



**Northern Ireland
Assembly**

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

THURSDAY, 5TH NOVEMBER 2020, THE SENATE,
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 Andrew Muir MLA – remotely
Mr Matthew O’Toole MLA

Apologies: Mr Maolíosa McHugh MLA
Mr David Hilditch MLA

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

Prior to the meeting opening in public session, the Committee discussed with Mr Kieran Donnelly, C&AG, Agenda Item 6 regarding the follow up briefing from the Department on NIAO Report on Major Capital Projects: Study 10 Ulster University Greater Belfast Campus.

The meeting opened in Public Session 2.30 pm.

Mr Kieran Donnelly, C&AG, Mr Patrick Barr, Director NIAO and Mr Kyle Donnelly, Assembly Support Officer NIAO joined the meeting.

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Mr Maolíosa McHugh MLA and Mr David Hilditch MLA.

2. Minutes of meeting on 22nd October 2020

Agreed: The draft minutes of 22nd October 2020 were agreed with a small amendment.

Agreed: That the minutes of 22nd October 2020, amended, to be published.

3. Declaration of Members' Interests

Mr Andrew Muir MLA, declared that he was a former employee of Translink, specifically with reference to the Major Capital Projects and that his step father is a quality manager for the A6 Dungiven by-pass.

4. Matters Arising

The Committee considered correspondence dated 21 October 2020 from Sue Gray, AO, DoF, regarding follow up information from the evidence session of 24 September 2020.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request further information regarding the missing names of the SROs for each live project.

The Committee considered correspondence dated 22 October 2020 from Sue Gray, AO, DoF, regarding annual project accounts of NI Direct Strategic Partner covering the period 2012-12 to 2019-20 prepared by Chartered Accountants CMCG of Belfast.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request further information regarding the delay of these accounts being signed off and, in particular, the reasons for the significant delays.

The Committee noted correspondence dated 3rd November 2020, from Mr Kieran Donnelly, CB, C&AG regarding clarification on the increase in the NIAO estimate proposals for 2022-23 and 2023-24.

Agreed: Committee discussed the response with the C&AG and were content with it.

5. Correspondence

The Committee noted emails dated 22nd October 24th, 25th, 26th October and 30th October 2020 from Edward Cooke on various issues regarding the impact of COVID-19 on universities and students.

The Committee noted correspondence dated 22 October 2020 from Marie McCue regarding CCNI which has been forwarded to NIAO.

The Committee noted correspondence dated 23 October 2020 from Sharon O'Connor, the Chair of the Board of the Education Authority, regarding her attendance at an evidence session and the current ongoing HR investigations

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to Ms O'Connor confirming her date to appear before the Committee on 19th November 2020; and noted Mr Gavin Boyd, a previous Chief Executive of the Education Authority will also give evidence on 19 November 2020.

Committee noted correspondence from Ms Sara Long, Chief Executive of the Education Authority, regarding the information the Committee has requested.

Agreed: Committee noted Ms Long's response will be received by 11th November 2020.

The Committee noted correspondence dated 29 October 2020 from Mike Brennan, AO, DfE deferring his proposed evidence session on 'Generating Electricity from Renewable Energy' due to COVID-19 pressures and EU Exit deadlines.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to consider this correspondence under Agenda Item 8.

The Committee noted correspondence dated 29 October 2020 from John Walsh, Board of Governors, St Mary's High School, Brollagh regarding his concerns on the scrutiny of the Schools' finances.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to Mr Walsh informing him that his concerns have been noted and that his correspondence will be forwarded to C&AG for consideration.

The Committee noted correspondence dated 2 November 2020 from Ms Derek Baker, AO DoE relating to the SEN evidence session on 15 October 2020.

The meeting moved into Open Session at 2.50 pm

6. Briefing from Mike Brennan, AO, DfE on UUBC (Report on Major Capital Projects)

Mr Mike Brennan, AO DfE; Mr Michael Donnelly, Strategic Investment Board (SIB) and Professor Paul Bartholomew, Vice-Chancellor, Ulster University joined the meeting. Ms Heather Cousins, Deputy Secretary, Skills and Education Group and Mr Philip Cromie, DfE joined the meeting remotely; and Mr Kieran Donnelly C&AG also attended the meeting.

In attendance:

- Mr Mike Brennan, AO DfE;
- Mr Michael Donnelly, Strategic Investment Board (SIB); and

- Professor Paul Bartholomew, Vice-Chancellor.

Attending remotely:

- Ms Heather Cousins, Deputy Secretary, Skills and Education Group; and
- Mr Philip Cromie, DfE

Also in attendance:

Mr Kieran Donnelly, CB, C&AG;
Mr Partick Barr, Director; and
Mr Kyle Bingham, Assembly Support Officer.

Departmental Officials updated the Committee on the NIAO Major Capital Projects, Case Study 10: Ulster University Greater Belfast Campus. Followed by a question and answer session.

***The meeting was suspended at 3.55 pm
The meeting reconvened at 4.04 pm in Closed Session.***

The Departmental Officials further updated the Committee on the NIAO Major Capital Projects, Case Study 10: Ulster University Greater Belfast Campus in closed session. Followed by a question and answer session.

***The Departmental Officials left the meeting at 5.02 pm.
The meeting remained in Closed Session.***

The Committee discussed the evidence session with Mr Kieran Donnelly, C&AG and the NIAO team.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to Professor Paul Bartholomew, Vice-Chancellor, on a range of issues, and to copy the letter to Mr Brennan AO, DfE.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to schedule a further evidence session with the Vice-Chancellor and the Departmental Officials in 6 months' time.

***Mr Matthew O'Toole left the meeting at 5.28 pm.
The meeting remained in Closed Session 5.28 pm.***

7. Inquiry into the 'LandWeb Project and Digital Transformation'

Mr Kieran Donnelly CB, C&AG and Mr Kyle Bingham, Assembly Support Office joined the meeting.

The Committee noted the second issues paper on LandWeb Project and Digital Transformation prepared by the NIAO in preparation for the LandWeb Project and Digital PAC Report.

Agreed: Committee noted the second issues paper.

The meeting remained in Closed Session at 5.32 pm

8. Draft Forward Work Programme

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

The Committee noted the draft Forward Work Programme covering September to end of December 2020 and agreed, due to the unavailability of Mr Mike Brennan AO DfE, to reschedule the inquiry into ‘Generating Electricity from Renewable Energy’ to the New Year.

Agreed: The Committee agreed its next inquiry will on ‘NIAO Report on Capacity and Capability in NICS’;

Agreed: To forward a witness letter to Ms Sue Gray, AO DoF, to appear in respect of NIAO Report on Capacity and Capability in NICS on 3rd December 2020.

Agreed: Committee agreed the amendments to the draft Forward Work Programme, to include a briefing from the C&AG on selecting inquiries for 2021.

The meeting remained in Closed Session at 5.09 pm

9. Any Other Business

The Committee noted that committee meetings can now be held in the Assembly Chamber in exceptional circumstances.

10. Date, time and place of next meeting

The next committee meeting will be held, on Thursday 12th November 2020 at 2.00 pm in Room 30.

The meeting was Adjourned at 5.41 pm.

Mr William Humphrey

Chairperson

Public Accounts Committee

12th November 2020