



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Public Accounts Committee

Minutes of Proceedings

Thursday, 5 June 2025

Meeting Location: Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings

Present: Daniel McCrossan, MLA (Chairperson)
Cheryl Brownlee, MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

Diane Forsythe, MLA
Tom Buchanan, MLA
Colin Crawford, MLA
Colm Gildernew, MLA
Pádraig Delargy, MLA
David Honeyford, MLA

Present by Video or Teleconference:

Apologies: Cathal Boylan, MLA

In Attendance: Lucia Wilson (Committee Clerk)
Kirsten McClelland (Assistant Committee Clerk - Remote)
Marion Johnson (Clerical Supervisor)
Karen Barry (Clerical Supervisor - Remote)
Yannie Mahood (Clerical Officer)

The meeting opened in public session at 2.06 pm.

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Cathal Boylan, MLA.

2. Draft minutes

Agreed: Members agreed the draft minutes of the meetings on 22 May 2025 and 29 May 2025.

3. Declaration of Interests

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

Cheryl Brownlee declared an interest as a member of the Northern Ireland Policing Board, a member of the Education Committee and a member of a Board of Governors of Sunnylands Primary School, Carrickfergus.

Diane Forsythe, MLA declared an interest as a member of the Board of Governors of Kilkeel Nursery School and Assembly Private Secretary to the Minister for Education.

Colin Crawford, MLA declared an interest as a member of the Education Committee and a member of a Board of Governors of Harryville Primary School, Ballymena.

David Honeyford, MLA declared an interest as a member of the Board of Governors of Dromara Primary School and in respect of a relative employed by the Education Authority.

Pádraig Delargy, MLA declared an interest as a member of the Board of Governors of Holy Child Primary School, Creggan, and former teacher, and in respect of family members who are GP's and regional representatives for the British Medical Association

4. Chairperson's Business

5. Matters Arising

Members noted a letter from the Northern Ireland Policing Board, advising of actions being taken in response to the NIAO report on PSNI Fleet Management.

Agreed: Members welcomed the ongoing monitoring of progress against the recommendations of the report and agreed to note the correspondence.

Members noted a letter from Ian Snowden, Accounting Officer for the Department for the Economy regarding the recent disclaimer on Departmental accounts providing a further update on work ongoing to address the matters raised by the disclaimer.

Agreed: Members agreed to note this correspondence and consider the matter further in the Autumn when the outcome of this year's accounts is known.

Agreed: Members agreed to share the correspondence with NIAO.

6. Correspondence

Members noted a memo from the Assembly and Executive Review Committee seeking views on how Committees best work together on cross-cutting issues and on scrutiny of cross-cutting legislation.

Agreed: Members agreed to the development of a draft response to be considered before the commencement of recess.

Pádraig Delargy, MLA joined the meeting at 2.16 pm.

The meeting moved into closed session at 2.17 pm.

7. Reducing Adults Reoffending in Northern Ireland: First consideration of draft report.

The following officials joined the meeting at 2.17 pm:

Dorinnia Carville, Comptroller and Auditor General;

Kyle Bingham, Assembly Support Officer, 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 this is a resumption of the first formal consideration for the report 'Reducing Adult Reoffending in Northern Ireland' which was deferred on 29 May 2025, and agreed the title of the report is 'Reducing Adult Reoffending 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 26 – 31

Paragraph 26: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 27: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 28: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 29: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 30: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 31: Read and Agreed

Agreed: Section Title: Despite the Department's efforts over the last decade, the reoffending rate in NI has largely remained static

Paras 32 – 35

Paragraph 32: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 33: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 34: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 35: Read and Agreed

Recommendation 1: Read and Agreed

Recommendation 2: Read and Agreed

Agreed: Section Title: A cross-departmental strategy to reduce offending and reoffending, with a real focus on action, urgently needs to be put in place

Paras 36 – 43

Paragraph 36: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 37: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 38: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 39: To be reworded

Paragraph 40: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 41: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 42: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 43: Read and Agreed

Recommendation 3: To be reworded

Agreed: Section Title: The enhanced strategic direction needs to be supported by a much stronger outcome measurement framework

