



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

# Public Accounts Committee

## Minutes of Proceedings

Thursday, 16 December 2021

**Meeting Location:** Room 30, Parliament Buildings, Belfast

**Present:** Mr William Humphrey MBE MLA (Chairperson)  
Mr Roy Beggs MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

**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  
Mr Andrew Muir MLA

**Apologies:** Mr David Hilditch MLA

**In Attendance:** Mr Paul Gill (Clerk Assistant)  
Ms Gillian Barker (Assistant Assembly Clerk)  
Ms Suzanne Patton (Clerical Supervisor)  
Ms Marion Johnston (Clerical Officer)

***The meeting went into Open Session at 2.03 pm.***

The following NIAO Officials joined the meeting:



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Mr Kieran Donnelly CB C&AG;  
Mr Rodney Allen, Chief Operating Officer; and  
Mr Roger McCance, Audit Manager.

The following NIAO Official joined the meeting remotely:

Mr Kyle Bingham, Assembly Support Officer.

**1. Apologies**

None

**2. Draft Minutes of 9 December 2021**

**Agreed:** The draft minutes of the meeting of 9 December 2021 were signed and agreed to be published.

**3. Declaration of Interests**

Mr Andrew Muir MLA declared an interest in Agenda Item 5, Correspondence regarding Sport Sustainability Fund, as he is affiliated to 'Athletics Northern Ireland'; and

Ms Cara Hunter MLA declared an interest in Agenda Item 6, Draft Report 'Addiction Services in NI' as she is Chair of 'Dual Diagnosis and Addiction' APG.

**4. Matters Arising**

None

**5. Correspondence**

The following NIAO Officials joined the meeting room:

Mr Kieran Donnelly CB C&AG  
Mr Rodney Allen, Chief Operating Officer; and  
Mr Roger McCance, Audit Manager.



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The following NIAO Official joined the meeting remotely:

Mr Kyle Bingham, Assembly Support Officer.

### **Sport Sustainability Fund**

The Committee noted correspondence dated 10 December 2021 from Ms Beverly Wall, Deputy Secretary DfC in response to our letter of 22 November 2021 regarding Sport Sustainability Fund. Ms Wall has provided information on the three areas requested:

- Delegation limits of the Funding Awards;
- An update on the allocation of funding to the four major sporting governing bodies, out of the total £23.01m awarded; and
- Information on Sport NI's wider funding programmes for sports and funding to cricket at Annex A.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to forward the correspondence to the Audit Office and for it to be included in the report.

The Committee noted that the Chief Executive of Sports NI has delegation up to £499,999 and that above this amount, it is referred to the Board of Sports NI, via the Chief Executive. The Board will then forward any awards above £500k to the Department.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department for clarity on the award / delegation process as it appears to be the same threshold figure for the Department and the Board.

### **Happy Healthy Minds**

The Committee noted correspondence dated 3 December 2021, from Dr Mark Browne AO, DE requesting further information on the 'Happy Healthy Minds' pilot. The response included a breakdown on the funding allocation, that all primary schools are participating including Special Schools and EOTAS with a primary school cohort.



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**Agreed:** The Committee noted the pilot will continue to the end of March 2022.

**NISRA Report Quarterly Sickness Levels in NICS**

The Committee noted correspondence and a report dated 14 December 2021 from Eimear McKee NISRA, regarding 'Quarterly Sickness Levels in NICS July - September 2021'. The Committee noted the Executive Summary Key Facts and that numbers regarding sick levels have mainly gone up since July / September 2020.

**Agreed:** The Committee noted the Report and agreed to review the figures with Dr Brady when she returns to the Committee later in the New Year.

***The meeting went into Closed Session at 2.15 pm  
Mr Cathal Boylan MLA left the meeting at 2.15 pm***

**6. Further Consideration of the Report - Inquiry into 'Addiction Services in NI'**

The following NIAO Officials joined the meeting:

Mr Kieran Donnelly CB C&AG,  
Mr Rodney Allen, Chief Operating Officer and  
Mr Roger McCane, Audit Manager.

The following Officials joined the meeting remotely:

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

The Committee noted the draft report is classified as RESTRICTED and therefore for Members use only.



