



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Public Accounts Committee

Minutes of Proceedings

Thursday, 7 October 2021

Meeting Location: The Senate, Parliament Buildings, Belfast

Present: Mr William Humphrey MBE MLA (Chairperson)
Mr Roy Beggs MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr William Irwin MLA
Mr Andrew Muir MLA

Present by Video or Teleconference:

Mr Cathal Boylan MLA
Ms Órlaithí Flynn MLA
Mr Maolíosa McHugh MLA
Mr Matthew O'Toole MLA

Apologies: Mr David Hilditch MLA

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

The meeting went into Open Session at 2.06 pm.



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1. Apologies

Mr David Hilditch MLA

2. Draft Minutes of 30 September 2021

Agreed: The draft minutes of the meeting of 30 September 2021 were signed and agreed to be published.

3. Declaration of Interest

The following Members declared an interest with reference to Agenda Item 7 - Briefing and Preparation Session for PAC's into 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 a member of Woodvale Cricket Club;

Mr Roy Beggs MLA declared he is a Governor of Roddensvale School, Larne and a committee member of Horizon Sure Start;

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

Mr Andrew Muir MLA declared he is a Governor of Priory Integrated College, Holywood; and

Mr Maolíosá McHugh MLA declared his is Chairman of pre-school, Naíscoil na Deirge.

4. Matters Arising

None

5. Correspondence

None



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The meeting remained in Open Session at 2.10 pm

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

The following Departmental Officials attended the meeting:

Dr Mark Browne, AO DE; and
Ms Alison Chambers, Director of Promoting Collaboration and Tackling Disadvantage.

The following Department Officials attended remotely:

Ms Suzanne Kinton, Head of School Improvement; and
Ms Linda Drysdale, Head of Early Years.

The following Officials were present:

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

The Committee noted the relevant papers in their pack regarding the ‘Closing the Gap – Social Deprivation and links to Educational Attainment’ evidence session:

- NIAO Report ‘Closing the Gap – Social Deprivation and links to Educational Attainment’;
- Biographies of the witnesses attending;
- NIAO RESTRICTED PAPER Briefing & Preparation and
- NIAO RESTRICTED PAPER Potential Questions

Dr Mark Browne made an opening statement which was followed by a question and answer session.



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The Chair thanked the Officials for attending and answering the Committees questions.

Mr Matthew O'Toole MLA left the meeting at 2.55 pm

The meeting remained in Closed Session at 3.21 pm

7. Inquiry into 'Closing the Gap – Social Deprivation and Links Education' – Discussion

The following NIAO Officials joined the meeting:

Mr Rodney Allen, Chief Operating Officer;
Mr Patrick Barr, Director; and
Mr Andrew Allen, Audit Manager.

The following NIAO Official joined the meeting remotely:

Mr Kyle Bingham, Assembly Support Officer.

The Committee discussed, with the NIAO Officials, the evidence session. NIAO officials agreed to produce an Issues Paper for next week's meeting.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to schedule a further evidence session on this inquiry with Dr Mark Browne AO DE and to also invite Ms Sarah Long CE EA to attend at a future meeting to discuss SEN.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to organise a visit to a school regarding their inquiry into 'Closing the Gap – Social Deprivation and links to Educational Attainment.

The meeting remained in Closed Session at 3.38 pm



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8. Draft Forward Work Programme

The following NIAO Officials joined the meeting:

Mr Rodney Allen, Chief Operating Officer, and
Mr Patrick Barr, Director.

The following Official joined the meeting remotely:

Mr Kyle Bingham, Assembly Support Officer.

The Committee noted the draft Forward Work Programme for September 2021 to March 2022 and an invitation is currently with Dr Jayne Brady, HOCS to attend a PAC meeting in the near future.

The Committee noted the date for an evidence session regarding 'Strategic Review of the Budget Process' as 25 November 2021; that the witness letter to the AO for the Department of Finance, and primacy memo to the Clerk of the Finance Committee have been issued.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to invite Sir Robert Chote, Chair of the Fiscal Council, to give evidence on the inquiry 'Strategic Review of the Budget Process'. The date will be scheduled into the FWP.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to launch the Report 'Speeding up the Justice System' on 21 October 2021 and noted the Clerk will bring a draft Press Release to next week's meeting.

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

The meeting remained in Closed Session at 3.42 pm



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9. Any Other Business

None

10. Date, Time and Place of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Public Accounts Committee will take place on Thursday 14 October, at 2.00 pm in Room 30, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting adjourned at 3.42 pm

Mr William Humphrey MBE MLA
Chairperson
Public Accounts Committee
7 October 2021