



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

# Public Accounts Committee

## Minutes of Proceedings

**Thursday, 13 June 2024**

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

**Present:**

Daniel McCrossan, MLA (Chairperson)

Cheryl Brownlee, MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

Diane Forsythe, MLA

Colm Gildernew, MLA

David Honeyford, MLA

**Present by Video or Teleconference:**

Pádraig Delargy, MLA

**Apologies:**

Cathal Boylan, MLA

Tom Buchanan, MLA

John Stewart, MLA

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

The meeting commenced at 2.01 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 commenced at 2.03 pm in public session

### **1. Apologies**

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

### **2. Draft minutes**

**Agreed:** The draft minutes of the meeting on 6 June 2024 were agreed.

### **3. Matters Arising**

There were no matters arising.

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

No Chairperson's business was raised.

## **5. Declaration of Interests**

## **6. Correspondence**

Members noted correspondence dated 12 June 2024 from NI Commissioner for Children & Young People providing evidence for inclusion in the Committees report on Mental Health Services in Northern Ireland.

**Agreed:** Members agreed that the correspondence be included in the final report.

Members noted correspondence dated 7 June 2024 from Michael Cairns, Acting Head of Communications, Northern Ireland Assembly Commission, providing advice on joining Committee meetings via Zoom.

Members noted correspondence dated 6 June 2024 from Mary-Ellen Nutt, Head of IT, Northern Ireland Assembly Commission, advising of an extension to the deadline for completion of the Constituency Office Survey.

## **7. Memorandum of Reply: Planning in Northern Ireland - Briefing**

The meeting moved into closed session at 2.06 pm.

The following officials from the Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO) joined the meeting at 2.06 pm.

Ms Dorinnia Carville, Comptroller and Auditor General, NIAO

Mrs Colette Kane, Director, NIAO

Mr Kyle Bingham, Assembly Support Officer, NIAO

Members received a preparatory briefing from the Northern Ireland Audit Office in advance of the Departmental Briefing with Department for Infrastructure Officials.

The meeting moved into public session at 2.26 pm.

## **8. Memorandum of Reply: Planning in Northern Ireland– Departmental Briefing**

The following officials joined the meeting at 2.27 pm.

Mr Denis McMahon, Permanent Secretary and Accounting Officer, Department for Infrastructure

Ms Julie Thompson, Deputy Secretary, Planning and Public Transport, Department for Infrastructure

Mr Alistair Beggs, Director of Regional Policy and Casework, Department for Infrastructure

Mr Stuart Stevenson, Treasury Officer of Accounts, Department of Finance

Ms Julie Sewell, Public Audit and Accountability Branch, Department of Finance

Members heard further evidence from Officials in response to the Memorandum of Reply provided by the Department.

Daniel McCrossan MLA left the meeting at 3.23 pm.

Daniel McCrossan MLA rejoined the meeting at 3.26 pm.

Padraig Delargey MLA left the meeting at 3.46 pm.

**Agreed:** Members agreed to write to the Department for Infrastructure to provide an update on the MOR, following the evidence session with the Accounting Officer and departmental officials.

Officials left the meeting at 3.58 pm.

The meeting moved into closed session at 3.59 pm.

**Agreed:** Members agreed to take Agenda Item 11 – Inquiry into Mental Health Services in Northern Ireland – Final Consideration of Draft Report and Item 12 – Inquiry into Mental Health Services in Northern Ireland – Draft Press Release out of sequence to ensure that the meeting remained quorate to make decisions pertaining to release of the report.

## **11. Final Consideration of Report ‘Mental Health Services in Northern Ireland’**

The following officials from the Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO) joined the meeting at 3.59 pm.

Ms Dorinnia Carville, Comptroller and Auditor General, NIAO

Mrs Collette Kane, Director, NIAO

Mr Rodger McCance, Audit Manager, NIAO

Mr Kyle Bingham, Assembly Support Officer, NIAO

Mr Damien Prenter, Senior Auditor, NIAO (Remote)

The Committee noted the draft report is classified as RESTRICTED for Members’ attention and therefore should not be published more widely.

The Committee noted it had a first formal consideration of the ‘Mental Health Services in Northern Ireland’ report at last week’s meeting, 6 June 2024.

The Clerk advised members of further information received from the Department of Health which has informed the final draft of the report.

The Committee was presented with the agreed amendments as follows:

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that the further information received from the Department of Health no longer necessitated amendments to Paragraphs 8 and 67.

**Agreed:** The Committee noted the Section Title ‘Data on mental health services has been unacceptably poor and needs to be improved urgently’ has been amended.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed an amendment to paragraph 97.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to order the report to be published.

## **12. Inquiry into ‘Mental Health Services in Northern Ireland’ – Consideration of draft press release.**

The Committee considered the draft press release regarding its first report ‘Mental Health Services in Northern Ireland’.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed the amended press release.

**Agreed:** The Committee noted the Mental Health Services in Northern Ireland report will be published on Thursday 20 June 2024.

Officials left the meeting at 4.26 pm.

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

The following officials from the Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO) joined the meeting at 4.26 pm.

Ms Dorinnia Carville, Comptroller and Auditor General, NIAO

Mr Tomas Wilkinson, Director, NIAO

Mr Barry Mitchell, Audit Manager, NIAO

Ms Claire Turner, Senior Auditor, NIAO

Mr Kyle Bingham, Assembly Support Officer, NIAO

The Committee received a briefing from the Northern Ireland Audit Office on their report into Child Poverty in Northern Ireland.

Daniel McCrossan, MLA, left the meeting at 4.32 pm.

Daniel McCrossan, MLA, rejoined the meeting at 4.43 pm.

## **10. Inquiry on Child Poverty in Northern Ireland – Preparation Session**

The Committee received a briefing in preparation for its third inquiry on Child Poverty in Northern Ireland.

### **13. Forward Work Programme**

The Committee was briefed on the draft Forward Work programme.

**Agreed:** Members agreed to consider further Memoranda of Reply on 27 June 2024.

The Committee received an update on the planned event to mark the launch of the 'Mental Health Services in Northern Ireland' Report on 20<sup>th</sup> June 2024.

**Agreed:** Members agreed the draft agenda for the launch.

### **14. Any Other Business**

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

The Chairperson advised members that the next meeting is scheduled for Thursday 20<sup>th</sup> June, at 2.00 pm in Room 21, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 4.59 pm.

**Daniel McCrossan MLA**

**Chairperson, Public Accounts Committee**

**13 June 2024**