

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

WEDNESDAY, 27 NOVEMBER 2013
SENATE CHAMBER, PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS

- Present: Ms Michaela Boyle (Chairperson)
Mr John Dallat (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Trevor Clarke
Mr Alex Easton
Mr Paul Girvan
Mr Chris Hazzard
Mr Daithí McKay
Mr Adrian McQuillan
Mr Seán Rogers
- In Attendance: Miss Aoibhinn Treanor (Assembly Clerk)
Ms Lucia Wilson (Assembly Clerk)
Mr Trevor Allen (Assistant Assembly Clerk)
Mrs Danielle Saunders (Clerical Supervisor)
Mr Darren Weir (Clerical Officer)
Miss Clare Rice (Bursary Student)
- Apologies: Mr Michael Copeland
Mr Ross Hussey

1.53 pm The meeting opened in public session

The Chairperson, on behalf of the Committee, welcomed Ms Lucia Wilson to the meeting and wished her well in her new role as incoming Clerk to this Committee.

1. Apologies

Apologies are listed above.

2. Minutes of the meeting on 20 November 2013

Agreed: The minutes of the last meeting were agreed.

1.54 pm Mr Clarke joined the meeting

3. Matters arising

- i. Members noted correspondence from the Northern Ireland Housing Executive in relation to EASA Group Ltd.

Agreed: Members agreed to forward the correspondence to the Social Development Committee for its information.

- ii. The Committee noted correspondence from Mooreland and Owenvarragh Residential Association and also noted that the Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO) will be considering issues in relation to the matter at a later date.
- iii. The Committee noted correspondence in relation to an allegation of fraudulent use of funding in the community sector.
- iv. Members noted a draft letter to the Finance Minister in relation to the Committee's debate on 12 November 2013.

Agreed: Members agreed that the correspondence be issued to the Finance Minister.

4. Ministerial Direction – Northern Ireland Hospice and Mencap

The Committee noted C&AG's notification of a Direction from the Minister for Health, Social Services and Public Safety in relation to capital funding to support emerging projects by the Northern Ireland Hospice and Mencap. The Direction is made in advance of the establishment of a capital grants scheme in 2014.

Mr Dallat queried the merits of Ministerial Directions in terms of limiting Accounting Officer accountability. C&AG reflected on those notified to the Committee to date this year and noted that in fact at Whitehall it was felt that there were circumstances in which Directions should have been sought and were not.

Agreed: the Committee agreed that the NIAO should monitor trends in the use of, and outcomes of Ministerial Directions and raise any issues that arise with the Committee.

2.05 pm Mr McKay left the meeting

2.05 pm Mr Hazzard joined the meeting

2.06 pm Mr Girvan left the meeting

5. Inquiry into the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) – Evidence Session

The Committee took oral evidence on the above inquiry from:

- Mr Noel Lavery, Accounting Officer, Department of Agriculture & Rural Development
- Mr Gerry Lavery, Senior Finance Director, Department of Agriculture & Rural Development
- Mr Norman Fulton, Director of Policy & Economics, Department of Agriculture & Rural Development
- Dr Seamus Kennedy, Chief Executive Officer, AFBI

2.20 pm Mr Hazzard left the meeting

2.37 pm Mr McKay re-joined the meeting

2.43 pm Mr Clarke left the meeting

2.46 pm Mr Rogers left the meeting
2.49 pm Mr Clarke and Mr Rogers re-joined the meeting
2.58 pm Mr Hazzard re-joined the meeting
3.12 pm Mr McQuillan left the meeting
3.32 pm Mr Dallat left the meeting
3.38 pm Mr Clarke left the meeting
3.44 pm Mr Dallat re-joined the meeting
3.57 pm Mr McKay left the meeting
4.03 pm Ms Boyle left the meeting; Mr Dallat took the Chair
4.04 pm Mr Clarke re-joined the meeting
4.08 pm Ms Boyle re-joined the meeting and resumed the Chair
4.09 pm Mr McKay re-joined the meeting
4.43 pm Mr Hazzard left the meeting
4.46 pm Mr McKay left the meeting
4.51 pm Mr Hazzard re-joined the meeting
4.52 pm Mr McKay re-joined the meeting

The witnesses answered a number of questions put by the Committee and agreed to provide additional information in writing.

4.59 pm the meeting moved to closed session
NIAO officials left the meeting

6. Inquiry into the PSNI: Use of Agency Staff – Legal Advice

5.02pm an Assembly Legal Advisor joined the meeting

The Committee received a briefing from the Assembly's Legal Services Office as agreed at the meeting of 13 October 2013.

5.45 pm the Assembly Legal Advisor left the meeting
NIAO officials rejoined the meeting

7. Inquiry into the PSNI: Use of Agency Staff – Consideration of draft report

Agreed: Members considered and agreed a proposed amendment to paragraph 7 of the Executive Summary to the report, and an amendment to paragraph 17 of the report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to consider the report early in its next meeting.

8. Inquiry into the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) – Post Evidence Session Discussion

Agreed: Members discussed the emerging issues arising from the evidence session with DARD and AFBI officials and agreed to consider an issues paper at the meeting on 4 December 2013.

5.57 pm Mr Clarke left the meeting

5.59 pm Mr McKay left the meeting

6.01 pm Mr Hazzard re-joined the meeting

9. Any other business

No other items of business were raised.

10. Date, time and place of next meeting

Members noted that the next meeting of the Committee will take place on Wednesday 4 December 2013 at 2.00 pm in Room 29, Parliament Buildings.

6.04 pm the meeting was adjourned

Ms Michaela Boyle
Chairperson, Public Accounts Committee