



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Public Accounts Committee

Minutes of Proceedings

Thursday, 6 March 2025

Meeting Location: Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings

Present:

Daniel McCrossan, MLA

Cheryl Brownlee, MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

Diane Forsythe, MLA

Tom Buchanan, MLA

David Honeyford, MLA

Colm Gildernew, MLA

Cathal Boylan, MLA

Present by Video or Teleconference:

Colin Crawford, MLA

Apologies: Pádraig Delargy, MLA

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 2.27 pm.

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Pádraig Delargy, MLA

2. Draft minutes

Agreed: The draft minutes of the meeting on 27 February 2025 were agreed.

3. Declaration of Interests

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

Colm Gildernew, MLA declared an interest as a former Social Worker.

4. Chairperson's Business

5. Matters Arising

Members received an update on the survey launched as part of the inquiry into Access to General Practice in Northern Ireland.

Agreed: Members noted the actions taken to address technical issues with the survey.

Members were advised of requests to engage with the Committee,

Agreed : Members agreed to consider requests as part of the forward work programme.

6. Inquiry into Access to General Practice in Northern Ireland – Oral Evidence from the Department of Health

Members noted an update received on 6 March 2025 from Peter May, Accounting Officer, Department of Health responding to questions raised in advance of the evidence session.

Agreed: Members agreed to note this correspondence.

Members noted an update received on 6 March 2025 from the Royal College of General Practitioners, providing an update on matters raised at the evidence session on 27 February 2025.

Agreed: Members agreed to note this correspondence.

The following witnesses and officials joined the meeting at 2.32 pm:

Peter May, Accounting Officer, Department of Health.

Gearóid Cassidy, Director of Primary Care, Department of Health.

Dr Margaret O'Brien, Head of General Medical Services, Strategic Planning and Performance Group, Department of Health.

Dorinnia Carville, Comptroller and Auditor General, NIAO.

Stuart Stevenson, Treasury Officer of Accounts, Department of Finance

Members heard evidence on Access to General Practice Services in Northern Ireland.

Colm Gildernew, MLA joined the meeting at 2.40 pm.

Colm Gildernew, MLA left the meeting at 4.11 pm.

Colm Gildernew, MLA rejoined the meeting at 4.12 pm.

Diane Forsythe, MLA left the meeting at 4.17 pm.

Cathal Boylan, MLA left the meeting at 4.21 pm.

Cathal Boylan, MLA rejoined the meeting at 4.27 pm.

The Chair thanked the witnesses and Officials for attending. Witnesses left the meeting at 5.18pm.

The meeting moved into closed session at 5.18 pm.

7. Discussion of evidence for inquiry into Access to General Practice in Northern Ireland

The following officials from the Northern Ireland Audit Office joined the meeting at 5.18 pm:

Dorinnia Carville, Comptroller and Auditor General;

Colette Kane, Director

Roger McCance, Audit Manager

Kyle Bingham, Assembly Support Officer

Members discussed the evidence heard in the inquiry into Access to General Practice in Northern Ireland.

Cheryl Brownlee, MLA left the meeting at 5.28 pm.

Agreed: Members agreed to write to Peter May, Accounting Officer, Department of Health to request further information offered by the department during the evidence session.

10. Correspondence

Members noted the latest NICS Quarterly Sickness Absence report.

Agreed: Members agreed to note the correspondence.

Agreed: The Committee considered correspondence from a concerned member of the public regarding issues related to potential conflicts of interest and allegations of financial irregularities. Give the sensitivities of the matters raised, the Committee agreed to consider this item in closed session.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the correspondent to advise them of the most appropriate avenue for their complaint, as the matter falls outside the Committee's remit and no further action can be taken.

11. Forward Work Programme

Agreed: Members agreed the draft forward work programme and noted matters for further discussion at the next meeting.

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

The next meeting will take place in the Senate Chamber on Thursday 13 March 2025 at 2.00 pm.

The meeting was adjourned at 5.38 pm.

Daniel McCrossan MLA

Chairperson, Public Accounts Committee

13 March 2024