



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Public Accounts Committee

Minutes of Proceedings

Tuesday, 22 March 2022

Meeting Location: Room 30, 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 Maolíosa McHugh MLA
Mr Andrew Muir MLA

Apologies: Ms Órlaithí Flynn
Ms Cara Hunter MLA
Mr William Irwin MLA

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

The following NIAO Officials joined the meeting:

Mr Kieran Donnelly CB C&AG;
Ms Colette Kane, Director;
Mr Roger McCance, Audit Manager; and
Mr Kyle Bingham, Assembly Support Manager.



Northern Ireland
Assembly

The following NIAO Official joined the meeting remotely:

Ms Claire Turner, Senior Auditor

The meeting Opened in Public Session at 3.14 pm.

1. Apologies

Ms Órlaithí Flynn MLA

Mr William Irwin MLA

Ms Cara Hunter MLA

2. Draft Minutes of 15 March 2022

Agreed: The draft minutes of the meeting of 15 March 2022 were signed and agreed to be published.

3. Declaration of Interests

None

4. Matters Arising

None

5. Correspondence

The following NIAO officials joined the meeting room:

Mr Kieran Donnelly CB C&AG;

Ms Colette Kane, Director;

Mr Roger McCance, Audit Manager; and

Mr Kyle Bingham, Assembly Support Manager

The following NIAO official joined the meeting remotely:

Ms Claire Turner, Senior Auditor

The Committee agreed to discuss correspondence in closed under Agenda item 6.



Northern Ireland
Assembly

The meeting went into Closed Session at 3.23 pm

6. Inquiry into 'Planning in Northern Ireland' – Final Consideration of the draft report

Mr Dean Blackwood, The Gathering

The Committee noted correspondence and supplementary information dated 17 March 2022 from The Gathering, specifically from Mr Dean Blackwood, regarding evidence given on 10 March 2022 as part of the 'Planning in Northern Ireland' Inquiry.

Agreed: The Committee noted the correspondence.

Ms Katrina Godfrey, AO DfI

The Committee noted correspondence dated 21 March 2022 from Ms Katrina Godfrey AO DfI in which she has responded to The Gathering evidence session of 10 March 2022 regarding the 'Planning in Northern Ireland' Inquiry.

Agreed: The Committee noted the correspondence.

The Speaker – Appointment of C&AG

The Committee noted correspondence dated 18 March 2022 from The Speaker, Mr Alex Maskey MLA regarding a motion to be heard in the Assembly on 22 March 2022, that the Assembly Commission is proposing Ms Dorinna Carville is to be the new Comptroller and Auditor General.

Agreed: The Committee noted this information.



Northern Ireland Assembly

Agreed: The Committee thanked Mr Kieran Donnelly CB C&AG for all his support and advice to the Public Accounts Committee during this mandate, and wished him all the best for his retirement.

Dr Mark Browne – Response regarding PAC’s SEN 2021 Report

The Committee noted correspondence dated 22 March 2022 from Dr Mark Browne in response to PAC’s letter of 16 March 2022 regarding an explanation for the slow roll-out of outstanding important recommendations of the 2021 SEN Report.

Dr Browne responded that the consultation processes, both internally and externally, have held up this process. However, since the evidence session of 10 March he has received funding approval for 2022/23, to progress with the review. Dr Browne also stated that work on implementing revised SEN regulations is continuing with officials who are working with colleagues in EA and the Department of Justice, but states these are very complex matters. It is hoped that the Department will be in a position to bring the new SEN regulations to the Assembly in Autumn 2022.

Agreed: The Committee noted Dr Browne’s response and agreed to forward it to the Audit Office.

Agreed: The Committee noted that Ms Sara Long will forward any further information on the operational matters, raised by PAC’s letter of 16 March, in due course.

Final Consideration of PAC’s Report ‘Planning in Northern Ireland

The Committee noted the draft report is classified as RESTRICTED and therefore should not be published.

The Committee noted it had a first consideration of the ‘Planning in Northern Ireland’ report at last week’s meeting, 15 March 2022. The Committee was presented with the agreed amendments as follows:

Agreed: The Committee noted the Section Title ‘*The current funding model does not recognise the value of the planning system and is not financially sustainable*’ plus paragraphs 44 – 47, have been moved to further on in the report and consequently the paragraph numbers in the Final Report have all changed.



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Agreed: The Committee agreed the amendments to the following paragraphs:

8, 14, 15, 36, 39, 40, 42, 46, 54, 72, 75, 76, 77, & 79

Agreed: The Committee agreed to order the report to be published

Mr Andrew Muir MLA joined the meeting at 3.23 pm

Mr Roy Beggs MLA left the meeting at 3.23 pm

The meeting remained in Closed session at 3.25 pm

7. Inquiry into 'Planning in Northern Ireland' – Consideration of draft press release

The following NIAO Officials joined the meeting room:

- Mr Kieran Donnelly CB C&AG;
- Ms Colette Kane, Director;
- Mr Roger McCance, Audit Manager; and
- Mr Kyle Bingham, Assembly Support Officer.

The following NIAO Official joined the meeting remotely:

Ms Claire Turner, Senior Auditor

The Committee considered the draft press release regarding its fourteenth report 'Planning in Northern Ireland'.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the amended draft press release.

Agreed: The Committee noted the Planning in NI report will be published on Thursday 24 March 2022.

The meeting remained in Closed session at 3.26 pm



Northern Ireland Assembly

8. Any Other Business

The Chairperson paid tribute to the Committee and commented on the collective efforts of Members, resulting in the production of 14 PAC reports, in a very short space of time, which he hoped will have made a difference. Tributes were also paid to the C&AG and his team for all their hard work and support, along with the PAC team, past and present.

Members thanked Chairperson, Mr William Humphrey MBE MLA, for chairing the committee and commended him for how he had conducted PAC meetings during this mandate. The Committee noted he was not standing in the forthcoming election and wished him all the best for his future.

Work of the Audit Office

The Committee thanked Mr Kieran Donnelly CB C&AG and his team for all their hard work during this mandate in supporting the work of the Public Accounts Committee.

Arrangements for correspondence during dissolution.

The Committee agreed arrangements to manage correspondence during dissolution as follows.

Any correspondence received by the Committee will be acknowledged and the sender advised it cannot be considered during dissolution. However, the sender can contact the relevant department, and / or the correspondence can be held to be considered by the new Public Accounts Committee.

9. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 3.29 pm

**Mr Roy Beggs MBE MLA
Deputy Chairperson
Public Accounts Committee
22 March 2022**