



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Audit Committee

Minutes of Proceedings

5 May 2021

Meeting Location: Room 29, Parliament Buildings

Present by Video or Teleconference:

Mr Daniel McCrossan MLA (Chairperson)

Mr Jim Allister MLA

Present: Ms Joanne Bunting MLA

Apologies: Mr Alan Chambers MLA

Ms Emma Rogan MLA

In Attendance: Ms Marie Austin (Assembly Clerk)

Mr David McClure (Assistant Clerk)

In Attendance by Video or Teleconference:

Mr Jim Nulty (Clerical Supervisor)

Ms Alison Ferguson (Clerical Officer)

The meeting commenced at 12.47pm in open session.



Northern Ireland Assembly

1. Apologies

As noted above.

2. Declaration of Interest

Mr Allister declared an interest in relation to Agenda Item 6 due to ongoing complaints being dealt with by the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman.

3. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 14 April 2021.

4. Matters Arising

Noted: The Committee noted a response from the Minister for Communities regarding the appointment of a single auditor for the public sector. This matter will be considered further at a later date.

Noted: The Committee noted a response from the Comptroller and Auditor General regarding the appointment of a single auditor for the public sector. This matter will be considered further at a later date.

Noted: The Committee noted a response from the Comptroller and Auditor General in relation to the potential remit, powers and membership of a Statutory Board of the NIAO should corporatisation be progressed. This matter will be considered further at a later date.



Northern Ireland Assembly

The Committee considered a response from the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) to its request for a view on the quality of service and performance of the Northern Ireland Audit Office.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to return to this matter closer to the end of the mandate when fuller feedback from the PAC will be available.

Noted: The Committee noted the decision that was made by the Committee under temporary Standing Order 115(9), since the last formal meeting on 14 April 2021: To commission research to clarify the arrangements in other UK jurisdictions in relation to investigating and adjudicating on complaints against councillors who may have failed to comply with their relevant codes of conduct.

5. Estimate 2021-22: Northern Ireland Audit Office

Mr Rodney Allen, Director, Northern Ireland Audit Office and Mr Richard Ross, Audit Manager, Northern Ireland Audit Office joined the meeting at 12.53pm.

The officials provided evidence on the Northern Ireland Audit Office Estimate for 2021-22.

The oral evidence was followed by a question and answer session.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their evidence.

The officials left the meeting at 1.01pm.

Members considered the Northern Ireland Audit Office Estimate 2021-22, alongside advice from the Department of Finance and the Public Accounts Committee. The Committee noted that the figures in the Estimate reflected the Committee's position on the draft budget which was agreed at the Audit Committee meeting on 10 February 2021.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the Northern Ireland Audit Office Estimate 2021-22, and to lay the Estimate before the Assembly and advise the Department of Finance accordingly.



Northern Ireland Assembly

6. Estimate 2021-22: Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman

Ms Margaret Kelly, Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman, Mr Sean Martin, Acting Deputy Ombudsman and Mr John McGinnity, Director of Finance and Corporate Services joined the meeting at 1.02pm.

The Ombudsman and her officials provided evidence on the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman Estimate for 2021-22.

The oral evidence was followed by a question and answer session.

The Chairperson thanked the Ombudsman and her officials for the evidence.

The Ombudsman and her officials left the meeting at 1.17pm.

Members considered the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman Estimate 2021-22, alongside advice from the Department of Finance. The Committee noted that the figures in the Estimate reflected the Committee's position on the draft budget which was agreed at the Audit Committee meeting on 10 February 2021.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman Estimate 2021-22, and to lay the Estimate before the Assembly and advise the Department of Finance accordingly.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that a report, to include the Estimates of the Northern Ireland Audit Office and the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman, should be drafted and issued to Members to agree under temporary Standing Order 115(9), whereby it is possible for a Standing Committee to make a decision without holding a Committee meeting.

The Committee noted that the publication of the report will give effect to its function of laying the Estimates of the Northern Ireland Audit Office and the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman before the Assembly.



Northern Ireland Assembly

7. Budgetary Oversight of Parliamentary Corporate Bodies: A comparative perspective – Research briefing

Ms Orla Drummond, Research and Information Service, and Ms Rachel Keyes, Research and Information Service, joined the meeting at 1.19pm.

The researchers spoke to their briefing paper: Budgetary Oversight of Parliamentary Corporate Bodies: A comparative perspective.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

The Chairperson thanked the researchers for the briefing.

The researchers left the meeting at 1.32pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Clerk should liaise with Legal Services to formally commission legal advice on codifying the Audit Committee's role in relation to scrutiny of the Assembly Commission's budget and laying its estimate in the Assembly.

8. Scrutiny Schedule

The Committee considered a draft Scrutiny Schedule.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the draft Scrutiny Schedule including the oral/written evidence sessions to be scheduled for June and July 2021.

9. Correspondence

Noted: The Committee noted a copy of correspondence from an individual to Executive Ministers regarding financial support for exam invigilators.



Northern Ireland
Assembly

10. Any Other Business

There was no other business.

11. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting

The next Audit Committee meeting will take place on Wednesday 2 June 2021.

The meeting was adjourned at 1.34pm.

Daniel McCrossan MLA,
Chairperson, Audit Committee

Wednesday 2 June 2021