



**Northern Ireland
Assembly**

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

**THURSDAY, 28TH JANUARY 2021, THE SENATE CHAMBER,
PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS**

Present: Mr William Humphrey MBE MLA (Chairperson)
Mr Roy Beggs MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Cathal Boylan MLA
Mr Harry Harvey MLA
Mr David Hilditch MLA
Mr Matthew O'Toole MLA

Attending Remotely Ms Órlaithí Flynn MLA
Mr Andrew Muir MLA
Mr Maoliosa McHugh MLA

Apologies: None

In Attendance: Ms Lucia Wilson, Assembly Clerk
Ms Gillian Barker, Assistant Assembly Clerk
Ms Karen Barry, Clerical Supervisor
Mr Darren Weir, Clerical Officer

The meeting began in Open Session at 2.08 pm

***Mr Kieran Donnelly CB C&AG joined the meeting; and Mr Kyle Bingham
Assembly Support Work joined the meeting remotely.***

1. Apologies

None

2. Minutes of the meeting 21st January 2021

Agreed: The draft minutes of the meeting on 21st January 2021 were agreed and to be published.

3. Declaration of Interests

- Mr Roy Beggs MLA declared he was a Governor of Roddensvale School, Larne;
- Cathal Boylan MLA, declared he was a Governor of Clea Primary School, Keady;
- William Humphrey MLA, declared he was a Governor of Edenbrooke Primary School and Governor of Belfast Model School for Girls;
- Mr Andrew Muir MLA, declared he was a Governor of Priory Integrated College, Holywood;
- Mr Maolíosa McHugh MLA declared he was Chairman of pre-school Naíscóil na Deirg.

4. Matters Arising

At last week's meeting the Committee agreed Members would continue to hold hybrid meetings, i.e. that Members should have the option to attend meetings either remotely or in person, in line with social distancing measures as they relate to the recent Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (No 2) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2021 made on 7 January 2021.

The Committee noted new guidelines which had been forward to all Chairpersons '*Actions for Committees to discuss in order to minimise face-to-face interactions and reduce risk at committee meetings*' in line with adhering to the recent regulations.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to continue holding hybrid meetings and would keep the matter under review.

5. Correspondence

The Committee noted correspondence dated 20 January 2021 from Tracy Meharg, AO, DfC regarding further information on Blue Light Regulations around Casement Park. Ms Meharg has provided a comprehensive response including a synopsis of the Belfast City Council's Safety Technical Group decisions and the PSNI statutory consultee response to the Casement Park Planning Application, in relation to Casement Park.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to return to this issue next week due to the extent of the response and time constraints this week.

The Committee noted correspondence, dated 21 January 2021, from Sara Long, CE EA, regarding EA's current HR investigation. Ms Long has requested the Committee contact EA Board Member Ms Pat Carville OBE, who is chairing the Interim Staffing Committee, in any future aspects of this matter.

The Committee noted correspondence, dated 21 January 2021, from Patricia Carville OBE, Chair of the Interim Staffing Committee, EA. Ms Carville OBE, has suggested that any information sought by PAC regarding the ongoing employment investigation, is directed to her in the first instance for the Interim Staffing Committee's consideration and response.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to Ms Carville OBE, to request further information on the timeline for the completion of the HR internal investigation,

The Committee noted correspondence, dated 22 January 2021, from Katrina Godfrey, AO, DFI, regarding confirmation of her attendance on 18 February 2021 for the evidence session on inquiry on 'Driver & Vehicle Agency 2019-20'.

The Committee noted correspondence, dated 25 January 2021, from the Construction Employers Federation regarding their submission to the Committee for Finance on draft Budget January 2021.

The meeting remained in Open Session at 2.21 pm

6. Ministerial Direction: Pilot scheme to address Period Poverty in schools

Mr Kieran Donnelly CB C&AG joined the meeting.

The Committee noted correspondence to Mr Kieran Donnelly CB C&AG, dated 13 January 2021, from Alison Chambers, Director, Department of Education, that the Minister of Education, with the approval of the Northern Ireland Executive, has provided a Ministerial Direction to the Acting Permanent Secretary of the Department of Education to implement a pilot scheme to address period poverty in schools.

The Committee noted the officials in DE have prepared options for Ministerial consideration regarding the provision of free sanitary products in schools in April 2020, which included details of schemes that are in place in the rest of the UK. The Minister of Education requested that options be developed in detail for his consideration.

The C&AG briefed the Committee on the pilot scheme regarding a Ministerial Direction, noting the relevant correspondence which underpins the decision to proceed with the delivery of the pilot scheme. The C&AG and Committee noted the estimated cost of the pilot scheme across 3 academic years, incurred across 5 financial years, is estimated to be a total of £2.6m. The Executive has agreed to provide funding of £725k (£60k 2020/21 £ 665k 2020/22).

Agreed: The Committee noted the Ministerial Direction.

