



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Public Accounts Committee

Minutes of Proceedings

Thursday, 10 October 2024

Meeting Location: Room 21, Parliament Buildings

Present:

Daniel McCrossan, MLA

Cheryl Brownlee, MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

Diane Forsyth, MLA

David Honeyford, MLA

Colm Gildernew, MLA

Diane Forsyth, MLA

Cathal Boylan, MLA

Present by Video or Teleconference:

Pádraig Delargy, MLA.

Apologies: John Stewart, MLA
Tom Buchanan, MLA

In Attendance: Lucia Wilson (Committee Clerk)
Kirsten McClelland (Assistant Committee Clerk)
Karen Barry (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 John Stewart, MLA and Tom Buchanan, MLA.

2. Draft minutes

Agreed: The draft minutes of the meeting on 3 October 2024 were agreed.

3. Declaration of Interests

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

4. Matters Arising

5. Chairperson's Business

Members were reminded that Daniel McCrossan, MLA has been invited to give the keynote speech to the CIPFA Public Finance NI conference on 15 October.

Agreed: Members noted the invitation and were content for him to attend.

Daniel McCrossan, MLA thanked members and staff for their condolences and messages following the recent death of his mother.

6. Correspondence

The meeting moved into closed session at 2.13 pm.

7. First Consideration of Report 'Child Poverty in Northern Ireland'

The following officials from the Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO) joined the meeting at 4.13 pm.

Dorinnia Carville, Comptroller and Auditor General, NIAO

Tomas Wilkinson, Director, NIAO

Barry Mitchell, Audit Manager, NIAO

Claire Turner, Senior Auditor, NIAO

Kyle Bingham, Assembly Support Officer, NIAO

Cheryl Brownlee, MLA joined the meeting at 2.14 pm.

The Committee noted the draft report is classified as RESTRICTED for Members' attention and therefore should not be published more widely.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 'Child Poverty in Northern Ireland' and agreed the title of the report is 'Child Poverty 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': Paragraph 29

Paragraph 29: Read and Agreed

Section 'Background': Paragraphs 30 – 32

Paragraph 30: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 31: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 32: Read and Agreed

Agreed: Section Title: 'The Child Poverty Strategy had no impact on poverty levels. Paras 33 - 35

Paragraph 33: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 34: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 35: Read and Agreed

Agreed: Section Title: 'The Child Poverty Strategy was not sufficiently targeted and funded. Paras 36 - 38

Paragraph 36: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 37: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 38: Read and Agreed

Agreed: Section Title: 'Children were not at the heart of the Child Poverty Strategy'. Paras 39 - 43

Paragraph 39: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 40: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 41: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 42: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 43: Read and Agreed

Agreed: Section Title: 'The Child Poverty Strategy did not focus on preventing child poverty'. Paras 44 - 45

Paragraph 44: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 45: Read and Agreed

Agreed: Section Title: 'Overall responsibility and accountability arrangements were unacceptably poor. Paras 46 – 50

Paragraph 46: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 47: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 48: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 49: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 50: 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

Agreed: Section Title: 'Much more progress is needed on joined up working across government and with the community and voluntary sector'. Paras 36 - 38

Paragraph 55: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 56: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 57: Read and Agreed

Agreed: Section Title: 'Relationships with important community and voluntary partners have been damaged'. Paras 58 – 60

Paragraph 58: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 59: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 60: Read and Agreed

Agreed: Section Title: 'There is an urgent need for an anti-poverty strategy, but the committee has serious concerns about timescales and engagement. Paras 61 – 67

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

Agreed: To be reworded: Section Title: 'A new anti-poverty strategy must be fully costed. Paras 68 – 79

Paragraph 68: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 69: Read and Agreed

Agreed: Section Title: 'The committee is concerned that lessons from the child poverty strategy are not being learned'. Para 80

Paragraph 70: Read and Agreed

The Committee then returned to the Executive Summary paragraphs 1 to 17 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: Read and Agreed

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

Paragraph 16: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 17: Read and Agreed

Recommendations 1 to 11: Paragraphs 18 to 28

Recommendation 1 Paragraph 18: Read and Agreed

Recommendation 2 Paragraph 19: Read and Agreed

Recommendation 3 Paragraph 20: Read and Agreed

Recommendation 4 Paragraph 21: Read and Agreed

Recommendation 5 Paragraph 22: Read and Agreed

Recommendation 6 Paragraph 23: Read and Agreed

Recommendation 7 Paragraph 24: Read and Agreed

Recommendation 8 Paragraph 25: Read and Agreed

Recommendation 9 Paragraph 26: Read and Agreed

Recommendation 10 Paragraph 27: Read and Agreed

Recommendation 11 Paragraph 28: Read and Agreed

That concluded the first consideration of the report – ‘Child Poverty in Northern Ireland’.

That concluded the first consideration of the report – ‘Child Poverty in Northern Ireland’.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to bring the amended Report to next week’s Committee meeting, 17 October 2024 for final consideration.

Officials left the meeting at 2.24 pm.

8. Inquiry into Major Capital Projects: Follow up report – Issues Paper

The following officials from the Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO) joined the meeting at 2.24 pm.

Dorinnia Carville, Comptroller and Auditor General, NIAO

Patrick Barr, Director, NIAO

Suzanne Murphy, Audit Manager, NIAO

Kyle Bingham, Assembly Support Officer, NIAO

The Committee received a briefing on the issues identified following its evidence sessions on Major Capital Projects: Follow Up report, on 3 October 2024.

Cathal Boylan left the meeting at 3.05 pm.

Cathal Boylan rejoined the meeting at 3.15 pm.

Agreed: Members agreed the issues to be included in the published report.

Agreed: Members agreed to write to Jayne Brady, Head of NICS with a number of follow up issues for clarification.

Agreed: The Members agreed to commission some research from RAISE in respect of the inquiry.

Agreed: Members agreed that in future evidence sessions, five witnesses, would exceed the maximum threshold for the number of witnesses

permitted at the table at any given time.

David Honeyford left the meeting at 3.45 pm.

Diane Forsythe left the meeting at 3.47 pm.

Cathal Boylan left the meeting at 3.47pm

The Chairperson noted that the Committee had fallen below its quorum of five Members and as such no further decisions could be taken.

The Chairperson thanked officials for attending.

Officials left the meeting at 3.52 pm.

9. Forward Work Programme

The Committee was briefed on the CAPAC annual conference.

The Committee was briefed on the draft Forward Work programme.

10. Any Other Business

11. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting

The Chairperson thanked officials for their attendance and advised members that the next meeting is scheduled for Thursday 17 October 2024 at 2.00 pm.

The meeting was adjourned at 4.04 pm.

Daniel McCrossan MLA

Chairperson, Public Accounts Committee

10 October 2024