



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Public Accounts Committee

Minutes of Proceedings

Thursday, 10 March 2022

Meeting Location: The Senate, 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:

Mr Cathal Boylan MLA
Ms Órlaithí Flynn MLA
Ms Cara Hunter MLA
Mr William Irwin MLA
Mr Andrew Muir MLA
Mr Maolíosa McHugh MLA

Apologies: None

In Attendance: Mr Peter McCallion (Clerk)
Ms Gillian Barker (Assistant Assembly Clerk)
Ms Suzanne Patton (Clerical Supervisor)
Ms Marion Johnston (Clerical Officer)



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The following NIAO Officials joined the meeting:

Mr Kieran Donnelly CB C&AG;
Mr Rodney Allen, Chief Operating Officer;
Ms Colette Kane, Director;
Ms Suzanne Murphy, Senior Auditor; and
Mr Roger McCance, Audit Manager.

The following NIAO Official joined the meeting remotely:

Mr Kyle Bingham, Assembly Support Officer.

The meeting opened in public session at 2.05pm.

1. Apologies

There were no apologies

2. Draft Minutes of 3 and 8 March 2022

Agreed: The draft minutes of the meetings of 3 and 8 March 2022 were signed and agreed to be published.

Mr Andrew Muir MLA joined the meeting at 2:07pm

3. Declaration of Interests

The following Members declared an interest in Agenda Item 7 & 8, Review of Special Educational Needs – update on the MOR:

Mr William Humphrey MBE MLA declared he is: a Governor of Edenbrooke Primary School, a Governor of Girls Model Belfast; and a former pupil of Boys Model.

Mr Roy Beggs MLA declared he is a Governor of Roddensvale School, Larne and a Committee Member of SureStart.



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Mr Cathal Boylan MLA declared he is a Governor of Clea Primary School, Keady.

Mr Andrew Muir MLA declared he is a Governor of Priory Integrated College, Holywood.

4. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising

5. Correspondence

The following NIAO Officials joined the meeting room:

Mr Kieran Donnelly CB C&AG;
Mr Rodney Allen, Chief Operating Officer;
Ms Colette Kane, Director;
Ms Suzanne Murphy; and
Mr Roger McCance, Audit Manager.

The following NIAO Official joined the meeting remotely:

Mr Kyle Bingham, Assembly Support Officer.

Mr Edward Cooke

The Committee noted correspondence from Mr Edward Cooke dated 4 March 2022, regrading Section 75 Screening at Queen's University; Mr Cooke highlighted concerns in respect of the treatment of student complaints.

The C&AG informed the Committee he will be responding to Mr Cooke on additional concerns Mr Cooke has raised with the Audit Office.



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Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to Mr Cooke indicating that it had noted his concerns and his correspondence had been forwarded to the Audit Office.

Ms Allen CE NILGA

The Committee noted correspondence from Mr Alison Allen CE NILGA dated 7 March 2022, in relation its inquiry into 'Planning in Northern Ireland'. Ms Allen had advised that all Councils have appropriate and robust polices in place to deal with any potential conflicts of interest and that those arrangements are routinely audited.

Agreed: The Committee noted that Ms Allen had confirmed that NILGA had raised no concerns in relation to how conflicts of interest are managed for council planning officers.

Mr Mike Kiely – Inquiry into 'Broadband Investment in NI'

The Committee noted correspondence from Mr Mike Kiely received 9 March 2022 regarding PAC's inquiry. Mr Kiely had asked this information is included in PAC's Report 'Broadband Investment in NI'.

Agreed: The Committee agreed this correspondence would be included in the appendices of the final report 'Broadband Investment in NI'.

Mr Maoliosa McHugh MLA joined the meeting at 2.10pm

The meeting continued in public session at 2.12pm

6. Ministerial Direction 'Covid Employment and Skills Initiative'.

The following NIAO Officials joined the meeting:

Mr Kieran Donnelly CB C&AG;
Ms Colette Kane, Director and
Mr Roger McCance, Audit Manager

The following NIAO Official joined the meeting remotely:



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Ms Tomas Wilkinson, Director;
Mr Kyle Bingham, Assembly Support Officer

The Committee noted correspondence from Mr Kieran Donnelly CB C&AG dated 7 March 2022, regarding a letter he received from the DfC Permanent Secretary Ms Tracy Meharg dated 22 February 2022, to advise him that the DfC Minister, Deirdre Hargey MLA issued a Ministerial Direction to deliver the Covid Recovery Programme Employment and Skills Initiative which will cost up to £20 million. The initiative is to provide funding for the next three years for grants to support individuals and not-for-profit organisations with costs for a variety of new or enhanced roles within the Arts, Heritage, Creative Industries, Sports and Voluntary and Community sectors.

This initiative is being delivered by four partners:

- Future Screens NI,
- Heritage Fund,
- The Rank Foundation, and
- BBC.

Agreed: The Committee noted the relevant Ministerial Direction.

Agreed: The Committee noted Mr Donnelly will keep this matter under view as the audit of the 2021-22 financial statements progresses.

The meeting continued in public session at 2.14pm

7. PAC Report 'Review of Special Educational Needs Impact' – MOR Update: Evidence Session

The following Officials joined the meeting:

Dr Mark Browne AO DE;
Ms Sarah Long CE EA;
Ms Una Turbit EA, Interim Director of Children and Young People's Services;
Mr Ricky Irwin DE, Director, Inclusion and Wellbeing; and



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Mrs Lindsay Farrell DE, Deputy Secretary.

