



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

# Public Accounts Committee

## **Draft** Minutes of Proceedings

**Thursday, 5 March 2026**

**Meeting Location:** Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings

**Present:**

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

**Present by Video or Teleconference:**

**Apologies:** Jemma Dolan, MLA

**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 2.03pm.

### **1. Apologies**

Apologies were noted from Jemma Dolan, MLA.

### **2. Draft minutes**

**Agreed:** Members agreed the draft minutes of the meeting on 19 February 2026.

### **3. Declaration of Interests**

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

Cathal Boylan, MLA declared an interest as a member of the Committee for Infrastructure.

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

Stephen Dunne, MLA declared an interest as APS to the Communities Minister and as a member of the Committee for Infrastructure.

#### **4. Chairperson's Business**

The Chair welcomed new Members, Gareth Wilson, MLA and Jemma Dolan, MLA to the Committee and placed on records his thanks to outgoing Members, Diane Forsythe, MLA and Pdraig Delargy, MLA.

The Chair also congratulated Tom Buchanan, MLA on his appointment as Deputy Chairperson, and thanked Diane Forsythe, MLA for her support in the role in recent months.

The Chair commented on the success of the launch event for the report on Homelessness in Northern Ireland and his gratitude to all who attended and participated. He placed on record Members' appreciation to Nikki McConville for sharing her personal experience of homelessness.

Jon Burrows, MLA joined the meeting at 2.10 pm.

The Chair recorded thanks Colm Gildernew, MLA for chairing the panel discussion and extended thanks to the panellists, the Clerking team, the Communications Team, the C&AG and NIAO team and the Engagement Team for their support to the inquiry and launch event.

**Agreed:** Members agreed to write letters of thanks to Nikki McConville and the panellists for their support at the launch event.

#### **5. Matters Arising**

Members noted correspondence dated 16 February 2026 from Mike Farrar, Accounting Officer, DoH, providing an update to the MOR on Mental Health Services in Northern Ireland.

**Agreed:** Members agreed to note the correspondence.

Members noted correspondence dated 27 February 2026 from Mr Farrar, confirming his attendance to brief the Committee on 26 March 2026 in respect of the MOR on Access to General Practice in Northern Ireland.

**Agreed:** Members agreed to note the correspondence.

Members noted correspondence dated 17 February 2026 from Katrina Godfrey, Accounting Officer, DAERA regarding the ongoing consultation on the Northern Ireland Resources and Waste Management Strategy.

**Agreed:** Members agreed to note the correspondence and defer further consideration of the matter to a later date.

Members noted correspondence dated 20 and 21 February 2026 from a member of the public regarding Dalradian Gold mining.

**Agreed:** Members agreed defer further consideration of the matter to a later date.

Members noted correspondence dated 23 February 2026 from HoCS in response to the Committee's concerns regarding Leading and Resourcing in the NICS.

**Agreed:** Members agreed to note the correspondence and forward to the Finance Committee for consideration as part of their inquiry.

## **6. Correspondence**

Members noted the Northern Ireland Fiscal Council's Assessment of the Finance Minister's Proposed 3 Year Budget.

**Agreed:** Members agreed to note the correspondence.

Members noted a mental health research report shared by the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People, entitled "A System at a Crossroads".

**Agreed:** Members agreed to note the report.

Members noted the Local Government Auditor Draft Code of Practice 2026 shared by the Business Office.

**Agreed:** Members agreed to note the draft Code of Practice.

The meeting moved into closed session at 2.21 pm.

### **7. Inquiry on Road Openings by Utilities: Formal Consideration of Draft Report.**

The following witnesses and officials joined the meeting at 2.21 pm.

Dorinnia Carville, C&AG;

Michael Heery, Audit Manager, NIAO;

Kyle Bingham, Assembly Liason Officer, NIAO.

The Committee noted the draft report is classified as RESTRICTED for Members' attention and therefore should not be published more widely.

The Committee noted it had the initial consideration for the report 'Road Openings by Utilities', on 19 February 2026.

The Committee noted this is the formal consideration for the report 'Road Openings by Utilities' and agreed the title of the report.

