



**Northern Ireland  
Assembly**

## **PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE**

### **MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS**

THURSDAY, 11<sup>TH</sup> FEBRUARY 2021, ROOM 30,  
PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS

Present: Mr William Humphrey MBE MLA (Chairperson)  
Mr Roy Beggs MLA (Deputy Chairperson)  
Mr Harry Harvey MLA  
Mr David Hilditch MLA

Attending Remotely Mr Cathal Boylan MLA  
Ms Órlaithí Flynn MLA  
Mr Andrew Muir MLA  
Mr Maoliosa McHugh MLA  
Mr Matthew O'Toole MLA

Apologies: None

In Attendance: Ms Lucia Wilson, Assembly Clerk  
Ms Gillian Barker, Assistant Assembly Clerk  
Ms Karen Barry, Clerical Supervisor  
Mr Darren Weir, Clerical Officer

*The meeting began in Open Session at 2.04 pm*

#### **1. Apologies**

#### **2. Minutes of the meeting 4<sup>th</sup> February 2021**

*Agreed:* The draft minutes of the meeting on 4<sup>th</sup> February 2021 were agreed and to be published.

### **3. Declaration of Interests**

There were no declaration of interests.

### **4. Matters Arising**

None

### **5. Correspondence**

*Mr Kieran Donnelly CB C&AG and Ms Colette Kane Director NIAO joined the meeting; Mr Kyle Bingham joined the meeting remotely.*

The Committee noted correspondence dated 22 January 2021 from Mr T.I McManus and his previous correspondence of July 2020 regarding the Charities Commission for Northern Ireland [CCNI].

The Committee noted correspondence, dated 8 February 2021, from NIAO regarding the Charities Commission for Northern Ireland [CCNI] and the impact of the ‘McBride Judgement.’ The Committee noted that the Communities Minister is about to commission an independent review of charity regulation and the effectiveness of the regulator. The CCNI has appointed independent counsel to complete a review. C&AG advises that he will report back to the Committee once this work has completed.

*Agreed:* The Committee noted C&AG’s approach on this matter and agreed to write back to Mr McManus to update him on the steps the C&AG is taking in relation to this matter.

The Committee noted correspondence, dated 2 February 2021, from Mr Paul Murnaghan, Regional Director NI, BT Enterprises regarding his concerns on PAC’s recent report on ‘LandWeb and Digital Transformation’.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to forward this correspondence to NIAO and to respond to Mr Murnaghan to advise him of this.

The Committee noted correspondence, dated 3 February 2021, from Mr Edward Cooke concerning the Ulster University’s decision to relocate students from Belfast to Magee Campus. The Committee noted Mr Cooke has forwarded his correspondence to individual MLAs, the Committee for the Economy, and NIAO regarding the relocation of medial students.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to the University Council to clarify their decision on this matter and a draft will be considered at next week’s meeting.

The Committee noted correspondence, dated 4 February 2021, from Jim Shannon MP regarding DAERA and the number of judicial reviews of farmers appeals. The Committee noted Mr Shannon MP has also written to the C&AG.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to Mr Shannon MP acknowledging his correspondence and that this has been raised with the C&AG. The Committee noted the C&AG will be meeting with Mr Shannon MP in the forthcoming weeks.

*Agreed:* The C&AG agreed to report back to the Committee on his meeting with Mr Shannon MP.

The Committee noted correspondence dated 5 February 2021 from Kathy Gray regarding a Bill of Rights.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to forward this correspondence to the Ad Hoc Committee on a Bill of Rights.

The Committee noted correspondence, dated 8 February 2021, from Lesley Hogg, Clerk to the Assembly, regarding additional broadcasting charges for use of the Assembly Chamber.

*Agreed:* The Committee noted charges for use of the Assembly Chamber have now been reallocated to the Clerking and Member Support Office.

The Committee noted correspondence, dated 9 February 2021, from Mike Brennan, AO, DfE confirming his attendance at an evidence session on 18<sup>th</sup> March 2021 for the inquiry into ‘Generating Electricity from Renewable Energy’.

***The meeting went into Closed Session at 2.21 pm***

## **6. Inquiry into ‘Driver and Vehicle Agency 2019-20’: Briefing Session:**

*Mr Kieran Donnelly CB C&AG and Ms Colette Kane Director remained in the meeting. Ms Suzanne Murphy, Auditor; Ms Caroline Laird, Audit Manager and Mr Kyle Bingham, Assembly Support Officer joined the meeting remotely.*

The Committee noted the inquiry into ‘Driver and Vehicle Agency 2019 – 20’ will be their fourth inquiry. Mr Kieran Donnelly, C&AG and the NIAO team briefed the Committee on the NIAO report on ‘Driver and Vehicle Agency 2019-20’ published 12 November 2020.

There then followed a question and answer session.

*Ms Órlaithí Flynn MLA left the meeting at 3.15 pm*

*The meeting went into Closed Session at 3.22 pm*

## **7. Inquiry into ‘Inquiry into ‘Driver and Vehicle Agency 2019-20’: Preparation Session**

*Mr Kieran Donnelly CB C&AG and Ms Colette Kane Director remained in the meeting. Ms Suzanne Murphy, Auditor; Ms Caroline Laird, Audit Manager and Mr Kyle Bingham, Assembly Support Officer joined the meeting remotely.*

The Committee discussed the forthcoming evidence session on ‘Driver and Vehicle Agency 2019-20’ scheduled for 18<sup>th</sup> February 2020 and the key areas of questioning.

