



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Public Accounts Committee

Minutes of Proceedings

Thursday, 5 December 2024

Meeting Location: Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings

Present:

Daniel McCrossan, MLA

Cheryl Brownlee, MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

Diane Forsythe, MLA

Colin Crawford, MLA

Colm Gildernew, MLA

Cathal Boylan, MLA

Present by Video or Teleconference:

Pádraig Delargy, MLA

Apologies: Tom Buchanan, MLA
David Honeyford, MLA

In Attendance: Lucia Wilson (Committee Clerk)
Neal Flanagan (Assistant Committee Clerk)
Marion Johnson (Clerical Supervisor)
Barbara Daly (Clerical Officer)

The meeting opened in public session at 2.11 pm.

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Tom Buchanan and David Honeyford.

2. Draft minutes

Agreed: The draft minutes of the meeting on 21 November 2024 were agreed.

3. Declaration of Interests

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

Diane Forsythe declared an interest as Assembly Private Secretary to The Education Minister.

Pádraig Delargy declared an interest as a former primary school teacher, as Sinn Féin spokesperson on Further and Higher Education, and a participant in the Skill Up Programme.

4. Matters Arising

Members noted a letter from Neil Gibson, Accounting Officer, Department of Finance, confirming both his attendance and that of the Head of the Civil Service on Thursday 16 January 2025.

Agreed: Members agreed to note the correspondence and forward to the Northern Ireland Audit Office for information.

Members considered a response from Ian Snowden, Accounting Officer, Department for the Economy, providing further information requested by Members.

Agreed: Members agreed to note this response; include it in the inquiry report, and forward to the Northern Ireland Audit Office for information.

5. Chairperson's Business

The Chairperson thanked Committee Clerk and staff for their assistance during the previous week's trip to Malta.

6. Correspondence

7. Evidence session for 'Developing the Skills for Northern Ireland's Future' inquiry.

The following officials joined the meeting at 2.15 pm.

Ronnie Armour, Interim Accounting Officer, Department for the Education;

Linsey Farrell, Deputy Secretary, Education Policy and Children's Services, Department for Education;

Karen McCullough, Director of Qualifications, 14-19 Strategy and Youthwork, Department for Education;

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

Stuart Stevenson, Treasury Officer of Accounts, Department of Finance

The Committee heard evidence from the witnesses.

The Chairperson thanked Mr Armour, Ms Farrell, Ms McCullough, Ms Carville and Mr Stevenson for attending.

Officials left the meeting at 3.55 pm.

The meeting moved into closed session at 3.55 pm.

8. Discussions following Evidence session for ‘Developing the Skills for Northern Ireland’s Future’ inquiry.

The following officials from the Northern Ireland Audit Office joined the meeting at 3.56 pm:

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

Patrick Barr, Director, Northern Ireland Audit Office;

Suzanne Murphy, Audit Manager, Northern Ireland Audit Office;

Kyle Bingham, Assembly Support Officer, Northern Ireland Audit Office

Members discussed the evidence heard.

Agreed: Members agreed to consider draft written follow-up questions to be agreed at its next meeting.

9. Forward Work Programme

The Clerk briefed the Committee on the draft Forward Work Programme.

Agreed: Members agreed to hold an informal meeting via teleconference on 9 January 2025.

Agreed: Members agreed to hold its first formal meeting after the Christmas recess on 16 January 2025.

Members discussed amendments to the draft Forward Work Programme.

Agreed: Members agreed the draft Forward Work Programme as amended.

The Chairperson and Members discussed the previous week's Committee visit to Malta and noted that report on the visit is being prepared by the Clerk for consideration at the next meeting.

The Chairperson thanked officials for their attendance.

NIAO officials left the meeting at 4.40 pm.

10. Any Other Business

11. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting

The Chairperson thanked officials for their attendance and advised members that the next meeting will take place in the Senate Chamber on Thursday 12 December 2024 at 2.00 pm.

The meeting was adjourned at 4.40 pm.

Daniel McCrossan MLA

Chairperson, Public Accounts Committee

5 December 2024