Northern Ireland Assembly

Audit Committee

Minutes of Proceedings

7 October 2026

Meeting Location: Room 21, Parliament Buildings

Present:

Alan Chambers MLA (Chairperson)

John Blair MLA

Nick Mathison MLA

Apologies:

Pam Cameron MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

In attendance:

Ashleigh Mitford, Assembly Clerk

Laura Gourley, Clerical Supervisor

Alison Ferguson, Clerical Officer

In attendance by video:

Elaine Farrell, Assistant Clerk

The meeting commenced at 10.05 a.m. in open session.

1. Apologies

As above.

2. Declaration of Interests

No interests were declared at this point in the meeting.

3. Draft minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 30 September 2026.

4. Matters arising

None.

5. Correspondence

None.

6. Draft End of Session Report

The Committee considered the draft End of Session Report for the period 1 September 2025-31 August 2026.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it is content with the Remit, Powers and Membership section of the report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it is content with the Key Activities, Outputs and Achievements section of the report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it is content with paragraphs 1-3 of the report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it is content with paragraphs 4-7 of the report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it is content with paragraphs 8-9 of the report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it is content with paragraphs 10-11 of the report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it is content with paragraph 12 of the report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it is content with paragraph 13 of the report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it is content with paragraph 14 of the report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it is content with paragraphs 15-16 of the report.

Noted: The Committee noted that the End of Session Report will be published on the Committee's webpage in due course.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to move into closed session to consider the DoF's Information Gathering exercise for the budget period 2026/27 – 2029/30 and the Committee's feasibility study on a job evaluation exercise to determine the future salary payable to the Office of the C&AG.

The meeting moved into closed session at 10.09 a.m.

7. Budget 2026/27 – 2029/30 - Committee consideration

Noted: The Committee noted briefing papers from the Clerk, a copy of the Department of Finance's (DoF's) comments on submissions from the Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO), the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO) and the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission (NIAC), additional correspondence from NIPSO and an email from the Deputy Chairperson, Pam Cameron MLA.

The Committee Clerk briefed the Committee on the DoF Information Gathering exercise for the budget period 2026/27 – 2029/30 and this was followed by extensive Committee discussion.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to receive further oral briefing from NIPSO on its budgets proposals following its request to NIPSO at the meeting on 30 September 2026 to consider the extent of scope available for NIPSO to absorb the pressures set out in its written submission within the position agreed by the Committee as set out in its October 2025 report.

The following witnesses from NIPSO joined the meeting at 10.29 a.m.

Margaret Kelly, Ombudsman

Sean Martin, Deputy Ombudsman

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

The Chairperson thanked the witnesses for their attendance and put on record the Committee's appreciation for the importance of the work of NIPSO and its service to the public.

The witnesses left the meeting at 11.01 a.m.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it is content with the 2026/27 budget proposal for NIPSO, noting that the figures for subsequent years can be scrutinised through future budgeting and in-year monitoring round exercises.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the draft letter to the Finance Minister, subject to amendment as agreed, which set out the confirmed budget position for the NIAO, NIPSO and the NIAC, and for the letter to be signed off by the Chairperson.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to publish the letter on the Committee's website page after issue.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek the views of the NIAO, NIPSO and the NIAC on the publication of their submissions to DoF and the Committee.

8. Audit Committee Feasibility Study – Job Evaluation to determine the future salary payable for the Office of the C&AG for Northern Ireland

The Committee Clerk briefed the Committee on this agenda item and this was followed by a Committee discussion.

Noted: The Committee noted the information and analysis gathered in relation to the feasibility study to date.

Agreed: Having considered the options available for next steps the Committee agreed that it was not content with Option 1 (do nothing further) in the paper.

Agreed: The Committee agreed a number of exploratory next steps in relation to Option 2 (approach DoF and/or the Department of Public Expenditure, Infrastructure, Public Service Reform and Digitalisation) and Option 3 (approach the private sector).

The meeting moved into open session at 11.39 a.m.

The Clerk summarised the Committee's position on agenda items 7 and 8 as noted above.

9. Forward Work Programme

Noted: The Committee noted the draft Forward Work Programme.

10. AOB

None.

11. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting

The next meeting of the Audit Committee will take place on Wednesday 4 November 2026 at 10.00 a.m. in Room 21.

The meeting was adjourned at 11.42 a.m.

Alan Chambers MLA

Chairperson, Audit Committee

4 November 2026