



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

# Audit Committee

## Minutes of Proceedings

26 January 2022

**Meeting Location:** Room 29, Parliament Buildings

**Present by Video or Teleconference:**

Mr Daniel McCrossan MLA (Chairperson)

Mr William Irwin MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

**In Attendance:**

Mr Jim Allister MLA

**Apologies:**

Mr Alan Chambers MLA

Ms Emma Rogan MLA

**In Attendance:**

Ms Marie Austin (Clerk to the Committee)

Ms Karen Barry (Assistant Clerk)

Dr Simon Gallaher (Clerical Supervisor)

Ms Alison Ferguson (Clerical Officer)

**In attendance by Video or Teleconference:**

Mr Jim Nulty (Clerical Supervisor)



## Northern Ireland Assembly

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to commence the meeting at 12.42pm in closed session.

### 1. Apologies

As noted above.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that, for the period in which temporary Standing Order 115(9) is in operation, any scheduled decisions which are unable to be taken during a Committee meeting, are taken via correspondence under temporary Standing Order 115(9).

### 2. Declaration of Interests

No interests were declared.

### 3. Review of the governance and accountability arrangements for the Northern Ireland Audit Office and the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman – Consideration of draft report

*Mr Allister joined the meeting at 12.44pm*

The Committee formally considered a draft report on its 'Review of the Governance and Accountability Arrangements for the Northern Ireland Audit Office and the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman'.

#### **Title Page, Committee Powers and Membership, Table of Contents and List of Abbreviations**

The Committee considered the Title Page, Committee Powers and Membership, Table of Contents and List of Abbreviations as drafted.



## Northern Ireland Assembly

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that it was content with the Title Page, Committee Powers and Membership, Table of Contents and List of Abbreviations.

### **Introduction**

The Committee considered the Introduction section of the report (paragraphs 8 to 13) as drafted.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that it was content with the Introduction section of the report.

### **The Review Process and Issues Considered**

The Committee considered the Review Process and Issues Considered section of the report (paragraphs 14 to 22) as drafted.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that it was content with the Review Process and Issues Considered section of the report.

### **Appointment and Tenure of the C&AGNI**

The Committee considered the Appointment and Tenure of the C&AGNI section of the report (paragraphs 23 to 41) as drafted.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that it was content with the Appointment and Tenure of the C&AGNI section of the report.

### **Governance and Accountability Arrangements**

The Committee considered the Governance and Accountability Arrangements section of the report (paragraphs 42 to 44) as drafted.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that it was content with the Governance and Accountability section of the report.



### **Corporatisation**

The Committee considered the Corporatisation section of the report (paragraphs 45 to 66) as drafted.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that it was content with the Corporatisation section of the report.

### **Board Membership and Status**

The Committee considered the Board Membership and Status section of the report (paragraphs 67 to 86) as drafted.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that it was content with the Board Membership and Status section of the report.

### **Code of Practice**

The Committee considered the Code of Practice section of the report (paragraphs 87 to 92) as drafted.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that it was content with the Code of Practice section of the report.

### **Appointment of the C&AGNI as Accounting Officer for the NIAO**

The Committee considered the Appointment of the C&AGNI as Accounting Officer for the NIAO section of the report (paragraphs 93 to 97) as drafted.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that it was content with the Appointment of the C&AGNI as Accounting Officer for the NIAO section of the report.

### **Appointment of an External Auditor for the NIAO**

The Committee considered the Appointment of an External Auditor for the NIAO section of the report (paragraphs 98 to 104) as drafted.



## Northern Ireland Assembly

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that it was content with the Appointment of an External Auditor for the NIAO section of the report.

### **Appointment of a Single Auditor for the Public Sector**

The Committee considered the Appointment of a Single Auditor for the Public Sector section of the report (paragraphs 105 to 126) as drafted.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that it was content with the Appointment of a Single Auditor for the Public Sector section of the report.

### **Memorandum of Understanding**

The Committee considered the Memorandum of Understanding section of the report (paragraphs 127 to 132) as drafted.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that it was content with the Memorandum of Understanding section of the report.

### **Appointment and Tenure of the NIPSO**

The Committee considered the Appointment and Tenure of the NIPSO section of the report (paragraphs 133 to 137) as drafted.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that it was content with the Appointment and Tenure of the NIPSO section of the report.

### **Governance and Accountability Arrangements**

The Committee considered the Governance and Accountability Arrangements section of the report (paragraphs 138 and 139) as drafted.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that it was content with the Governance and Accountability Arrangements section of the report.

### **Corporatisation**

The Committee considered the Corporatisation section of the report (paragraphs 140 to 171) as drafted.



