, AO DFI, made a statement to the Committee and there then followed a



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question and answer session.

Mr David Hilditch MLA left the meeting at 3.33 pm

Mr David Hilditch MLA re-joined the meeting at 4.01 pm

The meeting went into Closed Session at 4.18 pm

8. Inquiry into 'Vehicle and Driver Agency 2019-20'.

The following officials remained in the meeting:

Mr Kieran Donnelly CB C&AG; and
Ms Colette Kane Director.

The following officials remained in the meeting remotely:

Ms Suzanne Murphy, Auditor;
Ms Caroline Laird, Audit Manager and
Mr Kyle Bingham, Assembly Support Officer.

The Committee discussed with Mr Kieran Donnelly CB C&AG and his team, the evidence it had received from Ms Godfrey AO DfI and Mr Logan CE DVA, regarding the 'NIAO Report Driver and Vehicle Agency 2019-20'.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request some further information from Ms Godfrey following the evidence session.

Agreed: The Committee noted Mr Kieran Donnelly CB C&AG and his team will produce an Issues Paper for next week's meeting.

The meeting remained in Closed Session at 4.32 pm



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9. Inquiry into 'Impact Review on Special Educational Needs'

The following officials remained in the meeting:

Mr Kieran Donnelly CB C&AG;
Ms Colette Kane Director NIAO; and
Mr Kyle Bingham Assembly Support Officer NIAO

Consideration of draft Press Release

The Committee considered the draft press release for the report on 'Impact Review on Special Educational Needs'. The Committee noted the report will be published on Thursday 25 February 2021 alongside the press release

Agreed: The Committee agreed the press release.

The meeting remained in Closed Session at 4.34 pm

10. Proposal for Co-operation

The following officials remained in the meeting:

Mr Kieran Donnelly CB C&AG;
Ms Colette Kane, Director NIAO; and
Mr Kyle Bingham Assembly Support Officer NIAO.

The Committee discussed the proposal for co-operation of committees on consequences of the new arrangements at the UK border, including trade and customs arrangement.

The Committee noted the relevant papers:

- Correspondence dated 29 January 2021 from Meg Hillier MP, Chair of Westminster PAC;



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- Letter dated 1 December 2020 to Permanent Secretary, Cabinet Office from Meg Hillier MP, entitled, 'The UK border: preparedness for the end of the transition period';
- National Audit Office report 'The UK border: preparedness for the end of the transition period' November 2020; and
- The Clerk's memo dated 11 February 2021 on 'Co-operation between Westminster PAC and NIA PAC on areas of mutual interest'.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to organise a meeting between the Chair of NIA PAC, Chair of Westminster PAC and both PAC Clerks, to discuss how this arrangement could evolve, and to report back to the Committee.

Agreed: The Committee noted it may be beneficial to have a briefing from Mr Andrew McCormick Director General, International Relations, The Executive, on this matter.

The meeting remained in Closed Session at 4.45 pm

11. Draft Forward Work Programme

The following officials remained in the meeting:

Mr Kieran Donnelly CB C&AG;
Ms Colette Kane Director NIAO; and
Mr Kyle Bingham Assembly Support Officer NIAO.

The Committee noted the updated list of NIAO reports, and that all Committees have been notified of those NIAO reports which PAC has agreed to release from primacy.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to review the list of NIAO reports periodically.

The Committee noted the amended draft forward work programme January–April 2021 including its next inquiry on 'Speeding up Justice: avoidable delays in the criminal justice system'.



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Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Justice, in advance of the inquiry, for an update on the implementation of the recommendations from the NIAO report, published on 27 March 2018.

12. Any Other Business

None

13. Date, Time and Place of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Public Accounts Committee will take place on Thursday 25th February 2021 at 2.00 pm in The Senate, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting adjourned at 4.47 pm.

**Mr William Humphrey MBE MLA
Chairperson
Public Accounts Committee
18 February 2021**