



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Public Accounts Committee

Minutes of Proceedings

Thursday, 18 June 2026

Meeting Location: Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings

Present: Tom Buchanan MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Stephen Dunne MLA
Colm Gildernew MLA
David Honeyford MLA
Gareth Wilson MLA

Present by Video or Teleconference:

Daniel McCrossan MLA (Chairperson)
Jon Burrows MLA
Jemma Dolan MLA

Apologies: Cathal Boylan MLA

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

The meeting opened in public session at 2.18pm.

1. Apologies

Apologies were noted from Cathal Boylan MLA.

2. Draft minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the draft minutes of the meeting on 11th June 2026.

3. Declaration of Interests

The Chairperson declared an interest as a Member of the Committee for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs.

Stephen Dunne MLA declared an interest as Assembly Private Secretary (APS) to the Minister for Communities.

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

David Honeyford MLA declared an interest as a Member of the Committee for the Economy.

4. Chairperson's Business

There was no Chairperson's Business.

5. Matters Arising

There were no Matters Arising.

6. Correspondence

The Committee deferred to closed session its consideration of correspondence received from the Department for the Economy (DfE) Accounting Officer (AO), on the approach to progressing audits for the 2025-26 DfE Group accounts.

7. Memorandums of Reply

The Committee noted correspondence from the Department for Communities (DfC) AO in relation to the Memorandum of Reply (MOR) on Child Poverty in Northern Ireland. The Committee had requested an update on progress made on the Executive's Anti-Poverty Strategy. The Committee discussed that there was an urgent need for the Strategy.

The following official joined the meeting at 2.22pm:

- Dorinnia Carville, Comptroller and Auditor General (C&AG), Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO).

The Chairperson welcomed the C&AG to the meeting.

The Committee considered the MOR from the Department for Infrastructure on Road Openings by Utilities.

Agreed: The Committee welcomes the broad acceptance by DfC of the Committee's recommendations and that the target implementation dates, presented in the MOR, broadly align with timescales recommended by the Committee, with the exception of recommendation 1 where the target implementation date extends beyond the Committee's recommended timescale.

Agreed: In relation to recommendation 1, the Committee agreed to write to the Department to receive clarification that the methodology underpinning the Department's financial analysis will be reviewed to ensure that it is robust and evidence based.

Agreed: In relation to recommendation 4, the Committee agreed to write to the Department and reiterate the importance of the inspection programme being suitably robust. Members agreed that the inspection programme should provide assurance not only regarding the quality of works undertaken by utility bodies and for the materials used, but also regarding the overall quality of reinstatement and the appearance of roads and footways following completion of works.

The Committee remains concerned about examples of poor reinstatement, including patchwork repairs and inconsistent restoration standards, which can negatively impact the public realm and lead to avoidable costs to the public purse. The Committee agreed to receive detail of the Department's inspection and monitoring arrangements and how it will meet its responsibilities in this important issue.

Further, the Committee agreed to receive detail on the engagement and co-ordination, including timelines, that is carried out between the Department and utility bodies ahead of commencement of work.

Agreed: In relation to recommendation 7, the Committee agreed to write to the Department for confirmation on whether the reason for partial acceptance of the recommendation is due to work already under way by the Department and, further, whether the Department believes that public perception aligns with the Department's own assessment of road openings.

Agreed: In relation to recommendation 8, the Committee agreed to write to the Department stating that the Committee is keen to see greater transparency through the publication of contractor related data and to

request greater clarity on whether it is the intention of the Department to publish such data, or whether work is currently being undertaken to assess how this could be achieved.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that Department officials attend in six months to provide an update on progress of the recommendations.

The Committee moved to closed session at 2.34pm.

The Committee considered correspondence received from the DfE AO regarding the approach to progressing the audits for the 2025-26 DfE Group Accounts, and a copy of correspondence sent to the AO from the Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO).

The following officials joined the meeting at 2.34pm:

- Dorinnia Carville, Comptroller and Auditor General, NIAO;
- Seamus Wade, Director, NIAO; and
- Gary Currie, Audit Manager, NIAO.

The officials briefed the Committee on NIAO's engagement with DfE in regards to 2025-26 DfE Group Accounts.

8. Inquiry on Northern Ireland Energy Strategy: Issues Paper

The following officials joined the meeting at 2.52pm:

- Dorinnia Carville, C&AG, NIAO;
- Seamus Wade, Director, NIAO; and
- Gary Currie, Audit Manager, NIAO.

The Committee considered an Issues Paper for the Committee's Inquiry on Northern Ireland Energy Strategy.

The Committee received a briefing from the C&AG and NIAO officials.

The Chairperson thanked the C&AG and NIAO officials.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Issues Paper covers the key issues to form the basis of the report, but that it should also include any further evidence gathered by the Committee from the business sector.

9. Inquiry into Major IT Projects in Northern Ireland: First Consideration of Draft Report

The following officials joined the meeting at 3.09pm:

- Dorinnia Carville, C&AG, NIAO;
- Suzanne Jones, Director, NIAO; and
- Suzanne Murphy, Audit Manager, NIAO.

The Committee considered its draft report 'Report on Major IT Projects in Northern Ireland'.

The Committee considered a draft press release.

Gareth Wilson MLA left the meeting at 3.27pm.

Gareth Wilson returned to the meeting at 3.28pm.

The Chairperson thanked the C&AG and NIAO officials.

Agreed: The Committee agreed amendments to be incorporated into the draft report before final consideration of the report at next week's meeting.

10. Oral Briefing by Legal Services

The following officials joined the meeting at 3.41pm:

- Jonathan McMillen, Head of Legal Services, Northern Ireland Assembly; and
- Holly Groves, Apprentice Solicitor, Legal Services, Northern Ireland Assembly.

The following official was in attendance:

- Dorinnia Carville, C&AG, NIAO.

The Committee considered a paper from Legal Services providing advice for the Committee in calling witnesses under section 44 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

The officials briefed the Committee on the paper provided to the Committee by Legal Services.

The Chairperson thanked the Assembly officials for the briefing.

Stephen Dunne MLA left the meeting at 3.55pm.

11. Draft Forward Work Programme

The following official joined the meeting at 3.57pm:

- Dorinnia Carville, C&AG.

The Committee considered a draft forward work programme.

The C&AG briefed the Committee on forthcoming NIAO reports.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the draft forward work programme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to undertake an Inquiry into the Planning Appeals Commission, which will be its thirteenth Inquiry by the Committee.

12. Any Other Business

There was no other business.

13. Date, time and place of next meeting

The next Committee meeting will take place on Thursday 25th June 2026 at 2.00pm in the Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 4.06pm.

Tom Buchanan

Deputy Chairperson, Public Accounts Committee

25 June 2026