



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Public Accounts Committee

Minutes of Proceedings

Thursday, 27 January 2022

Meeting Location: The Senate, Parliament Buildings, Belfast

Present: Mr William Humphrey MBE MLA (Chairperson)
Mr Roy Beggs MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr David Hilditch MLA
Mr Andrew Muir 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: None

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



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The following NIAO Officials joined the meeting:

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

The following NIAO Official joined the meeting remotely:

Mr Kyle Bingham, Assembly Support Officer.

The meeting Opened in Public Session at 2.05 pm.

Holocaust Memorial Day

The Committee held a one-minute silence to commemorate Holocaust Memorial Day; to remember the millions of people murdered in the Holocaust under Nazi persecution and the genocides that followed in Cambodia, Rwanda, Bosnia and Darfur.

1. Apologies

None.

2. Draft Minutes of 20 January 2022

Agreed: The draft minutes of the meeting of 20 January 2022 were signed and agreed to be published.

3. Declaration of Interests

The following Members declared an interest:

In Agenda Item 6, Ministerial Direction – Omicron Hospitality Payment:
Mr David Hilditch declared he is a Director, Carrick Rangers Football Club.



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In Agenda Item 8, Final Consideration of the report 'Closing the Gap – Social Deprivation and links to Educational Attainment':

Mr William Humphrey MBE MLA declared he is a Governor, Edenbrooke Primary School, Governor, Girls Model Belfast; and a former pupil of Boys Model, Belfast.

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.

4. Matters Arising

None.

5. Correspondence

The following NIAO Officials joined the meeting room:

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

The following NIAO Official joined the meeting remotely:

Mr Kyle Bingham, Assembly Support Officer.

Ms Linda Fox-Rogers

The Committee noted correspondence from Ms Linda Fox-Rogers, a lecturer in spatial planning in Queen's University Belfast. Ms Fox-Rogers is currently working with Professor Geraint Ellis on a project that explores stakeholder opinion of



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Northern Ireland's planning system, based on a survey that was carried out in 2019/20. The correspondence includes a link to BBC media coverage the project received.

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

Katrina Godfrey AO Dfl

The Committee noted correspondence dated 21 January 2022 from Ms Katrina Godfrey, AO Dfl. Ms Godfrey has confirmed she will be appearing in front of the Committee on 10 February 2022 regarding the inquiry 'Planning in NI'.

Agreed: The Committee noted the correspondence.

Minister Swann – MACA Employer Liability

The Committee noted correspondence from the Business Office dated 24 January 2022, regarding a notification from Minister Swann for 'COVID-19 Indemnity Arrangement February 2022 – Military Assistance for Civilian Authorities (MACA) Employer Liability'. This is in relation to there being no statutory authority regarding a Government Department proposing to undertake a contingent liability in excess of £250,000. The Department concerned will present to the Assembly a Minute outlining the circumstances; and will refrain from incurring the liability until 14 days (exclusion of Saturdays and Sundays) after the issue of the Minute, except in cases of special urgency.

The Committee noted this is further to the Minister's letter of 28 September 2021 notifying the Assembly of non-HSC Medically Trained and Seconded Public Sector Personnel support (namely MACA), in relation to COVID-19 vaccinations. It is an update to a further agreement period regarding Combat Military Technicians (CMTs) being deployed to support existing staff.

The Committee has now been notified of the indemnity that the Department has entered into by means of this letter - the Business Office has copied the Chairpersons of the Health and Public Accounts Committees.



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Agreed: The Committee noted the indemnity.

The meeting remained in Public Session at 2.12 pm.

6. Ministerial Direction – Omicron Hospitality Payment

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

The following NIAO Official joined the meeting remotely:

Mr Kyle Bingham, Assembly Support Officer.

