



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Public Accounts Committee

Minutes of Proceedings

Thursday, 4 November 2021

Meeting Location: The Senate, Parliament Buildings, Belfast

Present: Mr William Humphrey MBE MLA (Chairperson)
Mr Roy Beggs MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Cathal Boylan MLA
Mr David Hilditch MLA
Mr Andrew Muir MLA

Present by Video or Teleconference:

Ms Órlaithí Flynn MLA
Ms Cara Hunter MLA

Apologies: Mr Maolíosa McHugh MLA
Mr William Irwin MLA

In Attendance: Ms Lucia Wilson (Assembly Clerk)
Ms Gillian Barker (Assistant Assembly Clerk)
Ms Suzanne Patton (Clerical Supervisor)
Ms Marion Johnston (Clerical Officer)

The meeting went into Open Session at 2.05 pm.



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The following NIAO Officials joined in the meeting:

Mr Rodney Allen, Chief Operating Officer
Mr Andrew Allen, Audit Manager and
Mr Roger McCance, Audit Manager.

The following Official joined the meeting remotely:

Mr Kyle Bingham, Assembly Support Officer.

1. Apologies

Mr Maolíosa McHugh MLA
Mr William Irwin MLA

2. Draft Minutes of 21 October 2021

Agreed: The draft minutes of the meeting of 21 October 2021 were signed and agreed to be published.

3. Declaration of Interests

The following Members declared an interest in Agenda Items 6 & 7, Evidence and Discussion Session regarding inquiry in to Closing the Gap – Social Deprivation and links to Educational Attainment’.

Mr William Humphrey MBE MLA declared he is a Governor, Edenbrooke Primary School, Governor of Girls Model Belfast and member of Woodvale Cricket Club;
and

Mr Roy Beggs MLA declared he is a Governor of Roddensvale School, Larne and Committee Member, Horizon SureStart;

Mr Cathal Boylan MLA declared he is a Governor, Clea Primary School, Keady;
and



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Mr Andrew Muir MLA declared he is a Governor, Priory Integrated College, Hollywood.

4. Matters Arising

None

5. Correspondence

The following NIAO Officials joined in the meeting:

Mr Rodney Allen, Chief Operating Officer,
Mr Andrew Allen, Audit Manager, and
Mr Roger McCance, Audit Manager.

The following Official joined the meeting remotely:

Mr Kyle Bingham, Assembly Support Officer.

Windwatch NI and West Tyrone Against Wind Turbines

The Committee noted correspondence dated 26 October 2021 from Dr Daniel Kane, Chairperson of Windwatch NI and Mr Owen McMullan, Chairperson of West Tyrone Against Wind Turbines, regarding PAC's Report into 'Generating Electricity from Renewable Energy'.

The Committee noted Dr Kane and Mr McMullan have raised a number of questions regarding the inquiry, specifically the ongoing investigations into the £9.3 million issued by Invest NI to the Anaerobic Digestion Plant; and also asked who implements the recommendations coming out of the report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to Dr Kane and Mr McMullan regarding the inquiry process and that the Memorandum of Reply [MOR] is due on 18 November 2021, which will be considered by the Committee in due course.



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Agreed: Mr Rodney Allen, Chief Operating Officer, NIAO and his colleagues agreed to investigate further, the issues raised by Dr Kane and Mr McMullan and report back to the Committee in due course. Dr Kane and Mr McMullan will also be updated.

Dr Mark Browne AO DE

The Committee noted correspondence dated 26 October 2021 from Dr Mark Browne AO DE about attending a further evidence session on Closing the Gap inquiry on 2 December 2021.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to discuss this matter in Closed Session, under Agenda Item 9.

Audit Committee – NIAO’s Draft Budget 2022-2025

The Committee noted correspondence from the Audit Committee, dated 29 October 2021, regarding NIAO’s Draft Budget 2022-2025, which included a written briefing paper submitted by the NIAO to the Audit Committee setting out its 3-year budget plan for resource costs and capital costs.

The Committee noted the Audit Committee is responsible for scrutinising and agreeing the annual estimate for the Northern Ireland Audit Office [NIAO] and in doing so, the Committee also scrutinises the NIAO budget plan as any agreed budget will underpin the estimate for the following year. The Audit Committee has requested views from PAC on the NIAO’s budget plan by noon on 19 November 2021.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Audit Committee stating that PAC is content but that it is kept updated on the final budget outcome and associated timelines.

Andrew Trimble, Executive Chair of Renewable Heat Association.

The Committee noted correspondence, dated 2 November 2021, from Andrew Trimble, Executive Chair of Renewable Heat Association, which includes an open letter ‘An Anti-Dote to Climate Change’ to First and deputy First Ministers; and a report into ‘Environmental & Economic Analysis into the Impact of RHI Options’.



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Agreed: The Committee agreed to note.

Visit to Boys Model, 4 November 2021,

The Committee noted Mr Humphrey, Mr Beggs and Mr Muir took part, today, in a visit to the Boys Model School, as part of its inquiry into Closing the Gap-Social Deprivation and Education Attainment. Members were briefed on how TSN funding is being spent on relevant projects to tackle targeting social need.

Agreed: The Committee agreed a report will be produced to capture the examples of good practice and any learning from this visit.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to Ms Mary Montgomery Principal of Boys Model, to thank her and her team for hosting the visit and to publish an extended caption on the visit with photos.