#### **Section 'Membership and Powers' and 'List of Abbreviations': Page 7**

Membership and Powers: Read and Agreed

List of Abbreviations: Read and Agreed

#### **Section: 'Introduction' page 15 of the report paragraph 19**

Paragraph 19: Read and Agreed

**Section: 'Background' pages 15 and 16 of the report paragraphs 20 to 21**

Paragraph 20: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 21: Read and Agreed

**Section 'An Innovative Digital Mapping And AI Project May Offer The Potential For Significant Improvement', paragraphs 25 to 32.**

Paragraph 25: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 26: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 27: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 28: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 29: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 30: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 31: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 32: Read and Agreed

**Agreed: Section Title: 'The Department Should Review Whether The Current Warranty Periods Are Appropriate And Fair', paragraphs 33 to 37.**

Paragraph 33: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 34: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 35: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 36: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 37: Read and Agreed

**Agreed: Section Title: 'Significant Weaknesses In The Department's Inspection Programme Limit Its Effectiveness', paragraphs 38 to 41**

Paragraph 38: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 39: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 40: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 41: Read and Agreed

**Agreed: Section Title: 'The Department Does Not Utilise Risk-Based Sampling In Its Inspection Programme'. Paragraphs 42 to 43**

Paragraph 42: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 43: Read and Agreed

**Agreed: Section Title: 'The Department Does Not Currently Have The Systems Needed To Understand The Public's Experience Of Road Openings'.**

**Paragraphs 44 – 49**

Paragraph 44: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 45: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 46: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 47: Read and Agreed as amended

Paragraph 48: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 49: Read and Agreed

**Agreed: Section Title: 'The Department Performance Management And Reporting Arrangements Require Improvement', paragraphs 50 to 52.**

Paragraph 50: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 51: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 52: Read and Agreed

**Agreed: Section Title: 'Significant Resourcing Gaps Are Inhibiting Service Delivery And Need To Be Addressed', paragraphs 53 to 56.**

Paragraph 53: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 54: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 55: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 56: Read and Agreed

**The Committee then returned to the Executive Summary paragraphs 1 to 18 and agreed the following:**

Paragraph 1: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 2: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 3: Read and Agreed as amended

Paragraph 4: Read and Agreed to be amended

Paragraph 5: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 6: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 7: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 8: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 9: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 10: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 11: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 12: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 13: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 14: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 15: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 16: Read and Agreed as amended

**Recommendations 1 to 11:**

Recommendation 1: Read and Agreed as amended

Recommendation 2: Read and Agreed as amended

Recommendation 3: Read and Agreed as amended

Recommendation 4: Read and Agreed

Recommendation 5: Read and Agreed as amended

Recommendation 6: Read and Agreed as amended

Recommendation 7: Read and Agreed as amended

Recommendation 8: Read and Agreed as amended

Recommendation 9: Read and Agreed as amended

Recommendation 10: Read and Agreed as amended

Recommendation 11: Read and Agreed

Members agreed that the appendices of the report would include;

- Extracts from the minutes
- Hansards
- Correspondence

Members noted that the final consideration of the report and consideration for the draft media release would be completed on 12 March 2026.

The Chair thanked officials for attending.

Witnesses left the meeting at 2.43pm.

## **8. Preparation for Departmental Briefing on Child Poverty in Northern Ireland MOR.**

The Clerk briefed members on the 12 month update to the MOR and correspondence dated 25 February received from Barnardo's.

**Agreed:** Members agreed to consider areas for questioning in advance of the briefing session scheduled for 12 March 2026.

**Agreed:** Members agreed to issue the previously agreed media release.

## **9. Draft Forward Work Programme**

**Agreed:** Members agreed to seek updates on the cased studies within the NIAO report on Major IT Projects in advance of the commencement of the inquiry.

**Agreed:** Members agreed that a Committee planning day will take place on 19 March 2026 at the Mount Conference Centre.

**Agreed:** Members agreed the draft forward work programme.

## **10. Any Other Business**

The Clerk briefed Members on the Audit and Accountability session held with Brian Whalley on 3 March 2026.

Jon Burrows, MLA left the meeting at 3.15 pm.

**Agreed:** Members agreed to arrange a further Committee Development Session with Brian Whalley on 4 June 2026.

The Chair noted that the Committee photograph would need to be updated due to changes to membership.

**Agreed:** Members agreed to attend for a photograph before the PAC meeting scheduled for 12 March 2026.

## **11. Date, time and place of next meeting**

The next meeting will take place in the Senate Chamber on Thursday 12 March 2026 at 2.00pm.

The meeting was adjourned at 3.20 pm.

**Daniel McCrossan**

**Chairperson, Public Accounts Committee**

**12 March 2026**