



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Public Accounts Committee

Minutes of Proceedings

Tuesday, 15 March 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:

Ms Cara Hunter MLA
Mr William Irwin MLA
Mr Maolíosá McHugh MLA
Mr Andrew Muir MLA

Apologies: Mr David Hilditch MLA
Mr Cathal Boylan MLA

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

Draft letter to Dr Mark Browne AO DE from PAC

The Committee discussed the draft letter to be issued to Dr Mark Browne AO DE regarding the evidence session of 10 March 2022 from the Department and the



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Education Authority and the issues that came out of the session. The Committee agreed the letter would be copied to Ms Sara Long CE EA.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the draft letter and that this should be issued to Dr Brown and Ms Long.

The following NIAO Officials joined the meeting:

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

The following NIAO Official joined the meeting remotely:

Ms Claire Turner, Senior Auditor

The meeting Opened in Public Session at 3.09 pm.

1. Apologies

Mr David Hilditch MLA

Mr Cathal Boylan MLA

2. Draft Minutes of 10 March 2022

Agreed: The draft minutes of the meeting of 10 March 2022 were signed and agreed to be published.

3. Declaration of Interests

The following Members declared an interest in Agenda Item 6, Review of Special Educational Needs Impact.



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Mr William Humphrey MBE MLA declared he is a Governor, Edenbrooke Primary School, 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.

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

Mr Maolíosa McHugh MLA declared he is Chairman of pre-school, Naíscoil na Deirge.

4. Matters Arising

None

5. Correspondence

The following NIAO officials joined the meeting room:

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

The following NIAO official joined the meeting remotely:

Ms Claire Turner, Senior Auditor

Ms Katrina Godfrey, AO DfI

The Committee noted correspondence dated 11 March 2022 from Ms Katrina Godfrey AO DfI regarding the 12,500 planning applications annually processed and the definition of 'successful' and 'unsuccessful' applications.



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Agreed: The Committee noted the previous supplementary information from Ms Godfrey and were content to note this correspondence.

The meeting went into Closed Session at 3.13 pm

6. Inquiry into 'Review into Special Educational Needs Impact'

The following NIAO officials joined the meeting:

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

The following NIAO Official joined the meeting remotely:

Ms Claire Turner, Senior Auditor

Dr Mark Browne AO DE

The Committee noted correspondence dated 15 March 2022 from Dr Mark Browne AO DE, regarding his evidence session of 10 March 2022. Dr Browne corrected information given at the evidence session regarding a contributing factor in the delay of commissioning the independent review of SEN provision. He provided an update on the external commissioning process and the preliminary work and scoping required to proceed to an external consultant.

Agreed: The Committee noted Dr Brown's correspondence.

Draft Letter from PAC Chairperson to Dr Mark Brown AO DE

The Committee considered a draft letter to forward to Dr Mark Browne AO DE and to copy Ms Sara Long CE EA regarding concerns coming out of the evidence session on Thursday 10 March 2022. The correspondence to Dr Browne includes concerns at the lack of progress in a number of key areas, particularly in respect of the



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independent, external review of the SEN service provision and processes that PAC had recommended to start immediately, more than 1 year ago.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the letter.

The Committee agreed to forward the letter to Dr Mark Browne AO and to forward a copy to Ms Sara Long CE Education Authority for comment.

The meeting went into Closed Session at 3.14 pm

7. Inquiry into 'Planning in Northern Ireland' – First Consideration

The following NIAO Officials joined the meeting room:

- . Mr Kieran Donnelly CB C&AG;
Ms Colette Kane, Director;
Mr Roger McCance, Audit Manager; and
Mr Kyle Bingham, Assembly Support Officer.

The following NIAO Official joined the meeting remotely:

Ms Claire Turner, Senior Auditor

Draft letter to Minister for Infrastructure

The Committee noted that a joint draft letter to the Minister for Infrastructure from PAC and the Infrastructure Committee awaits agreement by the Infrastructure Committee. Subject to the Committee's agreement, the letter will then be issued to the Minister from both PAC and Infrastructure Chairpersons.



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Draft Report – Planning in Northern Ireland

The Committee noted the draft report is classified as RESTRICTED and therefore for Members use only.

The Committee considered its draft report, ‘Closing the Gap – Social Deprivation and Links to Education Attainment’ and agreed the title of the report is **‘Planning in Northern Ireland’**

Agreed: The Committee agreed the section on Membership and Powers and the List of Abbreviations.

The Committee made the following decisions regarding each section and paragraphs within the report, that is – **Agreed, Agreed as amended or to be reworded.**

Section ‘Introduction’: Paragraphs 29

Paragraph 29: Read and Agreed

Section ‘Background’: Paragraphs 30 - 34

Paragraph 30: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 31: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 32: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 33: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 34: Agreed as amended

Agreed: Section Title ‘The planning system is in need of fundamental improvement’ Paras 35 - 39

Paragraph 35: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 36: Agreed as amended

Paragraph 37: Agreed as amended

Paragraph 38: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 39: Agreed as amended



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Agreed: Section Title: ‘ No one has been willing to take responsibility for the overall performance of the planning system’ Paras 40 - 43

Paragraph 40: Agreed as amended
Paragraph 41: Read and Agreed
Paragraph 42: Agreed as amended
Paragraph 43: Read and Agreed

Agreed: Section Title: ‘The current funding model does not recognise the value of the planning system and is not financially sustainable’ Paras 44 - 47

Agreed: The Committee agreed to move this Title Section, paras 44 – 47 to further on in the report.

