

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

WEDNESDAY, 9 APRIL 2014
NORTHERN IRELAND AUDIT OFFICE, 106 UNIVERSITY STREET, BELFAST

Present: Ms Michaela Boyle (Chairperson)
Mr John Dallat (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Trevor Clarke
Mr Michael Copeland
Mr Paul Girvan
Mr Chris Hazzard
Mr Ross Hussey
Mr Adrian McQuillan
Mr Seán Rogers

In Attendance: 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 Alex Easton
Mr Daithí McKay

The Committee undertook a visit to the Northern Ireland Audit Office, 106 University Street, Belfast and, after meeting staff in their offices, Members were briefed on the NIAO's Value for Money Work Programme.

3.29pm The meeting opened in closed session

1. Apologies

Apologies are listed above.

2. Minutes of the meeting on 2 April 2014

Agreed: The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed.

3. Matters Arising

Correspondence from the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development

The Committee noted correspondence from the Accounting Officer for the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development clarification issues in relation to the Committee's report on the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI).

Ministerial Direction - Financial Support for the Fishing Industry

The Committee considered notification from C&AG of a Direction from the Minister for Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) in relation to the provision of financial support for the fishing industry.

Correspondence in follow-up to a cancelled meeting between the Finance Minister and the Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson

The Committee noted correspondence from the Budget Director, DFP, in relation to the handling of Memoranda of Reply.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister on the issue, in advance of the rescheduled meeting on 29th April 2014.

Request for information pursuant to the Freedom of Information Act 2000

Agreed: The Committee noted a request for information pursuant to the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

3.58pm Mr McQuillan left the meeting

4.00pm Mr McQuillan re-joined the meeting

4.02pm Mr Hazzard left the meeting

4.04pm Mr Hazzard re-joined the meeting

Internal review of a request for information pursuant to the Freedom of Information Act 2000

Agreed: The Committee noted the outcome of an internal review of the information provided following a previous request for information pursuant to the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and agreed that the proposed response be issued.

Correspondence from the Accounting Officer, DOE

The Committee noted correspondence from the Accounting Officer for the Department of the Environment in relation to home working and car parking arrangements within the DOE's Planning Policy Division.

4. Inquiry into NI Water's Response to a Suspected Fraud and Inquiry into DRD: Review of a Whistleblower Complaint – Consideration of Draft Report

The Committee continued its consideration of the draft report on the above inquiries.

Members noted correspondence from the Northern Ireland Audit Office clarifying issues raised during the meeting of 26 March 2014.

NI Water's response to a suspected fraud – body of report

Paragraph 15 read, amended and agreed

Paragraph 20 read, amended and agreed

Paragraph 29 read, amended and agreed

NI Water's response to a suspected fraud – Executive Summary

Paragraph 4 read, amended and agreed

Forward Section

Paragraphs 1 to 3 read and agreed

4.10pm Mr Dallat left the meeting

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes, minutes of evidence and correspondence to be included as appendices to the report.

Agreed: The Committee ordered the report to be printed.

5. Inquiry into Account NI

The Committee considered the draft report on the above inquiry.

4.13pm Mr Dallat re-joined the meeting

Members noted correspondence from the Accounting Officer for the Department of Finance and Personnel, clarifying issues raised during the evidence session on 22 January 2014.

Introduction

Paragraphs 1 to 7 read and agreed

Benchmarking Performance

Paragraphs 8 to 10 read and agreed

Recommendation 1 read and agreed

Paragraphs 11 to 13 read and agreed

Recommendation 2 read and agreed

Paragraphs 14 and 15 read and agreed

Project Costs and Benefits

Paragraphs 16 to 22 read and agreed

Recommendation 3 read and agreed

Paragraphs 23 and 24 read and agreed

Recommendation 4 read and agreed

The Future Development of Account NI

Paragraphs 25 to 29 read and agreed

Recommendation 5 read and agreed

Paragraphs 30 and 31 read and agreed

Recommendation 6 read and agreed

Consideration of Executive Summary

Executive Summary read, amended and agreed

Consideration of Summary of Recommendations

Summary of Recommendations read and agreed

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes, minutes of evidence and correspondence to be included as appendices to the report.

Agreed: The Committee ordered the report to be printed.

4.25pm Mr McQuillan left the meeting

6. Any Other Business

4th Westminster Workshop: The Role of Public Accounts and Other Parliamentary Committees in Financial Scrutiny of the Public Sector

The Committee noted an invitation to the above event but Members indicated that they were not available to attend the event.

Tablet Devices

Members noted that all tablet devices should be periodically restarted during the forthcoming Easter recess to allow software updates to take effect.

7. Date, time and place of next meeting

Members noted that the next meeting of the Committee will take place on Wednesday 30 April 2014 at 2.00pm in Room 106, Parliament Buildings.

4.29pm the meeting adjourned

Ms Michaela Boyle
Chairperson, Public Accounts Committee