



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Public Accounts Committee

Minutes of Proceedings

Thursday, 26 June 2025

Meeting Location: Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings

Present: Daniel McCrossan, MLA (Chairperson)

Diane Forsythe, MLA

Tom Buchanan, MLA

Colm Gildernew, MLA

Cathal Boylan, MLA

David Honeyford, MLA

Present by Video or Teleconference:

Cheryl Brownlee, MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

Pádraig Delargy, MLA

Apologies:

Tom Buchanan, MLA

Colin Crawford, MLA

In Attendance: Lucia Wilson (Committee Clerk)
Kirsten McClelland (Assistant Committee Clerk)
Marion Johnson (Clerical Supervisor)
Karen Barry (Clerical Supervisor - Remote)
Yannie Mahood (Clerical Officer)

The meeting opened in public session at 2.14 pm.

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from, Tom Buchanan MLA and Colin Crawford, MLA.

2. Draft minutes

Agreed: Members agreed the draft minutes of the meeting on 19 June 2025.

3. Declaration of Interests

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

4. Chairperson's Business

The Chairperson placed on record his concerns regarding the court ruling in respect of the A5 infrastructure project, the impact on other major capital projects and the ability of PAC to investigate the circumstances and financial implications of the decision.

Agreed: Members will commission a paper from Ralse outlining the role, remit and powers of PAC's across UK and Ireland and identify any other relevant comparisons internationally.

Agreed: The Clerk will seek legal advice on behalf of Members regarding the legislative scope of PAC's statutory remit and powers and the legislative options available to clarify or extend the statutory remit of PAC.

5. Matters Arising

Members reconsidered a letter from a member of the public raising concerns relating to major capital projects in Newry, Mourne and Down Council following receipt of legal advice.

Agreed: Members agreed a draft response addressing the issues raised.

Members considered further correspondence from a member of the public raising a number of housing related concerns which have been directed to the Northern Ireland Audit Office.

Agreed: As per the Committee's decision of 19 June, Members agreed that the matter still remains outside the remit of the Committee and agreed a draft response to be issued.

Members received advice from the Clerk on recent correspondence from the Assembly and Executive Review Committee requesting views on committee engagement on cross-cutting executive issues.

Agreed: Members agreed to defer further consideration of this request until after summer recess to allow for further consideration of PAC statutory remit powers ahead of providing a response.

Members noted a letter from Ronnie Armour, Interim Accounting Officer for the Department of Education responding to questions raised following the evidence session on Managing the Schools Estate.

Agreed: Members agreed to share this correspondence with the Northern Ireland Audit Office for inclusion in the final report.

Agreed: Members agreed to defer consideration of the correspondence to the next PAC meeting due to it being received just prior to the meeting to allow for further consideration of its contents.

6. Correspondence

Members considered correspondence from the Competition and Markets Authority regarding a review of civil engineering for roads and railways.

Agreed: Members agreed to note this correspondence.

Members considered correspondence from Ann Watt, Director of Pivotal regarding their recent report on Policy Delivery in Northern Ireland regarding a review of civil engineering for roads and railways.

Agreed: Members agreed to note this correspondence.

Members considered a letter from the Patient Client Council, requesting access to the raw data collected in the survey on Access to General Practice in Northern Ireland to assist in their own reporting on the issues faced.

Agreed: Members agreed to decline this request in accordance with Data Protection legislation.

Diane Forsythe, MLA joined the meeting at 2.35 pm

Pádraig Delargy, MLA joined the meeting at 2.35 pm

7. Major Capital Projects: Follow-Up Report: Memorandum of Reply

The following officials joined the meeting at 2.35 pm:

Dorinnia Carville, Comptroller and Auditor General;

Kyle Bingham, Assembly Support Officer, Northern Ireland Audit Office.

The Clerk informed Members that the Memorandum of Reply (MoR) has not been received in respect of this report and clarified that it has been 16 weeks since the report was published. Guidance provided to the ToA, Department of Finance requires that the Memorandum of Reply be provided within 8 of publication of the PAC report.

Agreed: Members agreed to write to the Department of Finance to express the Committees dissatisfaction with the delay in publication of the Memorandum of Reply and seek an urgent explanation and update on when the MoR will be provided.

Agreed: Members agreed to convene an additional meeting of PAC on 3 July 2025 to consider the Departmental response.

Agreed: Members agreed to request a copy of correspondence between the Infrastructure Committee and the Department for Infrastructure on the issues raised by the court ruling on the A5 project, to enable Members to consider the implications of the ruling on all major capital projects.

Agreed: Members agreed to clarify expectations on Departments in respect of MoRs upon publication of future reports.

The meeting moved into closed session at 2.56 pm.

11. Northern Ireland Audit Office Member's Survey

The following officials joined the meeting at 2.56 pm:

Dorinnia Carville, Comptroller and Auditor General;

Kyle Bingham, Assembly Support Officer, Northern Ireland Audit Office.

Members received a briefing from the Comptroller and Auditor General on the responses to the recent survey.

8. Forward Work Programme

Agreed: Members agreed the draft forward work programme.

Cheryl Brownlee, MLA left the meeting at 3.27 pm

Agreed: Members agreed to issue a formal invitation to the Department for Communities to give evidence to the forthcoming inquiry on Homelessness in Northern Ireland.

Members received a briefing from the Comptroller and Auditor General on upcoming report publications on Waste Crime and IT Systems.

Agreed: Members agreed to retain primacy over the NIAO reports, which will be published imminently.

Members considered the list of reports over which the Committee continues to have primacy.

Agreed: Members agreed that the Committee will not consider the NIAO report on Health and Social Care Imaging and that this report will be released from primacy.

Agreed: Members agreed to rearrange the planned GP Practice visit on 25 June 2025 which had to be cancelled due to unforeseen circumstances impacting on Member availability.

Agreed: Members agreed arrangements for a working lunch planned for 3 July 2025.

Agreed: Members agreed a number of themes for the Committee Strategic Planning day planned for September.

9. Any Other Business

Agreed: Members agreed to the delegation of authority to the Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson in respect of FOI requests received during recess.

Agreed: Members agreed that urgent matters arising during recess will be agreed via correspondence and noted in the minutes of the first formal meeting of the Committee in September.

The Chairperson placed on record his thanks to the Committee staff, Members and the Northern Ireland Audit Office for their support in delivering PAC business. He

thanked Cheryl Brownlee, MLA and Colm Gildernew, MLA for chairing meetings in his absence in recent months.

10. Date, Time, and Place of the next meeting

The next meeting will take place in the Senate Chamber on Thursday 3 July 2025 at 1.00 pm.

The meeting was adjourned at 4.07 pm.

Daniel McCrossan

Chairperson, Public Accounts Committee

3 July 2025