Paragraph 44: Read and Agreed
Paragraph 45: Read and Agreed
Paragraph 46: Agreed as amended
Paragraph 47: Agreed as amended

Agreed: Section Title ‘Progress on Local Development Plans has been slow and the Department’s input has led to further delays’ Paras 48 - 50

Paragraph 48: Read and Agreed
Paragraph 49: Read and Agreed
Paragraph 50: Agreed as amended

Agreed: Section Title ‘There is a lack of transparency around key decision making processes, undermining confidence in the planning system as a whole’ Paras 51 - 59

Paragraph 51: Read and Agreed
Paragraph 52: Read and Agreed
Paragraph 53: Read and Agreed
Paragraph 54: Read and Agreed
Paragraph 55: Read and Agreed



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Paragraph 56: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 57: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 58: Agreed as amended

Paragraph 59: Read and Agreed

Agreed: Section Title ‘ Members of the public feel excluded from planning and more meaningful access to the system is needed’ Paras 60 - 62

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Paragraph 60: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 61: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 62: Read and Agreed

Agreed: Section Title ‘ The Committee is concerned by how planning is operating for rural housing’ Paras 63 – 66

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Paragraph 63: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 64: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 65: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 66: Read and Agreed

Agreed: Section Title ‘The Department’s leadership of the planning system has been weak’. Paras 67 - 71

Paragraph 67: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 68: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 69: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 70: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 71: Read and Agreed

Agreed: Section Title: ‘The planning system has been slow to respond to quality issues’ Paras 72 – 76.

Paragraph 72: Read and Agreed



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Paragraph 73: Read and Agreed
Paragraph 74: Read and Agreed
Paragraph 75: Read and Agreed
Paragraph 76: Agreed as amended

Agreed: Section Title 'The planning system is badly fragmented and this hampers effective delivery' Paras 77 – 83

Paragraph 77: Agreed as amended
Paragraph 78: Read and Agreed
Paragraph 79: Agreed as amended
Paragraph 80: Read and Agreed
Paragraph 81: Read and Agreed
Paragraph 82: Read and Agreed
Paragraph 83: Read and Agreed

The Committee then returned to **The Executive Summary**, paragraphs 1 - 12 and agreed the following:

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

Recommendations 1 - 12: Paragraphs 13 – 28

Recommendation 1 Paragraph 13 Read and Agreed
Recommendation 2 Paragraph 14: Agreed as amended



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Recommendation 3	Paragraph 15: Agreed as amended
Recommendation 4	Paragraph 16: Read and Agreed
Recommendation 5	Paragraph 17: Read and Agreed
	Paragraph 18: Agreed as amended
Recommendation 6	Paragraph 19: Read and Agreed
Recommendation 7	Paragraph 20: Read and Agreed
	Paragraph 21: Read and Agreed
Recommendation 8	Paragraph 22: Read and Agreed
	Paragraph 23: Read and Agreed
Recommendation 9	Paragraph 24: Read and Agreed
Recommendation 10	Paragraph 25: Read and Agreed
Recommendation 11	Paragraph 26: Agreed as amended
Recommendation 12	Paragraph 27: Read and Agreed
	Paragraph 28: Read and Agreed

Agreed: The Committee noted Recommendation 4 will move in line with paragraphs 44 – 47 to further on in the report.

Agreed: The Committee noted paragraph numbers would be changed in the Final version of the Report to reflect the agreed amendments to the report.

That concluded the first consideration of the report – ‘Planning in Northern Ireland’.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the Appendices of the report will include:

- Extracts from the minutes
- Hansard
- Correspondence

Agreed: The Committee agreed to bring the amended Report to Tuesday’s meeting 22 March 2022 for the final consideration. The Committee would consider a draft press release on 22 March 2022.



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Agreed: The Committee proposed to launch the report on Thursday 24 March 2022.

The meeting remained in Closed Session at 4.03 pm

Mr Roy Beggs MLA left the meeting.

8. Draft Forward Work Programme

The following NIAO Officials joined the meeting:

Mr Kieran Donnelly, CB C&AG;
Ms Colette Kane, Director;
Mr Roger McCance, Audit Manager; and
Mr Kyle Bingham, Assembly Support Officer

The following Official joined the meeting remotely:

Ms Claire Tuner, Senior Auditor

The Committee noted the September 2021 to March 2022 draft Forward Work Programme to the end of the Mandate.

The meeting remained in Closed Session at 4.04 pm

9. Any Other Business

None



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10. Date, Time and Place of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Public Accounts Committee will take place on Tuesday 22 March 2022

The meeting adjourned at 4.04 pm

Mr William Humphrey MBE MLA
Chairperson
Public Accounts Committee
15 March 2022