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**Agreed:** The Committee agreed at last week's meeting, 9 December 2021, the word MISUSE to be replaced throughout the report, with the word USE, where appropriate.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed at last week's meeting the following sections of the report were either, '**Read and Agreed**' or '**Read and Agreed as Amended**':

The Title is '**Addiction Services in NI**'.

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

Recommendations 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 & 6 that is paragraphs 8 – 14

The Introduction Section paragraph 19;

The Background Section paragraphs 20 – 30

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

**Executive Summary: Paragraphs 1 – 7**

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

Paragraph 6: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 7: Read and Agreed as amended

**Recommendations 7 - 9: Paragraphs 8 – 18**

Recommendation 7

Paragraph 15: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 16: Read and Agreed

Recommendation 8

Paragraph 17: Read and Agreed as amended

Recommendation 9

Paragraph 18: Read and Agreed as amended



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Recommendation 10

Paragraph 19: Agreed to insert a NEW Paragraph and NEW Recommendation 10.

For the purpose of this record the paragraph numbers will remain the same but will change in the amended report.

**Amendments to the paragraphs 31 - 52 are noted below under each Section Title.**

**Agreed:** Section Title: 'Developing the new substance misuse strategy has taken too long. [Paras 31-32].

Paragraph 31: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 32: Read and Agreed as amended

**Agreed:** Section Title: 'There is uncertainty around funding for the new strategy and as a result, it may be only partially implemented'. [Paras 33-35.]

Paragraph 33: Read and Agreed as amended

Paragraph 34: Read and Agreed as amended

Paragraph 35: Read and Agreed as amended

**Agreed:** Section Title: 'Significant deficiencies in data quality and completeness impact the Department's ability to plan and assess its substance misuse services'. [Paras 36 – 39].

Paragraph 36: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 37: Read and Agreed as amended

Paragraph 38: Read and Agreed as amended

Paragraph 39: Read and Agreed as amended



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**Agreed:** Section Title: 'Community and voluntary sector organisations provide effective harm reduction services and should be a priority, yet some of these services have had funding withdrawn'. [Paras 40 – 41].

Paragraph 40: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 41: Read and Agreed

**Agreed:** Section Title: 'Clearer, more consistent care pathways are needed to ensure people are able to access the right services at the right time.' [Paras 42 – 44]

Paragraph 42: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 43: Paragraph to be reworded

Paragraph 44: Read and Agreed

**Agreed:** Section Title: 'Access to residential rehabilitation beds is inconsistent and a review is long overdue'. [Paras 45 – 47].

Paragraph 45: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 46: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 47: Read and Agreed as amended

**Agreed:** Section Title: 'Misuse of prescription drugs is a significant issue in Northern Ireland, but there is little evidence that interventions to date have made an impact'. [Paras 48 – 52].

Paragraph 48: The word 'misuse' was to be retained in the Title and in the paragraph. Read and Agreed

Paragraph 49: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 50: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 51: Read and Agreed as amended

Paragraph 52: Read and Agreed as amended

**Agreed:** The Committee noted this concluded first full consideration of the report.



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**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that the appendices of the report would include:

- Extract from the minutes
- Hansard
- Correspondence.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to schedule a Final Consideration of the Report at next week's PAC meeting, 13 January 2022.

***The meeting remained in Closed Session at 2.50 pm***

## **7. Draft Forward Work Programme**

The following NIAO Officials joined the meeting:

Mr Kieran Donnelly, CB C&AG

The following Official joined the meeting remotely:

Mr Kyle Bingham, Assembly Support Officer.

The Committee noted the updated list of NIAO Reports regarding a new inquiry for the New Year. Mr Kieran Donnelly CB C&AG discussed the forthcoming VFM NIAO Reports with the Committee.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to take forward 'Planning in Northern Ireland' as their final report for this mandate.

The Committee noted the September 2021 to March 2022 draft Forward Work Programme.

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





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***The meeting remained in Closed Session at 3.03 pm***

**8. Any Other Business**

**9. Date, Time and Place of Next Meeting**

The next meeting of the Public Accounts Committee will take place on Thursday 13 January 2022.

***The meeting adjourned at 3.03 pm***

**Mr William Humphrey MBE MLA  
Chairperson  
Public Accounts Committee  
16 December 2021**