



PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

WEDNESDAY, 27 MAY 2020, THE SENATE CHAMBER,
PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS

Present: Mr William Humphrey MLA (Chairperson)
Mr Roy Beggs MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
*Ms Órlaithí Flynn MLA
*Mr Harry Harvey MLA
Mr David Hilditch MLA
Mr Maolíosa McHugh MLA
Mr Andrew Muir MLA
Mr Matthew O'Toole MLA

*These Members attended the meeting via telephone conferencing.

In Attendance: Ms Lucia Wilson, Assembly Clerk
Mrs Gillian Barker, Assistant Assembly Clerk
Ms Karen Barry, Clerical Supervisor

The meeting commenced in open session at 1.10 pm

1. Apologies

There were no apologies.

The Chair welcomed the new members to PAC: Mr Andrew Muir MLA who is replacing Mr Trevor Lunn MLA and Mr Matthew O'Toole MLA who is replacing the late Mr John Dallat MLA.

2. Minutes of meeting on 19 March 2020

The draft minutes of 19 March 2020 noted and signed.

3. Matters Arising

3.1 The Chair spoke on the death of PAC's esteemed colleague John Dallat MLA, noting his years of service and his huge contribution to the work of the Public Accounts Committee. He stated that a press release had been issued on behalf of the Committee and invited members to pay tribute to Mr John Dallat MLA.

3.2 The Committee noted the revised 'Guidance for Committees', dated 27 April 2020, that today's meeting is limited '*to considering matters relating to the COVID-19 response and or any other essential business.*'

4. Declaration of Members' Interests

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

5. Correspondence

5.1 The Committee discussed further correspondence from the whistleblower – letters dated 6 April, 21 April, 15 May and 18 May 2020. In compliance with GDPR, the Committee noted they had written to the whistleblower on 20 April 2020, to request permission to forward his correspondence to the Audit Office for its consideration. The Committee noted that this permission was declined.

Agreed: Committee agreed to seek legal advice from the NI Assembly's Legal Services on PAC's statutory function in respect of addressing the whistleblower's complaint regarding C&AG reports.

Agreed: Committee agreed to write to NIAO seeking information on their whistleblowing process and whether it had been applied in this case.

5.2 The Committee discussed correspondence received from Permanent Secretary for Communities, Ms Tracy Meharg dated 7 May 2020, on the Provision of a £5m Indemnity for retailers, and the Clerk's explanatory memo dated 27 May 2020.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to Ms Tracy Megard, Perm Secretary to ask for more details on the indemnity and why a contingent liability of £5m is needed for those retailers who are providing a priority on-line shopping service for those COVID-19 shielding members of the community.

The meeting continued in open session 1.35 pm

6. Ministerial Direction – DfE and DoF on the Covid-19 Business Support Grant Scheme and;

7. Ministerial Direction – DfE on Covid-19 Microbusiness Hardship Scheme

Committee agreed to take Agenda items 6 & 7 together.

Mr Kieran Donnelly CB, C&AG; Patrick Barr, Director NIAO and Kyle Bingham, Assembly Support Officer joined the meeting.

The Chair welcomed Mr Kieran Donnelly to the meeting and referred Members to the Clerk's memo dated 27 May 2020, the 2 Ministerial Directions received from DfE and DE on COVID-19 Business Support Grant Schemes dated 23 April 2020 and a COVID-19 Microbusiness Hardship Scheme dated 14 May 2020.

Mr Donnelly briefed the Committee which was followed by a question and answer session.

The Chair thanked Mr Donnelly for the briefing.

The meeting continued in open session at 2.01 pm

8. Update from the C&AG – The impact on NIAO's work programme since the outbreak of Covid-19.

Mr Kieran Donnelly CB, C&AG; Patrick Barr, Director NIAO and Kyle Bingham, Assembly Support Officer joined the meeting.

Mr Donnelly briefed the Committee on the impact to the NI Audit Office's work programme since the outbreak of COVID-19. The Committee noted how this would impact on PAC's future forward work programme, details of which will be discussed at a future PAC meeting.

9. Any Other Business

None

10. Date, time and place of next meeting

The next committee meeting will be confirmed in due course.

The meeting was adjourned at 2.19 pm

Mr William Humphrey

Chairperson

Public Accounts Committee

Dated: 27 May 2020

Signed:

William Humphrey MLA