



**Northern Ireland
Assembly**

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

THURSDAY, 3RD DECEMBER 2020, THE SENATE,
PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS

Present: Mr William Humphrey MLA (Chairperson)
Mr Roy Beggs MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Cathal Boylan MLA
Mr Harry Harvey MLA
Mr David Hilditch MLA
Mr Matthew O'Toole MLA
Mr Andrew Muir MLA
Mr Maolíosa McHugh MLA

Apologies: Ms Órlaithí Flynn MLA

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 began in Open Session at 2.09 pm

*Mr Kieran Donnelly, C&AG and Mr Kyle Bingham, Assembly Support Officer
NIAO joined the meeting.*

1. Apologies

Ms Órlaithí Flynn MLA

2. Minutes of the meeting 26th November 2020

Agreed: The draft minutes of the meeting on 26^h November 2020 were agreed.

3. Declaration of Interests

Mr Matthew O'Toole MLA declared he was formerly an employee of the UK Civil Servant and a colleague of one of the witnesses' giving evidence on NIAO report 'Capacity and Capability in the NICS'.

4. Matters Arising

The Committee noted the appointment of the interim Head of Civil Service, Ms Jenny Pyper, former CE for the Utility Regulator NI.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to Ms Pyper HOCS, to congratulate her on her appointment and to request an informal meeting between the Chair and deputy Chair and with Ms Pyper HOCS to discuss PAC's key priorities.

The Committee noted a statement that the Minister of Finance made on 1st December 2020 in the Chamber regarding the restructure of the new Procurement Board.

The Committee welcomed the Minister's statement which was aligned to PAC's report on Major Capital Projects in which the Committee had highlighted the lack of representation on the Procurement Board from the private sector.

The Committee noted the extract from the report: *"The Committee heard from the Construction Employers Federation that it would be very keen to take a place on the Procurement Board to ensure that the private sector could contribute to the public sector process. The Committee welcomes assurances from DoF that discussions have started about the make-up of the Procurement Board and how often it meets"*.

5. Correspondence

The Committee noted correspondence dated 25 November 2020 from Sue Gray, AO, DoF in relation to its inquiry into the 'LandWeb Project and Digital Transformation'.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to return to this correspondence next week when considering their draft report on 'LandWeb and Digital Transformation'.

The Committee noted correspondence dated 27 November 2020 from Suzanne Wylie regarding 'Blue Light Regulations' and Casement Park.

The Committee noted their correspondence has been referred to John Walsh, City Solicitor, who will respond in due course.

The Committee noted correspondence dated 1 December 2020 from Sara Long, CE EA regarding the current HR investigation and the implementation of recommendations from 2017 & 2020 NIAO reports on 'Special Educational Needs'.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to return to this correspondence next week for further consideration.

6. Inquiry into ‘Capacity and Capability in the NICS’ – Evidence Session

Ms Sue Gray, Accounting Officer for DoF; and Ms Jill Minne, Head of NICSHR, DoF joined the meeting.

Ms Michele Woods, Director of NICSHR; and Ms Anne Breen, Learning & Development Lead NICSHR joined the meeting remotely.

Mr Kieran Donnelly CB, C&AG was in attendance and Mr Stuart Stevenson TOA joined the meeting remotely.

Ms Gray made an opening statement which was followed by a question and answer session.

Mr Andrew Muir MLA left the meeting at 2.46 pm

Mr Andrew Muir MLA re-joined the meeting at 2.28 pm

Mr Maolíosa McHugh MLA left the meeting at 3.17 pm

Mr Maolíosa McHugh MLA re-joined the meeting at 3.20 pm

Mr Matthew O’Toole MLA left the meeting at 3.33pm

Mr Matthew O’Toole MLA re-joined the meeting at 3.38 pm

Mr William Humphrey MLA [Chairperson] left the meeting at 3.48 pm

Mr Roy Beggs MLA [Deputy Chairperson] took the Chair at 3.48 pm

Mr William Humphrey MLA re-joined the meeting at 3.52 pm and re-took the Chair.

Mr David Hilditch MLA left the meeting at 4.46 pm

Mr David Hilditch MLA re-joined the meeting at 4.50 pm

Mr Matthew O’Toole MLA left the meeting at 4.46 pm

The meeting went into Closed Session at 4.52 pm

7. Inquiry into ‘Capacity and Capability in the NICS’

Mr Kieran Donnelly CB, C&AG; Mr Rodney Allen, Director; Mrs Christine Burns Audit Manager and Mr Kyle Bingham, Assembly Support Officer joined the meeting.

Mr Conor McGeown, Senior Auditor joined the meeting remotely.

The Committee discussed with Mr Kieran Donnelly C&AG and his team the evidence it had received from the departmental officials regarding the ‘NIAO Report Capacity and Capability in the NICS’.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the department to request further information on a number of issues arising from the evidence session.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to invite Ms Sue Gray AO DoF and her officials back to the Committee in the 2021.

Agreed: The Committee agreed an Issues Paper would be prepared by the Audit Office Officials for consideration in the final report.

Mr Andrew Muir MLA left the meeting at 5.04 pm

Mr Andrew Muir MLA re-joined the meeting at 5.06 pm

Mr Matthew O'Toole MLA re-joined the meeting at 5.07 pm

The meeting remained in Closed Session at 5.31 pm

8. Forward Work Programme – September - March 2021

The Committee noted the draft Forward Work Programme covering the period to the end of March 2021 and noted Mr Mike Brennan AO DoE will give evidence regarding NIAO report 'Generating Electricity from Renewable Energy' on 28 January 2021.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to issue witness letter to Mr Mike Brennan AO DoE.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the draft Forward Work Programme to the end of March 2021 and to publish it.

Agreed: The Committee agreed their last meeting prior to Christmas recess is 17th December 2020 and their first meeting after the Christmas recess is 14th January 2021.

9. Any Other Business

The Committee returned to business under Matters Arising regarding the Minister of Finance's 1st December 2020 statement in the Chamber regarding the restructuring of the Procurement Board.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to Sue Gray, AO DoF to request the terms of reference for the new Procurement Board.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to issue a press release welcoming the announcement by the Minister of Finance that there will be private sector representation on the new Procurement Board.

10. Date, time and place of next meeting

The next meeting of the Public Accounts Committee will take place on Thursday 10th December 2020 at 2.00p.m in The Chamber, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting adjourned at 5.38 pm.

Mr William Humphrey
Chairperson
Public Accounts Committee

3rd December 2020

Signed