



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

# Public Accounts Committee

## Minutes of Proceedings

**Thursday, 27 June 2024**

**Meeting Location:** Room 21, Parliament Buildings

**Present:**

Daniel McCrossan, MLA (Chairperson)

Cheryl Brownlee, MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

Diane Forsyth, MLA

Colm Gildernew, MLA

David Honeyford, MLA

John Stewart, MLA

**Present by Video or Teleconference:**

Pádraig Delargy, MLA

**Apologies:**

Cathal Boylan, MLA

Tom Buchanan, MLA

**In Attendance:** Lucia Wilson (Committee Clerk)  
Kirsten McClelland (Assistant Committee Clerk)  
Karen Barry (Clerical Supervisor)  
Barbara Daly (Clerical Officer)

The meeting commenced at 2.04 pm in closed session

The Chairperson advised members of the requirement to declare interests in any items of business on the agenda, and discussed the substantive items of business to be considered.

The meeting moved into public session at 2.10 pm.

### **1. Apologies**

Apologies were received from Cathal Boylan, MLA and Tom Buchanan, MLA.

### **2. Draft minutes**

**Agreed:** The draft minutes of the meeting on 20 June 2024 were agreed.

### **3. Matters Arising**

**Agreed:** Members agreed to note correspondence dated 17 June 2024 from Neil Hutcheson of the Federation of Small Businesses providing further information following the evidence session on Public Procurement in Northern Ireland.

**Agreed:** Members agreed to note correspondence dated 19 June 2024 from Mark Browne, Permanent Secretary and Accounting Officer for the Department of Education, providing further information following recent consideration of the Memorandum of Reply on the Closing the Gap report.

#### **4. Chairperson's Business**

The Chair placed on record his thanks on behalf of the Committee to the Clerking and administrative staff for their support throughout the year.

#### **5. Declaration of Interests**

The Chairperson reminded members of their requirement to register their interests under Standing Order 69(5).

#### **6. Correspondence**

Members noted written submissions to the Child Poverty in Northern Ireland inquiry from Action for Children, the British Association of Social Workers, Save The Children and the Cliff Edge Coalition.

**Agreed:** Members agreed to forward these submissions for consideration and inclusion in the final report.

Members noted correspondence from Noelle McAlinden, Chair of NI Mental Health Arts Festival outlining some of the groups' recent activities and offering ongoing support to the Committee in its inquiry into Mental Health Services in Northern Ireland.

#### **7. Memorandum of Reply on Broadband Investment in Northern Ireland**

The following witness joined the meeting at 2.16 pm

Ms Dorinnia Carville, Comptroller and Auditor General, NI

The Clerk briefed the Committee on the Memorandum of Reply received from the Department for Infrastructure.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to refer this MoR to the Economy Committee.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to seek an update on Recommendation 10 in 6 months time.

## **8. Inquiry on Child Poverty in Northern Ireland – Evidence Session**

The following witnesses from the Department for Communities joined the meeting at 2.18 pm

Colum Boyle, Permanent Secretary and Accounting Officer;

Emer Morelli, Deputy Secretary, Engaged Communities Group;

Paddy Rooney, Deputy Secretary, Work and Health Group;

George Sampson, Chief Economist and Director of Analytics.

The following official also joined the meeting:

Ms Dorinnia Carville, Comptroller and Auditor General

Mr Stuart Stevenson, Treasury Officer of Accounts

The Committee heard evidence from the witnesses.

John Stewart, MLA left the meeting at 2.07 pm.

John Stewart, MLA rejoined the meeting at 2.12 pm.

The Chairperson thanked Mr Boyle, Ms Morelli, Mr Rooney, Mr Sampson, C&AG and Mr Stevenson for attending.

Officials left the meeting at 4.20 pm.

The meeting moved into closed session at 4.20 pm.

## **9. Inquiry on Child Poverty in Northern Ireland – Discussion**

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 4.20 pm

Ms Dorinnia Carville, Comptroller and Auditor General;

Mr Tomas Wilkinson, Director, Northern Ireland Audit Office;

Mr Barry Mitchell, Audit Manager, Northern Ireland Audit Office;

Ms Claire Turner, Senior Auditor, Northern Ireland Audit Office;

Nicola Maguire, Analyst Northern Ireland Audit Office (Note Taker);

Kyle Bingham, Assembly Liaison Officers, Northern Ireland Audit Office.

Members discussed the evidence heard.

Daniel McCrossan, MLA left the meeting at 4.49 pm.

Daniel McCrossan, MLA rejoined the meeting at 4.51 pm.

**Agreed:** Members agreed to follow up in writing on matters raised during the evidence session.

**Agreed:** Members agreed to raise a request to the Assembly Research and Information Service to explore best practice in other jurisdictions in respect of reduction in levels of Child Poverty.

## **10. Forward Work Programme**

The Committee was briefed on the draft Forward Work programme. Members identified potential future inquiries and agreed the release of three reports to the relevant statutory

John Stewart, MLA left the meeting at 5.09 pm

John Stewart, MLA rejoined the meeting at 5.11 pm

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed its forward work programme.

**Agreed:** Members agreed to release the following reports to the relevant statutory Committees,

Pre-School Vaccinations in Northern Ireland (Health Committee)

Developing the Northern Ireland Food Animal Information System  
(Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee)

Financing NI Water's Capital Programme (Infrastructure Committee)

## **11. Any Other Business**

On behalf of the Committee, the Chair thanked the Northern Ireland Audit Office and Committee Staff for their work in support of the Committee.

The Clerk advised members of the requirement for Committees to delegate authority for views relating to the release of information through Freedom of Information during periods of recess.

**Agreed:** Members agreed to delegate authority to the Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson for the purposes of responding to Freedom of Information requests.

## **12. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting**

The Chairperson thanked officials for their attendance and advised members that there is a planning day scheduled for Thursday 12 September 2024, next meeting is scheduled for Thursday 19 September 2024, at 2.00 pm.

The meeting was adjourned at 5.14 pm.

**Daniel McCrossan MLA**

**Chairperson, Public Accounts Committee**

**20 June 2024**