



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Audit Committee

Minutes of Proceedings

Wednesday 6 March 2024

Meeting Location: Room 21, Parliament Buildings

Present:

Alan Chambers MLA (Chairperson)

Ciara Ferguson MLA

Nick Mathison MLA

In Attendance by video or teleconference:

John Blair MLA

Apologies:

Keith Buchanan MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

In Attendance:

Nick Mitford, Committee Clerk

Elaine Farrell, Assistant Clerk

Alison Ferguson, Clerical Supervisor

Ciara Dorrian, Clerical Officer



Agreed: The Committee agreed to commence the meeting in closed session.

The meeting commenced at 10.03 a.m. in closed session

1. Apologies

As above.

2. Declaration of Interests

The Chairperson advised the Committee that all Assembly Members are required to register relevant financial and other interests in the Register of Members' Interests.

The Chairperson informed Members of the requirement in Standing Order 69(5) that:

"A member who has

(a) a financial interest in any matter; or

(b) a relevant interest in any matter,

must declare that interest before taking part in any proceedings of the Assembly relating to that matter".

The Chairperson advised that, in particular, there is a requirement to declare any interests that might reasonably be thought by others to influence the Members' approach to the matter under consideration.

The Chairperson advised that "proceedings of the Assembly" included meetings of the Audit Committee and that, as this is the first meeting of the Committee, Members should ensure that any financial or other interests that relate to the remit of the Committee, or that are likely to be relevant to a substantial part of its work, are drawn to the attention of the Committee.



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The Chairperson advised Members that failure to register and/or declare an interest may be an offence under section 43 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

No interests were declared.

The Chairperson reminded Members that the rules governing the registration and declaration of interests are contained in “The Code of Conduct and Guide to the Rules Relating to the Conduct of Members”, and that further advice and guidance is available from the Clerk of Standards.

3. Procedures and administrative arrangements

The Committee noted the following guidance documents:

- 3.1 Committee Membership;
- 3.2 Staff contact details;
- 3.3 Arrangements for committee meetings;

Agreed: The Committee agreed that tea, coffee and water will be provided as refreshments at committee meetings.

- 3.4 Guide to the Powers and Operations of Standing and Ad Hoc Committees;

Noted: While considering this document, the Committee noted in particular the guidance on privilege and matters of sub-judice contained therein.

- 3.5 Guide to the role of the Committee Chairperson;
- 3.6 Guide for members to the Role and Functions of the Committee Secretariat;
- 3.7 Protocol on conduct and courtesy in Committee meetings;



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

3.8 Committee approach to dealing with correspondence.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to adopt the principles of the approach outlined to dealing with correspondence with the provision for its use in the Audit Committee context to be reviewed at a later stage.

The meeting moved into open session at 10.15 a.m.

4. Functions of the Audit Committee

The Committee received a briefing from the Committee Clerk on the functions of the Audit Committee.

5. Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO): Introductory briefing and 24/25 budget position

The following NIAO officials joined the meeting at 10.21 a.m.

Dorinnia Carville, Comptroller and Auditor General

Rodney Allen, Chief Operating Officer

Brian O'Neill, Director

The officials briefed the Committee and this was followed by a question and answer session.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their briefing.



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6. Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO): Introductory briefing and 24/25 budget position

The following NIPSO officials joined the meeting at 10.57 a.m.

Margaret Kelly, Ombudsman

Sean Martin, Acting Deputy Ombudsman

Kirsty McCool, Head of Governance

The officials briefed the Committee and this was followed by a question and answer session.

Mr Blair left the meeting at 11.01 a.m.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their briefing.

7. Northern Ireland Assembly Commission (NIAC): Introductory briefing and 24/25 budget position

The following NIAC officials joined the meeting at 11.34 a.m.

Lesley Hogg, Chief Executive/Clerk to the Assembly

Steven Baxter, Directorate of Corporate Services

The officials briefed the Committee and this was followed by a question and answer session.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their briefing.

8. Next steps for the current budget process

The Committee received a briefing from the Committee Clerk on the next steps for the current budget process.



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Agreed: The Committee agreed to write urgently to the Minister of Finance to seek her views on the budget submissions of the NIAO, NIPSO and the NIAC.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write urgently to the Public Accounts Committee to seek its views on the budget submissions of the NIAO and NIPSO.

9. Correspondence

Noted: The Committee noted the paper and reports laid in the Business Office from 25 March 2022 – 6 February 2024.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to send a signed copy of the minutes to a member of the public who collects political memorabilia.

10.AOB

None.

11.Date, Time and Place of the next meeting

The next meeting of the Audit Committee is to be confirmed.

The meeting was adjourned at 12.09 p.m.

Alan Chambers MLA
Chairperson, Audit Committee
20 March 2024