In attendance:

Mr Kieran Donnelly CB C&AG and Mr Stuart Stevenson TOA, remotely.

The Committee noted the relevant papers:

- Briefing Paper with suggested Questions;
- NIAO Report 'Review of Special Educational Needs';
- SEN MOR dated 30 April 2021;
- SEN MOR dated 21 October 2021;
- NIAO Report 'Closing the Gap: Social Deprivation and links to Educational Needs; and
- Witness Biographies.

Dr Mark Browne AO DE opened the evidence session with a statement, followed by a statement from Ms Sara Long CE EA. There then followed a question and answer session.

Ms Cara Hunter MLA left the meeting at 2.50 pm

Mr Cathal Boylan MLA left the meeting at 3.11pm

The meeting continued in private session at 3.18pm.

8. PAC Report 'Review of Special Educational Needs Impact' – MOR Update: Discussion.

The following NIAO Officials joined the meeting:

Mr Kieran Donnelly CB C&AG; and
Ms Colette Kane, Director and
Mr Roger McCance, Audit Manager.



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The following NIAO Official joined the meeting remotely:

Ms Suzanne Murphy, Audit Manager; and
Mr Kyle Bingham, Assembly Support Officer

The Committee and NIAO Officials discussed the evidence session. The Committee expressed concerns at the lack of progress on the two independent reviews recommended in the SEN Report published 4 February 2021.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to Dr Mark Browne AO DE and Ms Sara Long CE EA indicating its concerns and seeking an explanation and timeline for action.

The Committee noted that the successor PAC will likely receive and consider the MoR regarding PAC's Report 'Closing the Gap: Social Deprivation and links to Educational Attainment'

The meeting returned to public session at 3.26pm

9. Inquiry in 'Planning in Northern Ireland' – further Evidence Session

The following representatives of The Gathering joined the meeting;

- Ms Nuala Crilly - Compassionate Campaigning Coordinator;
- Mr Dean Black - Co-founder and Co-Convener of The Gathering;
- Ms Anne Harper – Member, active in the Friends of Knock Iveagh campaign; and
- Mr George McLaughlin - Founder Member and past chairperson of the Prehen Historical and Environmental Society, Prehen Community Association and Friends of Prehen House Support Group.

In attendance:

Mr Kieran Donnelly CB C&AG



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The Committee noted the relevant papers:

- NIAO Planning in NI Report;
- The Gathering – A Background;
- Suggested areas of Questions; and
- The Gathering – Witness Biographies

Ms Crilly and Mr Black of The Gathering made an opening statement and there then followed a question and answer session. The Gathering representatives raised various issues of how the currently planning system, from their experiences, is not fit for purpose.

Ms Órlaithí Flynn MLA left the meeting at 4.30pm

The meeting returned to private session at 4.42pm

10. Inquiry in 'Planning in Northern Ireland' – Discussion

The following NIAO Officials joined the meeting:

Mr Kieran Donnelly CB C&AG; and
Ms Colette Kane, Director and
Mr Roger McCance, Audit Manager.

The following NIAO Officials joined the meeting remotely:

Ms Claire Turner, Senior Auditor; and
Mr Kyle Bingham, Assembly Support Officer

The Committee and NIAO Officials discussed the evidence session. The Committee noted issues raised by The Gathering representatives included the need for transparency and clarity on documentation held regarding 'overturned' planning applications. The Committee also discussed if its report should include a recommendation relating to a 3rd Party Right of Appeal.



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Agreed: The Committee agreed that its report should make reference to the need for consideration of a limited 3rd Party Right of Appeal insofar as this would not impeded the efficiency, timeliness and transparency of the planning process.

The meeting continued in private session at 4.57pm

11. Draft Press Release – ‘Broadband Investment in NI’

The Committee considered the draft press release regarding its thirteenth report ‘Broadband Investment in NI’.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the draft press release with amendments.

Agreed: The Committee noted the Broadband Investment in NI report will be published on Friday 18 March 2022.

The meeting continued in private session at 4.59pm

12. Draft Forward Work Programme

The following NIAO Official joined the meeting:

Mr Kieran Donnelly, CB C&AG and

The following Official joined the meeting remotely:

Mr Kyle Bingham, Assembly Support Officer.

The Committee noted the December 2021 to March 2022 draft Forward Work Programme to the end of the mandate.



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

2017 – 2022 PAC Legacy Report – Final Consideration

The Committee noted that at its meeting of 3 March 2022 a number of typographical amendments to PAC’s 2017 – 2022 Legacy Report had been agreed. The Committee noted the relevant typographical amendments

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the appendices will be completed once the final PAC meeting has concluded.

Agreed: Subject to the above, the Committee agreed that its “2017 – 2022 Legacy Report’ should be published.

The meeting remained in private session at 5.02pm

13. Any Other Business

Mr Kieran Donnelly, CB C&AG

Mr Donnelly CB C&AG briefed the Committee on the qualification of the recently published 2020-21 Department for Economy and Invest NI financial statements.

Agreed: The Committee noted the above and agreed that it was content for this matter to be considered by the Economy Committee.

14. Date, Time and Place of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Public Accounts Committee will take place on Tuesday 15 March 2022 at 3.00pm in Room 30.

The meeting was adjourned at 5.04pm

Mr William Humphrey MBE MLA



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**Chairperson
Public Accounts Committee
15 March 2022**