



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Public Accounts Committee

Minutes of Proceedings

Thursday, 2 December 2021

Meeting Location: Room 30, Parliament Buildings, Belfast

Present: Mr William Humphrey MBE MLA (Chairperson)
Mr Roy Beggs MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr David Hilditch MLA

Present by Video or Teleconference:

Mr Cathal Boylan MLA
Ms Órlaithí Flynn MLA
Ms Cara Hunter MLA
Mr William Irwin MLA
Mr Maolíosa McHugh MLA
Mr Andrew Muir MLA

Apologies: **None**

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



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In Closed Session 2.03 pm

Inquiry ‘Closing the Gap – Social Deprivation and links to Education Attainment’.

The Committee received a recap prior to going into open session regarding the work already completed on the inquiry into ‘Closing the Gap - Social Deprivation and links to Education Attainment’.

The Committee noted the NI Audit Office had also visited the Boys Model School.

The Committee noted the common themes from the evidence sessions of 7 October and 4 November 2021 and the visit to the Boys Model School.

The meeting went into Open Session at 2.09 pm.

The following NIAO Officials joined the meeting:

Mr Kieran Donnelly CB C&AG

The following NIAO Official joined the meeting remotely:

Mr Patrick Allen, Director;
Mr Andrew Allen, Audit Manager; and
Mr Kyle Bingham, Assembly Support Officer.

1. Apologies

None

2. Draft Minutes of 25 November 2021

Agreed: The draft minutes of the meeting of 25 November 2021 were signed and agreed to be published.



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3. Declaration of Interests

The following Members declared an interest in Agenda Items 6, 7 and 8 in relation to the 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 a former pupil of Boys Model.

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

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

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

Mr Maolíosa McHugh MLA declared his is Chairman of pre-school, Naíscóil na Deirge

4. Matters Arising

None

5. Correspondence

The following NIAO Official joined the meeting room:

Mr Kieran Donnelly CB C&AG

The following NIAO Official joined the meeting remotely:

Mr Patrick Allen, Director;



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Mr Andrew Allen, Audit Manager; and
Mr Kyle Bingham, Assembly Support Officer.

Clerking and Member Support [CAMS]

The Committee noted correspondence dated 25 November 2021 from Clerking and Member Support Office [CAMS] regarding Member Development, Personal Security.

The Committee noted a one-hour session on Wednesday 15 December 2021 10:00am – 11:00am via Microsoft Teams is being facilitated by the PSNI, which will include a presentation and discussion. There will also be sessions scheduled in early 2022 for party and constituency staff.

The meeting remained in Open Session at 2.12 pm

6. Inquiry into ‘Closing the Gap – Social Deprivation and links to Education Attainment’ – Recap

The following NIAO Officials joined the meeting:

Mr Kieran Donnelly, CB C&AG

The following NIA Officials joined the meeting remotely:

Mr Rodney Allen, Chief Operating Officer;
Mr Patrick Allen, Director;
Mr Andrew Allen, Audit Manager; and
Mr Kyle Bingham, Assembly Support Officer.

The Committee noted the relevant papers for the evidence session:

- Clerk’s Cover Memo – including information on common themes across the evidence sessions and school visit;
- NIAO Closing the Gap report Final WEB;
- Closing the Gap – Second Issues Paper dated 8 November;
- NIAO Paper - potential questions; and



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- Draft Report 'PAC Visit to Boys Model School'.

The Committee noted the draft Report 'PAC Visit to Boys Model School' will be considered at next week's meeting and will be included in the final inquiry report.

The meeting remained in Open Session at 2.16 pm

7. Inquiry into 'Closing the Gap – Social Deprivation and links to Education Attainment' – Additional Evidence Session

The following departmental officials joined the meeting:

Dr Mark Browne, Accounting Officer, DE and
Ms Sara Long, Chief Executive, EA.

Joining the meeting remotely:

Ms Alison Chambers, Director of Promoting Collaboration and Tackling Disadvantage,
DE; Ms Linda Drysdale, Head of Early Years, DE;
Ms Suzanne Kingon, Head of School Improvement, DE;
Ms Michele Corkey, Director of Education, EA; and
Ms Patricia Cooney, Assistant Director

In attendance were the following Officials:

Mr Kieran Donnelly, CB C&AG;
Mr Stuart Stevenson, TOA

The Committee noted the relevant papers for the evidence sessions and the following additional papers:

- Biographies of the Department Officials;
- Biography, Sara Long CE EA; and
- Biography, Michele Corkey.



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Dr Mark Browne AO DE and MS Sara Long CE EA made opening statements regarding the inquiry 'Closing the Gap – Social Deprivation and links to Education Attainment', which was then followed by a question and answer session.

The Committee thanked Dr Browne, Ms Long and their colleagues for attending the meeting.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department for more detailed information on the 'Healthy Happy Minds' pilot project.

Agreed: The Committee noted the 'Fair Start Report' has been endorsed by The Executive and agreed the Report's Action Plan requires committed funding across the relevant Departments to ensure its implementation.

***Mr William Irwin left the meeting at 2.57 pm
The meeting went into Closed Session at 3.55 pm***

8. Inquiry into 'Closing the Gap – Social Deprivation and links to Education Attainment' – Discussion.

In attendance were the following officials:

Mr Kieran Donnelly, CB C&AG;

The following NIAO Officials joined the meeting remotely:

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

The Committee discussed the additional evidence session with the NIAO Officials who agreed to up-date the Issues Paper that will be included in the main report.



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The meeting went into Closed Session at 4.04 pm

9. Inquiry into 'Review of the Budget Process' – Issues Paper.

The following NIAO Officials joined the meeting:

Mr Kieran Donnelly CB C&AG.

The following NIAO Officials joined the meeting remotely:

Ms Karen Beattie, Audit Manager;
Ms Pamela Dugdale, Senior Auditor and
Mr Kyle Bingham, Assembly Support Officer

The Committee discussed with the NIAO Officials, the Restricted Issues Paper regarding the inquiry 'Review of the Budget Process'.

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

The meeting remained in Closed Session at 4.09 pm

10. Draft Forward Work Programme

The following NIAO Officials joined the meeting:

Mr Kieran Donnelly, CB C&AG

The following Official joined the meeting remotely:

Mr Kyle Bingham, Assembly Support Officer.



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The Committee noted the September 2021 to March 2022 draft Forward Work Programme, and that next week Dr Jayne Brady HOCS will appear before PAC.

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

The meeting remained in Closed Session at 4.12 pm

11. Any Other Business

12. Date, Time and Place of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Public Accounts Committee will take place on Thursday 9 December, at 2.00 pm in The Senate, Parliament Buildings. The Committee's last meeting before the Christmas Recess is Thursday 16 December 2021.

The meeting adjourned at 4.12pm

Mr William Humphrey MBE MLA
Chairperson
Public Accounts Committee
2 December 2021