



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Public Accounts Committee

Minutes of Proceedings

Thursday, 18 November 2021

Meeting Location: Room 30, Parliament Buildings, Belfast

Present: Mr William Humphrey MBE MLA (Chairperson)
Mr Roy Beggs MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Andrew Muir MLA
Mr Maolíosa McHugh MLA

Present by Video or Teleconference:

Mr Cathal Boylan MLA
Ms Órlaithí Flynn MLA
Ms Cara Hunter MLA
Mr William Irwin MLA

Apologies: Mr David Hilditch MLA

In Attendance: Ms Lucia Wilson (Assembly 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.



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The following NIAO Officials joined in the meeting:

Mr Kieran Donnelly CB C&AG; and
Ms Catherine O'Hagan, Audit Manager

The following NIAO Official joined the meeting remotely:

Mr Kyle Bingham, Assembly Support Officer.

1. Apologies

Mr David Hilditch MLA

2. Draft Minutes of 11 November 2021

Agreed: The draft minutes of the meeting of 11 November 2021 were signed and agreed to be published.

3. Declaration of Interests

The following Members declared an interest in Agenda Item 6, MOR update regarding the report 'Impact Review on Special Educational Needs'.

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

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

Mr William Humphrey MBE MLA declared he is Governor of Girls Model Belfast and Edenbrooke Primary School;

Mr Andrew Muir MLA declared he is a Governor, Priory Integrated College, Hollywood and

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



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4. Matters Arising

None

5. Correspondence

The following NIAO Officials joined the meeting:

Mr Kieran Donnelly CB C&AG; and
Mr Rodney Allen, Chief Operating Officer,

The following NIAO Official joined the meeting remotely:

Mr Kyle Bingham, Assembly Support Officer.

Mr Colin McGrath MLA

The Committee noted correspondence dated 12 November 2021 from Mr Colin McGrath MLA regarding the recognition payment scheme within the independent care sector.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to discuss this matter in closed session, under Agenda Item 11.

Ms Tracey McAlinden

The Committee noted correspondence from Ms Tracey McAlinden regarding her concerns about the Special Educational Needs system.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to consider Ms McAlinden's correspondence at Agenda Item 6, an update on the MOR regarding the inquiry 'Impact Review on Special Education Needs'.



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Ms Rosemary Barton MLA

The Committee noted correspondence dated 18 November 2021 from Ms Rosemary Barton MLA regarding the inquiry into Sports Sustainability Fund. The Committee noted Ms Barton's concerns however as this has just been received they would return to this next week.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the correspondence to C&AG and to return to this issue at next week's meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 2.08 pm

The meeting re-commenced in Open Session at 2.10pm

6. Memorandum of Reply – Impact Review of Special Educational Needs

The following NIAO Officials joined the meeting:

Mr Kieran Donnelly, CB C&AG; and
Ms Catherine O'Hagan, Audit Manager.

The following NIA Officials joined the meeting remotely:

Mr Kyle Bingham, Assembly Support Officer.

The Committee noted correspondence dated 21 October 2021 from Dr Mark Brown, AO DE, regarding a further Memorandum of Reply to PAC's report on Special Educational Needs. The response includes a summary of work progressed to date on each of the seven recommendations and how the Department and the Education Authority will continue to work to ensure the recommendations in the report are fully addressed and what remedial actions are being implemented.

Agreed: The Committee noted that a further evidence session is being scheduled with Dr Brown AO DE and Ms Sara Long CE EA regarding the Special Educational Needs Report, and that they would consider the MOR update closer to the time of this evidence session.



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Ms Tracey McAlinden regarding SEN system

The Committee noted correspondence from Ms Tracey McAlinden regarding her concerns about the Special Educational Needs system. The Committee agreed to raise Ms McAlinden's issue about the need for educational recovery plans and SEN provision, more generally, with the Department and the Education Authority, when they are next called to discuss the MOR update on the Impact Review on Special Educational Needs.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write back to Ms McAlinden informing her of this action.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward Ms McAlinden's correspondence to the Education Committee to consider the issues that go beyond the remit of PAC.

Agreed: The Committee noted that Ms McAlinden, under GDPR, has given her permission to share her correspondence with third parties, if required.

Youth Assembly

The Committee noted correspondence dated 15 November from the Clerk for the Youth Assembly, Mr Peter Hall, which informs the Committee that he will be the point of contact for the Youth Assembly.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write back to the Clerk welcoming the establishment of the Youth Assembly and to highlight recent PAC Reports that may be of interest to the Youth Assembly's priority of Education, i.e. PAC report 'Review on Special Educational Needs' and its forthcoming report 'Closing the Gap – Social Deprivation and links to Educational Attainment'.

