



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Public Accounts Committee

Minutes of Proceedings

Thursday, 16 May 2024

Meeting Location: Room 21, Parliament Buildings

Present:

Daniel McCrossan, MLA (Chairperson)

Cheryl Brownlee, MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

Cathal Boylan, MLA

Diane Forsyth, MLA

Colm Gildernew, MLA

John Stewart, MLA

Tom Buchanan, MLA

Present by Video or Teleconference:

Pádraig Delargy, MLA

Apologies:

David Honeyford, MLA

In Attendance: Lucia Wilson (Committee Clerk)
Tom Armstrong (Assistant Committee Clerk)
Karen Barry (Clerical Supervisor)
Barbara Daly (Clerical Officer)

The meeting commenced at 2.02 pm in closed session

The Deputy 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 2.07 pm.

1. Apologies

No apologies were received.

2. Draft minutes

Agreed: The draft minutes of the meeting on 9 May 2024 were agreed.

3. Matters Arising

There were no Matters Arising.

4. Chairperson's Business

The Chairperson advised that he had been invited by CIPFA Northern Ireland Branch to provide the keynote address at their annual conference in October.

Agreed: Members agreed that the Chairperson can attend this event on behalf of the Committee.

5. Declaration of Interests

There were no declarations of interest.

6. Correspondence

Members noted correspondence from Neil Gibson, Permanent Secretary, Department of Finance, advising of an additional witness for the evidence session on Public Sector Procurement in Northern Ireland.

Members noted correspondence from New Script for Mental Health, providing a written submission to the inquiry on Mental Health Services in Northern Ireland.

Agreed: Members agreed to forward this correspondence to the Northern Ireland Audit Office for consideration as part of the inquiry's final report stage.

Members noted correspondence from the Federation of Small Businesses (FSB) offering to provide evidence to the Public Procurement Inquiry

Agreed: Members agreed to invite FSB to attend an evidence session on 23 May 2024

Members discussed correspondence from Dr Deirdre Meehan on behalf of the Chairperson of the Association of Child Psychotherapists.

Agreed: Members agreed to consider the issues raised as part of the Committee's inquiry into Mental Health and to forward this submission to the Northern Ireland Audit Office for consideration in the final report.

7. Inquiry on Public Procurement in Northern Ireland: Evidence Session

The following officials from the Department of Finance joined the meeting at 2.12 pm

Mr Neil Gibson, Permanent Secretary, Department of Finance;

Ms Sharon Smyth, Chief Executive, Construction and Procurement Delivery, Department of Finance;

Mr Michael Watson, Director, Construction and Procurement Delivery, Department of Finance;

The following officials also joined the meeting;

Mr Stuart Stevenson, Treasury Officer of Accounts;

Ms Dorinnia Carville, Comptroller and Auditor General.

The Committee heard evidence from the Officials.

Daniel McCrossan MLA left the meeting at 4.08pm

Daniel McCrossan MLA re-joined the meeting at 4.10pm

Cheryl Brownlee MLA left the meeting at 4.26pm

Agreed: The Department agreed to send the Committee information on the numbers of vacancies in the Procurement centres across the NICS.

Agreed: The Department agreed to send the Committee updated statistics on Prompt Payments.

The Chairperson thanked Mr Gibson, Ms Smyth and Mr Stevenson for attending.

Officials left the meeting at 4.40 pm.

The meeting moved into closed session at 4.41 pm.

8. Inquiry on Public Procurement in Northern Ireland: Discussion

The following officials from the Northern Ireland Audit Office joined the meeting at 4.41 pm

Ms Dorinnia Carville, Comptroller and Auditor General, NI

Ms Suzanne Jones, Director, NIAO

Mr Michael Heery, Audit Manager, NIAO

Mr Kyle Bingham, Assembly Support Officer, NIAO

Mr Geoff Murphy, Senior Auditor, NIAO (Public Gallery)

Mr Corey Parr, Auditor, NIAO (Public Gallery)

Members discussed the evidence provided by officials and agreed the issues to be included in the published report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to ask the Department to provide comparable data on how procurement is conducted in other jurisdictions.

9. Forward Work Programme

The Committee was briefed on the draft Forward Work programme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to invite the Department of Education to brief the Committee on the Memorandum of Reply on Closing the Gap – Social Deprivation and links to educational attainment on 6th June

Agreed: The Committee agreed to invite the Department for Infrastructure to brief the Committee on Planning in NI on 13th June.

Agreed: The Committee agreed it's forward work programme.

10. Any Other Business

The Committee discussed a report from the Department of Health

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Permanent Secretary of the Department of Health regarding inconsistencies with this report and what was previously stated by the Health Minister.

11. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting

The Deputy Chairperson thanked officials for their attendance and advised members that the next meeting is scheduled for Thursday 23rd May, at 2.00 pm in Room 21, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 4.56 pm.

Daniel McCrossan MLA

Chairperson, Public Accounts Committee

16 May 2024