



## **PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE**

### **MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS**

THURSDAY, 19 MARCH 2020, THE SENATE CHAMBER,  
PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS

Present: Mr William Humphrey MLA (Chairperson)  
Mr Roy Beggs MLA (Deputy Chairperson)  
Mr Cathal Boylan MLA  
Mr Harry Harvey MLA  
Mr David Hilditch MLA

Apologies: Mr John Dallat MLA  
Ms Órlaithí Flynn MLA  
Mr Trevor Lunn MLA  
Mr Maolíosa McHugh MLA

In Attendance: Ms Lucia Wilson, Assembly Clerk  
Mrs Bronagh Irwin, Assistant Assembly Clerk  
Ms Karen Barry, Clerical Supervisor

*The meeting commenced in open session at 2.08 pm*

#### **1. Apologies**

Apologies noted from Mr John Dallat MLA, Ms Órlaithí Flynn MLA, Mr Trevor Lunn MLA and Mr Maolíosa McHugh MLA.

#### **2. Minutes of meeting on 12 March 2020**

The draft minutes of 12 March 2020 were agreed.

#### **3. Matters Arising**

The Committee discussed meeting arrangements given the current public health crisis and the fight to contain the spread of coronavirus following the Government's latest advice on 18 March 2020.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to suspend its forthcoming meetings until further notice and issue a press release detailing the Committees position and arrangements to work remotely.

#### **4. Declaration of Members' Interests**

There was no declaration of members' interests declared at the commencement of the meeting.

#### **5. Correspondence**

The Committee discussed Dr Edward Cooke's correspondence dated 10 March 2020 and noted they are not in a position to take this forward.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to Dr Cooke informing him that his letter has been forwarded to the Department for the Economy.

The Committee noted correspondence from the Northern Ireland Audit Office dated 13 March 2020 in response to a letter of 10 March 2020 from Mr Chris Murphy regarding the costs associated with the A6 Randalstown to Castledawson Dualling Scheme. The Northern Ireland Audit Office advised that they do not have access to the information requested.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to request this information from the Department for Infrastructure for the next evidence session.

The Committee noted correspondence from Mr Kieran Donnelly CB, Comptroller and Auditor General, Northern Ireland Audit Office, dated 13 March 2020 regarding a whistleblower's letter in respect of the Northern Ireland Audit Office Houses for Land (2004) report. This matter was raised by the whistleblower in June 2016. Mr Donnelly stated he had no further information to add to his response of June 2016.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to forward the response from the Comptroller and Auditor General dated 13 March 2020 to Ms Lesley Hogg, Clerk to the Assembly/Chief Executive for her to forward to the whistleblower.

*The meeting moved into closed session at 2.12 pm*

#### **6. Inquiry into Major Capital Projects – Briefing from Department for the Economy Officials**

*Mr Mike Brennan, Accounting Officer, Department for the Economy; Ms Heather Cousins, Deputy Secretary Department for the Economy; Mr Michael Donnelly, Head of Corporate Finance, Assets Management Unit Strategic Investment Board and Mr Philip Cromie, Head of Higher Education Finance, Department for the Economy joined the meeting.*

The departmental officials briefed the Committee on the Northern Ireland Audit Office Major Capital Project Report, Ulster University's Greater Belfast Development, followed by a question and answer session.

The Chairperson thanked officials for their attendance.

## **7. Inquiry into Major Capital Projects – Preparation Session**

Members agreed to defer this item of business to a date to be arranged.

## **8. Draft Forward Work Programme**

The Clerk briefed the Committee on the current draft forward work programme.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to defer evidence sessions as appropriate and write to the relevant witnesses who had been scheduled to attend.

## **9. Any Other Business**

The Chairperson discussed arrangements for agreeing business electronically and without Members having to attend Parliament Buildings due to emerging public health issues.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to delegate to the Chairperson the authority to agree any report, motion, amendment or any other matter where all committee members have been consulted and the Chair is satisfied that the decision represents the view of the majority of members who have responded.

## **10. Date, time and place of next meeting**

The next committee meeting will be confirmed in due course.

*The meeting was adjourned at 3.14 pm*

**Mr William Humphrey**  
**Chairperson**  
**Public Accounts Committee**