



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Public Accounts Committee

Minutes of Proceedings

Thursday, 14 October 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
Mr Andrew Muir MLA
Mr Maolíosa McHugh MLA

Present by Video or Teleconference:

Mr Cathal Boylan MLA
Mr Matthew O'Toole MLA

Apologies: Ms Órlaithí Flynn MLA
Mr William Irwin MLA

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



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Agreed: The Committee agreed to discuss in closed session at Agenda Item 11, Any Other Business, correspondence dated 8 October 2021 from Ms Tracy Meharg regarding additional information on the 'Sports Sustainability Fund'.

The meeting went into Open Session at 2.05 pm.

The Committee noted the forthcoming change in PAC membership that Mr Matthew O'Toole MLA is being replaced by Ms Cara Hunter MLA. The Chair thanked Mr O'Toole for his contribution and hard work during his time as a member of PAC.

The following NIAO Officials joined in the meeting:

Mr Kieran Donnelly, CB C&AG, and
Mr Roger McCance, Audit Manager.

The following Official joined the meeting remotely:

Mr Kyle Bingham, Assembly Support Officer.

1. Apologies

Ms Órlaithí Flynn MLA
Mr William Irwin MLA

2. Draft Minutes of 7 October 2021

Agreed: The draft minutes of the meeting of 7 October 2021 were signed and agreed to be published.

3. Declaration of Interest

The following Members declared an interest in Agenda Item 7, Briefing and Preparation Session regarding inquiry in to Closing the Gap – Social Deprivation and links to Educational Attainment'.



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Mr William Humphrey MBE MLA declared he is a Governor, Edenbrooke Primary School, Governor of Girls Model Belfast and member of Woodvale Cricket Club; and

Mr Roy Beggs MLA declared he is a Governor of Roddensvale School, Larne and Committee Member, Horizon Sure Star;

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; and

Mr Maolíosá McHugh MLA declared his is Chairman of pre-school Naíscoil na Deirge.

4. Matters Arising

None

5. Correspondence

The following NIAO Officials joined in the meeting:

Mr Kieran Donnelly, CB C&AG, and
Mr Roger McCance, Audit Manager.

The following Official joined the meeting remotely:

Mr Kyle Bingham, Assembly Support Officer.

Mr Colum Boyle AO DoF

The Committee noted correspondence, dated 8 October 2021, from Mr Colum Boyle AO DoF regarding the inquiry into 'Strategic Review of the Budget Process'. Mr Boyle AO DoF has confirmed his attendance and those of his Departmental Officials for the evidence session on 25 November 2021.



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Sports Sustainability Fund

The Committee noted correspondence dated 8 October from Ms Tracy Meharg AO DoC regarding additional information received on the 'Sports Sustainability Fund' and noted the response has been forwarded to NIAO for inclusion in the draft Report.

The Committee noted the response included a letter to Antoinette McKeown, Chief Executive, Sports NI from the Department dated 3 March 2021 with a full list of applicants, outlining the amounts claimed and those above £500k; Minutes of the meeting of the Sport NI Board held on Wednesday 10th February 2021; and Minutes of the Extraordinary Meeting of the Sport NI Board held on Friday 26th February 2021 outlining Sports NI Board's funding decisions.

The Committee noted Sports NI received legal advice on 5 July 2021; the evidence session was on 8 July 2021; and decisions to award grants were taken on 26 February 2021.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to discuss this matter further under Agenda Item 11.

The meeting remained in Open Session at 2.10 pm

6. Ministerial Direction: Creative Individual's Recovery Fund

The following NIAO Officials attended the meeting:

Mr Kieran Donnelly, CB C&AG, and
Mr Roger McCance, Audit Manager.

The following NIAO Officials attended the meeting remotely:

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



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The Committee noted correspondence from Mr Kieran Donnelly CB C&AG dated, 11 October 2021, regarding a ministerial direction for a Creative Individual's Recovery Fund. Ms Tracy Meharg AO DoC had sought a ministerial direction from the DfC Minister, Deirdre Hargey MLA, on 9 September 2021 to put in place arrangements for individual payments of up to £2,000 to self-employed and freelance individuals to prevent loss of skills in the culture, languages, arts and heritage sectors.

The Committee noted the Ministerial Direction has been designed to prevent individuals, and their talent and expertise, from leaving the creative economy; thereby potentially destabilising the sector and the benefits it delivers. It is anticipated that this Fund will support circa 2,500 successful applications and will cost a maximum of £5.5 million, including delivery.

The Committee noted the C&AG provided the relevant correspondence which underpins the decision to proceed with the delivery of this Scheme.

Agreed: The Committee noted the C&AG will be keeping this matter under review as the audit of the 2021-22 financial statements progresses.

