



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

# Public Accounts Committee

## Minutes of Proceedings

**Thursday, 7 March 2024**

**Meeting Location:** Room 21, Parliament Buildings

**Present:**

Daniel McCrossan, MLA (Chairperson)

Cheryl Brownlee, MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

Cathal Boylan, MLA

Tom Buchanan, MLA

Diane Forsyth, MLA

Colm Gildernew, MLA

David Honeyford, MLA

**Present by Video or Teleconference:**

Pádraig Delargy, MLA

**Apologies:**

John Stewart, MLA

**In Attendance:** Lucia Wilson (Committee Clerk)  
Kirsten McClelland (Assistant Committee Clerk)  
Karen Barry (Clerical Supervisor)  
Barbara Daly (Clerical Officer)

The meeting commenced at 2.03 pm in closed session

The Chairperson advised members of the requirement to declare interests in any items of business on the agenda, and discussed the substantive items of business to be considered.

The meeting moved into public session at 2.05 pm.

### **1. Apologies**

Apologies were received from John Stewart.

### **2. Draft minutes**

**Agreed:** The draft minutes of the meeting on 29 February 2024 were agreed.

### **3. Declaration of Interests**

The Chairperson reminded members of their requirement to register their interests under Standing Order 69(5).

No specific interests were declared.

### **4. Matters Arising**

There were no Matters Arising.

## **5. Chairperson's Business**

- i. The Chairperson welcomed John Stewart to the Public Accounts Committee and thanked Robbie Butler for his service to the Committee.
- ii. The Chairperson welcomed Assistant Assembly Clerk Kirsten McClelland to the Public Accounts Committee.

## **6. Correspondence**

There was no correspondence brought before the Committee in advance of the meeting.

A letter from the Northern Ireland Audit Committee relating to draft budgets 2024-25 for the Northern Ireland Audit Office and the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission was received on 7 March 2024. The Chairperson agreed this could be dealt with under AOB due to the late notice and timescales for a response.

## **7. Northern Ireland Audit Office – Briefing – Report on Ministerial Directions in Northern Ireland**

The following officials from the Northern Ireland Audit Office joined the meeting at 2.09 pm:

Ms Dorinnia Carville, Comptroller and Auditor General, Northern Ireland Audit Office;

Mr Kyle Bingham, Assembly Support Officer, Northern Ireland Audit Office;

Mr Rodney Allen, Chief Operating Officer, Northern Ireland Audit Office;

Mr Brian O'Neill, Director, Northern Ireland Audit Office.

Ms Diane Forsyth joined the meeting at 2.11 pm.

The Committee received an introductory briefing on the use of Ministerial Directions in Northern Ireland.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that the Committee Clerk should invite the Treasury Officer of Accounts to attend on the 21 March 2024 to provide further information on the prolific use of Ministerial Directions in

Northern Ireland when compared with other jurisdictions within the United Kingdom.

## **8. Ministerial Direction**

The Committee received briefing on Ministerial Directions received by the Northern Ireland Audit Office during the current 2022-2027 mandate prior to restoration of the Executive and Public Accounts Committee.

**Agreed:** The Comptroller and Auditor General (C&AG) agreed to revert to Mr Colm Gildernew with further information regarding the Ministerial Direction in respect of Belfast Distillery Company

## **9. Forward Work Programme**

The Clerk outlined the proposed arrangements and agenda for a visit to the Northern Ireland Audit Office planned for 14 March 2024 in lieu of a meeting.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed the timings of the visit to accommodate members attending other committees and board meetings.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed its forward work programme.

## **10. Any Other Business**

The meeting moved into closed session at 3.09 pm.

The Committee considered a letter from the Northern Ireland Audit Committee relating to draft budgets 2024-25 for the Northern Ireland Audit Office and the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission received on 7 March 2024.

Mr Daniel McCrossan declared an interest as former Chairperson of the Northern Ireland Audit Committee.

The Chairperson invited comment from Northern Ireland Audit Office officials. Mr Rodney Allen outlined the impact of current budgetary challenges on the NIAO ability to service demand.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Northern Ireland Audit Committee in response to their letter to express support for the Northern Ireland Audit Office bid for £10.5 million budget.

#### **11. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting**

The Chairperson thanked officials for their attendance and advised members that the next meeting is scheduled for Thursday 21<sup>st</sup> March, at 2.00 pm in Room 21, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 3.29 pm.

**Daniel McCrossan MLA**

**Chairperson, Public Accounts Committee**

**7 March 2024**