The Committee noted the following witnesses would be attending:

- Ms Kathrine Godfrey, AO DfI; and
- Mr Jeremy Logan, CE of Driver and Vehicle Agency.

The Committee noted next week’s evidence session would be held in open session.

*Mr David Hilditch MLA left the meeting at 3.22 pm*

*Mr David Hilditch MLA re-joined the meeting at 3.26 pm*

*The meeting remained in Closed Session at 3.26 pm*

## **8. Proposal for co-operation**

*Mr Kieran Donnelly CB C&AG and Ms Colette Kane, Director remained in the meeting.*

The Committee noted papers on the proposal for co-operation of committees on consequences of the new arrangements at the UK border, including trade and customs arrangement. Papers included:

- Correspondence dated 29 January 2021 from Meg Hillier MP, Chair of Westminster PAC;
- Letter dated 1 December 2020 to Permanent Secretary, Cabinet Office from Meg Hillier MP, entitled, ‘The UK border: preparedness for the end of the transition period’;
- National Audit Office report ‘The UK border: preparedness for the end of the transition period’ November 2020; and
- The Clerk’s memo dated 11 February 2021 on ‘Co-operation between Westminster PAC and NIA PAC on areas of mutual interest’.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to the Chair of Westminster PAC acknowledging her letter of 29 January 2021; and to return to this matter at next week’s meeting to consider areas of mutual co-operation.

*The Committee adjourned at 3.29 pm*

*The Committee reconvened in Closed Session at 3.36 pm*

## 9. Draft Forward Work Programme

*Mr Kieran Donnelly CB C&AG and Ms Colette Kane, Director remained in the meeting.*

The Committee noted the paper on current, forthcoming and future NIAO reports and discussed which reports they could release to the relevant Committees, and which they would keep under primacy.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed the following regarding the list of current NIAO reports:

<b>NAME OF THE NIAO REPORT</b>	<b>DEPT</b>	<b>ACTION</b>
Workforce planning for nurses and midwives	DoH	<b>Release</b>
Addiction Services in Northern Ireland	DoH	<b>Keep</b> <b>[possibly tie in with future Mental Health Report]</b>
Follow-up reviews in the Health and Social Care Sector: Locum Doctors and Patient Safety	DoH	<b>Release</b>
Type 2 Diabetes Prevention and Care	DoH	<b>Release</b>
The Financial Health of Schools	DoEd	<b>Release</b>
Managing Children who offend	DoJ	<b>Release</b>
Reducing Costs in the PSNI	DoJ	<b>Keep</b>
Mental Health in the Criminal Justice System	DoJ	<b>Release</b>
Speeding up Justice; avoidable delay in the criminal justice system	DoJ	<b>Next Inquiry</b>
Governance Issues in Sport Northern Ireland	DfC	<b>Keep with the possibility of a future inquiry</b>
Welfare Reforms in NI	DfC	<b>Keep</b>
Structural Maintenance of the Road Network	DoI	<b>Release</b>
The Social Investment Fund	EO	<b>Release</b>

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to the Assembly Committees informing them of the NIAO Reports that the Committee has released from PAC’s primacy.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed their next inquiry would be ‘Speeding up Justice; avoidable delay in the criminal justice system’.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed the following regarding the list of forthcoming NIAO reports noting the publishing dates may move:

<b>NAME OF THE NIAO REPORT</b>	<b>DEPT</b>	<b>PUBLISHING DATE</b>	<b>ACTION</b>
Welfare Reform - PIP	DfC	March 2021	<b>Keep</b>
RHI	Across Departments	March 2021	<b>Keep</b>
Strategic Review of the Budget Process -	EO/DoF	March 2021	<b>Future Inquiry</b>
Closing the Gap – social deprivation and links to educational attainment	DfC / DE	April 2021	<b>Future Inquiry</b>
COVID 19 Update	EO	April 2021	<b>Keep</b>
Investment in Broadband	DoE	April/May 2021	<b>Future Inquiry</b>
Small Grants Scheme	DfC	April 2021	<b>Keep</b>

The Committee noted there should be a balance of working across the departments regarding deciding their inquiries and would keep this as a watching brief.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to revisit the list of NIAO Reports at next week’s meeting.

The Committee noted the amended draft forward work programme January–March 2021 including the attendance of Mr Mike Brennan, AO DoE to give evidence on 18<sup>th</sup> March 2021, regarding inquiry into ‘Generating Electricity from Renewable Energy’.

The Committee noted a draft press release on the ‘Report on Impact Review of Special Educational Needs’ will be available at next week’s meeting.

## **10. Any Other Business**

None

**11. Date, time and place of next meeting**

The next meeting of the Public Accounts Committee will take place on Thursday 18<sup>th</sup> February 2021 at 2.00 p.m. in Room 30, Parliament Buildings.

*The meeting adjourned at 5.03 pm.*

**Mr William Humphrey MBE MLA  
Chairperson  
Public Accounts Committee**

**11<sup>th</sup> February 2021**

**Signed .....**