



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Public Accounts Committee

Minutes of Proceedings

Thursday, 15 January 2026

Meeting Location: Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings

Present:

- Daniel McCrossan, MLA (Chairperson)
- Diane Forsythe, MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
- Stephen Dunne, MLA
- Tom Buchanan, MLA
- Cathal Boylan, MLA
- Colm Gildernew, MLA
- David Honeyford, MLA
- Jon Burrows, MLA

Present by Video or Teleconference:

Pádraig Delargy, MLA

Apologies:

In Attendance: Lucia Wilson (Committee Clerk)
Kirsten McClelland (Assistant Committee Clerk)
Karen Barry (Clerical Supervisor)
Yannie Mahood (Clerical Officer)

The meeting opened in public session at 2.12pm.

1. Apologies

2. Draft minutes

Agreed: Members agreed the draft minutes of the meeting on 11 December 2025.

3. Declaration of Interests

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

Diane Forsythe, MLA declared an interest as APS to the Education Minister.

Pádraig Delargy, MLA declared an interest as former teacher and head of the all party group on mental health.

Colm Gildernew, MLA declared an interest as Chair of the Communities Committee.

4. Chairperson's Business

The Chairperson thanked the Deputy Chairperson for chairing recent meetings in his absence, and thanked Committee Members for their support.

The Chairperson placed on record his congratulations to Colette Kane, Local Government Auditor on her recent retirement and New Year's Honours.

Agreed: Members agreed to write to Colette to pass on congratulations and thank her for her service to the public.

The Chairperson congratulated the Committee Clerk on 25 years of service to the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission, and the Clerical Officer on her appointment as a permanent member of Assembly Commission Staff.

The Chairperson noted correspondence from the Royal College of General Practitioners (RCGP) requesting a meeting regarding the Committee's recommendations on Access to General Practice in Northern Ireland.

Agreed: Members agreed to respond to RCGP to offer a meeting upon receipt and consideration of the MOR to better inform discussions.

5. Matters Arising

Members noted correspondence from the Northern Ireland Housing Executive following the evidence session on Homelessness in Northern Ireland.

Agreed: Members agreed to note the correspondence for inclusion in the final report.

Members noted correspondence from the Department of Finance confirming that Accounting Officer Neil Gibson will attend to brief Members on MOR's on 29 January 2026.

Agreed: Members agreed to note this correspondence.

Members noted correspondence from Homeless Connect following the evidence session on Homelessness in Northern Ireland.

Agreed: Members agreed to note the correspondence for inclusion in the final report.

6. Correspondence

Members noted correspondence from a member of the public.

Agreed: Members agreed that this matter does not fall within the remit of the PAC and agreed a response to be issued to the member of the public.

Members noted correspondence from Action for Children providing a written submission of evidence on Homelessness in Northern Ireland.

Agreed: Members agreed to note the correspondence for inclusion in the final report.

Members noted correspondence from the Assembly Engagement Team regarding Committee's attendance at the 2026 Balmoral Show.

Agreed: Members agreed that PAC would hold a meeting at the Balmoral Show on 14 May 2026.

7. Ministerial Direction – 2025-26 HSC Pay Awards

The following witnesses and officials joined the meeting at 2.22 pm.

Dorinnia Carville, Comptroller and Auditor General

Members considered the Ministerial Direction. Members noted the unusual circumstances of the nature of the Accounting Officer supporting a Ministerial Direction and financial risks associated with this practice.

Jon Burrows, MLA joined the meeting at 2.41 pm.

Agreed: The Clerk will seek further advice on the role of PAC and statutory committees in the scrutiny of Ministerial Directions.

Agreed: Members agreed to keep the matter under review and consider the wider implications for wider public sector financial control.

8. Memorandum of Reply

The following officials joined the meeting at 2.47 pm.

Dorinnia Carville, Comptroller and Auditor General; and

Patrick Barr, Director, NIAO;

Members considered the MOR on Managing the Schools Estate.

Agreed: Members agreed to write to the Department of Education to seek further information on a number of recommendations.

Agreed: Members agreed to write to the Education Committee to advise that PAC wish to retain Primacy to allow for a response from the Department.

Members considered further correspondence from the Department for Economy and Department for Education in relation to the MOR on Developing the Skills for Northern Ireland's Future.

Agreed: Members agreed to request a copy of the Careers Action Plan from the Department for the Economy.

Agreed: Members agreed to request a further update on the MOR in 6 months.

Officials left the meeting at 3.05pm.

9. Memorandum of Reply – Mental Health Services in Northern Ireland

The following officials joined the meeting at 3.05pm.

Mike Farrar, Accounting Officer, Dept of Health;

Heather Stevens, Director of Mental Health, DoH;

Dr Ciara McKillop, Interim Director of Community Care, SPPG, DoH;

and;

Stuart Stevenson, Treasury Officer of Accounts, Dept of Finance;

Dorinnia Carville, Comptroller and Auditor General.

The Chair welcomed witnesses and congratulated Mike Farrar on his appointment as Accounting Officer to DoH.

Members received a briefing updating them on progress against the recommendations made in June 2024, and the deliverability review published in October 2025 in respect of the DoH Mental Health Strategy.

David Honeyford, MLA left the meeting at 3.05 pm.

David Honeyford, MLA rejoined the meeting at 3.05 pm.

Colm Gildernew, MLA left the meeting at 4.21 pm.

Colm Gildernew, MLA rejoined the meeting at 4.22 pm.

Tom Buchanan, MLA left the meeting at 4.31 pm.

Jon Burrows, MLA left the meeting at 4.35 pm.

Jon Burrows, MLA rejoined the meeting at 4.38 pm.

Tom Buchanan, MLA rejoined the meeting at 4.39 pm.

Stephen Dunne, MLA left the meeting at 4.40 pm.

David Honeyford, MLA left the meeting at 4.41 pm.

Stephen Dunne, MLA rejoined the meeting at 4.44 pm.

David Honeyford, MLA rejoined the meeting at 4.45 pm.

Cathal Boylan, MLA left the meeting at 4.52 pm.

The Chairperson thanked officials for attending.

Officials left the meeting at 5.00 pm.

The meeting moved into closed session at 5.00 pm.

Members discussed the briefing provided.

Jon Burrows, MLA left the meeting at 5.12 pm.

Agreed: Members agreed to seek a further written update from DoH and invite the Accounting Officer to provide a further briefing in 6 months.

10.Preparation for briefing with Treasury Officer of Accounts

Agreed: Members agreed to defer this matter.

11.Draft Forward Work Programme.

Agreed: Members agreed to seek further information in relation to the 'Rethinking Our Resources: Northern Ireland Resources and Waste Management Strategy' consultation before issuing invitations to officials in respect of the planned inquiry into waste.

Agreed: Members agreed to seek a 12 month MOR update from the Department for Communities in respect of Child Poverty in Northern Ireland.

Agreed: Members agreed to defer consideration of the draft forward work programme.

12.Any Other Business

13.Date, time and place of next meeting

The next meeting will take place in the Senate Chamber on Thursday 22 January 2026 at 2.00pm.

The meeting was adjourned at 5.14pm.

Daniel McCrossan

Chairperson, Public Accounts Committee

22 January 2026