



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Public Accounts Committee

Minutes of Proceedings

Thursday, 24 February 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 Andrew Muir MLA
Mr Maolíosa McHugh MLA

Present by Video or Teleconference:

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

Apologies: Mr David Hilditch MLA

In Attendance: Mr Peter McCallion (Clerk)
Ms Gillian Barker (Assistant Assembly Clerk)
Ms Suzanne Patton (Clerical Supervisor)
Ms Marion Johnston (Clerical Officer)



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The meeting opened in public session at 2.00 pm.

The Committee held a minute's silence to remember their colleague Christopher Stalford MLA.

1. Apologies

Mr David Hilditch MLA

2. Draft Minutes of 17 February 2022

Agreed: The draft minutes of the meeting of 17 February 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:

Mr Kieran Donnelly CB C&AG; and
Ms Colette Kane, Director.

The following NIAO official joined the meeting remotely:

Mr Kyle Bingham, Assembly Support Officer.



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Mr Mike Kiely

The Committee noted correspondence dated 18 and 22 February 2022 from Mr Mike Kiely regarding the Broadband Investment in Northern Ireland inquiry. The Committee noted that Mr Kiely had provided some interesting information regarding the inquiry which will be included in the Report's appendices.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward Mr Kiely's correspondence to NIAO.

Mr Edward Cooke

The Committee noted correspondence dated 14 February 2022 from Mr Edward Cooke regarding equality monitoring of NI government departmental spending programmes.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to acknowledge Mr Cooke's correspondence and forward this to NIAO.

The meeting remained in public session at 2.08pm

6. Inquiry into Planning in Northern Ireland – Evidence Session

The following NILGA Members joined the meeting:

Cllr Steven Corr (Belfast City Council), Chair of NILGA, Placeshaping and Infrastructure Network;

Cllr Robert Irvine (Fermanagh and Omagh District Council), Member of Planning Committee and Mentor on NILGA's Elected Member Accredited Member Development Programme on Planning; and

Ms Karen Smyth, Head of Policy and Governance, NILGA

In attendance:

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

The Committee noted the relevant papers for the evidence session for the inquiry 'Planning into Northern Ireland'. The papers included:



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- NIAO Report 'Planning in Northern Ireland',
- NIAO Restricted Potential Questions; and
- Background information on NILGA.

NILGA representatives made an opening statement which was followed by a question and answer session.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to NILGA for some further information in respect of the requirement for planning officers to declare interest and regarding NILGA's views in respect of standing order legislation and qualified majority voting.

The meeting was adjourned at 3.29 pm

The meeting resumed in private session at 3.35 pm

7. Inquiry 'Planning in Northern Ireland' – Discussion and Issues Papers

The following NIAO officials joined the meeting:

Mr Kieran Donnelly CB C&AG; and
Ms Colette Kane, Director

The following NIAO officials joined the meeting remotely:

Mr Roger McCance, Audit Manager;
Ms Claire Turner, Senior Auditor; and
Mr Kyle Bingham, Assembly Support Officer

The Committee discussed the evidence session with the NIAO Officials who agreed to produce an additional Issues Paper for the main report.

The Committee noted the Issues Paper covering both the Department's evidence session on 10 February 2022 and SOLACE evidence session on 17 February 2022.



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Agreed: The Committee agreed the Issues Paper with a few amendments including reference to the role of the Regional Planning Commission, will form the main part of the final report.

Inquiry Correspondence

The Committee noted correspondence dated 21 February 2022 from Nature's Keepers International regarding 'Planning in NI' evidence sessions.

Agreed: The Committee noted the correspondence and agreed to write to Mr McLaughlin acknowledging his correspondence

The Committee noted correspondence dated 22 February 2022 from Katrina Godfrey, Permanent Secretary DfI regarding follow up questions from the Department's evidence session.

The Committee also noted a further letter to the Department has been issued, regarding additional information in respect of the evidence session with SOLACE.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the Departmental correspondence to the Audit Office.

