



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Audit Committee

Minutes of Proceedings

5 June 2024

Meeting Location: Room 21, Parliament Buildings

Present:

John Blair MLA

Nick Mathison MLA

In attendance by Video or Teleconference:

Ciara Ferguson MLA

Apologies:

Alan Chambers MLA (Chairperson)

Diane Forsythe MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

In Attendance:

Nick Mitford, Assembly Clerk

Elaine Farrell, Assistant Clerk

Alison Ferguson, Clerical Supervisor

Thomas McConville, Clerical Officer

The meeting commenced at 10:01 a.m. in Closed Session

In the absence of the Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson, the Clerk took the Chair and called for proposals for a temporary Chairperson.

Mr Blair proposed that Mr Mathison take the Chair and Ms Ferguson seconded the proposal.

The proposal was carried and Mr Mathison took the Chair.

The meeting moved into Open Session at 10:07 a.m.

1. Apologies

Noted above.

2. Declaration of Interests

No interests were declared.

3. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 9 April 2024.

4. Matters arising

Noted: The Committee noted the correspondence dated 24 April 2024 from the Minister of Finance in respect of the draft budgets for the NI Assembly, the Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO) and the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO) for 2024-25.

5. Committee quorum

The Committee clerk briefed Members on the recommendation by the previous Audit Committee in its Legacy Report that consideration should be given to increasing the membership and quorum of the Committee.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to commission a research paper to provide a comparative analysis of the quorum and membership of its counterpart bodies in other UK jurisdictions, including whether changes to their quorum and membership have been made since their establishment, and the background to/rationale for any changes.

6. NIAO Main Estimates 2024-25

The Committee Clerk briefed the Committee on the NIAO Main Estimates 2024-25.

7. NIPSO Main Estimates 2024-25

The Committee Clerk briefed the Committee on the NIPSO Main Estimates 2024-25.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to move into Closed Session

The Committee moved into Closed Session at 10.17 a.m.

8. Committee Report on the Estimates for NIAO and NIPSO 2024-25

The Committee undertook formal consideration of the draft report on the Estimates for the NIAO and NIPSO 2024-25 as follows:

- Agreed:** The Committee agreed that the Title Page, Committee Powers and Membership, Table of Contents and List of Abbreviations stands part of the report.
- Agreed:** The Committee agreed that the Introduction at paragraphs 1-5 stands part of the report.
- Agreed:** The Committee agreed that the Background to the Estimates at paragraphs 6-11 stands part of the report.
- Agreed:** The Committee agreed that the NIAO Estimates 2024-25 at paragraphs 12-13 stands part of the report.
- Agreed:** The Committee agreed that the NIPSO Estimates 2024-25 at paragraphs 14-15 stands part of the report.
- Agreed:** The Committee agreed that the Committee Consideration and Conclusion at paragraphs 16-19 stands part of the report.
- Agreed:** The Committee agreed that this report be the first report of the Audit Committee in the 2022-2027 mandate.
- Agreed:** The Committee agreed that the Chairperson will agree an extract of the minutes from the meeting today regarding agreement of the report so that it may be included in the Minutes of Proceedings appendix to the report.
- Agreed:** The Committee agreed that the Appendices stand part of the report.
- Agreed:** The Committee agreed that the Audit Committee Report on the Estimates of the Northern Ireland Audit Office and the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman 2024-25 be published on the Northern Ireland Assembly website.

9. Comptroller and Auditor General (C&AG) Salary

The Committee clerk briefed Members on the recommendation by the previous Audit Committee in its Legacy Report that a review of the options available in determining the C &AG Salary should be considered by the successor committee.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to commission a research paper to provide a comparative analysis of the arrangements for determining the C&AG's salary in other UK jurisdictions with a focus on who determines the salary; whether any benchmarking applies, including whether salaries are tied to a particular role; and, details of the salary for C&AGs in all UK jurisdictions.

10. Correspondence

Noted: Correspondence dated 2 May 2024 from the NIAO on its Corporate Plan and Public Reporting Forward Work Programme 2024-25.

Noted: Correspondence dated 29 April 2024 from a member of the public on Module2C of the Covid Inquiry.

Noted: Correspondence dated 3 May 2024 from a member of the public on damage to a thatched listed building.

Noted: Correspondence dated 24 May 2024 from the Committee for Finance on its report on Engagement on the 2024-25 draft Executive budget.

Noted: Correspondence dated 10 May 2024 from the Assembly Business Office on the Assembly Members Pension fund 2022-23.

Noted: Correspondence dated 24 May 2024 from the Assembly Business Office on the NI Audit Office Report – Budgeting and Accountability.

Noted: Correspondence dated 17 May 2024 from the Assembly Business Office on the Financial Assistance for Political Parties Scheme 2024 (NIA 32/22-27).

The Committee considered correspondence dated 28 May 2024 from the NIAO on the appointment of a Chairperson and Non-executive members to the NIAO.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the NIAO to advised that it is content to assist in the recruitment of Board Members.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to defer consideration of a member of the Committee to sit on the recruitment panel for NIAO Board Members until the next meeting.

11. AOB

None.

12. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting

The next meeting of the Audit Committee is to be confirmed at the end of August 20-2024.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:29 a.m.

Nick Mathison MLA

Acting Chairperson, Audit Committee