



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Public Accounts Committee

Minutes of Proceedings

Thursday, 12 March 2026

Meeting Location: Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings

Present:

Tom Buchanan, MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

Stephen Dunne, MLA

Gareth Wilson, MLA

David Honeyford, MLA

Jon Burrows, MLA

Cathal Boylan, MLA

Present by Video or Teleconference:

Daniel McCrossan, MLA (Chairperson)

Jemma Dolan, MLA

Apologies: Colm Gildernew, MLA

In Attendance: Lucia Wilson (Committee Clerk)

Kirsten McClelland (Assistant Committee Clerk)

Karen Barry (Clerical Supervisor)

Yannie Mahood (Clerical Officer)

The meeting opened in public session at 2.13pm.

1. Apologies

Apologies were noted from Colm Gildernew, MLA.

2. Draft minutes

Agreed: Members agreed the draft minutes of the meeting on 5 March 2026.

3. Declaration of Interests

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

Cathal Boylan, MLA declared an interest as a member of the Committee for Infrastructure.

Stephen Dunne, MLA declared an interest as APS to the Communities Minister and as a member of the Committee for Infrastructure.

4. Chairperson's Business

The Chair welcomed new Member Jemma Dolan, MLA to the Committee.

5. Matters Arising

Members noted correspondence dated 3 March 2026 from Neil Gibson, Accounting Officer, DoF, responding to Members questions regarding the MOR update on Public Procurement in Northern Ireland

Agreed: Members agreed to note the correspondence and write to the department requesting a further substantive update in six months.

6. Correspondence

Members noted correspondence from a Member of the Public regarding senior grading structures in SPPG and HSC.

Agreed: Due to the sensitive nature of the correspondence, Members agreed to defer consideration to enable it to be considered in closed session.

Members considered correspondence from Extern regarding future funding for their Prisoner Support Project. Members noted that while the project relates to issues previously examined in the inquiry into Reducing Adult Reoffending in Northern Ireland, as the matter relates to justice policy, it would not fall within the remit of the PAC.

Agreed: Members agreed to forward the correspondence to the Committee for Justice for their consideration.

Members considered further correspondence from a Member of the Public regarding NIHE housing.

Agreed: Members agreed to note the correspondence, acknowledging that the matter does not currently fall within the remit of the PAC as previously advised to the Member of the Public.

7. MOR on Child Poverty in Northern Ireland: Departmental Briefing

The following witnesses and officials joined the meeting at 2.18 pm.

Emer Morelli, Interim Permanent Secretary, DfC;

John McCord, Director of Central Policy Division, DfC;

Cherrie Arnold, Interim Deputy Secretary, Work & Health Group, DfC;

Stuart Stevenson, Treasury Officer of Accounts, DoF.

The Chair welcomed the witnesses to the Committee and congratulated Ms Morelli on her appointment as Permanent Secretary to DfC.

Members received a briefing from the Accounting Officer which updated Members on progress against the recommendations made in the report on Child Poverty in Northern Ireland.

The Treasury Officer of Accounts (ToA), commented on the Department's Memorandum of Reply, emphasising the need for Departments to provide clearer and more detailed information, including an explanation of actions taken to implement Committee recommendations and greater clarity on delivery timescales.

The Committee welcomed these observations and noted the intention of the ToA to reflect these expectations in future accountability guidance issued to Accounting Officers.

The Chair thanked witnesses for attending. Witnesses left the meeting at 3.40 pm.

The meeting moved into closed session at 3.40 pm.

Members considered the briefing provided.

Agreed: Members agreed to seek a quarterly update on the MOR.

Agreed: Subject to the approval of the Anti-Poverty Strategy, Members would also seek copies of the associated action plans.

Agreed: Members agreed to write to the ToA to welcome his position on the need for departments to provide clearer and more detailed information in their Memoranda of Reply.

Inquiry on Road Openings by Utilities: Final Consideration

The following witnesses and officials joined the meeting at 3.45 pm.

Dorinnia Carville, C&AG;

The Committee noted the draft report is classified as RESTRICTED for Members' attention and therefore should not be published more widely.

The Committee noted it had the formal consideration for the report 'Road Openings by Utilities', at last week's meeting, 5 March 2026.

Agreed as amended: Paragraph 4

Tom Buchanan, MLA left the meeting at 3.46 pm.

Tom Buchanan, MLA rejoined the meeting at 3.52 pm.

Agreed: Members agreed to order the report to be published on 26 March 2026.

Agreed: Members agreed the draft press release for the report.

The Chair thanked the C&AG for attending.

The C&AG left the meeting at 3.49 pm.

8. Draft Forward Work Programme

Agreed: Members agreed the draft forward work programme.

9. Any Other Business

Members considered the deferred correspondence from a Member of the Public regarding senior grading structures in the SPPG and HSC.

Agreed: Members agreed to write to the Member of the Public to seek permission to forward his correspondence to the Finance Committee.

10. Date, time and place of next meeting

The next meeting will take place in the Senate Chamber on Thursday 26 March 2026 at 2.00pm.

The meeting was adjourned at 3.56 pm.

Daniel McCrossan

Chairperson, Public Accounts Committee

26 March 2026