



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Public Accounts Committee

Minutes of Proceedings

Thursday, 22 February 2024

Meeting Location: Room 21, Parliament Buildings

Present:

Daniel McCrossan	MLA (Chairperson)
Cheryl Brownlee	MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Cathal Boylan	MLA
Tom Buchanan	MLA
Robbie Butler	MLA
Diane Forsyth	MLA
Colm Gildernew	MLA
David Honeyford	MLA

Present by Video or Teleconference:

Pádraig Delargy MLA

Apologies:

None

In Attendance:

Lucia Wilson (Committee Clerk)

Deirdre Farry (Assistant Committee Clerk)

Karen Barry (Clerical Supervisor)

Barbara Daly (Clerical Officer)

The meeting commenced at 2.06 pm in open session

1. Apologies

There were no apologies.

2. Chairperson's Business

- i. The Chairperson welcomed Members to the first meeting of the Public Accounts Committee.
- ii. The Chairperson advised Members that he had an informal meeting with the Comptroller and Auditor General to gain a brief overview of her role, and how the Audit Office can support the Committee.

- iii. The Chairperson advised Members that both he and the Deputy Chairperson met with the Treasury Officer of Accounts, Mr Stuart Stevenson from the Department of Finance, in relation to his role vis a vis the Committee

3. Declaration of Interests

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

Members declared interests as follows:

Colm Gildernew:

Owner of a property in Tyrone from which rental income is received;

Committee Member, Achadh Lú Gaelic Football Club;

Director, Willowbank Disability Organisation;

Vice Chairperson, Aghaloo Credit Union Limited;

Vice Chairperson, Brantry Area Rural Development Association; and

Secretary, Brantry Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann.

David Honeyford:

Director of TAS Homes Limited from which dividends are received;

Director of TAS Properties Limited, from which dividends are received; and

Development Officer in St Joseph's Gaelic Athletic Club.

Padraig Delargy:

Director, Museum of Free Derry;

Director, Bloody Sunday Trust; and

Member of the Board of Governors, Holy Child Primary School.

The Chairperson referred to his declaration of interests as published in the Assembly Members' Register of Interests, as a director of two companies, and a member of a GAA Club.

Tom Buchannan, Cheryl Brownlee and Diane Forsythe referred to their declaration of interests as published in the Assembly Members' Register of Interests.

4. Committee Composition

The Chairperson invited Members to introduce themselves.

- i. The Committee noted the membership of the Public Accounts Committee.
- ii. The Committee noted contacts details for Committee Office staff.

The meeting moved into closed session at 2.15 pm.

5. Clerk's First Day Brief

The Clerk briefed the Committee on the role of the Public Accounts Committee.

6. Committee Procedures and Practices

- i. The Committee noted the arrangements for Committee meetings.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that meetings should, as a rule, be held in public session unless there is an overriding reason for proceedings to be closed.

- ii. The Committee noted a paper on the Outcomes of an Effective Committee.
- iii. The Committee considered its approach to correspondence.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the approach to be adopted by the Committee when dealing with correspondence and requests for meetings that are not linked to strategic priorities or statutory duties.

iv. The Clerk outlined the various approaches to preparation and questioning.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to prioritise training on effective questioning.

v. The Committee considered a draft protocol on conduct and courtesy at Committee meetings.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to adopt the protocol on conduct and courtesy at Committee meetings.

vi. **Agreed:** The Committee noted the Committee's approach to the use of social media and how the Committee's X account could potentially be used.

vii. Members noted guidance papers on:

- Powers and Operations of Standing and Ad-Hoc Committees for Chairpersons and Members;
- Role of Committee Chairpersons; and
- Role and functions of the Committee Office.

The meeting moved into public session 2.29 pm.

7. Public Accounts Committee Legacy Report 2017-22

The Clerk brief the Committee on the Legacy Report 2017-22 mandate.

Committee noted the predecessor Committee's report for the 2017-2022 mandate.

8. Northern Ireland Audit Office – First Day Brief

The following officials from the Northern Ireland Audit Office joined the meeting at 2.59 pm:

Ms Dorinnia Carville, Comptroller and Auditor General

Mr Kyle Bingham, Assembly Support Officer

Mr Rodney Allen, Chief Operating Officer

The Committee received an introductory briefing on the work of the Northern Ireland Audit Office.

The Chairperson thanked officials for their attendance.

9. Correspondence

The Chairperson outlined his approach to the weekly correspondence.

The Committee noted the following:

- i. List of correspondence and reports received during from 17/01/22 to 12/02/24.
- ii. Correspondence from Shane Campbell, CEO ICBAN, regarding broadband investment in NI.
- iii. Correspondence from a member of the public regarding NI universities.
- iv. Correspondence from a member of the public regarding proposed development of Craigavon Lake.
- v. Correspondence from John Walsh, CE of Belfast City Council responding to the PAC Report on Planning in NI.

- vi. Correspondence from Sara Long, CE of the Education Authority responding to PAC recommendation with the report on Special Educational Needs.
- vii. Correspondence from Chris Boomer, Service Director, Mid Ulster District Council responding to the PAC Report on Planning in NI.
- viii. Correspondence from a member of the public regarding broadband providers
- ix. The Committee considered correspondence from an individual requesting memorabilia from the Committee.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to provide the individual with a signed copy of Committee minutes, and to invite him to attend a Committee meeting.

- x. The Committee considered correspondence from the Chairperson of the Finance Committee from the Comptroller and Auditor General regarding the budget allocation to the NIAO.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the correspondence to the Audit Committee.

The meeting moved into closed session at 3.34 pm.

10. Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered a draft forward work programme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed its forward work programme, which included a visit to the NIAO offices on 14 March.

11. Any Other Business

None.

12. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting

The next meeting is scheduled for Thursday 29th February, at 2.00 pm in Room 21, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 3.57 pm.

Daniel McCrossan MLA

Chairperson, Public Accounts Committee

22 February 2024