



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Public Accounts Committee

Minutes of Proceedings

Thursday, 16 January 2025

Meeting Location: Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings

Present:

Daniel McCrossan, MLA

Cheryl Brownlee, MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

Diane Forsythe, MLA

David Honeyford, MLA

Cathal Boylan, MLA

Colm Gildernew, MLA

Pádraig Delargy, MLA

Present by Video or Teleconference:

Apologies:

Tom Buchanan, MLA

Colin Crawford, MLA

In Attendance: Aoibhinn Treanor (Committee Clerk)
 Kirsten McClelland (Assistant Committee Clerk)
 Marion Johnson (Clerical Supervisor)
 Barbara Daly (Clerical Officer)

The meeting opened in public session at 2.14 pm.

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Colin Crawford, MLA and Tom Buchanan, MLA.

2. Draft minutes

Agreed: The draft minutes of the meeting on 12 December 2024 were agreed.

3. Declaration of Interests

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

The Chairperson declared an interest in respect of correspondence relating to Dalradian Gold which referred to his constituency.

4. Chairperson's Business

The Chair noted the work done by the Committee to date and noted the positive feedback and media coverage received. The Chair placed on record his thanks and appreciation to the Deputy Chair, Committee Members, Committee Staff Team, Communications Team, Comptroller and Auditor General, Northern Ireland Audit Office staff and the Treasury Officer of Accounts for the support provided to the work of the Committee.

Mr Honeyford concurred and proposed for completeness to seek clarification on a matter relating spending on nursing homes which is of relevance to the Committee's recent 'Public Procurement in NI' inquiry.

Agreed: Members agreed to write and seek clarification on the matter in advance of receipt of the MOR on 13 February.

5. Matters Arising

Members were advised that the planned evidence session with Ms Jayne Brady, Head of the Northern Ireland Civil Service, and Mr Neil Gibson, Accounting Officer, Department of Finance in the inquiry on Major Capital Projects: Follow Up Report was cancelled as a result of Ms Brady being required to attend an urgent meeting of the Northern Ireland Executive.

Members were advised that Ms Brady and Mr Gibson would be available to the Committee on 30 January 2025.

Agreed: Members agreed to invite Ms Brady and Mr Gibson to a rescheduled evidence session for its inquiry into Major Capital Projects: Follow Up Report on 30 January 2025.

Members noted a further update from the Department of Finance dated 9 January 2025 in which responses were provided to questions raised following the evidence session held on 3 October 2024 in the inquiry into Major Capital Projects: Follow Up Report,

Agreed: Members agreed to forward the correspondence to the Northern Ireland Audit Office for inclusion in the final report.

Members noted correspondence dated 9 January 2025 from Peter May, Accounting Officer, Department of Health providing members with further information in respect of in-year spend and performance outcomes within Mental Health Services in Northern Ireland.

Agreed: Members agreed to note the update and welcomed the clarity and reassurance provided by the Department.

Members noted correspondence dated 8 January 2025 from Ronnie Armour, Acting Accounting Officer, Department of Education providing members with further information in respect of queries arising from the evidence session on Developing the Skills for Northern Ireland's Future on 5 December 2024.

Agreed: Members agreed to forward the correspondence to the Northern Ireland Audit Office for inclusion in the final report.

6. Correspondence

Members noted correspondence from Committee for Finance dated 16 December 2024 providing an update from the Department of Finance on Broadband Investment in Northern Ireland.

Agreed: Members agreed to note this correspondence.

Members also noted correspondence received on 6 January 2025 from a member of the public in respect of planning matters relating to Dalradian Gold.

Agreed: Members agreed a response to be issued.

The meeting moved into closed session at 2.19 pm.

7. Review of Outstanding Northern Ireland Audit Office Reports

The following officials from the Northern Ireland Audit Office joined the meeting at 2.19 pm:

Dorinnia Carville, Comptroller and Auditor General, Northern Ireland Audit Office;

Kyle Bingham, Assembly Support Officer, NIAO

Members were briefed on the NIAO reports currently held pending a decision on future PAC inquiries.

The meeting returned to open session at 3.02 pm.

Agreed: Members agreed to release the report on Water Quality in Rivers and Lakes for consideration by the Committee for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs.

Agreed: Members agreed provisionally, subject to consideration of reports yet to be published by the NIAO, that its eighth inquiry would be 'Managing the Schools Estate'.

The meeting returned to closed session at 3.03 pm.

8. Forward Work Programme

The Clerk briefed members on the draft Forward Work programme.

Agreed: Members agreed the draft Forward Work programme.

Agreed: Members agreed witnesses to be invited to give evidence for the upcoming inquiry into Access to GP Services.

9. Any Other Business

10. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting

The next meeting will take place in the Senate Chamber on Thursday 23 January 2025 at 2.00 pm.

The meeting was adjourned at 3.32 pm. **Daniel McCrossan MLA**

Chairperson, Public Accounts Committee

23 January 2024