



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Public Accounts Committee

Minutes of Proceedings

Thursday, 18 September

Meeting Location: Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings

Present: Daniel McCrossan, MLA (Chairperson)
Diane Forsythe, MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Tom Buchanan, MLA
Colm Gildernew MLA
Cathal Boylan, MLA
David Honeyford, MLA

Present by Video or Teleconference:

Pádraig Delargy, MLA

Apologies: Cheryl Brownlee, 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 2.09 pm.

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from, Cheryl Brownlee, MLA.

2. Draft minutes

Agreed: Members agreed the draft minutes of the meeting on 3 July 2025.

3. Declaration of Interests

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

Daniel McCrossan, MLA declared an interest in respect of the A5 and Dalradian Gold being within his constituency.

Diane Forsythe, MLA declared an interest as a member of the Audit Committee.

Tom Buchanan, MLA declared an interest in respect of the A5 and Dalradian Gold being within his constituency.

Colm Gildernew, MLA declared an interest in respect of the A5 being within his constituency.

Pádraig Delargy, MLA declared an interest in respect of the A5 being within his constituency and as a member of the Economy Committee.

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

David Honeyford, MLA declared an interest as a member of the Economy Committee.

4. Chairperson's Business

The Chairperson congratulated Diane Forsythe, MLA on her appointment as Deputy Chairperson of the Committee. The Chairperson Cheryl Brownlee, MLA for her work as Deputy Chairperson,

Agreed: Members agreed to write a note of thanks to Cheryl Brownlee, MLA

The Chairperson shared a letter from the Chairperson's Liaison Group in respect of Guidance and Training for Members and Committees on the use and effectiveness of AI.

Agreed: Members agreed to note this correspondence.

5. Matters Arising

Members considered a response from the Audit Committee regarding the review of the arrangements for the C&AG Salary.

Agreed: Members agreed to note the correspondence.

6. Correspondence

Members considered a letter from a member of the public regarding mineral prospecting licenses.

Agreed: Members agreed to refer this matter to the Economy Committee as it is not within the remit of the Public Accounts Committee.

Members considered further correspondence from a member of the public regarding Belfast Exposed.

Agreed: Members agreed to respond to the member of the public to advise that the matters raised do not fall within the remit of the Public Accounts Committee.

Members considered a letter from The Environmental Gathering regarding the recent Northern Ireland Audit Office reports on matters relating to waste.

Agreed: Members agreed a response to be issued to The Environmental Gathering regarding the Committee's Forward Work Programme.

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

Members considered correspondence from the Department of Finance regarding the ongoing delay in furnishing the Committee with a Memorandum of Reply in respect of the Major Capital Projects: Follow-Up Report.

Agreed: Members agreed to write to the Department of Finance to express its frustration at the ongoing delays and to invite Departmental witnesses to appear before the Committee to provide an explanation.

Agreed: Members agreed to seek a copy of the report into the effectiveness of the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) Board.

Agreed: Members agreed to write to the Committee for the Executive Office to seek an explanation for the delay in approval of the Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland (ISNI).

8. Major Capital Projects: A5 Case Study

The following officials joined the meeting at 2.23pm.

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 Terms of Reference for an update on the A5 Case Study.

Agreed: Members agreed for C&AG to proceed with the update as per the Terms of Reference subject to any restrictions arising from the ongoing legal proceedings and an amendment to point 5 of the TOR.

Agreed: Members agreed to seek legal advice following completion and consideration of the C&AG's study.

Agreed: Members agreed to write to the Infrastructure Committee to advise that PAC will retain primacy over Major Capital Projects, including the A5 case study, which it will continue to monitor under its statutory remit.

The Chairperson thanked officials for attending.

Officials left the meeting at 3.19pm.

The meeting moved into closed session at 2.56 pm

The following official joined the meeting at 3.19pm.

Dr Karen Clarke, Research Officer, Ralse

Members received a briefing on a Ralse paper: A comparative Analysis of the Statutory Remit and Powers of Public Accounts Committees.

The Chairperson thanked Dr Clarke for attending.

Dr Clarke left the meeting at 3.41 pm.

Agreed: Members agreed to the publication of the Ralse paper.

The following official joined the meeting at 3.20pm.

Mr Jonathan McMillen, Head of Legal Services

Members were briefed on legal advice on the powers and remit of the Public Accounts Committee.

Colm Gildernew, MLA left the meeting at 3.36pm.

Colm Gildernew, MLA rejoined the meeting at 3.42pm.

Daniel McCrossan, MLA left the meeting at 4.05pm.

Diane Forsythe, MLA took the Chair at 4.05pm.

Daniel McCrossan, MLA rejoined the meeting and resumed the Chair at 4.07pm/

The Chairperson thanked Mr McMillen for attending.

Mr McMillen left the meeting at 4.09 pm.

9. Northern Ireland Audit Office Budget Submission 2026-2029

Members considered correspondence from the Audit Committee seeking views on the Northern Ireland Audit Office Budget Submission 2026-2029.

The following officials joined the meeting at 4.10 pm:

Dorinnia Carville, Comptroller and Auditor General;

Megan O'Neill, Corporate Services Manager, Northern Ireland Audit Office;

Brian O'Neill, Director, Northern Ireland Audit Office;

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

The C&AG briefed members on the budget submission for the Northern Ireland Audit Office for 2026 to 2029.

The Chair thanked officials for attending and thanked the Northern Ireland Audit Office staff for their continuing work in support of the Public Accounts Committee.

Officials left the meeting at 4.25pm.

Agreed: Members agreed to write to the Audit Committee to express support for the Northern Ireland Audit Office Budget Submission 2026-2029.

10. Forward Work Programme

Agreed: Members agreed the draft forward work programme, subject to future updates.

Agreed: Members agreed to explore developing a video update on the ongoing work of the Committee this autumn.

Agreed: Members agreed to the Clerk's proposal on a staged review of the Citizen Space Survey on Access to GPs, whilst the Clerk explores what additional resources are required to complete the qualitative analysis in a timely manner.

Agreed: Members to advise on priorities for the autumn session.

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11. Any Other Business

The Clerk briefed members on the invitation to the BIMR PAC Network event planned for 7 November 2025 at the Jersey States Assembly.

Agreed: Members agreed to seek further information on proposed itinerary and travel arrangements.

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

The next meeting will take place in the Senate Chamber on Thursday 25 September 2025 at 2.00 pm.

The meeting was adjourned at 4.47 pm.

Daniel McCrossan

Chairperson, Public Accounts Committee

25 September 2025