



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Public Accounts Committee

Minutes of Proceedings

Thursday, 12 December 2024

Meeting Location: Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings

Present:

Daniel McCrossan, MLA

Diane Forsythe, MLA

Tom Buchanan, MLA

Colin Crawford, MLA

David Honeyford, MLA

Cathal Boylan, MLA

Present by Video or Teleconference:

Pádraig Delargy, MLA

Apologies:

Cheryl Brownlee, MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

Colm Gildernew, MLA

In Attendance: Lucia Wilson (Committee Clerk)

Kirsten McClelland (Assistant Committee Clerk)

Marion Johnson (Clerical Supervisor)

Barbara Daly (Clerical Officer)

The meeting opened in public session at 2.14 pm.

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Cheryl Brownlee, MLA and Colm Gildernew, MLA.

2. Draft minutes

Agreed: The draft minutes of the meeting on 5 December 2024 were agreed.

3. Declaration of Interests

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

Pádraig Delargy declared an interest as Sinn Féin spokesperson on Further and Higher Education, and a participant in the Skill Up Programme.

Diane Forsythe declared an interest as a member of the Audit Committee.

4. Matters Arising

The Clerk reported to members on the BIMR and CAPAC conference held in Malta on 28 and 29 November 2024.

Agreed: Members agreed to write to the Speaker of the Parliament of Malta to thank him and his staff for hosting the conference and the hospitality afforded to members.

Agreed: Members agreed to write to the conference Chairs to thank them for organising the conference and the hospitality afforded to members.

5. Chairperson's Business

The Chair placed on record his thanks and appreciation to the Committee Staff Team, Communications Team and the Comptroller and Auditor General and Northern Ireland Audit Office staff for the support provided to the work of the Committee.

6. Correspondence

Members noted the report into Quarterly Sickness Absence in Northern Ireland Civil Service for the period from July to September 2024.

Members noted correspondence from the Audit Committee to the Finance Minister regarding draft budgets for the Northern Ireland Audit Office and Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman.

Members noted correspondence from Peter May, Accounting Officer for the Department of Health following questions raised by members in response to the Memorandum of Reply on Mental Health Services in Northern Ireland.

Diane Forsythe expressed concern at the lack of progress on recommendations made within the PAC report and an overreliance within the department upon the implementation of Encompass.

Agreed: Members agreed to write to the Department to request a copy of the quarterly report referenced in their letter and seek further clarification on how in year spend and performance outcomes are currently being measured as implementation of Encompass continues.

Members noted correspondence from Margaret Ritchie on behalf of her constituent Dermott Nesbitt in relation to planning matters in Crossgar following discussion of the Memorandum of Reply on planning in June 2024.

Agreed: Members agreed that due to the complexity of the issues raised this matter would be deferred for further consideration until January.

7. RalSE briefing on Inquiry into the use of Social Licenses in Major Capital Projects

The following official joined the meeting at 2.38 pm.

Nathan Mulholland, RalSE Research Officer

The Committee were briefed on the use of Social Licenses in Major Capital Projects within other jurisdictions.

David Honeyford left the meeting at 2.56 pm.

The Chairperson thanked Mr Mulholland for attending.

Mr Mulholland left the meeting at 3.03 pm.

The meeting moved into closed session at 3.03 pm.

8. Issues paper following Evidence session for 'Developing the Skills for Northern Ireland's Future' inquiry.

The following officials from the Northern Ireland Audit Office joined the meeting at 3.04 pm:

Dorinnia Carville, Comptroller and Auditor General, Northern Ireland Audit Office;

Patrick Barr, Director, Northern Ireland Audit Office;

Suzanne Murphy, Director, Northern Ireland Audit Office;

Kyle Bingham, Assembly Support Officer, NIAO

Members were briefed on the key issues arising from the evidence session held on 5 December 2024.

Tom Buchanan left the meeting at 3.25 pm.

Tom Buchanan rejoined the meeting at 3.30 pm.

Members noted correspondence received from the Department for the Economy and Department for Education following recent evidence sessions.

Agreed: Members agreed to forward correspondence to the NIAO for consideration and inclusion in the draft report.

9. Forward Work Programme

The C&AG briefed members on the recent NIAO report into Road Openings by Utilities in Northern Ireland.

Agreed: Members agreed the draft Forward Work programme.

10. Any Other Business

The C&AG briefed members on her forthcoming attendance at the invitation of the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee to provide evidence in respect of the funding and delivery of public services in Northern Ireland.

11. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting

The next meeting will take place in the Senate Chamber on Thursday 16 January 2025 at 2.00 pm.

The meeting was adjourned at 4.15 pm.

Daniel McCrossan MLA

Chairperson, Public Accounts Committee

21 November 2024