



**Northern Ireland
Assembly**

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE

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Dear Accounting Officer,

As part of its inquiry into Public Procurement in Northern Ireland, Members have a number of questions to be directed to Accounting Officers, COPEs and Arm's Length Bodies. For your Department, and any associated Arm's Length Bodies, the Committee would be grateful if you could provide responses to the following questions by 19th August 2024:

1. In your view, does your Department have sufficient procurement capacity and capability to effectively manage its full range of procurement activities? If not, can you provide details on where there are potential shortfalls.
2. Within your Department have staff, with procurement responsibilities, received appropriate training to ensure they can perform their role effectively?
3. What actions has your Department taken since 2020 to ensure that your workforce possess sufficient capacity and capability? Members would be grateful if you could also provide detail in the form of facts or figures if possible.

Members would also appreciate if you could provide a response to the following questions in consultation with your Heads of CoPE;

4. Does your CoPE have a robust workforce plan that details the optimal workforce you will require over the next 3-5 years to deliver an effective service?

5. Is there any shortfall between your actual current total workforce and grade mix compared to that plan? Please provide details of optimal and actual FTEs.
6. Are there any specific professions or areas of expertise where your CoPE struggles to recruit and retain appropriately skilled and/or qualified staff? What do you feel are the barriers to recruitment and retention?
7. Has your CoPE considered or implemented any form of collaborative working with other CoPE to help address resource or workforce pressures?
8. The Northern Ireland Audit Office Report highlights a range of different reforms that were implemented between 2020 and 2022. In your opinion, were there any significant weaknesses, within the process used to develop and implement these changes, that may require lessons to be learned for future reforms of procurement arrangements?
9. In your opinion, have there been any negative consequences for your Department as a result of the reforms implemented? Please can you provide examples?
10. Is your Department adequately prepared to comply with the new requirements arising out of the implementation of the Procurement Act 2023? If not, please can you provide examples of areas where more work is required to comply with the new Act.

Yours sincerely,



Daniel McCrossan
Chairperson
Public Accounts Committee