



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Public Accounts Committee

Minutes of Proceedings

Thursday, 13 January 2022

Meeting Location: Room 30, Parliament Buildings, Belfast

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

Present by Video or Teleconference:

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

Apologies: Mr David Hilditch MLA
Ms Cara Hunter MLA

In Attendance: Ms Lucia Wilson (Clerk)
Ms Gillian Barker (Assistant Assembly Clerk)
Ms Suzanne Patton (Clerical Supervisor)
Ms Marion Johnston (Clerical Officer)

The meeting went into Open Session at 2.04 pm.

The following NIAO Officials joined the meeting:



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Mr Kieran Donnelly CB C&AG;
Mr Tomas Wilkinson, Director; and
Mr Roger McCance, Audit Manager.

The following NIAO Official joined the meeting remotely:

Mr Kyle Bingham, Assembly Support Officer.

1. Apologies

Mr David Hilditch MLA
Ms Cara Hunter MLA

2. Draft Minutes of 16 December 2021

Agreed: The draft minutes of the meeting of 16 December 2021 were signed and agreed to be published.

3. Declaration of Interests

None

4. Matters Arising

None

5. Correspondence

The following NIAO Officials joined the meeting room:

Mr Kieran Donnelly CB C&AG
Mr Tomas Wilkinson, Director; and
Mr Roger McCance, Audit Manager.

The following NIAO Official joined the meeting remotely:

Mr Kyle Bingham, Assembly Support Officer.



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6. Mr Brandon Lewis CBE, Secretary of State

The Committee noted correspondence dated 22 December 2021 from Mr Brandon Lewis CBE, Secretary of State (SoS) regarding PAC's Report on Capacity and Capability in the NICS. Recommendation 11 states *'The Committee recommends the Commissioners for NI explore with the NICS how they can best support the delivery of change and transformation in recruitment and selection processes and other related areas'*.

The Committee noted Mr Lewis, SoS has welcomed the report but considers that it is for the Commissioners and NICs to decide if a MoU is necessary. He has also asked his officials to engage with the Civil Service Commissioners and Ms Jayne Brady, HOCS on this matter and to consider how best any future changes would protect the Commissioners' independence.

Agreed: The Committee noted Mr Lewis's comments and agreed to recommend, in the Legacy Report, that the new PAC Committee take this matter forward.

7. Mr Dooley Harte, NIPSA Assistant Secretary

The Committee noted correspondence dated 10 January 2022 to Mr Kieran Donnelly CB C&AG from Mr Dooley Harte, Assistant Secretary NIPSA regarding a complaint raised by a member of the public who is a retired employee from the Department for Communities. The person feels the complaint is under the remit of the C&AG to investigate.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to discuss this in closed session under AOB.

8. Sport NI Sustainability Fund

The Committee noted correspondence dated 11 January 2022 from Ms Tracy Meharg, AO, DfC, regarding delegation limits of Sport NI Board in the award of grant funding. Ms Meharg confirms that the authority for the Board to approve the award



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of funding of £500,000 or more, is an internal delegation within Sport NI and is set out in the organisation's Scheme of Delegation. Ms Meharg is content with these arrangements and states that the Management Statement and Financial Memorandum is in place and in accordance with Managing Public Money NI.

Agreed: The Committee noted the response.

The meeting remained in Open Session at 2.12

9. Memorandum of Reply – ‘Speeding up the Justice System’

The following NIAO Officials joined the meeting:

Mr Kieran Donnelly CB C&AG,
Mr Tomas Wilkinson, Director; and
Mr Roger McCance, Audit Manager.

The following Officials joined the meeting remotely:

Mr Neil Gray, Director; and
Mr Kyle Bingham, Assembly Support Officer NIAO.

The Committee noted the Memorandum of Reply on Speeding up the Justice System which was laid in the Assembly on 21 December 2021 by the Minister of Finance.

The Committee noted the 6 recommendations from the Report have all been accepted or accepted in principle by the Department, and on behalf of the relevant justice organisations.

The Committee noted that recommendations 3 and 5 have been agreed in principle.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Justice Committee to inform the Committee that PAC has concluded its consideration of this inquiry, that it no longer



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has primacy over this matter and now refers it to the Justice Committee for its consideration.

The meeting went into Closed Session at 2.18 pm

10. 'Broadband Investment in NI' – Briefing and Preparation Session

The following NIAO Officials joined the meeting:

Mr Kieran Donnelly CB C&AG,
Mr Tomas Wilkinson, Director; and
Mr Roger McCance, Audit Manager.

The following Officials joined the meeting remotely:

Mr Conor McGeown, Audit Manager; and
Mr Kyle Bingham, Assembly Support Officer NIAO.