## Northern Ireland Assembly

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that it was content with the Corporatisation section of the report.

### **Local Government Standards Commissioner**

The Committee considered the Local Government Standards Commissioner section of the report (paragraphs 172 to 180) as drafted.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that it was content with the Local Government Standards Commissioner section of the report.

### **Memorandum of Understanding**

The Committee considered the Memorandum of Understanding section of the report (paragraphs 181 to 186) as drafted.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that it was content with the Memorandum of Understanding section of the report.

### **Overview**

The Committee considered the Overview section of the report (paragraphs 1 to 7) as drafted.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that it was content with the Overview section of the report.

### **Appendices**

The Committee considered the Appendices section of the report.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that it was content that the Appendices be included in the report.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that this report be the fifth report of the Audit Committee in the 2017-22 Mandate.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that it was content for the Chairperson to approve an extract of the Minutes of Proceeding from today's meeting that covers the consideration and approval of the Committee report. This will be published in



## Northern Ireland Assembly

the report and then replaced with the full Minutes of the proceedings of the meeting once they have been agreed by the Committee.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that, in line with normal practice, the Committee report to the Assembly be embargoed until commencement of the debate in plenary.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that the report be published on-line on the Assembly's webpages on the expiration of the embargo.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that an electronic copy of the report, once published, should be sent to all witnesses who provided evidence to the Committee.

The Committee considered the following draft motion:

*'That this Assembly notes the Report of the Audit Committee, under Standing Order 46(7), on its Review of the Governance and Accountability Arrangements for the Northern Ireland Audit Office and the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIA 158/17-22); and approves the Committee's recommendations contained in the Report.'*

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed the draft motion and to table it in the Assembly Business Office.

The Committee agreed to move the meeting into public session at 12.52pm.

#### 4. Draft Minutes

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 15 December 2021.

#### 5. Matters Arising

Westminster Public Accounts Commission



## Northern Ireland Assembly

The Committee considered further a request to meet, in March 2022, with the Chairperson of the Westminster Public Accounts Commission to discuss the Audit Committee's role, remit and relationship with the Northern Ireland Audit Office.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that, given the level of Assembly business up until the end of the current Mandate and the associated time pressures, it would not be feasible to meet with the Chairperson of the Westminster Public Accounts Commission at that time. The Committee agreed to recommend to its successor Audit Committee that it should engage with the Westminster Committee on these matters in the next Mandate.

### 6. Comptroller and Auditor General Salary Arrangements

The Committee considered a draft motion on the salary of the Comptroller and Auditor General (C&AG) to reflect its decision that the salary to be paid to the C&AG, under Article 4(1) of the Audit (Northern Ireland) Order 1987, should be the same as that approved by the United Kingdom Government for a judge in salary group 5.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to request legal advice on whether there is provision for retrospective payment to the C&AG to compensate for loss of earnings due to the Assembly not maintaining alignment with the judicial grade 5 salary since its last resolution on 7 April 2014.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Finance to seek full information on the financial implications should retrospective payment be progressed.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to consider the matter further once the legal advice and financial information has been received.





## Northern Ireland Assembly

### **7. NI Assembly Commission budget: Consideration of thresholds on Committee input to in-year adjustments**

The Committee considered responses from the Finance Committee in Wales and the Finance and Public Administration Committee in Scotland providing information on their respective supplementary budget processes and how they work in practice.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to forward a copy of the responses to the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission and invite officials to brief Members on the matter at the Audit Committee meeting on 16 February 2022.

### **8. Membership and quorum of the Audit Committee**

The Committee considered the Research and Information Service Briefing Paper: Membership and quorum of the Audit Committee (NIAR 255-2021).

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Business Committee outlining its concerns in relation to the membership and quorum of the Audit Committee and ask it to consider and advise on the wider implications of increasing the total number of standing committee places.

### **9. Draft Budget 2022-25**

The Committee noted responses from the Minister of Finance and the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission to the concerns it raised in relation to the Assembly Commission's draft budget.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to address the issues it raised in relation to the Assembly Commission's draft budget during the Assembly debate on the Commission's budget.



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

## **10. Correspondence**

The Committee noted the following:

- i. The Northern Ireland Assembly Members' Pension Fund Annual Report and Accounts for Year ended 31 March 2021.
- ii. Northern Ireland Audit Office report on 'Contract award and management of Project Stratum'.

## **11. Any Other Business**

There was no other business.

## **12. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting**

The next Audit Committee meeting will take place on Wednesday 16 February 2022, at 12.40pm.

The meeting was adjourned at 1.34pm.

**Daniel McCrossan MLA**

**Chairperson, Audit Committee**

**16 February 2022**