



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Public Accounts Committee

Minutes of Proceedings

Thursday, 30 September 2021

Meeting Location: Room 30, Parliament Buildings, Belfast

Present: Mr William Humphrey MBE MLA (Chairperson)
Mr Roy Beggs MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr David Hilditch MLA

Present by Video or Teleconference:

Ms Órlaithí Flynn MLA
Mr Maolíosa McHugh MLA
Mr William Irwin MLA
Mr Matthew O'Toole MLA

Apologies: Mr Cathal Boylan MLA
Mr Andrew Muir MLA

In Attendance: Ms Aoibhinn Treanor (Assembly Clerk)
Ms Gillian Barker (Assistant Assembly Clerk)
Ms Suzanne Patton (Clerical Supervisor)

The meeting went into Open Session at 2.05 pm.



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1. Apologies

Mr Cathal Boylan MLA
Mr Andrew Muir MLA

2. Draft Minutes of 23 September 2021

Agreed: The draft minutes of the meeting of 23 September 2021 were signed and agreed to be published.

3. Declaration of Interest

The following Members declared an interest in Agenda Item 7, Briefing and Preparation Session regarding the Committee's new inquiry into 'Closing the Gap – Social Deprivation and links to Educational Attainment'.

Mr William Humphrey MBE MLA declared he is Governor of Girls Model Belfast and Edenbrooke Primary School; and
Mr Roy Beggs MLA declared he is Governor of Roddensvale School, Larne

4. Matters Arising

None.

5. Correspondence

The following NIAO Officials joined the meeting:

Mr Rodney Allen, Chief Operating Officer and;
Mr Patrick Barr, Director.

The following NIAO Official joined the meeting remotely:

Mr Kyle Bingham, Assembly Support Officer.



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Indemnity Arrangements – Military Assistance for Civilian Authorities

The Committee noted correspondence dated 28 September 2021 from Minister Swann regarding COVID Indemnity Arrangements October 2021 - Military Assistance for Civilian Authorities (MACA), to provide Employer Liability cover to support existing medical staff in delivering COVID vaccinations.

The Committee noted that normally when a department proposes to undertake a Contingent Liability in excess of £250,000, the department is required to give the Assembly 14 days' notice before entering into an indemnity. However, in light of the ongoing pandemic response, this has not been possible.

Minister Swann has now notified PAC of this indemnity and that the Department has entered into by means of this letter, that has also been copied to the Chair of the Health Committee.

Pivotal Report – Transforming the 14-19 education and skills system in Northern Ireland

The Committee noted correspondence dated 28 September 2021 from Anne Watt, Pivotal's Director regarding their recent report, 'Transforming the 14-19 education and skills system in Northern Ireland – voices and solutions'. The report compiles the views of young people in the 14-19 age group on the education system.

The Committee noted Theme 5 which addresses the barriers identified by young people leaving care with regard to education and skills, suggesting there is a significant gap between the educational achievement of care leavers and other young people in Northern Ireland.

The Committee noted the report and potential parallels with the NIAO Report 'Closing the Gap – Social Deprivation and links to Educational Attainment', PAC's tenth inquiry.

The meeting remained in Open Session at 2.11 pm



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6. Ministerial Direction: Northern Ireland Domestic Aviation Kickstart Scheme

The following NIAO Officials joined the meeting:

Mr Rodney Allen, Chief Operating Office and
Mr Patrick Barr, Director

The following NIAO Official joined the meeting remotely:

Mr Kyle Bingham, Assembly Support Officer, remotely.

The Committee noted correspondence from Kieran Donnelly CB C&AG dated 21 September 2021 regarding Ministerial Direction: Northern Ireland Domestic Aviation Kickstart Scheme. The DfE Permanent Secretary wrote to the C&AG on 28 June 2021 to advise that he had sought a Ministerial Direction from the DfE Minister, Paul Frew MLA, on 17 June 2021 to implement the Northern Ireland Domestic Aviation Kickstart Scheme (NIDAKS). The scheme will operate from 1 June 2021 to 31 October 2021.

The Committee noted the background paper to the Ministerial Direction regarding the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic which has had a profound impact upon the aviation industry: globally, nationally and regionally. The aviation sector is critical to the UK economy, providing connectivity to support a global and connected UK and arguably even more vital to Northern Ireland due to its geographical location.

