Northern Ireland Assembly

Public Accounts Committee

Minutes of Proceedings

Thursday, 5 November 2026

Meeting Location: Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings

Present:	Daniel McCrossan MLA (Chairperson)
	Stephen Dunne MLA
	Colm Gildernew MLA
	David Honeyford MLA
	Áine Murphy MLA
	Mike Nesbitt MLA
	Gareth Wilson MLA
By video conference:	Cathal Boylan MLA
Apologies:	Tom Buchanan MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
In Attendance:	Lucia Wilson (Committee Clerk)
	Angela McParland (Assistant Assembly Clerk)
	Karen Barry (Clerical Supervisor)
	Yannie Mahood (Clerical Officer)

The meeting opened in public session at 2.10pm.

1. Apologies

As above.

2. Draft minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the draft minutes of the meeting on 22nd October 2026.

3. Declarations of Interest

Mike Nesbitt MLA declared an interest as holding the office of Minister of Health for 27 months and having worked with the Northern Ireland Mental Health Champion and Mental Health Champion office, noting he was the first MLA to lobby for the appointment of a Mental Health Champion.

4. Chairperson's Business

The Chairperson extended his condolences on behalf of the Committee to the Deputy Chairperson following the bereavement of his brother.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Deputy Chairperson offering the Committee's thoughts and condolences to him and his family.

The Chairperson extended his condolences on behalf of the Committee to former Member of the Committee, Cheryl Brownlee MLA, and her family, following the bereavement of her father.

5. Matters Arising

The Committee considered a progress update on the Memorandum of Reply (MOR) on Mental Health Services in Northern Ireland from the Department of Health (DoH)

and agreed to further explore the update in its briefing with the Mental Health Champion later in the meeting.

Agreed: Members noted the term “co-occurring mental health and substance use” is seemingly being used in place of ‘dual diagnosis’ and agreed to write to the Department for confirmation that is the case and that the Department provide the Committee with an explanation on the reason for this.

The Committee considered a progress update on the MOR on Homelessness in Northern Ireland from the Department for Communities.

Colm Gildernew MLA declared an interest in regards to his Private Member’s Bill on Homelessness Prevention, and as Chairperson of the Committee for Communities.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to sector organisations to ascertain whether stakeholders are seeing tangible improvements from the progress reported by the Department.

6. Correspondence

The Committee noted correspondence from an individual concerning administrative efficiency, use of public resources, and wider value-for-money implications between two Health and Social Care Trusts, the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO) and the DoH.

The Committee considered correspondence from an individual concerning governance, data integrity, and use of public funds at the South Eastern Regional College.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the correspondence to the Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO), subject to approval by the individual.

The Committee considered correspondence from the Committee for the Economy on school age students vocational pathways.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Committee for the Economy that it is in agreement that the relevant Departments should clarify funding arrangements.

The Committee considered correspondence from an individual in regards to solar panel regulations.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the correspondence to the Committee for Infrastructure.

7. Oral briefing by the Mental Health Champion: Update on Mental Health Services

The following officials joined the meeting at 2.25pm:

- Professor Siobhan O'Neill, Northern Ireland Mental Health Champion;
- Dr Nicole Bond, Mental Health Champion (MHC); and
- Peter Cash, MHC.

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The Committee considered a written briefing by the Northern Ireland Mental Health Champion and correspondence from New Script.

The Committee received a briefing from the Northern Ireland Mental Health Champion and Mental Health Champion officials.

The Chairperson thanked the Northern Ireland Mental Health Champion and the officials.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to receive a further targeted update on workforce expansion, waiting-list reduction and

regional crisis services, including funding, milestones and anticipated outcomes.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to publish the Mental Health Champion paper to the Committee on the Committee's webpages.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the correspondence from New Script to the NIAO and the Committee for Health.

The Committee discussed movement of staff between Trusts and the effect this has on workforce gaps across Trusts.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to give further consideration to the issue and consider a next step at a future meeting.

Stephen Dunne MLA left the meeting at 3.14pm.
Áine Murphy MLA left the meeting at 3.20pm.
Stephen Dunne MLA returned to the meeting at 3.21pm.

The Committee moved to closed session at 3.51pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to commission research into a comparison with other jurisdictions on the issue of movement of staff between Trusts.

8. Draft Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered correspondence from the Department of Justice and the Planning Appeals Commission in terms of the Committee's scheduling of hearings for the Inquiry 'A Strategic Review of the Planning Appeals Commission'.

The Committee considered a draft Forward Work Programme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that all hearings with the Planning Appeals Commission will be held in open session.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the draft Forward Work Programme.

Cathal Boylan MLA left the meeting at 4.14pm.

9. Any Other Business

There was no other business.

10. Date, time and place of next meeting

The next Committee meeting will take place on Thursday 12th November 2026 at 2.00pm in the Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 4.27pm.

Chairperson
Public Accounts Committee
12 November 2026