



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

# Public Accounts Committee

## Minutes of Proceedings

Thursday, 18 March 2021

**Meeting Location:** Room 30, Parliament Buildings, Belfast

**Present:** Mr William Humphrey MBE MLA (Chairperson)  
Mr Roy Beggs MLA (Deputy Chairperson)  
Mr Harry Harvey MLA  
Mr David Hilditch MLA  
Mr Matthew O'Toole MLA

**Present by Video or Teleconference:**

Mr Cathal Boylan MLA  
Ms Órlaithí Flynn MLA  
Mr Andrew Muir MLA  
Mr Maolíosa McHugh MLA

**Apologies:** **None**

**In Attendance:** Ms Lucia Wilson (Assembly Clerk)  
Ms Gillian Barker (Assistant Assembly Clerk)

**In Attendance by Video or Teleconference:**

Ms Karen Barry (Clerical Supervisor)  
Mr Darren Weir (Clerical Officer)



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The meeting commenced at 2.13 pm in Open Session

**1. Apologies**

None

**2. Draft Minutes of 11 March 2021**

**Agreed:** The draft minutes of the meeting of 11 March 2021 were agreed and to be published.

**3. Declaration of Interest**

Mr Cathal Boylan MLA declared he had been contacted by RenewableNI about its report;

Mr Andrew Muir MLA declared he had been contacted by RenewableNI about its report;

Mr Maoliosa McHugh MLA declared he receives ROCS from solar panels and that he has also been contacted by Mr Pollock regarding an anaerobic digester plant;

Mr Matthew O'Toole MLA declared he has been approached by a local company about the inquiry into 'Generating Electricity from Renewable Energy'.

**4. Matters Arising**

None



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### 5. Correspondence

The following Officials joined the meeting:

Mr Kieran Donnelly CB Comptroller & Auditor General (C&AG) for Northern Ireland Assembly (NIAO);  
Mr Tomas Wilkinson, Director, NIAO; and  
Mr Kyle Bingham Assembly Support Officer, NIAO joined the meeting remotely.

#### **Chairpersons' Liaison Group**

The Committee noted correspondence dated 10 March 2021 from the Chairpersons' Liaison Group regarding the condensed committee stage of the Damages (Return on Investment) Bill which is to pass all of its stages by Summer Recess 2021.

**Agreed:** The Committee noted the correspondence.

#### **Edward Cooke**

The Committee noted correspondence, dated 8,12 & 15 March 2021 from Edward Cooke

#### **Audit Committee**

The Committee noted correspondence from the Audit Committee dated 12 March 2021 regarding its' 'Review of the Governance and Accountability arrangements for the Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO) and Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO)'.

The Committee noted the Audit Committee are seeking the views of PAC regarding the quality of service and performance of the Northern Ireland Audit Office.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to return to this item after Easter to allow more time to consider.



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**Jeremy Logan, Chief Executive, DVA**

The Committee noted correspondence dated 12 March 2021 from Jeremy Logan, CE DVA, on the follow-up issues raised at the evidence session of 18 February 2021

**Agreed:** The Committee noted the correspondence and agreed to forward it to NIAO.

**Peter May, AO Department for Justice**

The Committee noted correspondence dated 15 March 2021, from Mr Peter May, AO, Department for Justice, requesting a deferral of the inquiry on 'Speeding up Justice, delays in the criminal system' until Autumn 2021.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to consider this correspondence in closed session, under Agenda Item 8, draft Forward Work Programme.

The meeting was suspended at 2.21 pm

The meeting reconvened in Open Session at 2.33 pm

**6. Inquiry into 'Generating Electricity from Renewable Energy' – Evidence Session**

The following Departmental Officials joined the meeting remotely:

Mr Mike Brennan AO DfE;  
Mr Richard Rodgers, Head of Energy DfE; and  
Mr Trevor McBriar, Principle Officer for Renewable Energy Branch.

In attendance:

Mr Kieran Donnelly, CB C&AG; and  
Mr Stuart Stevenson the Treasury Officer of Accounts, remotely.

