



**Northern Ireland
Assembly**

AUDIT COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

**WEDNESDAY 15 JUNE 2016, ROOM 21, PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS,
BALLYMISCAW, STORMONT**

Present: John O’Dowd MLA, Chairperson
Kellie Armstrong MLA, Deputy Chairperson
Jo-Anne Dobson MLA
Claire Hanna MLA

In Attendance: Shane McAteer, Assembly Clerk
Keith McBride, Senior Assistant Assembly Clerk
Clairita Frazer, Assistant Assembly Clerk
Jim Nulty, Clerical Supervisor
Alison Ferguson, Clerical Officer

Apologies: David Hilditch MLA

The meeting commenced at 10.03am in closed session.

Agreed: that future meetings of the Committee will generally be held in public session unless individual agenda items require to be held in closed session due to the nature of business being considered.

1. Procedures and Administrative Arrangements

The Committee noted a number of guidance papers and protocols provided by the Committee and Members Support Office.

Agreed: that Committee staff will liaise with officials from both the Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO) and the office of the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO) to identify elements of the “Guidance on Timescales for Interactions between Committees and Departments” which can be applied in the context of the work of the Audit Committee.

Jo-Anne Dobson joined the meeting at 10.05am.

The meeting moved into open session at 10.06am.

2. Apologies

As detailed above.

3. Declaration of Interests

The Committee noted information in respect of the requirement to declare any interests which may be relevant to the work of the Committee.

The Chairperson declared an interest as a former Minister for Education, highlighting that the remit of both NIAO and NIPSO could include matters concerning the Department of Education during his tenure in post.

Jo-Anne Dobson declared an interest as the sister-in-law of Janet Sides, Assistant Auditor General who will be presenting to the Committee for agenda item 6.

4. Clerk's Briefing on Role of the Audit Committee

The Clerk briefed members on the role and functions of the Committee including relevant provisions in Assembly Standing Orders and legislation.

5. Legacy Report

The Chairperson briefly outlined the main points from the Legacy Report of the previous Audit Committee in the last mandate, drawing members' attention to the section entitled 'Issues for Incoming Mandate'.

Agreed: that the issues highlighted will be added to a list of potential topics for the Forward Work Programme, which will be considered at the next meeting of the Committee.

6. Briefing from the Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO)

The Chairperson welcomed to the meeting; Kieran Donnelly, Comptroller and Auditor General (C&AG); Janet Sides, Assistant Auditor General; and Kerry Harkin, Assembly Liaison Officer and invited the officials to brief the Committee on the work of NIAO.

7. Briefing from the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO)

The Chairperson welcomed to the meeting; Marie Anderson, Northern Ireland Ombudsman and John McGinnity, Director of Finance and Corporate Services, NIPSO and invited the officials to brief the Committee on the work of NIPSO.

Agreed: that Committee staff will liaise with NIPSO to establish a draft timetable for the preparation and submission of NIPSO Estimates, similar to that which is in place for NIAO.

8. Correspondence

The Committee noted the following items of correspondence:

- 8.1 Correspondence dated 11 April 2016 from the Minister of Finance and Personnel regarding the proposed Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on the Budget Process; and

Agreed: to write to the Finance Committee seeking an update on any plans it may have to work with the Department of Finance to finalise the MoU in time for the 2017-20 Budget process.

- 8.2 Correspondence from a member of the public

Agreed: to write to the NIAO's Audit Committee and the C&AG to seek assurances in relation to this correspondence. It was further *agreed* that, subject to considering the responses from the NIAO Audit Committee and the C&AG, consideration will be given to referring this correspondent to NIPSO given its remit in relation to investigating complaints about maladministration by the NIAO.

9. Forward Work Programme

Members noted that there will be a need to hold a meeting of the Committee on Wednesday 29 June 2016 to consider the NIAO's Annual Report and Accounts. The Committee will also consider potential areas of future work at that meeting.

10. Any Other Business

There was no other business.

11. Date, Time and Place of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Committee will take place on Wednesday 29 June 2016 at 10am in Room 21.

The Chairperson adjourned the meeting at 11.25pm.

Mr John O'Dowd MLA
Chairperson
Audit Committee