



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

# Public Accounts Committee

## Minutes of Proceedings

**Thursday, 15 October 2026**

**Meeting Location:** Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings

**Present:** Daniel McCrossan MLA (Chairperson)  
Cathal Boylan MLA  
Stephen Dunne MLA  
Colm Gildernew MLA  
David Honeyford MLA  
Áine Murphy MLA  
Mike Nesbitt MLA  
Gareth Wilson MLA

**Apologies:** Tom Buchanan MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

**In Attendance:** Lucia Wilson (Committee Clerk)  
Angela McParland (Assistant Assembly Clerk)  
Karen Barry (Clerical Supervisor)  
Yannie Mahood (Clerical Officer)

The meeting opened in public session at 2.08pm.

## **1. Apologies**

As above.

## **2. Draft minutes**

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed the draft minutes of the meeting on 8<sup>th</sup> October 2026.

## **3. Declarations of Interest**

Cathal Boylan MLA and Stephen Dunne MLA declared an interest as Members of the Committee for Infrastructure.

## **4. Chairperson's Business**

There was no Chairperson's Business.

## **5. Matters Arising**

There were no Matters Arising.

## **6. Correspondence**

The Committee considered correspondence from an individual concerning the Northern Ireland Audit Office report 'Governance, accountability and oversight arrangements relating to the Voluntary Grammar and Grant-Maintained Integrated Sectors'.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to forward the correspondence to the Northern Ireland Audit office (NIAO) for comment, on approval by the individual.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to defer possible further consideration of the issues raised until 22 October 2026 when the Committee will decide on its next inquiry.

## **7. Committee Inquiry on A Strategic Review of the Planning Appeals**

### **Commission: Oral Evidence from the Department for Infrastructure**

The following officials joined the meeting at 2.11pm:

- Emer Morelli, Permanent Secretary, Department for Infrastructure (DfI);
- Rosemary Daly, Chief Planner and Director of Regional Planning, Governance and Legislation, DfI; and
- Dr. Kathryn McFerran, Director of Regional Planning Policy and Casework, DfI.

In attendance:

- Dorinnia Carville, Comptroller and Auditor General for Northern Ireland (C&AG);
  - Conor McGeown, Director, NIAO; and
  - Tomas Wilkinson, Director, NIAO.
- And
- Stuart Stevenson, Treasury Officer of Accounts (TOA), Department of Finance (DoF).

The Committee heard evidence from the DfI officials for the inquiry.

*Gareth Wilson MLA joined the meeting at 2.15pm*

*Cathal Boylan MLA left the meeting at 2.42pm*

*Cathal Boylan MLA returned to the meeting at 2.43pm*

*Áine Murphy MLA joined the meeting at 2.57pm*

*David Honeyford MLA left the meeting at 2.59pm*

*David Honeyford MLA returned to the meeting at 3.05pm*

*Gareth Wilson MLA left the meeting at 3.13pm*

*Gareth Wilson MLA returned to the meeting at 3.14pm*

The Chairperson thanked the officials for attending.

The meeting was paused for a short refreshment break at 3.17pm.

The meeting resumed at 3.37pm.

**8. Committee Inquiry on A Strategic Review of the Planning Appeals  
Commission: Oral Evidence from the Department of Justice, and the  
Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service**

The following officials joined the meeting at 3.38pm:

- Hugh Widdis, Permanent Secretary, Department of Justice (DoJ).
- Karen Ward, Acting Chief Executive, Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service (NICTS); and
- Astrid Hamilton, Director of Tribunals and Corporate Services, NICTS.

In attendance:

- Dorinnia Carville, C&AG;
  - Conor McGeown, Director, NIAO; and
  - Tomas Wilkinson, Director, NIAO.
- And
- Stuart Stevenson, TOA, DoF.

The Committee heard evidence from the Permanent Secretary and NICTS officials for the inquiry.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for attending.

- Agreed:** The Committee agreed that the officials forward to the Committee:
- the essential criteria asked for in the recruitment of commissioners;
  - detail regarding the resignations of seven commissioners, including confirmation of the period in which the resignations occurred, and the reasons given; and
  - confirmation of any instances in which a commissioner received training and left during or shortly after receiving the training.

*Áine Murphy MLA left the meeting at 4.22pm*

*David Honeyford MLA left the meeting at 4.32pm*

*Áine Murphy MLA returned to the meeting at 4.33pm*

*Colm Gildernew MLA left the meeting at 4.34pm*

The meeting moved into closed session at 4.45pm.

## **9. Committee Inquiry on A Strategic Review of the Planning Appeals**

### **Commission: Consideration of Session**

The following officials joined the meeting at 4.46pm:

- Dorinnia Carville, C&AG;
- Tomas Wilkinson, Director, NIAO; and
- Conor McGeown, Director, NIAO.

The Committee considered the oral evidence heard for the inquiry.

The Committee noted the deadline for written submissions for the inquiry is Friday 30<sup>th</sup> October 2026.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for attending.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to commission research for the inquiry on approaches adopted in other jurisdictions by Planning Appeals Commissions especially in regards to transferring functions to other agencies.

## **10. Draft Forward Work Programme**

The Committee considered a draft Forward Work Programme.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed the Forward Work Programme.

### **11.Any Other Business**

There was no other business.

### **12.End of Session Report**

The Committee considered an draft End of Session Report for 2025/2026.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed the End of Session Report and that it be published on the Committee web pages.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to hold a 'Take Note' debate in the Assembly in January 2027.

### **13.Date, time and place of next meeting**

The next Committee meeting will take place on Thursday 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2026 at 3.00pm in the Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 5.10pm.

**Chairperson**

**Public Accounts Committee**

**22 October 2026**