The Committee noted the relevant papers for next week's evidence session on their thirteenth inquiry 'Broadband Investment in NI'. The papers included:

- Correspondence dated 31 December 2021 from Mike Brennan AO DfE including details of next week Departments' Witnesses.
- NIAO Report 'Broadband Investment in NI';
- NIAO Report 'Contract award and management of Project Stratum';
- RESTRICTED NIAO Briefing Paper Broadband and Project Stratum;
- RESTRICTED NIAO Background Paper 'Project Stratum'; and
- RESTRICTED NIAO Potential Questions.

The meeting remained in Closed Session at 2.19 pm



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11. Final Consideration of draft Report – ‘Addiction Services in NI’

The following NIAO Officials joined the meeting:

Mr Kieran Donnelly CB C&AG,
Mr Tomas Wilkinson, Director; and
Mr Roger McCance, Audit Manager.

The following Officials joined the meeting remotely:

Mr Kyle Bingham, Assembly Support Officer NIAO.

The Committee agreed the amendments made to the draft Report ‘Addiction Services in NI’ at its meeting of 16 December 2021 as follows:

Agreed: Paragraphs 7, 17, 18, and 19 read and agreed.

Agreed: An additional recommendation 10 and a new paragraph 19 were read and agreed.

The Committee noted the paragraph numbers have now changed from section ‘Introduction’ which is now paragraph 20.

Agreed: Paragraphs 33, 34, 35, 36, 38, 39, 40, 44, 48, 49, 52, and 53 were read and agreed. Also agreed was the Title at paragraph 49 to read ‘*Misuse of prescription drugs is a significant issue in NI....*’.

Agreed: The Committee agreed this concluded the final consideration of the Report and agreed to Order the Report ‘Addiction Services in NI’ to Print.

Agreed: The Committee noted a draft Press Release will be ready for consideration at next week’s meeting and propose to publish the Report on 27 January 2022.

The meeting remained in Closed Session at 2.28 pm



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12. 'Broadband Investment in NI' – Briefing and Preparation Session

The following NIAO Officials joined the meeting:

Mr Kieran Donnelly CB C&AG,
Mr Tomas Wilkinson, Director; and
Mr Roger McCance, Audit Manager.

The following Officials joined the meeting remotely:

Mr Conor McGeown, Audit Manager; and
Mr Kyle Bingham, Assembly Support Officer NIAO.

The Committee discussed the forthcoming evidence session on 'Broadband Investment in NI' scheduled for 20 January 2022 and the key areas of questioning.

The Committee noted the following witnesses would be attending:

- Mr Mike Brennan, Permanent Secretary DfE;
- Mr Nigel Robbins, Project Director, Project Stratum;
- Mr Trevor Forsythe, Project Manager, Project Stratum;
- Mr David Hamill, Project Manager, Superfast Rollout Project;
- Mr Andrew Field, Programme Director, Project Gigabit; and
- Mr Billy McClean, Area Development Lead – Northern Ireland.

The meeting remained in Closed Session at 2.56 pm

13. Draft Forward Work Programme

The following NIAO Officials joined the meeting:

Mr Kieran Donnelly, CB C&AG;
Mr Tomas Wilkinson, Director and



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Mr Roger McCance, Audit Manager.

The following Official joined the meeting remotely:

Mr Kyle Bingham, Assembly Support Officer.

The Committee noted the September 2021 to March 2022 draft Forward Work Programme including 4 reports to be finalised and published by March 2022:

- Addiction Services in NI
- Closing the Gap
- Sports Sustainability Fund and
- Review of the Budget Process.

The Committee noted in addition two further inquiries to be completed by the end of the mandate.

- Broadband Investment in NI and
- Planning in NI

Agreed: The Committee agreed to meet on Tuesday 15 March, as there will be no meeting on Thursday 17 March and to hold an extra meeting on Tuesday 22 March 2022 to complete the Planning Inquiry.

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

The meeting remained in Closed Session at 3.00 pm

14. Any Other Business

15. Mr Dooley Harte, NIPSA Assistant Secretary

The Committee noted correspondence dated 10 January 2022 to Mr Kieran Donnelly CB C&AG from Mr Dooley Harte, Assistant Secretary NIPSA regarding a complaint raised by a member of the public, a retired employee from the Department for



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Communities. The person considers it to come under the remit of the C&AG to investigate.

Agreed: The Committee noted the complaint and asked Mr Donnelly CB C&AG to consider if this matter is under his remit.

16. Date, Time and Place of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Public Accounts Committee will take place on Thursday 20 January 2022.

The meeting adjourned at 3.02 pm

Mr William Humphrey MBE MLA
Chairperson
Public Accounts Committee
13 January 2022