The meeting went into Closed Session at 2.15 pm

7. Inquiry into 'Sports Sustainability Fund' – Evidence Session



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Ms Antoinette McKeown, Chief Executive, Sports NI joined the meeting and Mr Ian Weir, Sports NI joined remotely.

In attendance were the following Officials:

Mr Kieran Donnelly, CB C&AG;
Mr Stuart Stevenson, TOA

The Committee noted the relevant papers for the evidence session:

- Clerk's Briefing dated 8 November on the Second Evidence Session;
- SSF SportNI Key extracts from Hansard report dated 08 July 2021, covering the relevant evidence session heard by Public Accounts Committee;
- Sports Sustainability Fund – Issues Paper;
- 20210917 Follow up letter from Tracy Meharg;
- 20211101 Response form Tracy Meharg;
- Sports Sustainability Fund – SportNI Board Paper, Award Approval Framework;
- Sports Sustainability Fund – SportNI Board Paper Awards; and
- Sports Sustainability Fund – SportNI Board Paper Investment Decisions

The Committee noted that the purpose of the second evidence session was to, primarily, clarify a number of points from the evidence session on 8 July 2021, in relation to the timeline and rationale for the legal advice sought on the awards made from the Sport Sustainability Fund.

There then followed a question and answer session.

The Chairperson thanked Ms McKeown and Mr Weir for attending the meeting today and giving evidence.

Ms Cara Hunter left the meeting at 2.45 pm

Ms Cara Hunter re-joined the meeting at 3.01 pm

Mr Andrew Muir MLA left the meeting at 3.13 pm

Mr Andrew Muir MLA re-joined the meeting at 3.17 pm

The meeting went into Closed Session at 3.14 pm



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8. Inquiry into ‘Sports Sustainability Fund’ – Discussion

The following NIAO Officials joined in the meeting:

Mr Kieran Donnelly, CB C&AG; and
Ms Catherine O’Hagan, Audit Manager.

The following NIAO Officials joined the meeting remotely:

Mr Kyle Bingham, Assembly Support Officer.

Members discussed the key issues and points of clarification arising from the evidence session, with NIAO officials.

***Mr Maolíosa McHugh MLA left the meeting at 3.24 pm
Mr Maoliosa McHugh re-joined the meeting at 3.27 pm***

The meeting remained in Closed Session at 3.25 pm

9. Inquiry into ‘Review of the Budget Process’ – Briefing and Preparation Session.

The following NIAO Officials joined in the meeting:

Mr Kieran Donnelly, CB C&AG;
Ms Catherine O’Hagan, Audit Manager; and
Ms Karen Beattie, Audit Manager.

The following NIA Officials joined the meeting remotely:

Ms Pamela Dugdale, Senior Auditor; and
Mr Kyle Bingham, Assembly Support Officer.

Mr Kieran Donnelly CB C&AG and his team, briefed the Committee on next week’s evidence session – inquiry into ‘Review of the Budget Process’. The Committee noted the relevant papers:



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- NIAO Report 'Review of the Budget Process';
- NIAO Restricted Briefing Paper;
- NIAO Restricted Suggested Questions;
- Department Witness Biographies; and
- Sir Robert Chote, Biography

There then followed a question and answer session.

The meeting remained in Closed Session at 3.49 pm

10. draft Forward Work Programme

The following NIAO Officials joined in the meeting:

Mr Kieran Donnelly, CB C&AG; and
Ms Catherine O'Hagan, 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 and that they will hear evidence on their eleventh inquiry 'Review on the Budget System' next week; also on 2nd December a further evidence session with Dr Mark Browne AO DE and Ms Sara Long CE EA has been scheduled.

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

The meeting remained in Closed Session at 3.52 pm



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11. Any Other Business

The Committee noted correspondence dated 12 November 2021 from Mr Colin McGrath MLA regarding the recognition payment scheme within the independent care sector. Mr McGrath MLA is concerned that these payments are slow in being rolled out and also that if there are insufficient records of individuals receiving the payments, that the scheme could be abused.

The Committee noted background information on this matter including a report published by the C&AG in August 2021, which raised concerns in relation to this scheme. The Committee noted the scheme received a Ministerial Direction.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write back to Mr McGrath MLA and advise him that his correspondence has been forwarded to the C&AG for comment and that the Committee will contact Mr McGrath, following the outcome of this.

Date, Time and Place of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Public Accounts Committee will take place on Thursday 25 November, at 2.00 pm in The Senate, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting adjourned at 3.59 pm

Mr William Humphrey MBE MLA
Chairperson
Public Accounts Committee
18 November 2021