Northern Ireland Assembly

Audit Committee

Minutes of Proceedings

10 December 2025

Meeting Location: The Senate, Parliament Buildings

Present:

Alan Chambers MLA (Chairperson)

Diane Forsythe MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

John Blair MLA

Nick Mathison MLA

In attendance by video:

Emma Sheerin MLA

In Attendance:

Ashleigh Mitford, Assembly Clerk

Elaine Farrell, Assistant Clerk

Alison Ferguson, Clerical Supervisor

Laura Gourley, Clerical Officer

The meeting commenced at 10.24 a.m. in open session

1. Apologies

None.

2. Declaration of Interests

No interests were declared.

3. Draft minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 19 November 2025.

4. Matters arising

Noted: The Committee noted the correspondence from NIPSO dated 3 December 2025, providing information requested in follow-up to NIPSO's evidence session on 19 November 2025.

5. Correspondence

Noted: The Committee noted the tabled correspondence from the Director of Corporate Services, in response to its request for information on the costs associated with the Blue Flax refurbishment project, given the level of public concern expressed in recent days about this expenditure. The Committee noted that a meeting of the NIAC is to be held on 15 December 2025 to discuss the issue further and was hopeful that NIAC would keep it updated on its considerations.

Noted: The Committee noted the correspondence dated 28 November 2025 from the Committee for Finance on the 2025-26 Public Expenditure Outturn and Forecast Outturn October Position (R7).

6. December Monitoring Round 2025/26 – Committee consideration of applicable returns by NIAO, NIPSO and NIAC

The Committee Clerk briefed the Committee on this agenda item.

Noted: The Committee noted information on the December Monitoring Round returns of the NIAO, NIPSO and the NIAC.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the NIAO ask for clarification on why income levels were higher that originally budgeted for.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to move into closed session for the remainder of the meeting.

The meeting moved into closed session at 10.35 a.m.

7. Briefing on the Audit Committee planning session – January 2026

The Committee Clerk briefed the Committee on this agenda item.

Agreed: The Committee noted and agreed the suggested workstreams for consideration at the planning session.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to hold the planning session in closed session as part of its formal meeting.

Noted: The Committee noted that a detailed briefing paper will be provided for the January 2026 planning session to help inform discussion.

8. Review of the arrangements in relation to the Comptroller & Auditor General salary

The Committee Clerk briefed the Committee on this agenda item.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to recommend that the level of salary payable for the office of the Comptroller & Auditor General (C&AG) for 2025/26 is increased by 4% to £160,708.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to recommend that the increased level of salary payable to the office of the C&AG be applied retrospectively to the beginning of the 2023/24 financial year.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to recommend that a feasibility study is carried out on the completion of a full job evaluation and salary benchmarking exercise, to establish if such an exercise would provide better information on an appropriate level of salary, before the appointment of the next C&AG.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister of Finance to seek his recommendation on the proposed salary before the Committee would move to agree its report and Motion for debate.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to include a request in the letter to the Minister of Finance to provide information on any guidance that the Department of Finance issues to departments in relation to role evaluation when determining senior public service salaries.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the draft Committee report will be reviewed by Assembly Legal Services before it is provided to the Committee.

9. Forward Work Programme

Noted: The Committee agreed the Forward Work Programme.

10. AOB

None.

11. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting

The next meeting of the Audit Committee will take place on 28 January 2026 at 10.00 a.m. in Room 21.

The meeting was adjourned at 10.56 a.m.

Alan Chambers MLA

Chairperson, Audit Committee

28 January 2026