



**Northern Ireland  
Assembly**

## **PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE**

### **MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS**

THURSDAY, 8<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  
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 2.02 pm.*

*Mr Matthew O'Toole MLA, joined the meeting at 2.04 pm.*

#### **1. Apologies**

None

#### **2. Minutes of meeting on 1<sup>st</sup> October 2020**

The draft minutes of 1<sup>st</sup> October 2020 were agreed.

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

- Cathal Boylan MLA, declared he was a Governor of Clea Primary School, Keady;
- 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, Hollywood;
- Mr Maolíosa McHugh MLA declared he was Chairman of pre-school Naíscóil na Deirg;

### **4. Matters Arising**

The Committee noted Ms Sue Gray, AO DoF and her Officials would be returning to the Committee on 22 October 2020, to give further evidence on the inquiry into the Landweb Project and Digital Transformation.

The Committee agreed to write to the First Minister and deputy First Minister regarding PAC's inquiry into 'Major Capital Projects' regarding a recommendation that relates to the appointment of the future Northern Ireland HOCS.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to the First Minister and deputy First Minister on this matter.

The Committee noted an acknowledgement email dated 5 October 2020 from Richard Pengelly, AO, DoH, in relation to the deferment of the evidence session on 'Addiction Services' due to the pressures on his Department arising from the pandemic.

### **5. Correspondence**

The Committee noted correspondence dated 1 October 2020 from the Committee for Communities in regards to the Charity Commission for NI. The Committee for Communities has agreed to provide PAC with an update on the outcome of their future Ministerial briefing on any ramifications of the recent court decision regarding the Charity Commission.

The Committee noted correspondence dated 1 October 2020 from the Justice Committee in Relation to the NIAO report on 'Mental Health in the Criminal Justice System'.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed that the Clerk write back to the Clerk of the Justice Committee providing an explanation as to why the Committee has decided not to proceed with this inquiry.

The Committee noted correspondence, dated 2 October 2020, from the Treasury Officer of Accounts, confirming that a section on emerging COVID 19 fraud will be included in the 2019/20 Annual Theft and Fraud Report.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to TOA to request further clarification on the paragraph referring to ‘abuse of position / assets / exploitation of information’, where one case accounted for over half the overall value.

The Committee noted correspondence, dated 5 October 2020, from the Audit Committee in relation to the NIAO budget requirements for 2021/24. The Committee discussed the increase in the budget forecast for 2021/22 by 5.1%; and 2.1% and 1.3% in the following two years.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to the Audit Committee to request a breakdown and further details on the increase in the proposed 2021/24 budgets for NIAO.

The Committee noted correspondence dated 5 October 2020 from Katrina Godfrey, AO, DfI providing further information in relation to the inquiry into ‘Major Capital Projects’.

The Committee noted correspondence dated 7 October 2020 from Ms Lesley Hogg, Clerk to the Assembly / Chief Executive regarding the availability of additional committee meeting rooms including use of the Chamber and Members Dining Room. Committee noted the Chair of CLG has written to the Speaker of the Assembly about this issue.

*The meeting moved into public session at 2.15 pm*

## **6. Inquiry into Special Educational Needs – Briefing Session**

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

Mr Kieran Donnelly, C&AG, and his team, briefed the Committee on the Special Educational Needs inquiry. The Committee noted NIAO report dated 27<sup>th</sup> June 2017 ‘Special Educational Needs’; and NIAO report, dated 29 September 2020, ‘Impact Review on Special Educational Needs’ and NIAO’s briefing paper.

There then followed a question and answer session.

*The meeting moved into closed session at 3.22 pm*

## **7. Inquiry into Special Educational Needs – Preparation Session**

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

The Committee discussed the forthcoming evidence session on ‘Special Educational Needs’ scheduled for 15 October 2020 and the key areas of questioning.

The Committee noted the following witnesses would be attending:

- Mr Derek Baker, AO Department for Education;
- Mr Ricky Irwin, Grade 5 Director of Inclusion & Wellbeing;
- Ms Sarah Long, Chief Executive of the Education Authority; and
- Ms Una Turbitt, Interim Director of Children and Young People’s Services

*The meeting was suspended at 3.26 pm.*

*The meeting reconvened in closed session at 3.36 pm.*

*Mr Andrew Muir, MLA rejoined the meeting at 3.41 pm.*

## **8. Inquiry into Major Capital Projects – Final Consideration of Draft Report.**

*Mr Kieran Donnelly CB, Comptroller and Auditor General and Mr Kyle Bingham joined the meeting.*

The Committee considered the final draft of the report on its inquiry into Major Capital Projects. The Committee noted the report has been amended to reflect 15 recommendations and not 14 and that this does not change anything substantive in the report.

*Agreed:* The Committee read and agreed the rewording of paragraph 29 and Recommendation 13.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed the minutes of proceedings, minutes of evidence and correspondence be included in the appendices to the ‘Report on Major Capital Projects’.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to order the Report to Print.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed a press release is prepared on the report and that it will be brought to the Committee next week, i.e. 15 October 2020. The proposed date to launch the report remains 22 October 2020.

*The meeting remained in closed session at 3.39 pm*

## **9. 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 12 November 2020 regarding breakdown of the Casement Park Project Grant Award from DfC's.

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 3.49 pm*

## **10. Any Other Business**

The Committee agreed a draft press release regarding the attendance of Ms Sue Gray, AO, DoF and her departmental officials, to give further evidence on the inquiry into 'LandWeb Project and Digital Transformation' on 22 October.

*Agreed:* Committee agreed the press release 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 agreed to take up the offer of attending the workshop, as either a member of PAC or another statutory committee of which they are a member.

The Committee noted that they will be meeting in Room 30 on 22 October 2020 and that numbers will be restricted due to social distancing.

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

The next committee meeting will be held, on Thursday 15<sup>th</sup> October 2020 at 2.00 pm in The Senate.

*The meeting was adjourned at 4.01 pm*

**Mr William Humphrey**

**Chairperson**

**Public Accounts Committee**

**15<sup>th</sup> October 2020**