



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Public Accounts Committee

Minutes of Proceedings

Thursday, 20 January 2022

Meeting Location: The Senate, 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
Ms Cara Hunter MLA
Mr William Irwin MLA
Mr Maolíosa McHugh MLA
Mr Andrew Muir MLA

Apologies: Mr David Hilditch 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 began in Closed Session at 2.06 pm.

The following NIAO Officials joined the meeting:

Mr Kieran Donnelly CB C&AG;



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Mr Tomas Wilkinson, Director; and
Mr Conor McGeown, Audit Manager.

The following NIAO Official joined the meeting remotely:

Mr Kyle Bingham, Assembly Support Officer.

The Committee discussed the evidence session on the inquiry into 'Broadband Investment in NI' and noted witnesses from DCMS are appearing as support to the Department. The Committee also noted the announcement on 17 January 2022 of the additional £32m funding for Project Stratum; and correspondence dated 17 January 2022 from Mr Shane Campbell ICBAN CEO.

The meeting Opened in Public Session at 2.15 pm.

1. Apologies

None

2. Draft Minutes of 13 January 2022

Agreed: The draft minutes of the meeting of 13 January 2022 were signed and agreed to be published.

3. Declaration of Interests

The following Members declared an interest in Agenda Item 9, First Consideration of the report 'Closing the Gap – Social Deprivation and links to Educational Attainment'

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.



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

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
Mr Tomas Wilkinson; and
Mr Conor McGeown, Audit Manager.

The following NIAO Official joined the meeting remotely:

Mr Kyle Bingham, Assembly Support Officer.

Mr Shane Campbell, ICBAN CEO

The Committee noted correspondence dated 17 January 2022 from Mr Shane Campbell ICBAN CEO, who had also written to the Committee on 17 June 2021 regarding NIAO's Report on 'Broadband Investment in NI'. Mr Campbell has welcomed the inquiry.

Agreed: The Committee noted the correspondence which has been copied to Board Members of ICBAN.



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The meeting remained in Public Session at 2.19 pm

6. Inquiry into ‘Broadband Investment in NI’ – Evidence Session

Witnesses attending remotely:

- 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.

In Attendance:

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

The Committee noted the relevant documents:

- NIAO Reports ‘Broadband Investment in NI’ and ‘Contract award and management of Project Stratum’;
- Witness Biographies;
- Restricted Paper - NIAO Briefing Paper and potential questions;
- Clerk’s Memo - further potential Questions and Press Release dated 17 January 2022 regarding Project Stratum expansion.

The Committee welcomed the Departmental Officials and asked Mr Mike Brennan AO, DfE to make an opening statement. There then followed a question and answer session.

Mr Donnelly CB C&AG commented on the need for more transparency on the disclosure of information from the Department.



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Mr Stevenson TOA commented for clarity, any monies to be reinvested back into the Department will be subject to The Executive's process which includes DoF's document 'Managing Public Money in NI'.

Mr Cathal Boylan MLA joined the meeting at 2.22 pm

The meeting went into Closed Session at 3.56 pm

7. Inquiry into 'Broadband Investment in NI' – Discussion

The following NIAO Officials joined the meeting room:

Mr Kieran Donnelly CB C&AG
Mr Tomas Wilkinson; and
Mr Conor McGeown, Audit Manager.

The following NIAO Official joined the meeting remotely:

Mr Kyle Bingham, Assembly Support Officer.

The Committee discussed with Mr Kieran Donnelly CB C&AG and his team the evidence received from Mr Mike Brennan AO DfE and his Officials regarding the 'NIAO Broadband Investment in NI'.

Agreed: The Committee noted Mr Kieran Donnelly CB C&AG and his team will produce an Issues Paper for next week's meeting.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to DoF Land and Property Services regarding the anomalies of the 6000 premises not included in the data gathered and due diligence going forward.

8. Draft Press Release – 'Addiction Services in NI'

Mr Kieran Donnelly CB C&AG

The following NIAO Official joined the meeting remotely:



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Mr Kyle Bingham, Assembly Support Officer.

The Committee agreed the draft Press Release for 'Addiction Services in NI' with amendments and noted the report will go out embargoed on Tuesday 25 January 2022 and will be published on Thursday 27 January 2022.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the draft Press Release to be issued with the published report 'Addiction Services in NI'.

9. First Consideration of draft Report – 'Closing the Gap – Social Deprivation and Links to Educational Attainment'.

Mr Kieran Donnelly CB C&AG
Mr Patrick Barr, Director; and
Mr Andrew Allen, Audit Manager.

The following NIAO Official joined the meeting remotely:

Mr Kyle Bingham, Assembly Support Officer.

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 '**Closing the Gap – Social Deprivation and Links to Educational Attainment**'.

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.**



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Agreed: The Committee noted any reference to the organisation Sure Start within the report, is recorded as 'SureStart'.

