



**Northern Ireland
Assembly**

AUDIT COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

**WEDNESDAY 26 OCTOBER 2016, ROOM 21, PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS,
BALLYMISCAW, STORMONT**

Present: John O'Dowd MLA, Chairperson
Claire Hanna MLA
David Hilditch MLA

In Attendance: Shane McAteer, Assembly Clerk
Keith McBride, Senior Assistant Assembly Clerk
Clairita Frazer, Assistant Assembly Clerk
Alison Ferguson, Clerical Officer

Apologies: Kellie Armstrong MLA, Deputy Chairperson
Jo-Anne Dobson MLA

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The meeting commenced at 10.03am in open session.

Agreed: that agenda items 5, 6 & 7 are recorded by Hansard.

Agreed: that agenda items 8 & 9 would be held in closed session to consider the Committee's position in relation to budgetary matters and sensitive correspondence.

1. Apologies.

As detailed above.

2. Declaration of Interests.

Members noted that they are obliged to declare any relevant financial or other interests before and during each Committee meeting.

3. Draft Minutes of meeting held on 21 September 2016.

The draft minutes of the meeting held on 21 September 2016 were agreed and will be published on the Committee website.

4. Matters Arising.

Members noted that the Assembly Research paper on Salary Arrangements for the Comptroller and Auditor General (C&AG) was not scheduled for today due to the already heavy agenda but would be scheduled at a later date.

The Committee noted that, following agenda items 5, 6 & 7, the Committee will need to reach a final position in relation to the 2017-18 budget plans of the Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO), Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO) and Northern Ireland Assembly Commission (NIAC).

5. NIAO evidence session on 2017-18 Budget plan.

The Chairperson welcomed the following NIAO officials to the meeting:

- Kieran Donnelly, C&AG;
- Janet Sides, Assistant Auditor General, NIAO;
- Andrew Allen, Audit Manager, NIAO; and
- Brandon McMaster, Audit Manager, NIAO.

The session was recorded by Hansard.

The Committee questioned the witnesses on NIAO's 2017-18 Budget plan.

Agreed: that the Committee Clerk liaises with the NIAO to arrange for a revised Terms of Reference for the proposed Value for Money study to be brought to the next Committee meeting, which should reflect the discussion today.

6. NIPSO evidence session on 2017-18 Budget plan.

The Chairperson welcomed the following NIPSO officials to the meeting:

- Ms Marie Anderson, Northern Ireland Ombudsman;
- Mr Paul McFadden, Deputy Ombudsman, NIPSO Office; and
- Ms Anne Scott, Finance and Corporate Services Manager, NIPSO Office.

The session was recorded by Hansard.

The Committee questioned the witnesses on NIPSO's 2017-18 Budget plan.

David Hilditch joined the meeting at 10.26am

7. NIAC evidence session on 2017-18 Budget plan.

The Chairperson welcomed the following NIAC officials to the meeting:

- Mrs Lesley Hogg, Clerk, Director General, Northern Ireland Assembly; and
- Mr Richard Stewart, Director of Resources, Northern Ireland Assembly.

The session was recorded by Hansard.

Members noted that the main area of focus for the Committee will be on NIAC's 'controllable costs' as there is a large proportion of the Assembly's budget that is determined by decisions of the Independent Financial Review Panel (IFRP).

The Committee questioned the witnesses on NIAC's 2017-18 Budget plan.

The Committee moved into closed session at 10.48am to agree its position in relation to the 2017-18 Budgets for NIAO, NIPSO and NIAC.

8. Consideration of Committee position on NIAO/NIPSO/NIAC budget plans

The Committee considered correspondence from the Minister of Finance outlining the view of the Department of Finance (DoF) on the 2017-18 budget plans of NIAO, NIPSO and NIAC. Members also considered a draft letter to the Finance Minister setting out the Committee's final position on each of the budget plans, based on its scrutiny work to date.

Agreed: that the letter to the Finance Minister is issued, as drafted, outlining the Committee's final position in relation to the 2017-18 budget plans for NIAO, NIPSO and NIAC and that this letter is copied to the three non-ministerial bodies for information.

Agreed: that the Committee will provide feedback, potentially through the Committee for Finance, on the issues identified from NIAC's consideration of using the Northern Ireland Civil Service Shared Services.

Agreed: to advise the Committee for Finance that the Audit Committee has reached its final position on the 2017-18 budget plans of NIAC, NIPSO and NIAC and has notified DoF of the agreed figures, which it expects will be reflected in the Executive's Budget document

The Committee noted an indicative timetable for the Executive's Budget 2017-18 provided by the Finance Committee, which indicated that the final Budget document will be laid in the Assembly on 9 January 2017.

9. Correspondence

The Committee noted the following items of correspondence:

- 9.1 Correspondence dated 21 September 2016 from NIPSO re Supreme Court Judgement, which had been requested following NIPSO's last evidence session with the Committee on 21 September 2016.
- 9.2 Correspondence dated 29 September 2016 from the Committee for Finance, providing further information on the Executive's 2017-18 Budget timetable.

9.3 Correspondence dated 04 October 2016 from NIPSO, advising that further information in relation to its new jurisdictions will be forwarded to the Committee as soon as possible.

9.4 Correspondence dated 10 October 2016 from a ‘whistleblower’.

Agreed: that a response to the correspondent is issued as drafted.

Agreed: to move into closed session to consider the next item of correspondence given the subject matter.

9.5 Correspondence dated 11 October 2016 from a ‘whistleblower’.

Agreed: that a response to the correspondent is issued as drafted.

Agreed: to return to open session for the remainder of the meeting.

The Committee moved into open session at 10.55am.

9.6 Correspondence dated 13 October 2016 from the Committee on Procedures, providing further information on its work in relation to E-petitions.

10. Any Other Business

There was no other business.

11. Date, Time and Place of Next Meeting

The date and time for the next meeting of the Committee will be notified to members in due course.

The Chairperson adjourned the meeting at 10.56am.

Mr John O’Dowd MLA
Chairperson
Audit Committee

30 November 2016