



**Northern Ireland  
Assembly**

**PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE**

**MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS**

THURSDAY, 4<sup>TH</sup> FEBRUARY 2021, ROOM 30,  
PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS

Present: Mr William Humphrey MBE MLA (Chairperson)  
Mr Roy Beggs MLA (Deputy Chairperson)  
Mr Matthew O'Toole MLA

Attending Remotely Mr Cathal Boylan MLA  
Mr Harry Harvey MLA  
Ms Órlaithí Flynn MLA  
Mr Andrew Muir MLA  
Mr Maoliosa McHugh MLA

Apologies: Mr David Hilditch MLA

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 2.10 pm*

**1. Apologies**

Mr David Hilditch MLA

**2. Minutes of the meeting 28<sup>th</sup> January 2021**

*Agreed:* The draft minutes of the meeting on 28<sup>th</sup> 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 MBE 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 Naíscoil na Deirg.
- Mr Matthew O'Toole MLA declared he had previously worked with Ms Sue Gray AO DoF.

### **4. Matters Arising**

The Committee noted correspondence dated 20 January 2021 from Tracy Meharg, AO, DfI regarding the 'Blue Light Regulations' for Casement Park Stadium.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to forward Ms Meharg's correspondence of 20 January 2021 to the Communities Committee and if necessary to revisit this matter when the Memorandum of Reply was received regarding PAC's Major Capital Projects Report.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to keep this matter under review.

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

### **5. Correspondence**

The Committee noted correspondence dated 29 January 2021 from Westminster PAC Chair, Meg Hillier MP on a proposal for co-operation of PAC committees on consequences of the new arrangements at the UK border, including trade and customs arrangements.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to discuss this issue under Agenda Item 9: the draft Forward Work Programme.

The Committee noted correspondence dated 31 January 2021 from Alan Dransfield regarding his concerns around wind turbines. Mr Dransfield has been asked for his permission to forward his correspondence under GDPR to relevant third parties.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to forward Mr Dransfield's correspondence to NIAO, subject to his permission, and to inform Mr Dransfield that his correspondence will be considered when the inquiry into 'Generating Electricity from Renewable Energy' commences.

The Committee noted correspondence dated 21 January 2021 from Lloyd Crawford, Chroma Lighting, in respect of NICS managing contracts and the existing tendering process.

*Agreed:* The Committee noted Mr Crawford's correspondence and agreed to forward it to NIAO.

***The meeting remained in Open Session at 2.19 pm***

## **6. Ministerial Directions:**

*Mr Kieran Donnelly CB C&AG joined the meeting.*

The Committee noted correspondence, dated 2 February 2021, from Sue Gray AO DoF, regarding its letter of 18 December 2020, requesting further information in relation to the Ministerial Direction and the temporary financial support for City of Derry Airport (CODA) and separately Belfast International Airport (BIA) and Belfast City Airport (BCA).

The Committee noted that Ms Gray has asked Stuart Stevenson, TOA, and his team to draft updated guidance requiring Departments to publish Ministerial Directions as quickly as possible after the NIAO and the Committee has been informed.

*Agreed:* The Committee noted Ms Grays comprehensive correspondence regarding the ministerial direction.

**MINISTERIAL DIRECTION: Limited Company Directors Support Scheme (LCDSS)**

The Committee noted correspondence dated 29 January from the C&AG regarding correspondence to the C&AG from the DfE Permanent Secretary, Mr Mike Brennan. Mr Brennan wrote to the C&AG on 25 January 2021 to advise that he had sought a ministerial direction from the DfE Minister, Diane Dodds MLA, on 16 December 2020 to implement a Limited Company Director Support Scheme (LCDSS).

