



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Public Accounts Committee

Minutes of Proceedings

Thursday, 4 March 2021

Meeting Location: Room 30, Parliament Buildings, Belfast

Present: Mr William Humphrey MBE 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 2.04 pm in Open Session

1. Apologies

None

2. Draft Minutes of 25th February 2021

Agreed: The draft minutes of the meeting of 25th February 2021 were agreed and to be published.

3. Declaration of Interest

None

4. Matters Arising

None



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5. Correspondence

The following Officials joined the meeting:

Mr Kieran Donnelly CB Comptroller & Auditor General (C&AG) for Northern Ireland Assembly (NIAO);
Mr Rodney Allen, Director, NIAO; and
Mr Kyle Bingham Assembly Support Officer, NIAO joined the meeting remotely.

St Marys High School, Brollagh

The Committee noted correspondence from John Walsh a member of the Board of Governors for St. Marys High School, Brollagh, dated 22 February 2021 and 29 October 2020.

The Committee noted that Mr Walsh has copied his correspondence to C&AG and Department of Education.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to Mr Walsh to advise him the matter was previously brought to the attention of C&AG and that the Committee will now refer his letter to the Education Committee for their attention as well.

Friends of Knock Iveagh

The Committee noted correspondence, dated 24 February 2021, from Friends of Knock Iveagh regarding a campaign against the 'unlawful development of an important heritage site and an 'incorrectly streamlined application for a wind turbine' adjacent to the summit of Knock Iveagh.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward this correspondence to the Audit Office for comment as it is relevant to the forthcoming inquiry on 'Generating Electricity from Renewable Energy', (GERE).

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write back to the Friends of Knock Iveagh advising the group that their concerns will be considered within the context of the forthcoming inquiry on Generating Electricity from Renewable Energy.



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Memo – Economy Committee

The Committee noted a memo dated 25 February 2021 from the Clerk to the Economy Committee regarding PAC's right to primacy on NIAO's Report into 'Investment in Broadband'.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to keep the Economy Committee updated regarding the commencement of this inquiry.

Ulster University – Relocation of Students

The Committee noted correspondence, dated 26 February 2021, from Professor Bartholomew regarding the rationale for the relocation of 800 students from Belfast Campus to Magee College.

Agreed: The Committee noted the University's response and also agreed to consider Professor's invitation to the visit the campus, once it is safe to do so.

DVA Evidence Session

The Committee noted correspondence dated 26 February 2021 from Katrina Godfrey, AO, Dfl. This was a follow up response to the Driver and Vehicle Agency (DVA) evidence session on 18 February 2021 requesting further information on the disposal of 52 Lifts and details of the current membership of the Department's Audit and Risk Assurance Committee (DARC).

Agreed: The Committee noted the response.

Managing Legal Aid Report

The Committee noted correspondence, dated 1 March 2021 from Peter May, AO, DoJ, regarding clarification on the Department's intentions regarding the Statutory Registration Scheme and an update on the implementation of the other recommendations in PAC's 2017 report on Managing Legal Aid Report,.

Agreed: The Committee agree to defer this item of business until next week.



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The meeting remained in Open Session at 2.14 pm

6. Inquiry into Capacity and Capability in the NICS - Evidence Session with Deirdre Toner, Civil Service Commissioner (NI)

The following Official joined the meeting:

Ms Deirdre Toner, Civil Service Commission NI.

In attendance:

Mr Kieran Donnelly CB C&AG NIAO; and
Mr Stuart Stevenson Treasury Officer of Accounts, TOA DoF, remotely.

The Committee welcomed Ms Deirdre Toner, Chairperson of the Civil Service Commissioners NI to the meeting.

The Committee noted the following papers for both Agenda Items 6 & 7:

- NIAO Report on 'Capacity and Capability in NICS';
- Restricted Issues Paper regarding evidence session of 4 February 2021, Sue Gray, Accounting Officer Department for Finance;
- Biographies of Ms Toner and Mr Watmore;
- Correspondence dated 4 February 2021 regarding Digital Skills & Capacity Research Report; and
- Suggested areas of questions for the evidence session.

Ms Toner made a statement to the Committee and there then followed a question and answer session.

The Committee thanked Ms Toner for taking time out today to give evidence.

The meeting remained in Open Session at 3.36 pm



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7. Inquiry into Capacity and Capability in the NICS - Evidence Session with Ian Watmore, Civil Service Commissioner (UK)

The following Official joined the meeting:

Mr Ian Watmore, Civil Service Commissioner UK.

In attendance:

Mr Kieran DonnellyCB, C&AG NIAO; and

Mr Stuart Stevenson, Treasury Officer of Accounts, DoF, remotely.

The Committee welcomed Mr Ian Watmore, Chairperson of the Civil Service Commissioners UK, to the meeting.

Mr Watmore made a statement to the Committee and there then followed a question and answer session.

The Committee thanked Mr Watmore for taking time out today to give evidence.

The meeting went into Closed Session at 4.35 pm

8. Inquiry into Capacity and Capability in the NICS - Discussion Session

The following officials joined the meeting:

Mr Kieran Donnelly, CB C&AG; and
M Rodney Allen, Director.

The following officials joined the meeting remotely:

Mr Kyle Bingham, Assembly Support Officer;
Ms Christina Burns, Auditor and
Mr Conor McGeown, Senior Auditor.



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The Committee discussed, with Mr Kieran Donnelly CB C&AG and his team, both evidence sessions from Deidre Toner, Civil Service Commissioner NI and Ian Watmore, Civil Service Commissioner UK.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request some further information from Ms Toner.

The meeting remained in Closed Session at 4.50 pm

9. Draft Forward Work Programme

The following officials remained in the meeting:

Mr Kieran Donnelly, CB C&AG;
Mr Rodney Allen, Director NIAO; and
Mr Kyle Bingham, Assembly Support Officer NIAO.

The Committee noted that since the meeting last week, there had been no changes or amendments to the draft forward work programme to Easter 2021.

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Agreed: The Committee noted the draft forward work programme.

10. Any Other Business

The Committee noted an email from NIAO, in regards to a question asked to the DVA Officials, on the status of 3 out of the 55 lifts, that were not put out of action due to not showing signs of fatigue.

Agreed: The Committee noted the response from the NIAO Official.

The Committee noted they still await the Memorandum of Reply regarding the Major Capital Project Report published on 22 October 2021.



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Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to Sue Gray AO DoF to remind her that the response was overdue.

11. Date, Time and Place of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Public Accounts Committee will take place on Thursday 11th March 2021 at 2.00 pm in The Senate, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting adjourned at 4.53 pm.

**Mr William Humphrey MBE MLA
Chairperson
Public Accounts Committee
4th March 2021**