The Committee noted the following papers:



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- NIAO report on 'Generating Electricity from Renewable Energy';
- Witness Biographies - Mr Mike Brennan AO DfE; Mr Richard Rodgers, Head of Energy DfE; and Trevor McBriar, Head of Renewable Energy Branch;
- Correspondence dated 4 March 2021 from Mike Brennan, AO, DfE;
- KPMG report on behalf of RenewableNI on 'An Economic Review of Small Scale Wind'
- NIAO Restricted Briefing Paper; and
- Restricted paper on suggested areas of questions.

The Committee discussed three submissions, tabled, for consideration, in advance of the evidence session on 'Generating Electricity from Renewable Energy'. The submissions were from:

- West Tyrone Against Wind Turbines;
- Alun Evans MD, Professor Emeritus Queen's University; and
- on Behalf of Standing Our Ground Women of the Sperrin's.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to note these submissions and, subject to GDPR permissions, forward the submissions to Northern Ireland Audit Office.

The Committee welcomed the Departmental Officials, Mr Mike Brennan, AO DfE; Mr Richard Rogers, Head of Energy; and Mr Trevor McBriar, Principle Officer for Renewable Energy.

Mr Brennan made an opening statement to the Committee and there then followed a question and answer session.

**Agreed:** The Committee noted the Department has implemented recommendation 5, and has accepted recommendation 6 from NIAO's Report 'Generating Electricity from Renewable Energy'.

*Mr David Hilditch MLA left the meeting at 4.36 pm*

*Mr David Hilditch MLA re-joined the meeting at 4.40 pm*



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The meeting went into Closed Session at 4.43 pm

## 7. Inquiry into 'Generating Electricity from Renewable Energy' – Discussion

The following officials remained in the meeting:

Mr Kieran Donnelly CB C&AG; and  
Mr Tomas Wilkinson, Director NIAO

The following officials joined the meeting remotely:

Mr Brian O'Neill, Auditor Manager NIAO; and  
Mr Kyle Bingham, Assembly Support Officer, NIAO.

The Committee discussed, with Mr Kieran Donnelly CB C&AG and his team, the evidence it had received from department officials, Mr Brennan AO DfE, Mr Rodgers Head of Energy and Mr McBriar Principle Officer for Renewable Energy, regarding the NIAO Report 'Generating Electricity from Renewable Energy'.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to request some further information from Mr Brennan and his officials following the evidence session.

**Agreed:** The Committee noted Mr Kieran Donnelly CB C&AG and his team will produce an issues paper for next week's meeting.

The meeting remained in Closed Session at 5.05 pm



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## 8. Draft Forward Work Programme

The following officials remained in the meeting:

Mr Kieran Donnelly, CB C&AG; and  
Mr Kyle Bingham, Assembly Support Officer NIAO.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to invite the Head of RenewableNI, Steven Agnew, and separately, Professor Gordon Hughes to provide oral evidence to its inquiry on Generating Electricity from Renewable Energy. The Committee will consider if it is necessary to schedule further evidence sessions, pending further information.

The Committee considered correspondence dated 15 March 2021, from Mr Peter May, AO Department for Justice, regarding a request to defer the inquiry on 'Speeding up Justice, delays in the criminal system' until Autumn 2021.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to Mr May AO DfJ, to request further information on the reasons for delaying the inquiry. Once this information is received, the Committee will consider if there are any compelling reasons to delay the inquiry.

**Agreed:** The Committee noted the forward work programme.

## 9. Any Other Business

Members were reminded to complete a survey from the Chairpersons' Liaison Group on strengthening scrutiny as soon as possible.



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#### **10. Date, Time and Place of Next Meeting**

The next meeting of the Public Accounts Committee will take place on Thursday 25 March 2021, at 2.00 pm in the Senate, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting adjourned at 5.11 pm.

**Mr William Humphrey MBE MLA**  
**Chairperson**  
**Public Accounts Committee**  
**18 March 2021**