



**Northern Ireland
Assembly**

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

**THURSDAY, 17TH DECEMBER 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 Matthew O'Toole MLA
Mr Andrew Muir MLA
Mr Maolíosa McHugh MLA

Apologies: 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

The meeting began in Open Session at 2.09 pm

Mr Kieran Donnelly, C&AG, Mr Rodney Allen, Director and Mr Kyle Bingham, Assembly Support Officer NIAO joined the meeting.

1. Apologies

Mr David Hilditch MLA

2. Minutes of the meeting 10th December 2020

Agreed: The draft minutes of the meeting on 10th December 2020 were agreed and to be published.

3. Declaration of Interests

There was no additional declaration of interests that hadn't been declared by Members in previous meetings.

4. Matters Arising

- a. The Committee noted a memo dated 15 December from Mr Kyle Bingham, Assembly Support Officer, NIAO to the PAC Clerk, regarding further information as requested regarding the Ministerial Direction on the City of Derry Airport.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to Ms Sue Gray AO DoF to request greater public transparency of Ministerial Directions that are more accessible to the public.

- b. The Committee noted correspondence dated 8, 11 & 15 December 2020 on the Ministerial Direction '*Urgent COVID temporary time limited financial support for Belfast International Airport and Belfast City Airport*'.

The Chair adjourned the meeting to allow Members to read through the Ministerial Direction correspondence prior to discussion.

Meeting was adjournment 2.16 pm

Mr Matthew O'Toole joined the meeting at 2.21pm

Meeting re-commenced 2.31 pm

The Committee was briefed by Mr Kieran Donnelly C&AG on the Ministerial Direction '*Urgent COVID temporary time limited financial support for Belfast International Airport and Belfast City Airport*'.

The Committee discussed the circumstances of the Ministerial Direction and the economic impact that COVID19 has had on the operation of the three airports in the region.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to Ms Sue Gray AO DoF requesting further information on the circumstances of the Ministerial Direction '*Urgent COVID temporary time limited financial support for Belfast International Airport and Belfast City Airport*'.

- c. The Committee noted correspondence, dated 15 December 2020, from Ms Sara Long, CE, EA and welcomed the clarity around the internal investigations.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to Sara Long CE EA to request clarity on the timescale of the ongoing internal investigation, and to ask when this will be completed.

- d. The Committee noted correspondence, dated 16 December 2020, from Sue Gray, AO, DoF, regarding the Memorandum of Reply to Major Capital Projects. Ms

Gray informed the Committee that the MOR will be with the Committee by the end of January 2021.

5. Correspondence

- i. The Committee noted correspondence, dated 8 December 2020, from Mr Robert Crawford regarding his letter to the Minister for Communities on the Charity Commission for NI. Mr Crawford has requested clarity on any actions following the recommendation out of Mr Jonathan Baurne's review.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward Mr Crawford's correspondence to NIAO

- ii. The Committee noted correspondence, dated 8 December 2020, from Mr Trevor McKee regarding his email to Department for the Communities on the Charity Commission for NI. Mr McKee refers to the Minister's announcement that the Department will be commissioning an independent review.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward Mr McKee's correspondence to NIAO.

- iii. The Committee noted correspondence, dated 8 December 2020, from Tracy Meharg, AO, DfC regarding further information the Committee had requested on Casement Park.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to defer consideration of Ms Meharg's correspondence until the remaining information, requested from Ms Meharg, had been received.

Agreed: The Committee also noted it may be more appropriate to discuss all correspondence regarding Casement Park once the MOR on PAC's report into Major Capital Projects had been received.

- iv. The Committee noted correspondence, dated 11 December, from 'Pivotal' regarding the '*Report on Education, skills and training for young people aged 14–19 years old*'.
- v. The Committee noted correspondence, dated 14 December, from Professor Paul Bartholomew regarding UUC recruitment policy to the University Council, regarding the University's recruitment policies and procedures for appointments to the University Council.
- vi. The Committee noted correspondence dated 14 December 2020 to Órlaithí Flynn MLA from Steven Agnew, Head of RenewableNI with regards to the NI Audit Office report on 'Generating Electricity from Renewable Energy'.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to Mr Agnew to inform him the inquiry into ‘Generating Electricity from Renewable Energy’ will commence at the end of January 2021; and at that point the Committee will be deciding on the need for additional witnesses. The Committee will write to Mr Agnew at this juncture with the outcome of this decision.

The meeting went into Closed Session m 2.50 pm

6. PAC Draft Strategic Plan 2021/22

Mr Kieran Donnelly CB, C&AG joined the meeting.

The Committee discussed PAC’s draft Strategic Plan 2021/22 report which is based on the outcomes of PAC’s strategic planning day of 3 September 2020.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the draft Strategic Plan report as amended and agreed to consider a draft strategic plan, based on this report, in January 2021 which the Clerk will draft.

The Committee briefly discussed PAC’s primacy over NIAO reports and how the Committee could release NIAO reports at regular intervals.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to return to this matter in January 2021.

The meeting remained in Closed Session at 3.28 pm

7. Inquiry into the ‘LandWeb Project and Digital Transformation’ – Further Consideration of Draft Report.

Mr Kieran Donnelly CB, C&AG; Mr Rodney Allen, Director; Mrs Christine Burns Audit Manager and Mr Kyle Bingham, Assembly Support Officer joined the meeting.

The Committee considered the draft report on its inquiry into ‘LandWeb Project and Digital Transformation’.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the report as amended.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the appendices of the report will include Extracts of Minutes; Hansard and Correspondence. The Committee noted that it was awaiting further correspondence from Ms Gray AO DoF.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the report to be Ordered to Print.

Agreed: The Committee noted that a press release on the report will be prepared by the Clerk to be agreed at PAC’s meeting of 14 January 2020.

8. Forward Work Programme – September - March 2021

The Committee noted the draft Forward Work

Agreed: The Committee agreed the draft Forward Work Programme to the end of March 2021.

9. Any Other Business

The Committee noted correspondence, dated 3 December 2020, from a member of the public regarding PAC’s inquiry into ‘Capacity and Capability into NICS’ and the perceived culture within NICS.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward this correspondence to NIAO once GPDRs have been satisfied.

10. Date, time and place of next meeting

The next meeting of the Public Accounts Committee will take place on Thursday 14th January 2021 at 2.00 p.m. in The Senate, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting adjourned at 3.49 pm.

**Mr William Humphrey
Chairperson
Public Accounts Committee**

17th December 2020

Signed