Recommendations 1 - 13: Paragraphs 10 – 22

Recommendation 1	Paragraph 10	Agreed as amended
Recommendation 2	Paragraph 11:	Read and Agreed
Recommendation 3	Paragraph 12:	Read and Agreed
Recommendation 4	Paragraph 13:	Read and Agreed
Recommendation 5	Paragraph 14:	Read and Agreed
Recommendation 6	Paragraph 15:	Agreed as amended
Recommendation 7	Paragraph 16:	Read and Agreed
Recommendation 8	Paragraph 17:	Agreed as amended
Recommendation 9	Paragraph 18:	Agreed as amended
Recommendation 10	Paragraph 19:	Read and Agreed
Recommendation 11	Paragraph 20:	Agreed as amended
Recommendation 12	Paragraph 21:	Agreed as amended
Recommendation 13	Paragraph 22:	Agreed as amended

Section 'Introduction': Paragraphs 23 - 26

Paragraph 23: Read and Agreed
Paragraph 24: Read and Agreed
Paragraph 25: Read and Agreed
Paragraph 26: Read and Agreed

Section 'Background': Paragraphs 27 – 30

Paragraph 27: Read and Agreed
Paragraph 28: Read and Agreed
Paragraph 29: Read and Agreed
Paragraph 30: Read and Agreed



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Agreed: Section Title: ‘The current funding mechanisms need to be re-considered’.

Paragraph 31: Read and Agreed
Paragraph 32: Read and Agreed
Paragraph 33: To be reworded
Paragraph 34: Agreed as amended
Paragraph 35: Read and Agreed

Agreed: Section Title: ‘Improvements in Accountability and Assessment arrangements are required’.

Paragraph 36: Read and Agreed
Paragraph 37: Read and Agreed
Paragraph 38: Read and Agreed
Paragraph 39: Read and Agreed
Paragraph 40: Read and Agreed

Agreed: Section Title: ‘ Setting and monitoring of targets need to be improved.’

Paragraph 41: Read and Agreed
Paragraph 42: Read and Agreed

Agreed: Section Title: ‘The long-term impact of early interventions such as SureStart need to be measured’.

Paragraph 43: Read and Agreed
Paragraph 44: Read and Agreed

Agreed: Section Title: ‘Good Practice need to be identified and disseminated.’

Paragraph 45: Read and Agreed
Paragraph 46: Read and Agreed
Paragraph 47: Read and Agreed
Paragraph 48: Read and Agreed



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Agreed: Section Title: 'High levels of absenteeism need to be addressed'.

Paragraph 49: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 50: Read and Agreed

Agreed: Section Title: 'School Leaders need additional support and training'.

Paragraph 51: Agreed as amended

Paragraph 52: Agreed as amended

Paragraph 53: Read and Agreed

Agreed: Section Title: 'Current scrutiny arrangements need to be enhanced'.

Paragraph 54: Agreed as amended

Agreed: Section Title: 'Funding needs to be improved to implement the Expert Panel's Action Plan'.

Paragraph 55: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 56: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 57: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 58: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 59: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 60: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 61: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 62: Agreed as amended

Agreed: Section Title: 'Collaboration across Government Departments is required to address social deprivation and educational attainment issues.'

Paragraph 63: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 64: Agreed as amended



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The Committee then returned to the Executive Summary, paragraphs 1 - 9 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: Read and Agreed
Paragraph 9: Read and Agreed

That concluded the first consideration of the report – ‘Closing the Gap – Social Deprivation and Links to Educational Attainment.’

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

- Extracts from the minutes
- Hansard
- Correspondence
- PAC visit to Boys Model School

Agreed: The Committee agreed to bring the amended Report to next week’s committee meeting, 27 January 2022 for final consideration.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to launch the report at a school and to include the Expert Panel in any arrangements. The Clerk advised that this could alter the launch date to allow for the arrangements to be made.

The meeting remained in Closed Session at 4.49 pm

10. Draft Forward Work Programme

The following NIAO Officials joined the meeting:



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Mr Kieran Donnelly, CB C&AG;
Mr Patrick Barr, Director and
Mr Andrew Allen, 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 to the end of the Mandate.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to schedule a further meeting with Ms Sara Long CE EA and Dr Mark Browne AO DE regarding an update on SEN and the MOR; and a further meeting with Dr Jayne Brady HOCS.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to SOLACE, UK Group for Local Council Chief Executives, regarding giving evidence to the inquiry 'Planning in NI'.

Agreed: The Committee proposed to schedule a meeting for Tuesday 8 March 2022 to help accommodate the draft Forward Work Programme to the end of the mandate.

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

The meeting remained in Closed Session at 5.04 pm

11. Any Other Business

None

12. Date, Time and Place of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Public Accounts Committee will take place on Thursday 27 January 2022.



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The meeting adjourned at 5.04 pm

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