The Committee noted rebuilding NI's regional and international air connectivity will be essential to rebuilding our economy in the months ahead, as we restart after the COVID pandemic. The Permanent Secretary advised the C&AG that £5m was provisionally allocated for NIDAKS for 2021-22 under the Minister's published Economic Recovery Action Plan (ERAP).



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The Committee noted the relevant correspondence which underpinned the decision to proceed with the delivery of the scheme.

The meeting went into Closed Session at 2.15 pm

7. Inquiry into ‘Closing the Gap – Social Deprivation and Links Education’ – Briefing and Preparation Session.

The following NIAO Officials joined the meeting:

Mr Rodney Allen, Chief Operating Officer, and
Mr Patrick Barr, Director.

The following NIAO Officials joined the meeting remotely:

Mr Andrew Allen, Audit Manager, and
Mr Kyle Bingham, Assembly Support Officer.

Mr Rodney Allen, Chief Operating Officer, NIAO and his team, briefed the Committee on NIAO’s Value For Money Report ‘Closing the Gap – Social Deprivation and links to Educational Attainment’. The Committee discussed the forthcoming evidence session scheduled for 7 October 2021 and noted the following papers:

- NIAO Report ‘Closing the Gap – Social Deprivation and links to Educational Attainment’;
- Biographies of the witnesses attending;
- NIAO RESTRICTED PAPER Briefing & Preparation and
- NIAO RESTRICTED PAPER Potential Questions

Agreed: The Committee noted the relevant papers and the key areas of questioning.



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Agreed: The Committee agreed to invite Dr Noel Purdy, Stranmillis University College, to give evidence on the inquiry. Dr Purdy is Chair of an Expert Panel appointed by the Education Minister on 28 July 2020, to examine the links between educational underachievement and social disadvantage.

The meeting remained in Closed Session at 2.41 pm

Mr Matthew O'Toole MLA joined the meeting at 2.41 pm

8. Final Consideration of Draft Report – ‘Inquiry into Speeding up the Justice System’.

The following NIAO Officials joined in the meeting:

Mr Rodney Allen, Chief Operating Officer, and
Mr Patrick Barr, Director.

The following Officials joined the meeting remotely:

Mr Neil Gray, Director;
Mr Michael Heery, Audit Manager, and
Mr Kyle Bingham, Assembly Support Officer.

The Committee noted the Final draft of the report ‘**Speeding up the Justice System**’ is classified as RESTRICTED and therefore for Members’ use only.

The Committee considered the amended paragraphs as agreed at last week’s meeting regarding the draft Report ‘**Speeding up the Justice System**’. The following paragraphs were amended and agreed:

Paragraph 2 - amended and agreed;



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Paragraph 5 - amended and agreed;
Paragraph 7 - amended and agreed;
Paragraph 11 - amended and agreed;
Paragraph 12 - amended and agreed;
Paragraph 14 - amended and agreed;
Paragraph 15 – bold text amended and agreed
Paragraph 23 - amended and agreed;
Paragraph 29 - amended and agreed;
Paragraph 30 - amended and agreed;
Paragraph 31 - amended and agreed;
Paragraph 36 – rewording agreed
Paragraph 43 – bold text rewording agreed.

Agreed: The Committee agreed this concluded the Report and to order the Report to Print. The appendices of the report would be included: extracts from the minutes; Hansard; and correspondence.

The meeting remained in Closed Session at 2.56 pm

9. Draft Forward Work Programme

The following NIAO Officials joined in the meeting:

Mr Rodney Allen, Chief Operating Officer, and
Mr Patrick Barr, Director.

The following Official joined the meeting remotely:

Mr Kyle Bingham, Assembly Support Officer.



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The Committee noted the September 2021 to March 2022 draft Forward Work Programme and noted an invitation has gone to Dr Jayne Brady, HOCS to attend a PAC meeting in the near future.

The Committee noted a provisional date for the evidence session regarding 'Strategic Review of the Budget Process' as 25 November 2021 and noted the evidence session for the inquiry into 'NI Addiction Services' as 21 October 2021.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the draft Forward Work Programme and agreed to publish.

The meeting remained in Closed Session at 2.56 pm

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 7 October, at 2.00 pm in The Senate, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting adjourned at 2.58 pm.

Mr William Humphrey MBE MLA
Chairperson
Public Accounts Committee
30 September 2021