



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Public Accounts Committee

Minutes of Proceedings

Thursday, 13 March 2025

Meeting Location: Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings

Present:

Daniel McCrossan, MLA

Cheryl Brownlee, MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

Diane Forsythe, MLA

Tom Buchanan, MLA

David Honeyford, MLA

Colm Gildernew, MLA

Cathal Boylan, MLA

Present by Video or Teleconference:

Colin Crawford, MLA

Pádraig Delargy, MLA

Apologies:

In Attendance: Lucia Wilson (Committee Clerk)
Sinead Kelly (Assistant Committee Clerk)
Marion Johnson (Clerical Supervisor)
Laura Gourley (Clerical Officer)

The meeting opened in public session at 2.02 pm.

Cathal Boylan, MLA joined the meeting at 2.03 pm.

1. Apologies

2. Draft minutes

Agreed: The draft minutes of the meeting on 13 March 2025 were agreed.

3. Declaration of Interests

The Chairperson reminded members of their requirement to register their interests under Standing Order 69(5).

David Honeyford MLA declared an interest as a member of the Committee for the Economy in relation to Agenda Items 7 and 8.

Padraig Delargy MLA declared an interest as a member of the Committee for the Economy in relation to Agenda Items 7 and 8.

Padraig Delargy MLA declared an interest having family members who are GPs and members of the British Medical Association in relation to Agenda Item 9.

4. Chairperson's Business

The Chairperson welcomed Sinead Kelly and Laura Gourley who were providing administrative support to the meeting.

5. Matters Arising

Members noted correspondence from Hugh Widdis, Accounting Officer, Department of Justice, advising of witnesses for the upcoming inquiry into Reducing Adult Reoffending.

Agreed: Members agreed to note this correspondence.

6. Correspondence

Members considered correspondence from the Commonwealth Association of Public Accounts Committees.

Agreed: Members agreed to note the correspondence.

7. Briefing on disclaimed opinion on Department for the Economy accounts.

The following officials joined the meeting at 2.05 pm:

Dorinnia Carville, Comptroller and Auditor General;

Seamus Wade, Director, Northern Ireland Audit Office

Kyle Bingham, Assembly Support Officer, Northern Ireland Audit Office

Members were briefed on the C&AG Disclaimed Opinion on the Department for the Economy Accounts.

Agreed: Members agreed to seek clarification on whether ultimate responsibility for the financial statements within the Department for the Economy sits with the Chief Accounting Officer.

Agreed: Members requested that the NIAO liaise with the other Audit Offices in the UK and devolved regions to determine whether similar complexities exist within other Departments for comparison purposes and whether lessons can be learned, or precedents followed.

The meeting moved to closed session at 2.45 pm

8. Briefing on disclaimed opinion on Department for the Economy accounts.

Members discussed the briefing from the C&AG.

Agreed: Members agreed to invite the Accounting Officer for the Department for the Economy to attend the Committee urgently on 20th March 2025 to respond to the C&AG disclaimed opinion on the Department's accounts.

Agreed: Members agreed to invite the Treasury Officer of Accounts to brief the Committee on 20th March 2025.

Agreed: To write to the Economy Committee Chairperson to inform that we have invited the Accounting Officer for the Department for Economy.

Agreed: To postpone the first consideration of the 'Developing the Skills for Northern Ireland's future' Report due on 20 March 2025 and to consider a revised Forward Work Programme at the next meeting.

9. Inquiry into Access to General Practice in Northern Ireland – Issues Paper

Members noted correspondence received offering engagement in respect of the inquiry from GPNI and a local practice pharmacist.

Agreed: Members agreed the draft responses to the correspondence as outlined by the Clerk.

The following officials joined the meeting at 3.08 pm:

Dorinnia Carville, Comptroller and Auditor General;

Colette Kane, Director, Northern Ireland Audit Office;

Roger McCance, Audit Manager, Northern Ireland Audit Office;

Kyle Bingham, Assembly Support Officer, Northern Ireland Audit Office;

Members discussed the issues identified during the recent evidence sessions.

The Chair thanked Officials for attending.

Witnesses left the meeting at 3.42pm.

Agreed: Members agreed to request a copy of the document Best Practice Guidance referred to during the evidence session of 6 March 2025 from the Department of Health.

Agreed: Members agreed to postpone the publication date of the Inquiry Report to allow time to factor in the results of the survey.

10. Formal consideration of draft report on Major Capital Projects: Follow Up Report

The following officials from the Northern Ireland Audit Office joined the meeting at 3.44 pm:

Dorinnia Carville, Comptroller and Auditor General;

Suzanne Murphy, Audit Manager, Northern Ireland Audit Office;

Karen Armstrong, Audit Manager, Northern Ireland Audit Office.

The Committee noted the draft report is classified as RESTRICTED for Members' attention and therefore should not be published more widely.

The Committee noted it had a first formal consideration of the 'Major Capital Projects: Follow Up Report' report at its meeting of 20 February 2025.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to give notice that they wish to rescind its decision in relation to its first formal consideration of its fourth report 'Major Capital Projects: Follow Up Report' and to include on the agenda for next week's meeting.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to consider its draft press release regarding its fourth report 'Major Capital Projects: Follow Up Report' at the next meeting.

11. Forward Work Programme

Agreed: Members agreed the draft forward work programme.

The following official joined the meeting at 3.52 pm:

Dorinnia Carville, Comptroller and Auditor General;

Members received a briefing on the Northern Ireland Audit Office report on Ambulance Handovers

Agreed: Members agreed to retain primacy over the report until further consideration could be given to the selection of future inquiries.

Agreed: Members agreed to release primacy over the NIAO report into Waiting Lists

The Clerk briefed members on potential further witnesses for the forthcoming inquiry into Reducing Adult Reoffending.

Colin Crawford, MLA left the meeting at 4.05pm

Agreed: Members agreed to issue further witness invites to NIACRO and Extern.

12. Any Other Business

Members noted that due to the Public Holiday on 17 March 2025, papers for next week's meeting would be issued on 18 March 2025.

12. Date, Time, and Place of the next meeting

The next meeting will take place in the Senate Chamber on Thursday 20 March 2025 at 2.00 pm.

The meeting was adjourned at 4.07 pm.

Daniel McCrossan MLA

Chairperson, Public Accounts Committee

20 March 2024