



## AUDIT COMMITTEE

Room 276  
Parliament Buildings  
Email: [committee.audit@niassembly.gov.uk](mailto:committee.audit@niassembly.gov.uk)

Dr Caoimhe Archibald MLA  
Finance Minister  
Department of Finance (DoF)  
2<sup>nd</sup> Floor Clare House  
303 Airport Road West  
Belfast BT3 9ED

6 March 2024

Dear Minister

**Draft Budgets 2024-25 for the Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO), the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO) and the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission (NIAC)**

The Audit Committee has today taken evidence from the above three non-Ministerial Public Bodies (NMPBs) on their draft Budgets for 2024-25. As any agreed budgets for these bodies will be reflected subsequently in their main estimates for 2024-25, in usual circumstances this Committee's scrutiny is integral to the exercise of the Audit Committee's statutory function of agreeing the estimates (which the Committee performs in place of DoF in recognition of the independence of the bodies from Executive departments).

The Committee is aware it has to agree urgently its position on the draft Budgets for 2024-25 for these bodies in advance of Executive deliberations and agreement. To do this, the Committee has endeavoured to carry out very limited scrutiny in the timescales provided by your Department. Members of the Committee noted this process does not allow the Committee to fulfil its Statutory role.

The Committee considered a number of papers at its meeting on Wednesday 6 March 2024, including written and oral evidence from the NMPBs. The Committee noted that, as a result of the extremely tight timescales for the current Budget process, the NMPBs were asked to make a Budget submission to your Department before the Committee was able to consider their draft Budgetary position.

The Committee agreed to write to you to seek an urgent response on your Department's view on the draft Budget submissions for 2024-25 for NIAO, NIPSO and NIAC. It is the Committee's understanding that the draft Budget 2024-25 will be

brought to the Executive in the days following Easter recess. The Committee has provisionally agreed to meet again on 20 March 2024 to review your Department's response and come to an agreed position on the draft Budgets for 2024-25.

Therefore, and to allow the Committee to report on the draft Budgets 2024-25, I would welcome a response from your Department by no later than Wednesday 13 March 2024.

Yours sincerely,

***Alan Chambers***

Alan Chambers MLA  
Chairperson  
Audit Committee

CC: Peter Hall, Clerk to the Finance Committee  
Dorinnia Carville, Comptroller and Auditor General, NIAO  
Margaret Kelly, NI Public Services Ombudsman  
Lesley Hogg, Clerk & Chief Executive, NI Assembly