



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Public Accounts Committee

Minutes of Proceedings

Thursday, 20 February 2025

Meeting Location: Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings

Present:

Daniel McCrossan, MLA

Cheryl Brownlee, MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

Diane Forsythe, MLA

Tom Buchanan, MLA

Colin Crawford, MLA

David Honeyford, MLA

Colm Gildernew, MLA

Cathal Boylan, MLA

Present by Video or Teleconference:

Pádraig Delargy, MLA

Apologies:

In Attendance: Lucia Wilson (Committee Clerk)
Kirsten McClelland (Assistant Committee Clerk)
Marion Johnson (Clerical Supervisor)
Damien Brown (Clerical Officer)

The meeting opened in public session at 2.08 pm.

1. Apologies

2. Draft minutes

Agreed: The draft minutes of the meeting on 6 February 2025 were agreed.

3. Declaration of Interests

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

Diane Forsythe, MLA declared an interest as a member of the Finance Committee.

Cathal Boylan, MLA declared an interest due to a meeting arranged with the British Medical Association.

4. Chairperson's Business

The Chair welcomed Damien Brown to the meeting and thanked him for providing administrative cover to the meeting.

The Chair welcomed Clerk Lucia Wilson back after a period of absence and thanked Assistant Clerk Kirsten McClelland and the Clerks who have provided cover to the Committee over recent weeks.

5. Matters Arising

Members noted correspondence from Colum Boyle, Accounting Officer, Department for Communities providing an update on Recommendation 2 in the Memorandum of Reply on Child Poverty in Northern Ireland.

Agreed: Members agreed to write to the Department to seek further clarity on the role of the Department in agreeing and monitoring of any targets set in conjunction with the Executive.

Agreed: Members agreed to request an update on the anti-poverty strategy which the Department previously advised was due to be shared with members after 31 January 2025.

Members noted an update from the Finance Committee on their request for an update on Recommendation 9 of the PAC report into Child Poverty in Northern Ireland.

Agreed: Members agreed to note this correspondence.

Members noted correspondence from the Patient Client Council, confirming attendees for the evidence session on Access to General Practice Services in Northern Ireland on 27 February.

Agreed: Members agreed to note this correspondence.

Ireland Audit Office for consideration and inclusion in the final report.

6. Correspondence

7. Inquiry into Public Procurement in Northern Ireland – Memorandum of Reply

Agreed: Members agreed to defer consideration of the MOR until the report on Major Capital Projects: Follow Up report is published due to a number of cross-cutting issues.

The meeting moved into closed session at 2.22 pm.

8. Preparation session for inquiry into Access to General Practice Services in Northern Ireland

The following officials from the Northern Ireland Audit Office joined the meeting at 2.22 pm:

Dorinnia Carville, Comptroller and Auditor General;

Colette Kane, Director

Roger McCance, Audit Manager

Kyle Bingham, Assembly Support Officer

Members were briefed on the forthcoming inquiry into Access to General Practice Services in Northern Ireland.

Pádraig Delargy, MLA joined the meeting at 2.56 pm.

Members were briefed on plans for Citizen Space consultation and reviewed a draft questionnaire.

Colm Gildernew, MLA left the meeting at 3.31 pm.

Colm Gildernew, MLA rejoined the meeting at 3.33 pm.

Agreed: Members agreed the draft questions.

Agreed: Members agreed to launch the consultation as soon as possible.

Agreed: Members agreed that the consultation should be live for a period of 4 weeks.

9. First Consideration of Report 'Public Procurement in Northern Ireland'

The following officials from the Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO) joined the meeting at 3.35 pm.

Dorinnia Carville, Comptroller and Auditor General, NIAO

Patrick Barr, Director, NIAO

Suzanne Murphy, Audit Manager, NIAO

Karen Armstrong, Senior Auditor, NIAO

Kyle Bingham, Assembly Support Officer, NIAO

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

The Committee noted this is the first formal consideration for the report 'Major Capital Projects: Follow Up Report' and agreed the title of the report is 'Major Capital Projects: Follow Up Report'.

The Committee made the following decisions regarding each section and paragraphs within the report, that is – Agreed, Agreed as amended or to be reworded.

Section 'Introduction': Paragraphs 28 – 29

Paragraph 28: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 29: Read and Agreed

Section 'Background': Paragraphs 30 – 34

Paragraph 30: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 31: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 32: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 33: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 34: Read and Agreed

Agreed: Section Title: Leadership, governance and the NICS Board need urgently reviewed

Paras 35 – 42

Paragraph 35: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 36: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 37: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 38: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 39: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 40: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 41: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 42: Read and Agreed

Agreed: Section Title: An independent oversight body remains lacking in Northern Ireland.

Paras 43 – 56

Paragraph 43: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 44: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 45: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 46: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 47: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 48: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 49: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 50: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 51: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 52: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 53: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 54: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 55: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 56: Read and Agreed

Agreed: Section Title: The current arrangements for delivery of major capital projects in Northern Ireland remain not fit for purpose.

Paras 57 – 59

Paragraph 57: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 58: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 59: Read and Agreed

Agreed: Section Title: The importance of effective collaborative and partnership working.

Paras 60 - 64

Paragraph 60: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 61: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 62: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 63: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 64: Read and Agreed

Agreed: Section Title: Urgent action must be taken to address the identified root causes of delays and cost overruns.

Paras 65 - 67

Paragraph 65: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 66: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 67: Read and Agreed

Agreed: Section Title: ‘The importance of social licence must be understood and addressed by all involved in major capital projects.’

Paras 68 - 73

Paragraph 68: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 69: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 70: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 71: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 72: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 73: Read and Agreed

Agreed: Section Title: The business case process has been streamlined but has not yet delivered any demonstrable positive impact.

Paras 74 – 76

Paragraph 74: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 75: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 76: Read and Agreed

Agreed: Section Title: The Committee states again that the NICS must develop the capacity and capability to successfully deliver major capital projects.

Paras 77 – 85

Paragraph 77: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 78: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 79: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 80: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 81: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 82: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 83: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 84: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 85: Read and Agreed

The Committee then returned to the Executive Summary paragraphs 1 to 15 and agreed the following:

Paragraph 1: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 2: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 3: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 4: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 5: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 6: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 7: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 8: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 9: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 10: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 11: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 12: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 13: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 14: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 15: Read and Agreed

Recommendations 1 to 12:

Recommendation 1: Read and Agreed

Recommendation 2: Read and Agreed

Recommendation 3: Read and Agreed

Recommendation 4: Read and Agreed

Recommendation 5: Read and Agreed

Recommendation 6: Read and Agreed

Recommendation 7: Read and Agreed

Recommendation 8: Read and Agreed

Recommendation 9: Read and Agreed

Recommendation 10: Read and Agreed

Recommendation 11: Read and Agreed

Recommendation 12: Read and Agreed

That concluded the first consideration of the report – Major Capital Projects: Follow Up Report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to bring the amended Report to its meeting on 13 March 2025 for final consideration

10. Forward Work Programme

The Clerk briefed members on the draft Forward Work programme.

Agreed: Members agreed the draft Forward Work programme.

11. Date, Time, and Place of the next meeting

The next meeting will take place in the Senate Chamber on Thursday 27 February 2025 at 2.00 pm.

The meeting was adjourned at 3.44 pm.

Daniel McCrossan MLA

Chairperson, Public Accounts Committee

27 February 2024