The Committee noted at last week's meeting it was decided to send a joint letter to the Minister for Infrastructure from the Chair of PAC and Chair of Infrastructure regarding issues coming out of the Planning inquiry.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to table the letter to the Minister at next week's meeting including a revised reference to the Regional Planning Commission rather than the Planning Forum. The Committee agreed that following its review, the letter will be forwarded to the Chairperson of the Infrastructure Committee Jonathan Buckley MLA for agreement and then sent on to the Minister.

The meeting remained in private session at 3.54 pm



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8. First Consideration of Report 'Broadband Investment in Northern Ireland'

The following NIAO officials joined the meeting:

Mr Kieran Donnelly CB C&AG; and
Ms Tomas Wilkinson, Director.

The following NIAO Official joined the meeting remotely:

Mr Conor McGeown, Audit Manager
Ms Julie Canning, Senior Auditor and
Mr Kyle Bingham, Assembly Support Officer

The Committee noted the draft report is classified as RESTRICTED for Members' attention and therefore should not be published more widely.

The Committee noted this is the First Consideration for the report 'Broadband Investment in Northern Ireland' and agreed the title of the report is '**Broadband Investment in Northern Ireland**'.

The Committee agreed the section on Membership and Powers and the List of Abbreviations.

The Committee made the following decisions regarding each section and paragraphs within the report, that is – **Agreed, Agreed as amended or to be reworded.**

Section 'Introduction': Paragraph 20

Paragraph 20: Read and Agreed

Section 'Background': Paragraphs 20 – 25

Paragraph 21: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 22: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 23: Read and Agreed



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Paragraph 24: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 25: Read and Agreed

Agreed: Section Title: 'Aspects of the tender scoring methodology used on the Project Stratum procurement were overly simplistic'. Paras 26 - 30

Paragraph 26: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 27: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 28: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 29: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 30: Agreed as amended

Agreed: Section Title: 'The LPS data used by the Department and the addition of 8500 premises to the Project Stratum'. Paras 31 - 36

Paragraph 31: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 32: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 33: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 34: Agreed as amended

Paragraph 35: Agreed as amended

Paragraph 36: Agreed as amended

Agreed as amended: Section Title: 'Departmental disclosure of the LPS Data'

Paragraph 37: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 38: Read and Agreed

Agreed: Section Title: 'Project Stratum will not improve broadband 100 per cent of premises'. Paras 39 - 41

Paragraph 39: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 40: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 41: Agreed as amended



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Agreed: Section Title: 'Commercial Operators and Changing Investment plans'.
Para 42 - 46

Paragraph 42: Read and Agreed
Paragraph 43: Agreed as amended
Paragraph 44: Read and Agreed
Paragraph 45: Agreed as amended
Paragraph 46: Read and Agreed

Agreed: Section Title: 'Competition and Wholesale pricing on the new network'.
Paras 47 - 48

Paragraph 47: Agreed as amended
Paragraph 48: Agreed as amended

Agreed: Section Title: 'Significant overestimate of the number of properties that would be improved by the earlier NIBIP project' '. Para 49 - 51

Paragraph 49: Read and Agreed
Paragraph 50: Agreed as amended
Paragraph 51: Agreed as amended

Agreed: Section Title: 'Clawback in the region of £14 million is due back from BT from the earlier NIBIP and SRP2 projects'. Paras 52 - 53

Paragraph 52: Read and Agreed
Paragraph 53: Read and Agreed

The Committee then returned to the Executive Summary, paragraphs 1 - 17 and agreed the following:

Paragraph 1: Read and Agreed
Paragraph 2: Read and Agreed
Paragraph 3: Read and Agreed
Paragraph 4: Read and Agreed
Paragraph 5: Read and Agreed



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Paragraph 6: Read and Agreed.
Paragraph 7: Read and Agreed

