



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Public Accounts Committee

Minutes of Proceedings

Thursday, 24 October 2024

Meeting Location: Room 21, Parliament Buildings

Present:

Daniel McCrossan, MLA

Cheryl Brownlee, MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

Diane Forsythe, MLA

Tom Buchanan, MLA

Colin Crawford, MLA

Colm Gildernew, MLA

Cathal Boylan, MLA

Present by Video or Teleconference:

Apologies:

Pádraig Delargy, MLA

David Honeyford, MLA

In Attendance: Lucia Wilson (Committee Clerk)

Kirsten McClelland (Assistant Committee Clerk)

Chris McAfee (Clerical Supervisor)

Barbara Daly (Clerical Officer)

The meeting commenced at 2.07 pm in closed session

The Chairperson advised members of the requirement to declare interests in any items of business on the agenda, and discussed the substantive items of business to be considered.

The meeting moved into public session at 2.09 pm.

1. Apologies

Apologies were noted from David Honeyford, MLA, and Pádraig Delargy, MLA.

2. Draft minutes

Agreed: The draft minutes of the meeting on 24 October 2024 were agreed.

3. Declaration of Interests

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

Diane Forsythe, MLA declared an interest as Deputy Chair of the Finance Committee.

Dorinnia Carville, Comptroller & Auditor General declared an interest as Head of the Northern Ireland Audit Office.

4. Matters Arising

Members noted a reply from Department of Health Permanent Secretary Peter May in respect of delays in the construction of the Royal Maternity Hospital.

Agreed: Members agreed to respond seeking further clarification on the projected final cost of the project.

5. Chairperson's Business

The Chair welcomed Colin Crawford, MLA to the Committee and placed on record his thanks to John Stewart, MLA for his contributions to the Public Accounts Committee.

6. Correspondence

Dorinnia Carville, Comptroller and Auditor General joined the meeting at 2.15 pm.

Members were notified of a letter dated 22 October 2024, received from the Audit Committee seeking members views in respect of the Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO) budget submission for 2025/26.

Members received a briefing from Dorinnia Carville in respect of the budget submission.

Dorinnia Carville left the meeting at 2.28 pm.

The meeting moved into closed session at 2.28 pm.

Members discussed the NIAO budget submission for 2025/26.

Agreed: Members agreed to write to the Audit Committee in support of the NIAO budget submission.

7. First Consideration of Report 'Public Procurement in Northern Ireland'

The following officials from the Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO) joined the meeting at 2.40 pm.

Dorinnia Carville, Comptroller and Auditor General, NIAO

Kyle Bingham, Assembly Support Officer, NIAO

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

The Committee noted this is the first formal consideration for the report 'Public Procurement in Northern Ireland' and agreed the title of the report is 'Public Procurement in Northern Ireland'.

The Committee made the following decisions regarding each section and paragraphs within the report, that is – Agreed, Agreed as amended or to be reworded.

Section 'Introduction': Paragraphs 16 - 23

Paragraph 16: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 17: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 18: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 19: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 20: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 21: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 22: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 23: Read and Agreed

Agreed: To be reworded: Section Title: A Procurement Strategy is urgently required.

Paras 24 – 27

Paragraph 24: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 25: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 26: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 27: Agreed as amended

Agreed: Section Title: It is not clear that procurement structures in Northern Ireland deliver value for money. Paras 28 – 36

Paragraph 28: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 29: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 30: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 31: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 32: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 33: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 34: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 35: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 36: Read and Agreed

Agreed: Section Title: 'There is a need to refresh accountability and governance arrangements for procurement'. Paras 37 - 41

Paragraph 37: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 38: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 39: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 40: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 41: Read and Agreed

Agreed: Section Title: 'Securing appropriate skills and experience is crucial for delivering procurement effectively'. Paras 42 - 48

Paragraph 42: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 43: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 44: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 45: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 46: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 47: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 48: Read and Agreed

Agreed: To be reworded: Section Title: 'Changes in how procurement is managed and delivered must be underpinned by effective stakeholder engagement'. Paras 49 - 54

Paragraph 49: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 50: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 51: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 52: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 53: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 54: Read and Agreed

Agreed: Section Title: 'Constant efforts must be made to promote access to public markets from all potential suppliers'. Paras 55 - 58

Paragraph 55: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 56: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 57: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 58: Read and Agreed

Agreed: To be reworded: Section Title: 'Exploiting opportunities and managing risks related to evolving technologies will be critical to effective management of procurement'. Paras 59 – 68

Paragraph 59: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 60: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 61: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 62: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 63: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 64: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 65: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 66: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 67: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 68: Read and Agreed

Agreed: Section Title: 'Annual reporting and monitoring was not meaningful.
Paras 51 – 54

Paragraph 51: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 52: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 53: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 54: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 70: Read and Agreed

The Committee then returned to the Executive Summary paragraphs 1 to 15 and agreed the following:

Paragraph 1: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 2: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 3: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 4: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 5: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 6: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 7: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 8: Agreed as amended

Paragraph 9: Agreed as amended

Paragraph 10: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 11: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 12: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 13: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 14: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 15: Read and Agreed

Recommendations 1 to 11:

Recommendation 1: Agreed as amended

Recommendation 2: Agreed as amended

Recommendation 3: Agreed as amended

Recommendation 4: Read and Agreed

Recommendation 5: Read and Agreed

Recommendation 6: Agreed as amended

Recommendation 7: Read and Agreed

Recommendation 8: Read and Agreed

Recommendation 9: Agreed as amended

Recommendation 10: Agreed as amended

Recommendation 11: Agreed as amended

That concluded the first consideration of the report – ‘Public Procurement in Northern Ireland’.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to bring the amended Report to its next Committee meeting, 7 November 2024 for final consideration.

8. Inquiry into Child Poverty in Northern Ireland – Report Launch

Members considered a draft press release for the launch of the report into Child Poverty in Northern Ireland.

Agreed: Members agreed the draft press release.

Members discussed the launch event scheduled to take place on 7th November 2024 in the Long Gallery, Parliament Buildings.

Agreed: Members agreed the format and guest list for the event.

9. Northern Ireland Non-Domestic Renewable Heat Incentive Scheme: Assessing Progress with the implementation of the Public Inquiry recommendations (Second Report).

Cheryl Brownlee, MLA left the meeting at 3.18 pm.

Agreed: Members agreed the draft letter to be sent to the Department of Finance.

Agreed: Members agreed the draft press release to be issued concurrently with the letter to the Department of Finance.

10. Forward Work Programme

The Committee was briefed on the BiMR and CAPAC annual conference.

Agreed: Members agreed nominations to attend the BiMR and CAPAC annual conference on 28th and 29th November 2024.

The Committee was briefed on the draft Forward Work programme.

Agreed: Members agreed the draft Forward Work programme.

11. Any Other Business

12. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting

The Chairperson thanked officials for their attendance and advised members that the next meeting will follow the event to launch the report into Child Poverty in Northern Ireland and is scheduled for Thursday 7 November 2024 at 2.15 pm.

The meeting was adjourned at 3.53 pm.

Daniel McCrossan MLA

Chairperson, Public Accounts Committee

24 October 2024