



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Public Accounts Committee

Minutes of Proceedings

Thursday, 25 November 2021

Meeting Location: The Senate, 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

Apologies: Mr Andrew Muir MLA

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

Prior to the meeting going into Open Session the Committee noted the NI Fiscal Council's recent reports:



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- The Public Finances in NI: A Comprehensive Guide; and
- NI Fiscal Council response to: 2021 Spending Review.

The Committee noted both reports from the NI Fiscal Council are very timely and highlight key areas to explore with Sir Robert Chote during his evidence session today, at Agenda Item 8.

The meeting went into Open Session at 2.20 pm.

The following NIAO Officials joined in the meeting:

Mr Kieran Donnelly CB C&AG; and
Ms Karen Beattie, Senior Auditor.

The following NIAO Official joined the meeting remotely:

Mr Kyle Bingham, Assembly Support Officer.

1. Apologies

Mr Andrew Muir MLA

2. Draft Minutes of 18 November 2021

Agreed: The draft minutes of the meeting of 18 November 2021 were signed and agreed to be published.

3. Declaration of Interests

There were no declaration of interests.

4. Matters Arising

None



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5. Correspondence

The following NIAO Officials joined in the meeting:

Mr Kieran Donnelly CB C&AG; and
Ms Karen Beattie, Senior Auditor.

The following NIAO Official joined the meeting remotely:

Mr Kyle Bingham, Assembly Support Officer.

Economy Committee

The Committee noted correspondence dated 18 November 2021 from the Clerk of the Economy Committee, Mr Peter Hall regarding PAC's forthcoming Broadband inquiry.

Agreed: The Committee noted the Economy Committee are unlikely to take forward this programme of work, on conclusion of PAC's inquiry, due to their legislative work load.

The meeting remained in Open Session at 2.22 pm

6. Memorandum of Reply – Generating Electricity from Renewable Energy

The following NIAO Officials joined in the meeting:

Mr Kieran Donnelly, CB C&AG; and
Ms Karen Beattie, Senior Auditor.

The following NIA Officials joined the meeting remotely:

Mr Tomas Wilkinson, Director; and
Mr Kyle Bingham, Assembly Support Officer.

The Committee noted the Memorandum of Reply regarding the MOR 'Generating Electricity from Renewable Energy' which was presented to the Assembly on 18 November 2021 by Minister of Finance.



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The Committee note and welcomed that all 8 recommendations from PAC's Report have been accepted by the Department.

Agreed: The Committee noted the MOR.

The meeting remained in Open Session at 2.25 pm

7. Inquiry into 'Review of the Budget Session' – 1st Evidence Session

Mr Colum Boyle AO DoF; Ms Joanne McBurney, Public Spending Director and Mr Jeff McGuinness, Head of Central Expenditure Division joined the meeting.

In attendance were the following Officials:

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

The Committee noted the relevant papers for the two evidence sessions:

- NIAO Report 'Review of the Budget Process';
- NIAO Restricted Briefing Paper;
- NIAO Restricted Suggested Questions;
- Department Witness Biographies
- Biography of Sir Robert Chote.

Mr Colum Boyle AO DoF made an opening statement regarding the 'Review of the Budget System', which was then followed by a question and answer session.

The Committee thanked Mr Boyle and his colleagues for attending the meeting.

The meeting remained in Open Session at 3.31 pm



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8. Inquiry into ‘Review of the Budget System’ – 2nd Evidence Session

Sir Robert Chote, Chairperson of the NI Fiscal Council joined the meeting.

In attendance were the following Officials:

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

The Committee noted the additional papers for the second evidence session:

- Biography of Sir Robert Chote;
- The Public Finances in NI: A Comprehensive Guide;
- NI Fiscal Council response to: 2021 Spending Review; and
- Press Release from DoF welcoming NI Fiscal Council’s first report.

Sir Robert Chote, Chairperson of NI Fiscal Council made an opening statement regarding the ‘Review of the Budget System’, which was then followed by a question and answer session.

The Committee thanked Sir Robert Chote for attending the meeting.

The meeting went into Closed Session at 4.00 pm

9. Inquiry into ‘Review of the Budget Process’ – Discussion Session.

The following NIAO Officials joined the meeting:

Mr Kieran Donnelly CB C&AG;
Ms Karen Beattie, Senior Auditor; and

The following NIAO Officials joined the meeting remotely:

Mr Kyle Bingham, Assembly Support Officer.



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

The meeting remained in Closed Session at 4.09 pm

10. Inquiry into Sports Sustainability Fund – Issues Paper

The following NIAO Officials joined the meeting:

Mr Kieran Donnelly CB C&AG; and
Ms Karen Beattie, Senior Auditor.

The following NIAO Official joined the meeting remotely:

Mr Tomas Wilkinson, Director; and
Mr Kyle Bingham, Assembly Support Officer

The Committee discussed with the NIAO Officials the 2nd Issues Paper regarding the inquiry into Sports Sustainability Fund.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the 2nd Issues Paper will also be included in the main report into the Sports Sustainability Fund.

Agreed: The Committee noted information regarding the breakdown of the £23.01m awarded by the Sports Sustainability Fund.

Agreed: The Committee noted the figures detailing the Executive's Block Grant, which in the current financial year is £15.8 billion, which includes additional COVID money of approximately £1.7 billion.

Correspondence from Ms Rosemary Barton

The Committee noted correspondence dated 18 November 2021, from Ms Rosemary Barton MLA regarding our inquiry into The Sports Sustainability Fund.



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Ms Barton has met with a group representing football, rugby, GAA and Golf who have concerns on how the scheme was designed.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write back to Ms Barton MLA advising her that the concerns raised by the group have been raised during the course of the Committee's inquiry and will factor in the findings of the report.

The meeting remained in Closed Session at 4.17 pm

11. Draft Forward Work Programme

The following NIAO Officials joined in the meeting:

Mr Kieran Donnelly, CB C&AG; and
Ms Karen Beattie, Senior Auditor.

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, that next week there is a further evidence session with Dr Mark Browne AO DE and Ms Sara Long CE EA regarding inquiry into 'Closing the Gap'.

The Committee noted there may be a change to the date Ms Jayne Brady HOCS, is to appear before PAC. Ms Brady is due to appear on Thursday 9 December 2021.

Agreed: The Committee noted the Clerk will liaise with the relevant Officials on this matter and report back to the Committee next week.

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

The meeting remained in Closed Session at 4.22 pm



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12. Any Other Business

The Committee noted NIAO Officials had a very successful visit to the Boys Model School, Belfast, yesterday, 24 November 2021 regarding PAC's inquiry into 'Closing the Gap – Social Deprivation and links to Education Attainment'.

13. Date, Time and Place of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Public Accounts Committee will take place on Thursday 2 December, at 2.00 pm in Room 30, Parliament Buildings.

The Committee noted the last meeting before the Christmas Recess is Thursday 16 December 2021.

The meeting adjourned at 4.22 pm

**Mr William Humphrey MBE MLA
Chairperson
Public Accounts Committee
18 November 2021**