**MINISTERIAL DIRECTION: Large Tourism and Hospitality Business Support Scheme (LTHBSS)**

The Committee noted correspondence dated 29 January 2021 from the C&AG regarding correspondence dated 27 January 2021, to the C&AG, from the Permanent Secretary, Mr Mike Brennan. Mr Brennan advised the C&AG that he had sought a ministerial direction from the DfE Minister, Diane Dodds MLA, on 19 January 2021 to implement a Large Tourism and Hospitality Business Support Scheme (LTHBSS).

The C&AG gave the Committee an update on the two Ministerial Directions as outlined above.

*Agreed:* The Committee noted the relevant information underpinning the decision to proceed with the ministerial direction, LCDSS.

*Agreed:* The Committee noted the relevant information underpinning the decision to proceed with the ministerial direction LTHBSS.

***The meeting went into Closed Session at 2.31 pm***

## **7. Inquiry into ‘Capacity and Capability in the NICS’ – Evidence Session**

*Ms Sue Gray AO DoF joined the meeting.*

*In attendance Mr Kieran Donnelly CB C&AG and Mr Rodney Director; and Mr Kyle Bingham Assembly Support Officer joined the meeting remotely.*

The Committee noted papers for the 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.

Ms Gray made an opening statement which was followed by a question and answer session.

*Mr Matthew O’Toole MLA left the meeting at 3.45 pm*

*Mr Matthew O’Toole re-joined the meeting at 3.51 pm*

*Ms Gray left the meeting at 4.16pm*

The Committee discussed with Mr Kieran Donnelly C&AG and his team the evidence it had received from Ms Gray regarding the ‘NIAO Report Capacity and Capability in the NICS’.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to request some further information from Ms Gray following the evidence session.

*The meeting remained in Closed Session at 4.28 pm*

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

*Mr Kieran Donnelly CB C&AG joined the meeting.*

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

The Committee considered the final draft of the ‘Report on Impact Review of Special Educational Needs’.

*Agreed:* The Committee read and agreed under the Executive Summary, paragraphs 7,9 and 12.

*Agreed:* The Committee read and agreed under recommendation 2 paragraph 15; and under recommendation 7, paragraph 20.

*Agreed:* The Committee read and agreed paragraphs 28, 30, 32,33, 36, 37, 58, 53, 55 and 58.

The Committee noted this concluded the final consideration of the report and noted it remains each Members responsibility to keep these restricted papers confidential.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to launch the report on 25<sup>th</sup> February 2021 and noted a press release would be prepared by the Clerk for 18<sup>th</sup> February 2021 for the Committee to agree.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed the report should be Ordered to Print.

*The Committee remained in Closed Session at 4.37 pm*

**9. Draft Forward Work Programme**

The Committee noted the amended draft forward work programme January–March 2021 including the attendance of the Civil Service Commissioners on 4<sup>th</sup> March 2021.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to Mr Mike Brennan, AO DoE to give evidence on 18<sup>th</sup> or 25<sup>th</sup> March 2021 regarding inquiry into ‘Generating Electricity from Renewable Energy’.

The Committee noted correspondence dated 29 January 2021, from Meg Hillier MP, Westminster PAC Chair, on a proposal for co-operation of committees on consequences of the new arrangements at the UK border, including trade and customs arrangement.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to discuss this further at next week's meeting when the Clerk will have a paper on options on taking this forward.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to the interim HOCS, Ms Jenny Pyper once the Memorandum of Reply is received for the Report on Major Capital Projects, to organise a meeting with the Chair and Deputy Chair.

## **10. Any Other Business**

The Committee noted correspondence dated 2 February 2021 from Mr Paul Murnaghan, Regional Director NI, BT Enterprise regarding Report on LandWeb Project and Digital Transformation Report.

*Agreed:* Committee agreed to address this matter at next week's meeting.

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

The next meeting of the Public Accounts Committee will take place on Thursday 11<sup>th</sup> February 2021 at 2.00 p.m. in The Senate, Parliament Buildings.

*The meeting adjourned at 4.46 pm.*

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

**4<sup>th</sup> February 2021**

**Signed .....**