The Committee noted correspondence dated 24 January 2022 regarding a Ministerial Direction on ‘Omicron Hospitality Payment’. The DoF Permanent Secretary wrote to Mr Kieran Donnelly CB C&AG on 11 January to advise that he had sought a Ministerial Direction from the DoF Minister, Conor Murphy MLA, in relation to a scheme to support hospitality businesses affected by the Omicron variant. The estimated cost of this scheme is £40 million.

The Committee noted the hospitality sector has been severely affected by changes in consumer behaviour in response to the Omicron variant and is currently the sector working under the greatest degree of control measures. In response, on 23 December 2021 the Finance Minister submitted a proposal to the NI Executive seeking the agreement for a one-off, targeted, grant to provide financial support for hospitality businesses.

The Committee noted the relevant correspondence attached to the Ministerial Direction.

Agreed: The Committee welcomed the Ministerial Direction and how this would support the hospitality sector. However, they had concerns over those businesses who are excluded from the scheme, but noted this is not a matter under the Committee’s remit for discussion.



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Agreed: The Committee noted the C&AG will keep the matter under review and will conduct an audit against the policy.

The meeting went into Closed Session at 2.20 pm.

7. Inquiry into ‘Broadband Investment in NI’ – Issues Paper

Mr Kieran Donnelly CB C&AG and
Mr 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 discussed with the NIAO Officials the Restricted Issues Paper regarding the inquiry into ‘Broadband Investment in NI’.

The Committee noted from the evidence session that further information has been requested from the Department.

Mr David Hilditch MLA left the meeting at 2.29 pm,

Mr David Hilditch MLA re-joined the meeting at 2.44 pm,

The meeting remained in Closed Session at 2.35 pm,

8. Final Consideration of draft Report – ‘Closing the Gap – Social Deprivation and Links to Educational Attainment’.

Mr Kieran Donnelly CB C&AG; and



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Mr Tomas Wilkinson, Director.

The following NIAO Officials joined the meeting remotely:

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

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

The Committee noted this is the Final Consideration for the report 'Closing the Gap – Social Deprivation and Links to Educational Attainment'.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the word 'SureStart' to be referenced as one word throughout the report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the following paragraphs to be amended from last week's meeting:

Paragraphs: 10, 17, 18, 20, 21, 22, 33, 34, 49, 50, 51, 54, 62, and 64.

This concluded the Final Consideration of the Report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to order the report to print and to consider a draft press release at next week's meeting.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to officially launch the report at the Boys Model School and to discuss arrangements at next week's meeting.

The meeting remained in Closed Session at 2.45 pm.



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9. Draft Forward Work Programme

The following NIAO Officials joined the meeting:

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

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 to the end of the Mandate.

Agreed: The Committee noted a further meeting with Ms Sara Long, CE EA and Dr Mark Browne, AO DE regarding an update on SEN and the MOR has been scheduled for Thursday 10 March 2022.

Agreed: The Committee noted a further meeting with Dr Jayne Brady, HOCS has been scheduled for Tuesday 8 March 2022.

Agreed: The Committee noted the 3 additional meetings scheduled for Tuesday 8, 15 & 22 March; and agreed to publish the draft Forward Work Programme with these meetings included.

The meeting remained in Closed Session at 2.46 pm

10. Any Other Business

The following NIAO Officials joined the meeting:

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



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The following Official joined the meeting remotely:

Mr Kyle Bingham, Assembly Support Officer.

NIAO Members Survey

Mr Kieran Donnelly, CB C&AG informed the Committee of the proposed Member's survey to gain feedback from the Committee on NIAO services.

Agreed: The Committee noted the proposed survey.

Take Note Debate

The Committee agreed to consider at next week's meeting a draft motion for a 'Take Note Debate' on the work of the Committee and to consider tabling with the Business Committee.

11. Date, Time and Place of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Public Accounts Committee will take place on Thursday 3 February 2022.

The meeting adjourned at x2.48 pm.

Mr William Humphrey MBE MLA
Chairperson
Public Accounts Committee
27 January 2022