



Northern Ireland
Assembly

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

THURSDAY, 20 FEBRUARY 2020, THE SENATE CHAMBER,
PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS

Present: Mr William Humphrey MLA (Chairperson)
Mr Roy Beggs MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Cathal Boylan MLA
Mr John Dallat MLA
Ms Órlaithí Flynn MLA
Mr Harry Harvey MLA
Mr David Hilditch MLA
Mr Trevor Lunn MLA
Mr Maolíosa McHugh MLA

Apologies: None

In Attendance: Ms Lucia Wilson, Assembly Clerk
Ms Gillian Barker, Assistant Assembly Clerk
Ms Karen Barry, Clerical Supervisor
Mr Sean O’Rawe, Clerical Officer

The meeting commenced at 2.01 pm in public session.

The Committee welcomed Harry Harvey MLA to the Public Accounts Committee who is replacing Gary Middleton MLA.

1. Apologies

None

2. Minutes of meeting on 5 February 2020

The draft minutes of 5 February 2020 were agreed.

3. Matters Arising

The Chairperson expressed his gratitude to the Northern Ireland Audit Office for hosting a visit to their offices on Wednesday 13 February 2020.

Agreed: That the Chairperson write to Kieran Donnelly, CB, C&AG, thanking him for hosting the visit.

4. Declaration of Members' Interests

There was no declaration of members' interests declared at the commencement of the meeting.

5. Correspondence

- The Committee noted correspondence from an unknown whistleblower, through the Chief Executive's Office, dated 24 January 2020.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to NIAO for sight of correspondence to a previous PAC, issued in June 2016, addressing the issues raised by the whistleblower.

- The Committee noted correspondence from Ann Watt, Director of Pivotal, dated 7 February 2020.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to Ms Watt to invite her to brief the Committee on the work of 'Pivotal', on a date to be confirmed, and subject to the forward work plan.

- The Committee noted correspondence from Edward Cooke dated 12 February 2020.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to Mr Cooke advising him that the Committee has forwarded his correspondence to the Economy Committee to consider the issues raised in relation to the University of Ulster.

- The Committee noted a memo from the Audit Committee dated 13 February 2020 on NIAO's First Day Brief, which outlines NIAO's resource and capital requirements for 2020/2021..

Agreed: To write to the Audit Committee informing it that it was content with the NIAO budget plan and requested that PAC is kept informed of the final budget position and associated timelines.

6. RaIse – Introduction Briefing

Mr Michael Scholes, NIA Research Officer joined the meeting

Mr Scholes presented a tabled paper.

Mr David Hilditch left the meeting at 2.07 pm

Mr David Hilditch joined 2.23 pm

The Chairperson thanked Mr Scholes for his briefing.

The meeting moved in to closed session at 2.24 pm

7. Inquiry into Major Capital Projects – Review on decision on witness

As part of the inquiry process, the Committee discussed receiving evidence sessions from relevant accounting officers in relation to Ulster University Greater Belfast Development, Casement Park and the A5 overspend.

Agreed: The clerk will rework the draft Forward Work Plan and aim to include these evidence sessions in forthcoming meetings.

Agreed: The clerk will produce an amended draft Forward Work plan at next week's meeting.

The clerk suggested commissioning a comparative research paper on delivery models, through RaIse, to inform the Committee's first inquiry, Major Capital Projects.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to commission a paper from RaIse as discussed.

The meeting moved in to closed session at 2.52 pm

8. Northern Ireland Audit Office – Briefing on Northern Ireland Audit Office Reports

Mr Kieran Donnelly CB, Comptroller and Auditor General; Ms Pamela McCreedy, Chief Operating Officer; Mr Kyle Bingham, Assembly Support Officer, Rodney Allen (Director),,

Neil Gray (Director), Roger McCance (Audit Manager), Anu Kane (Director), joined the meeting.

The Committee received briefings on the following NIAO Value for Money Reports:

- Helping to deliver Digital Transformation; The Social Investment Fund and Managing the Central Government Office Estate: briefing from Rodney Allen, Director, NIAO.
- Health and Social Care Sector; Locum Doctors and Patient Safety; and Type 2 Diabetes Prevention and Care: briefing from Roger McCance, Audit Manager, NIAO.
- Eradicating Bovine TB in Northern Ireland: briefing from Neil Gray (Director).
- Access to Finance for Small and Medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and Homelessness in Northern Ireland: briefing from Kieran Donnelly, C&AG.

The Committee discussed each report with the NIAO team and relevant officials.

Mr John Dallat left the meeting at 3.00 pm

Mr Maolíosa McHugh left the meeting at 3.45 pm

Mr Maolíosa McHugh joined the meeting at 3.46 pm

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their attendance.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the NIAO reports on Mental Health in the Justice System and Special Educational Needs will be the Committee's second and third inquiries.

Agreed: Relevant accounting officers and officials will be requested to provide oral evidence to this inquiry.

The meeting moved into closed session at 4.15pm.

9. Draft Forward Work Programme

The Clerk briefed the Committee on the current draft forward work programme.

Agreed: That the Committee is content with the draft forward work programme. The revised changes, as discussed, will be reviewed at next week's meeting as discussed at Agenda Item 7.

Agreed: The draft forward work programme will be published on the website.

The meeting moved into closed session at 4.35pm

10. Any Other Business

The Committee noted a question received from a journalist seeking clarification on whether the PAC convention not to call Ministers is still in place.

Agreed: The Committee noted the response issued on behalf of the Chair.

A member raised an issue regarding the role and remit of the Comptroller and Auditor General in respect of auditing the Electoral Office.

Agreed: That the clerk will seek clarification from NIAO on the role and remit of the C&AG in respect of his role in auditing the Northern Ireland Electoral Office.

The Committee noted that the new tablets are scheduled to be rolled out from next week and that the provision of paper packs will no longer be available from the meeting of 27 February 2020 onwards.

11. Date, time and place of next meeting

The next Committee meeting will be held on Thursday 27 February 2020 at 2.00 pm in the Senate Chamber.

The meeting was adjourned at 4.50 pm

Mr William Humphrey

Chairperson

Public Accounts Committee

20th February 2020