



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Public Accounts Committee

Minutes of Proceedings

Thursday, 7 November 2024

Meeting Location: Room 30, Parliament Buildings

Present:

Daniel McCrossan, MLA

Cheryl Brownlee, MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

Diane Forsythe, MLA

Tom Buchanan, MLA

Colin Crawford, MLA

David Honeyford, MLA

Colm Gildernew, MLA

Cathal Boylan, MLA

Present by Video or Teleconference:

Pádraig Delargy, MLA

Apologies:

In Attendance: Lucia Wilson (Committee Clerk)
Kirsten McClelland (Assistant Committee Clerk)
Marion Johnson (Clerical Supervisor)
Barbara Daly (Clerical Officer)

The meeting commenced at 2.33 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 2.35 pm.

1. Apologies

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.

Pádraig Delargy, MLA declared an interest as Party spokesperson on Further and Higher Education.

4. Matters Arising

Agreed: Members agreed a letter to the Audit Committee regarding the Northern Ireland Audit Office budget submission for 2025/26.

Agreed: Members agreed to discuss a letter received from the Head of the Civil Service in response to questions raised in the inquiry into major capital projects in closed session due to the inquiry not being completed.

5. Chairperson's Business

The Chair reflected on the successful event marking the launch of the report on Child Poverty in Northern Ireland, and recognised the contributions of those in attendance, the Northern Ireland Youth Assembly, Committee Staff, the Northern Ireland Assembly Visitor Experience Team, Engagement Team and Communications.

6. Correspondence

The meeting moved into closed session at 2.39 pm.

Members discussed the letter received from the Head of the Civil Service deferred from matters arising.

Agreed: Members agreed to write to the Head of the Civil Service and request her attendance at Committee alongside Neil Gibson, Permanent Secretary, Department of Finance.

7. Briefing on 'Developing the Skills for Northern Ireland's Future' inquiry.

The following officials from the Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO) joined the meeting at 2.58 pm.

Dorinnia Carville, Comptroller and Auditor General, NIAO

Patrick Barr, Director, NIAO

Suzanne Murphy Audit Manager, NIAO

Kyle Bingham, Assembly Support Officer, NIAO

Members received a briefing in advance of the inquiry into 'Developing the Skills for Northern Ireland's Future' commencing on 21 November 2024.

Officials were thanked for their attendance.

NIAO Officials left the meeting at 3.39 pm.

The meeting moved into open session at 3.39 pm.

Michael Scholes, Research Officer from the Assembly Research and Information Service joined the meeting at 3.39 pm.

Members were briefed on research previously commissioned in the inquiry into Major Capital Projects regarding Public Sector Skills Gaps due to its relevance to this inquiry.

Members thanked Michael Scholes for his report and briefing.

Michael Scoles left the meeting at 4.01 pm.

The meeting moved into closed session at 4.01 pm.

Diane Forsythe left the meeting at 4.01 pm.

8. Final Consideration of Report: 'Public Procurement in Northern Ireland'

The following officials from the Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO) joined the meeting at 4.01 pm.

Dorinnia Carville, Comptroller and Auditor General, NIAO

Suzanne Jones, Director, NIAO

Michael Heery, Audit Manager, 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 it had a first formal consideration of the 'Public Procurement in Northern Ireland' report at its last meeting on 24 October 2024.

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

The Committee was presented with the agreed amendments as follows:

Agreed: The Committee agreed an amendment to paragraph 8.

Agreed: The Committee agreed an amendment to paragraph 16.

Agreed: The Committee agreed an amendment to paragraph 17.

Agreed: The Committee agreed an amendment to paragraph 18.

Agreed: The Committee agreed an amendment to paragraph 21.

Agreed: The Committee agreed an amendment to paragraph 24.

Agreed: The Committee agreed an amendment to paragraph 25.

Agreed: The Committee agreed an amendment to paragraph 26.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the amended Section Title: 'A procurement strategy is urgently required: Agreed.

Agreed: The Committee agreed an amendment to paragraph 38.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the amended Section Title: 'Changes in how procurement is managed and delivered must be underpinned by stakeholder engagement to ensure best use of public funds'.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the amended Section Title: 'Maximising opportunities and managing risks related to evolving technologies will be critical to effective management of procurement'.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to order the report to be published.

9. Forward Work Programme

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

The Committee was briefed on the draft Forward Work programme.

Tom Buchanan left the meeting at 4.11 pm.

Tom Buchanan rejoined the meeting at 4.12 pm.

Agreed: Members agreed the draft Forward Work programme.

NIAO officials left the meeting at 4.17 pm.

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 will follow the event to launch the report into Child Poverty in Northern Ireland and is scheduled for Thursday 14 November 2024 at 2.00 pm.

The meeting was adjourned at 4.18 pm.

Daniel McCrossan MLA

Chairperson, Public Accounts Committee

7 November 2024