The Committee adjourned at 2.20 pm

The meeting reconvened in Open Session at 2.29 pm

6. Inquiry into ‘Closing the Gap – Social Deprivation and Education Attainment’ NI – Evidence Session

The following witnesses, ‘The Expert Panel on Educational Attainment’ attended the meeting remotely:

Dr Noel Purdy, Director of the Centre for Research in Educational Underachievement, Stranmillis College;
Ms Joyce Logue, Principal, Long Tower Primary School;
Ms. Mary Montgomery, Principal, Belfast Boys’ Model School;
Mrs Kathleen O’Hare, Retired Principal Hazelwood Integrated College, Former Principal St Cecilia’s College; and
Dr Jackie Redpath MBE, CEO Greater Shankill Partnership



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The following Officials were in attendance:

Mr Rodney Allen, Chief Operating Officer and
Mr Stuart Stevenson TOA, remotely

The Committee noted the relevant papers in their pack regarding the evidence session:

- Cover Memo from the Clerk regarding papers for the evidence session;
- Fair Start Report: Expert Panel on Educational Underachievement DE, which highlights the key areas in the Fair Start report and potential areas of questions for members;
- Biographies of witnesses;
- The Hansard dated 6 October 2021, 'A Fair Start' Committee for Education evidence session;
- NIAO Report Closing the Gap – Social Deprivation and Educational Attainment; and
- NIAO Restricted Issues Paper from Closing the Gap evidence session.

Dr Purdy made an opening statement regarding the Fair Start Report, which was then followed by a question and answer session.

The Committee thanked the panel for giving evidence, commending them on the Fair Start Report and their dedication to this subject matter.

The Expert Panel and Mr Stuart Stevenson left the meeting.

Ms Cara Hunter MLA left the meeting at 3.03 pm

The meeting went into Closed Session at 3.42 pm



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7. Inquiry into ‘Closing the Gap – Social Deprivation and Education Attainment’ NI – Discussion

The following NIAO Officials joined the meeting:

Mr Rodney Allen, Chief Operating Officer,
Mr Andrew Allen, Audit Manager, and
Mr Roger McCance, Audit Manager.

The following NIA Officials joined the meeting remotely:

Mr Kyle Bingham, Assembly Support Officer.

The Committee discussed the evidence session with the NIAO Officials who agreed to produce an Issues Paper to be included in the main report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to send a letter to Dr Purdy and his colleagues to thank them for the evidence session.

***Mr David Hilditch MLA left the meeting at 4.00 pm
Mr David Hilditch MLA re-joined the meeting at 4.13 pm***

The meeting remained in Closed Session at 4.05 pm

8. Inquiry into ‘Addiction Services in NI’ – Issues Paper

The following NIAO Officials joined in the meeting:

Mr Rodney Allen, Chief Operating Officer,
Mr Andrew Allen, Audit Manager, and
Mr Roger McCance, Audit Manager.

The following NIA Officials joined the meeting remotely:

Mr Neil Gray, Director and
Mr Kyle Bingham, Assembly Support Officer.



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The Committee discussed, with the NIAO Officials, the Restricted Issues Paper regarding the inquiry into Addition Services in NI.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the Issues Paper will form part of the main report.

The meeting remained in Closed Session at 4.19 pm

9. Draft Forward Work Programme

The following NIAO Officials joined in the meeting:

Mr Rodney Allen, Chief Operating Officer,
Mr Andrew Allen, Audit Manager, and
Mr Roger McCance, Audit Manager.

The following Official joined the meeting remotely:

Mr Kyle Bingham, Assembly Support Officer.

The Committee noted the September 2021 to March 2022 draft Forward Work Programme and that Dr Mark Brown AO DE and Ms Sara Long CE EA will give evidence on 2 December 2021 regarding the inquiry into 'Closing the Gap – Social Deprivation and Education Attainment'.

The Committee noted Dr Browne and Ms Long have requested a separate meeting to discuss the implementation of PAC's report 'Impact Review on Special Education'

Agreed: The Committee agreed to schedule a separate meeting regarding the implementation of the recommendations from the report 'Impact Review on Special Education'. This will be scheduled in January / February 2022.

The Committee noted Ms Antoinette McKeown, CE Sports NI has forwarded background papers presented to the Sports Sustainability Funding Board, and noted



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Ms McKeown will give evidence on 18 November 2021 regarding the inquiry into 'Sport Sustainability Fund'.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to Ms McKeown to confirm this date.

Take Note Debate

The Clerk stated that as the mandate comes it is usual for the Committee to table a 'Take Note Debate'. The 'Take Note Debate' is an opportunity for the Committee to showcase the work of the Public Accounts Committee since January 2019, that is all PAC published reports that have a Memorandum of Reply.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the 'Take Note Debate' should be tabled in January / February 2022, subject to other Committee priorities.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to publish the draft Forward Work Programme.

The meeting remained in Closed Session at 4.24 pm

10. Any Other Business

None

11. Date, Time and Place of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Public Accounts Committee will take place on Thursday 11 November, at 2.00 pm in Room 30, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting adjourned at 4.24pm

**Mr Roy Beggs MLA
Vice Chairperson
Public Accounts Committee
4 November 2021**