The meeting went into Closed Session at 2.14 pm

7. Inquiry into 'Closing the Gap – Social Deprivation and Links Education' – Issues Paper

The following NIAO Officials joined in the meeting:

Mr Kieran Donnelly, CB C&AG, and
Mr Roger McCance, Audit Manager.

The following NIA Officials joined the meeting remotely:

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



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The Committee discussed, with the NIAO Officials, the Issues Paper regarding its inquiry into 'Closing the Gap – Social Deprivation and links to Educational Attainment', and agreed this paper will form part of the main report.

The Committee noted Dr Noel Purdy, who is heading up an 'Expert Panel' in this subject, will be attending PAC on 4 November to give evidence on the inquiry.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to Mr Mark Browne AO DE to attend a further evidence session on 11 November 2021.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request that Ms Sara Long CE EA attend an evidence session on 11 November 2021, on EA's role as the delivery body for TSN. The Committee suggested that Ms Long could also provide the Committee with an update on the MOR regarding PAC's recent report 'Review of Special Educational Needs' at this session or a later date.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to visit Boys Model School on Thursday 4 November 2021, details of the arrangements will be available at PAC's next meeting. The Committee agreed to contact the Clerk if they wish to attend.

Mr Andrew Muir MLA left the meeting at 2.16 pm
Mr Andrew Muir MLA re-joined the meeting at 2.17 pm

The meeting remained in Closed Session at 2.34 pm

8. Inquiry into 'Addiction Services in NI' – Briefing and Preparation Session

The following NIAO Officials joined in the meeting:

Mr Kieran Donnelly CB C&AG, and
Ms Roger McCance Audit Manager.

The following NIA Officials joined the meeting remotely:

Mr Neil Gray, Director;
Ms Claire Turner, Senior Auditor and
Mr Kyle Bingham, Assembly Support Officer.



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Mr Kieran Donnelly CB C&AG and his team briefed the Committee on the 'Addiction Services in NI' inquiry. The Committee noted the evidence session is scheduled for 21 October 2021 and noted the following papers:

- NIAO Report 'Addictions Services in NI'
- Restricted NIAO Papers - Briefing & Preparation Paper
- Restricted NIAO Paper - Suggested Question Areas
- Biographies of the Department Officials attending:
 - Mr Richard Pengelly, AO DoH
 - Professor Sir Michael McBride, Chief Medical Officer DoH
 - Mr Brendan Whittle, Director of Social Care and Children HSCB

The Committee noted the key areas of questioning and a question / answer session followed.

The meeting remained in Closed Session at 3.10 pm

9. Speeding up the Justice System – draft Press Release

The following NIAO Officials attended the meeting

Mr Kieran Donnelly, CB C&AG, and
Mr Roger McCance, Audit Manager.

The following NIAO Officials attended the meeting remotely:

Mr Neil Gray, Director and
Mr Kyle Bingham, Assembly Support Officer.



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The Committee considered the draft Press Release and the date to launch the report 'Speeding up the Justice System'.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the launch date for their report 'Speeding up the Justice System' as Thursday 21 October 2021.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the draft Press Release with one amendment.

Mr David Hilditch MLA left the meeting at 3.15 pm

Mr David Hilditch MLA re-joined the meeting at 3.23 pm

The meeting remained in Closed Session at 3.17 pm

10. Draft Forward Work Programme

The following NIAO Officials joined in the meeting:

Mr Kieran Donnelly, CB C&AG, and
Mr Roger McCance, Audit Manager.

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.

Agreed: The Committee agreed Dr Jayne Brady, HOCS will attend PAC meeting on 9 December 2021.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to move their inquiry into 'Broadband Investment in NI' to January 2022.



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Agreed: The Committee agreed to amend the draft Forward Work Programme to include the further evidence sessions and school visit. The amended programme will be brought back to next week's meeting.

The meeting remained in Closed Session at 3.19 pm

11. Any Other Business

Sports Sustainability Fund

The Committee considered correspondence, dated 8 October, from Ms Tracy Meharg AO DoC regarding a follow-up response to the Committee's questions on the 'Sports Sustainability Fund.' specifically that Sports NI received legal advice on 5 July 2021; the evidence session was on 8 July 2021; and decisions to award grants were taken on 26 February 2021.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to invite Ms Antoinette McKeown CE Sports NI to attend a further evidence to clarify some of the information in the correspondence, particularly in relation to the timing of the legal advice. The Committee also agreed to request paper SNI 21 07, referred in the minutes of 10 & 26 February 2021, and paper SNI 21 06 referred to in the minutes of 19 March 2021.

12. Date, Time and Place of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Public Accounts Committee will take place on Thursday 21 October, at 2.00 pm in The Senate, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting adjourned at 3.35pm



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Mr William Humphrey MBE MLA
Chairperson
Public Accounts Committee
14 October 2021