



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Public Accounts Committee

Minutes of Proceedings

Thursday, 20 March 2025

Meeting Location: Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings

Present:

Daniel McCrossan, MLA

Cheryl Brownlee, MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

Diane Forsythe, MLA

Colin Crawford, MLA

David Honeyford, MLA

Colm Gildernew, MLA

Cathal Boylan, MLA

Present by Video or Teleconference:

Pádraig Delargy, MLA

Apologies: Tom Buchanan, MLA

In Attendance: Lucia Wilson (Committee Clerk)

Kirsten McClelland (Assistant Committee Clerk)

Marion Johnson (Clerical Supervisor)

Damien Brown (Clerical Officer)

The meeting opened in public session at 2.10 pm.

1. Apologies

Apologies were noted from Tom Buchanan, MLA.

2. Draft minutes

Agreed: The draft minutes of the meeting on 13 March 2025 were agreed.

3. Declaration of Interests

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

David Honeyford MLA declared an interest as a member of the Committee for the Economy in relation to Agenda Items 7 and 8.

Padraig Delargy MLA declared an interest as a member of the Committee for the Economy in relation to Agenda Items 7 and 8.

4. Chairperson's Business

5. Matters Arising

6. Correspondence

7. Treasury Officer of Accounts briefing on disclaimed Department for the Economy accounts.

Members noted a written brief from the Treasury Officer of Accounts on the C&AG Disclaimed Opinion on the Department for the Economy Accounts.

8. Department for the Economy oral evidence on disclaimed Department for the Economy accounts.

The following officials joined the meeting at 2.15 pm:

Ian Snowden, Accounting Officer, Department for the Economy;

Sharon Hetherington, Finance Director, Department for the Economy;

Iain McFarlane, Deputy Finance Director, Department for the Economy;

Dorinnia Carville, Comptroller and Auditor General;

Julie Sewell, Director, Public Audit and Accountability Branch, Department of Finance.

Members heard evidence on the disclaimed accounts of the Department for the Economy.

The Chair thanked the witnesses and Officials for attending. Witnesses left the meeting at 3.24 pm.

The meeting moved into closed session at 3.24 pm.

9. Inquiry into Major Capital Projects: Follow Up Report

The following officials joined the meeting at 3.25 pm:

Dorinnia Carville, Comptroller and Auditor General;

Patrick Barr, Director, Northern Ireland Audit Office;

Suzanne Murphy, Audit Manager, Northern Ireland Audit Office;

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

Members discussed the issues identified during the recent evidence sessions.

Agreed: Members agreed to rescind the decision of 20 February 2025 to approve the draft Major Capital Projects: Follow Up Report.

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 'Major Capital Projects: Follow Up Report' and agreed the title of the report is 'Major Capital Projects: Follow Up Report'.

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 28 – 29

Paragraph 28: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 29: Read and Agreed

Section 'Background': Paragraphs 30 – 34

Paragraph 30: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 31: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 32: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 33: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 34: Read and Agreed

Agreed: To be reworded: Section Title: Leadership, governance and the effectiveness of the NICS Board need urgently reviewed

Paras 35 – 42

Paragraph 35: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 36: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 37: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 38: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 39: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 40: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 41: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 42: Read and Agreed

Agreed: To be reworded: Section Title: Northern Ireland remains without an independent oversight body.

Paras 43 – 56

Paragraph 43: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 44: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 45: Read and Agreed

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

Paragraph 53: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 54: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 55: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 56: Read and Agreed

Agreed: To be reworded: Section Title: The arrangements for delivery of major capital projects in Northern Ireland remain not fit for purpose.

Paras 57 – 59

Paragraph 57: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 58: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 59: Read and Agreed

Agreed: To be reworded: Section Title: The critical importance of effective collaborative and partnership working.

Paras 60 - 64

Paragraph 60: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 61: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 62: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 63: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 64: Read and Agreed

Agreed: Section Title: Urgent action must be taken to address the identified root causes of delays and cost overruns.

Paras 65 - 67

Paragraph 65: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 66: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 67: Read and Agreed

Agreed: Section Title: ‘The importance of social licence must be understood and addressed by all involved in major capital projects.

Paras 68 - 73

Paragraph 68: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 69: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 70: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 71: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 72: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 73: Read and Agreed

Agreed: To be reworded: Section Title: The business case process must now deliver demonstrable positive impact.

Paras 74 – 76

Paragraph 74: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 75: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 76: Read and Agreed

Agreed: To be reworded: Section Title: Regrettably the Committee repeats again that the NICS must develop the capacity and capability to successfully deliver major capital projects.

Paras 77 – 85

Paragraph 77: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 78: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 79: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 80: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 81: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 82: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 83: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 84: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 85: Read and Agreed

The Committee then returned to the Executive Summary paragraphs 1 to 15 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

Recommendations 1 to 12:

Recommendation 1: Read and Agreed

Recommendation 2: Read and Agreed

Recommendation 3: Read and Agreed

Recommendation 4: Read and Agreed

Recommendation 5: Read and Agreed

Recommendation 6: Read and Agreed

Recommendation 7: Read and Agreed

Recommendation 8: Read and Agreed

Recommendation 9: Read and Agreed

Recommendation 10: Read and Agreed

Recommendation 11: Read and Agreed

Recommendation 12: Read and Agreed

That concluded the first consideration of the report – Major Capital Projects: Follow Up Report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to bring the amended Report to its meeting on 27 March 2025 for final consideration

Members considered the draft press release for the Major Capital Projects: Follow Up Report.

Agreed: Members agreed to bring the amended press release to its meeting on 27 March 2025 for final consideration.

The Chair thanked officials for attending.

Witnesses left the meeting at 3.59 pm.

10. Briefing Session on Inquiry into Reducing Adult Reoffending in Northern Ireland

The following officials joined the meeting at 3.59 pm:

Dorinnia Carville, Comptroller and Auditor General;

Connor McGeown, Audit Manager, Northern Ireland Audit Office;

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

Members received a briefing on the forthcoming inquiry into Reducing Adult Reoffending in Northern Ireland.

The Chair thanked Officials for attending.

Witnesses left the meeting at 4.16 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 27 March 2025 at 2.00 pm.

The meeting was adjourned at 4.20 pm.

Daniel McCrossan MLA

Chairperson, Public Accounts Committee

27 March 2025