Paras 44 – 45

Paragraph 44: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 45: Read and Agreed

Recommendation 4: To be reworded

Agreed: Section Title: Rehabilitation provision for short-term prisoners needs to be improved

Paras 46 – 52

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

Paragraph 51: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 52: Read and Agreed

Recommendation 5: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 53: Read and Agreed

Recommendation 6: To be reworded

Agreed: Section Title: Short-term custodial sentences are costly and more now needs to be done to develop viable community alternatives

Paras 54 – 57

Paragraph 54: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 55: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 56: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 57: Read and Agreed

Recommendation 7: To be reworded

Paragraph 59: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 60: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 61: Read and Agreed

Recommendation 8: To be reworded

Paragraph 62: Read and Agreed

Recommendation 9: To be reworded

Paragraph 63: Read and Agreed

Recommendation 10: To be reworded

Agreed: Section Title: Remand levels in NI are too high and are negatively impacting on reoffending

Paras 64 – 67

Paragraph 64: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 65: To be reworded

Paragraph 66: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 67: Read and Agreed

Recommendation 11: To be reworded

Agreed: Section Title: The VCS plays a vital role in rehabilitating offenders but needs more certainty on funding

Paras 68 - 70

Paragraph 68: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 69: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 70: Read and Agreed

Recommendation 12: Read and Agreed

Recommendation 13: To be reworded

The Committee then returned to the Executive Summary paragraphs 1 to 25 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: Read and Agreed

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

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

Paragraph 24: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 25: Read and Agreed

Recommendations 1 to 12:

Recommendation 1: Read and Agreed

Recommendation 2: Read and Agreed

Recommendation 3: To be reworded

Recommendation 4: To be reworded

Recommendation 5: Read and Agreed

Recommendation 6: To be reworded

Recommendation 7: To be reworded

Recommendation 8: To be reworded

Recommendation 9: To be reworded

Recommendation 10: Read and Agreed

Recommendation 11: To be reworded

Recommendation 12: Read and Agreed

Recommendation 13: To be reworded

That concluded the first consideration of the report – Reducing Adult Reoffending in Northern Ireland.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to bring the amended Report to its meeting on 19 June 2025 for final consideration

8. Reducing Adults Reoffending in Northern Ireland: Consideration of draft for Press Release

Agreed: Members agreed to defer the consideration of the draft press release to 19 June 2025.

The Chair thanked the C&AG and Northern Ireland Audit Office colleagues for their work on the inquiry to date.

9. Access to General Practice in Northern Ireland: Initial consideration of draft report.

The following officials joined the meeting at 2.36 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 received a briefing on the draft report.

Agreed: Members agreed to further consider the report in the Autumn to allow completion of analysis of survey results.

Agreed: Members agreed to a script for a video to provide an update on the inquiry to be released before the commencement of recess.

The Chair thanked the C&AG and Northern Ireland Audit Office colleagues for their work on the inquiry to date.

Officials left the meeting at 3.03 pm.

10. Managing the School's Estate: Preparation Session

The following officials joined the meeting at 3.03 pm:

Dorinnia Carville, Comptroller and Auditor General;

Patrick Barr, Director, Northern Ireland Audit Office;

Peter O'Sullivan, Audit Manager, Northern Ireland Audit Office;

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

Members received a briefing ahead of the evidence session scheduled for 12 June 2025.

Agreed: Members agreed to consider seeking further written evidence from schools managing authorities following the evidence session next week

Agreed: Members agreed to write to the DE Accounting Officer for data on maintenance costs of the entire schools estate over 5 years, in advance of the evidence session on 12 June.

The Chair thanked the C&AG and Northern Ireland Audit Office colleagues for their work on the inquiry to date.

Officials left the meeting at 3.27 pm.

11. Forward Work Programme

Agreed: Members agreed the draft forward work programme.

12. Any Other Business

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

The next meeting will take place in the Senate Chamber on Thursday 12 June 2025 at 2.00 pm.

The meeting was adjourned at 3.29 pm.

Daniel McCrossan

Chairperson, Public Accounts Committee

12 June 2025