The meeting remained in Open Session at 2.25 pm

7. Inquiry into ‘Capacity and Capability in the NICS’ – Preparation Session

Mr Kieran Donnelly CB C&AG remained in the meeting. Mr Kyle Bingham Assembly Support Officer and Mr Rodney Director joined the meeting remotely.

The Committee discussed the forthcoming evidence session with Ms Sue Gray AO DoF in closed session, on ‘Capacity and Capability in NICS’.

The Committee noted papers for next week’s evidence session:

- NIAO report on ‘Capacity and Capability in the NICS’;
- NIAO restricted Issues Paper from evidence session on 3 December 2020;
- Correspondence dated 18 December 2020 from Sue Gray, AO, DoF; and
- Restricted Memo prepared by the Clerk on areas of suggested questioning.

The meeting remained in Closed Session at 2.42 pm

8. Inquiry into ‘Special Educational Needs’ – Consideration of draft report – Restricted Paper.

Mr Kieran Donnelly CB C&AG and Ms Collette Kane Director joined the meeting.

Mr Kyle Bingham Assembly Support Officer; Ms Suzanne Murphy, Audit Manager and Ms Karen Armstrong Senior Auditor joined the meeting remotely.

Mr David Hilditch MLA left the meeting at 2.45 pm

Mr David Hilditch MLA re-joined the meeting at 3.05 pm

The Committee noted that due to the virtual nature of the committee’s work at present, it was no longer be possible to issue ‘paper based’ confidential packs. Therefore, the draft report had been issued in the tabled pack, marked restricted.

Agreed: The Committee noted it remains each Members responsibility to keep these restricted papers confidential.

The Committee considered its draft report into its inquiry into Special Educational Needs

The Committee agreed the title of the report ‘**Report on Impact Review of Special Educational Needs.**’

Executive Summary: Paragraphs 1 – 13

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 as amended
Paragraph 8	Read and Agreed
Paragraph 9	Read and Agreed as amended
Paragraph 10	Read and Agreed as amended
Paragraph 11	Read and Agreed
Paragraph 12	Read and Agreed as amended
Paragraph 13	Read and Agreed

Recommendations 1 – 7: Paragraphs 14 – 20

Recommendation 1 : Paragraph 14	Read and Agreed
Recommendation 2 : Paragraph 15	Read and Agreed as amended
Recommendation 3 : Paragraph 16	Read and Agreed
Recommendation 4: Paragraph 17	Read and Agreed
Recommendation 5 : Paragraph 18	Read and Agreed
Recommendation 6 : Paragraph 19	Read and Agreed
Recommendation 7 : Paragraph 20	Read and Agreed as amended

Introduction: Paragraph 21

Paragraph 21	Read and Agreed
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Background: Paragraphs 22 - 26

Paragraph 22	Read and Agreed
Paragraph 23	Read and Agreed
Paragraph 24	Read and Agreed
Paragraph 25	Read and Agreed
Paragraph 26	Read and Agreed

The Committee agreed the wording of ALL section titles for the remainder of the report, covering paragraphs 27 – 58. Amendments to the paragraphs 27 - 58 are noted below under each section title.

Paragraph 27	Read and Agreed
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Paragraph 28	Read and Agreed as amended
Paragraph 29	Read and Agreed
Paragraph 30	Read and Agreed as amended
Paragraph 31	Read and Agreed
Paragraph 32	Read and Agreed as amended
Paragraph 33	Read and Agreed as amended
Paragraph 34	Read and Agreed
Paragraph 35	Read and Agreed
Paragraph 36	Read and Agreed as amended
Paragraph 37	Read and Agreed as amended
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
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 as amended
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 as amended
Paragraph 54	Read and Agreed
Paragraph 55	Read and Agreed as amended
Paragraph 56	Read and Agreed
Paragraph 57	Read and Agreed
Paragraph 58	Read and Agreed as amended

Agreed: The Committee noted this concluded the first consideration of the report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the appendices of the report would include:

- Extract from the minutes
- Hansard
- Correspondence.

Agreed: The Committee agreed for a final consideration of the report at next week's meeting; and noted it is proposed to launch the report towards the end of February 2021.

The Committee remained in Closed Session at 3.39 pm

9. Draft Forward Work Programme

The Committee noted the amended draft forward work programme January–March 2021 reflecting the inquiry into ‘Generating Electricity from Renewable Energy’ has been deferred and that it will be rescheduled as soon as possible.

The Committee noted Ms Deirdre Toner, Chairperson on NICS Commissioners, has agreed to attend the meeting of 4th March 2021.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the amended draft Forward Work Programme and to write to Ms Toner to confirm her attendance on 4th March 2021.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to discuss current and forthcoming NIAO reports at next week's meeting in regard to primacy and their forward work programme into the summer.

10. Any Other Business

None

11. Date, time and place of next meeting

The next meeting of the Public Accounts Committee will take place on Thursday 4th February 2021 at 2.00 p.m. in Room 30, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting adjourned at 3.47 pm.

Mr William Humphrey MBE MLA

**Chairperson
Public Accounts Committee**

28th January 2021

Signed