



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Audit Committee

Minutes of Proceedings

16 October 2024

Meeting Location: Room 21, Parliament Buildings

Present:

Alan Chambers MLA (Chairperson)

Diane Forsythe MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

John Blair MLA

Present by video or teleconference:

Ciara Ferguson MLA

Apologies:

Nick Mathison MLA

In Attendance:

Nick Mitford, Assembly Clerk

Elaine Farrell, Assistant Clerk

Laura Gourley, Clerical Supervisor

Alison Ferguson, Clerical Officer

Ray McCaffrey, Research Officer (agenda item 5)

The meeting commenced at 10.03 a.m. in open session

1. Apologies

As above.

2. Declaration of Interests

No interests were declared.

3. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 5 June 2024.

4. Matters arising

The Committee considered the correspondence from the Department of Finance dated 11 October 2024 in respect of the 2024-25 October Monitoring Round which issued to all Departments.

Mr Blair joined the meeting at 10.05 a.m.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Finance, as well as the Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO); the Northern Ireland Public Service Ombudsman (NIPSO); and the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission, to seek further information on any submission to made under the October Monitoring Round process, which will be considered at the next Audit Committee meeting in November.

5. RalSe briefing – Committee Quorum

The Assembly Research Officer, Ray McCaffrey, joined the meeting at 10.06 a.m.

Mr McCaffrey briefed the Committee on his research paper on Committee Quorum.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

The Chairperson thanked Mr McCaffrey for his briefing.

Agreed: The Committee agreed not to consult on an increase to the quorum for the Audit Committee and to monitor the situation going forward.

6. Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO) – Draft budget 2025/26

The following officials from the NIAO joined the meeting at 10.16 a.m.

Dorinnia Carville, Comptroller and Auditor General

Rodney Allen, Chief Operating Officer

Brian O'Neill, Director

Anu Kane, Corporate Services Manager

The officials briefed the Committee and this was followed by a question and answer session.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their briefing.

7. Northern Ireland Public Service Ombudsman (NIPSO) - Draft Budget 2025/26

The following officials from NIPSO joined the meeting at 10.50 a.m.

Margaret Kelly, Ombudsman

Sean Martin, Acting Deputy Ombudsman

Kirsty McCool, Head of Governance

The officials briefed the Committee and this was followed by a question and answer session.

Mr Blair left the meeting at 11.26 a.m.

Mr Blair rejoined the meeting at 11.30 a.m.

8. Correspondence

Noted: The Committee noted the following items of correspondence:

- I. Correspondence from the Committee for Finance dated 27 June 2024 on the monthly outcome covering April and May 2024;
- II. Correspondence from the Committee on Procedures dated 4 July 2024 on potential work areas for the Committee;
- III. Correspondence from a member of the public dated 17 July 2024 on Cubbies;
- IV. Correspondence from the Business Office dated 4 July 2024 on the NIAO report on Public Bodies Response to Misrepresented Soil Analysis;
- V. Correspondence from the Business Office dated 4 July 2024 on the NIAO report on the Review of Waste Management in Northern Ireland;
- VI. Correspondence from the Business Office dated 5 July 2024 on the NI Assembly Commission's Annual Report and Accounts 2023-24;
- VII. Correspondence from the Business Office dated 5 July 2024 on the NIAO Annual Report and Accounts 2023-24;
- VIII. Correspondence from a member of the public dated 26 June 2024 on issues not relating to the Committee's remit; and
- IX. Correspondence from the Committee for Finance dated 10 October 2024 on the 2024-25 Outturn and Forecast Outturn Information – August (R05) position.

9. Any other business

There was no other business

Agreed: The Committee agreed to move into closed session.

The meeting moved into closed session at 11.40 a.m.

10. Discussion on draft budget submissions

The Committee discussed the draft submissions from the NIAO and NIPSO.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Finance to seek its views on the draft budget submissions by NIAO, NIPSO and NIAC.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Public Accounts Committee to seek its view on the draft budget submission by NIAO.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to defer any decision on the draft budget submissions from NIAO and NIPSO until it receives the views of the Department of Finance and the Public Accounts Committee.

11. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting

The next meeting of the Audit Committee will take place on 13 November at 10.00 a.m. in the Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 11.53 a.m.

Alan Chambers MLA

Chairperson, Audit Committee

13 November 2024