Mr Roy Beggs MLA left the meeting at 4.15 pm

Recommendations 1 - 10: Paragraphs 8 – 19

Recommendation 1	Paragraph 8: Read and Agreed
Recommendation 2	Paragraph 9: Agreed as amended
Recommendation 3	Paragraph 10: Agreed as amended
Recommendation 4	Paragraph 11: Read and Agreed
Recommendation 5	Paragraph 12: Read and Agreed
Recommendation 6	Paragraph 13: Agreed as amended
Recommendation 7	Paragraph 14: Read and Agreed
	Paragraph 15: Read and Agreed
	Paragraph 16: Read and Agreed
Recommendation 8	Paragraph 17: Read and Agreed
Recommendation 9	Paragraph 18: Read and Agreed
Recommendation 10	Paragraph 19: Read and Agreed

That concluded the first consideration of the report – ‘Broadband Investment in Northern Ireland’.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the Appendices of the report will include:

- Extracts from the minutes
- Hansard
- Correspondence

Agreed: The Committee agreed to bring the amended Report to next week’s Committee meeting, 3 March 2022 for final consideration.

The meeting remained in private session at 4.17pm



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9. Draft Press Release – Report into ‘Review of Northern Ireland Budget Process’.

The following NIAO officials joined the meeting:

Mr Kieran Donnelly CB C&AG; and
Ms Tomas Wilkinson, Director.

The following NIAO official joined the meeting remotely:

Mr Kyle Bingham, Assembly Support Officer.

Ms Órlaithí Flynn MLA left the meeting at 4:19pm

The Committee agreed the draft press release for the ‘Review of Northern Ireland Budget Process’ with amendments. The report ‘Review of Northern Ireland Budget Process’ will be published on Friday 4 March 2022.

The meeting remained in private session at 4.20pm

10. Draft Forward Work Programme

The following NIAO officials joined the meeting:

Mr Kieran Donnelly, CB C&AG; and
Ms Neil Wilkinson, Director.

The following official joined the meeting remotely:

Mr Kyle Bingham, Assembly Support Officer.



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The Committee noted the December 2021 to March 2022 draft Forward Work Programme to the end of the mandate including the evidence session with HOCS on Tuesday 8 March 2022.

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

Take Note Debate

The Committee noted the Take Note Debate is scheduled for on Monday 28 February 2022, 8.00 pm – 10.00 pm, indicative timings. The Committee noted the Chairperson will open the debate and the Deputy Chairperson will wind up the proceedings.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the 'Information Paper for Members' regarding the reports for the Take Note Debate.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to circulate the 'Information Paper for Members' to ALL Members prior to the debate.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the following Members will speak on the reports as follows:

REPORT	SPEAKING
1. <u>Major Capital Projects</u>	Andrew Muir MLA
2. <u>The LandWeb Project and Digital Transformation</u>	Cara Hunter MLA
3. <u>Special Educational Needs:</u>	William Humphrey MLA: Roy Beggs MLA
4. <u>Capacity and Capability in the NICS:</u>	Andrew Muir MLA
5. <u>Driver and Vehicle Agency:</u>	Roy Beggs MLA
6. <u>Generating Electricity from Renewable Energy:</u>	William Irwin MLA
7. <u>Speeding up Justice</u>	TBA



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Letter from The Speaker – Business over the next two weeks

The Committee noted correspondence from the Speaker dated 18 February 2022 to Committee Chairpersons.

The meeting remained in private session at 4.27 pm

11. Any Other Business

Chairpersons' Liaison Group – Report on Strengthening Committee Scrutiny

The Committee noted correspondence dated 18 February 2022 from the Chairpersons' Liaison Group, regarding their report on Strengthening Committee Scrutiny.

Agreed: The Committee noted CLG has requested the views on the attached report from committees and parties by close of business on Tuesday 1 March 2022.

12. Date, Time and Place of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Public Accounts Committee will take place on Thursday 3 March 2022 at 2pm in the Senate Chamber.

The meeting adjourned at 4.27 pm

Mr William Humphrey MBE MLA
Chairperson
Public Accounts Committee
24 February 2022