



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

## **PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE**

### **MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS**

WEDNESDAY, 5 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 David Hilditch MLA  
Mr Trevor Lunn MLA  
Mr Maolíosá McHugh MLA  
Mr Gary Middleton 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 closed session.*

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

#### **1. Arrangements for Public Accounts Committee Meetings**

The Committee discussed the meeting day arrangements for the Public Accounts Committee.

*Agreed:* The Committee will meet on Thursday afternoons.

*Mr Maolíosá McHugh left the meeting at 2.08 pm*

## **2. Committee Protocols**

The Committee noted two protocol papers for discussion: the Whistleblower Process and PAC Protective Document Markings. The Clerk briefed the Committee on both protocol papers.

- The Whistleblower Process:

The Clerk briefed members on the process for dealing with whistleblowing correspondence.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed the paper and to adopt this process.

- PAC Protective Document Markings;

The Clerk outlined the importance of protective document markings for PAC papers.

*Agreed:* The Committee noted the paper outlining the classification markings of documents and agreed to adopt this process, but to keep it under review.

*The meeting moved in to open session 2.37 pm.*

## **3. Apologies**

None

## **4. Minutes of meeting on 29 January 2020**

The draft minutes of 29 January 2020 were agreed.

## **5. Matters Arising**

Committee noted the new electronic tablets would be issued from next week on wards.

## **6. Correspondence**

- Committee noted correspondence from Edward Cooke dated 15, 16, 22, & 30 January 2020.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to forward the correspondence to the Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO), and request that C&AG report back on his findings in due course.

*Agreed:* Committee agreed to write to Mr Cooke advising him of this action.

- Committee noted correspondence from Paul Sayer dated 28 January 2020.

*Agreed:* Committee agreed to write to NIAO requesting clarification on the points that Mr Sayer raises regarding the remit of C&AG in respect of auditing the accounts of the National Trust (NI) and ask if NIAO holds the information Mr Sayer is looking for.

*Agreed:* Committee agreed to write to Mr Sayer advising him on this action.

## **7. Introductory Brief – Treasury Officer of Accounts (TOA).**

*Mr Stuart Stevenson, Treasury Officer of Accounts and Ms Julie Sewell, Head of Public Audit and Accountability Branch, Department of Finance joined the meeting.*

The Committee received a briefing from the TOA outlining the main principles for dealing with resources used by public sector organisations in Northern Ireland. The papers discussed included:

- Managing Public Money, Northern Ireland, June 2008.
- Regularity, Propriety and Value for Money, Treasury officer of accounts.
- Parliamentary scrutiny of public spending – December 2015.
- Clearance and Agreement of Northern Ireland Audit Office Value for Money Reports, dated 14 April 2015.
- New Protocols in relation to DFP Memoranda of Reply (MORS); and revised guidance on preparation on DFP Memoranda of Reply – dated 5 March 2015. Pages 259-271; and
- Public Accountability Process: Commenting on NIAO Reports, PAC Reports and matter under consideration by PAC – dated 1 September 2015.

The Committee noted the challenges ahead for TOA and the ongoing work required to refresh publications, namely Managing Public Money 2008. The Committee discussed the legal status and robustness of this publication.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their attendance.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to Stuart Stevenson, TOA to seek clarity on the revision of the document ‘Managing for Money, Northern Ireland, June 2008’; and to seek clarity on the legal status of this publication.

*The meeting moved in to closed session at 3.15 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), Colette Kane (Director), Neil Gray (Director), Tomas Wilkinson (Director), Anu Kane (Audit Manager), joined the meeting.*

The Committee received briefings on the following reports:

- Major Capital Projects - briefing from Tomas Wilkinson;
- Structural Maintenance of the Road Network- briefing from Colette Kane;
- The Financial Health of Schools – briefing from Colette Kane;
- Speeding up Justice – briefing from Neil Gray;
- Mental Health in the Criminal Justice System - briefing from Neil Gray; and
- Welfare Reforms in Northern Ireland – briefing from Anu Kane.

*Mr Boylan declared an interest in The Financial Health of Schools briefing, as he is a Governor with Clea Primary School, Keady.*

*Mr Humphrey declared an interest in The Financial Health of Schools briefing, as he is a Governor with Belfast Model School for Girls.*

*Mr Lunn left the meeting at 4.16 pm.*

*Mr Lunn joined the meeting at 4.18 pm.*

*Mr Middleton left the meeting at 4.22 pm.*

*Mr Middleton jointed meeting at 4.26 pm.*

The Committee discussed each report with the NIAO team and relevant officials. The Committee then considered what its first initial inquiry should be.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their attendance.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed that ‘Major Capital Projects’ will be PAC’s first inquiry. Relevant accounting officers and officials will be requested to provide oral evidence to this inquiry.

*The meeting moved into closed session at 4.47pm.*

## **9. Committee Induction Plan**

The Clerk briefed the Committee on the PAC draft Induction Plan.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed the Committee Induction Plan.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to consider, at its strategic planning day, whether to visit another PAC as part of its induction process.

*Agreed:* The Clerk will write to members, who were unable to attend the first day briefs, to ascertain if they would like to receive first day briefs from NIAO and/or the Clerk.

*The meeting moved into closed session at 4.43pm*

## **10. Draft Forward Work Programme & Inquiry Time Line**

The Clerk briefed the Committee on the draft forward work programme and inquiry time line. The Committee specifically noted the last stage of the process: the ‘Memorandum of Reply’, which is laid in the Assembly, 8 weeks after the report’s launch.

*Agreed:* The draft Forward Work Programme and Inquiry Time Line were agreed.

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

*The meeting moved into closed session at 4.47pm*

## **11. Any Other Business**

Committee noted the Easter Recess is 4 April 2020 to 19 April 2020. All recess dates are on the NI Assembly website under General Business.

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

The Committee are visiting NIAO, at their premises, in their University Street, Belfast on Thursday 13 February 2020,

The next Committee meeting will be held on Thursday 20 February 2020 at 2.00 pm in the Senate Chamber.

*The meeting was adjourned at 4.58 pm*

**Mr William Humphrey**  
**Chairperson**  
**Public Accounts Committee**  
**5<sup>th</sup> February 2020**