



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Public Accounts Committee

Minutes of Proceedings

Thursday, 21 May 2026

Meeting Location: Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings

Present:

Stephen Dunne MLA

Gareth Wilson MLA

David Honeyford MLA

Colm Gildernew MLA

Jemma Dolan MLA

Jon Burrows MLA

Present by Video or Teleconference:

Daniel McCrossan MLA (Chairperson)

Apologies:

Tom Buchanan MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

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 2.07pm.

1. Apologies

Apologies were noted from Tom Buchanan MLA and Cathal Boylan MLA.

2. Draft minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the draft minutes of the meeting on 7 May 2026.

3. Declaration of Interests

Colm Gildernew MLA declared an interest as Chair of the Committee for Communities and in respect of his Private Members Bill on Homelessness.

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

Members agreed to consider Item 6 further in closed session.

7. Memorandums of Reply: Updates

Members considered correspondence from Mike Farrar, Accounting Officer, Department of Health (DoH), providing an update on progress and developments relating to the Committee's report on 'Access to General Practice in Northern Ireland' since issuance of the Department's Memorandum of Reply (MOR).

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the additional information provided, and the areas of progress outlined, and to receive a further update from DoH within six months. The next update to include details of measurable improvements in patient access, progress against implementation milestones, workforce planning, complaints analysis, General Practice access standards, and delivery of the Neighbourhood Model.

Members considered a response from Grainia Long, Accounting Officer, Department for Communities (DfC), which provided further clarification on Recommendations 2 and 10 in the Department's MOR to the Committee's report on 'Homelessness in Northern Ireland'.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to give further consideration to the response at the meeting on 11 June 2026, when the DfC Accounting Officer will attend to provide a briefing on Recommendation 8 of the MOR. The Committee will still receive an update on all ten Recommendations within six months.

The meeting moved into closed session at 2.12pm.

[Item 6 moved to closed session] Correspondence

The Committee considered further correspondence received from a member of the public which contained inappropriate language directed towards Committee staff. Members noted the nature and tone of the correspondence and that the matter did not fall within the remit of the Committee. Members agreed an approach in accordance with Assembly Standing Orders.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the correspondence and that no further response would issue.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that any future correspondence received from the individual would only be brought to the Committee where it raises new matters which fall within the Committee's remit. Correspondence will be retained on file and made available to Members on request from the Committee team.

8. Inquiry into Major IT Projects in Northern Ireland: Further Information

The following officials joined the meeting at 2.22pm:

- Dorinnia Carville, Comptroller and Auditor General; and
- Suzanne Jones, Director, Northern Ireland Audit Office.

The Chair welcomed the officials to the Committee.

The Committee considered correspondence from the DoH Accounting Officer on the Encompass Programme in relation to financial, scope and reporting positions, and correspondence from the Department of Finance (DoF) Accounting Officer in relation to additional information requested by the Committee following the evidence session 23 April 2026.

The officials provided further evidence on the Inquiry into Major IT Projects in relation to the written evidence received.

The Chair thanked the officials for attending. The officials left the meeting at 2.33pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to include the DoF correspondence as written evidence to the Inquiry and to write to the Accounting Officer to advise that the Committee has concerns that the standard expected of the Department in terms of clarity and accountability has not been met, and that significant questions remain regarding oversight, governance and how success will be measured going forward.

David Honeyford MLA left the meeting at 2.33pm.

Colm Gildernew MLA left the meeting at 2.33pm.

9. Inquiry on Northern Ireland Energy Strategy: Briefing and Preparation Session

The following officials joined the meeting at 2.33pm:

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

The Chair welcomed the officials to the Committee.

The Committee considered a position paper from the Chamber of Commerce 'The Northern Ireland Energy Transition - Building Momentum with Common Purpose'.

The Clerk briefed Members on the issues arising from the Northern Ireland Audit Office report on Northern Ireland Energy Strategy.

Members discussed the potential value of hearing evidence from business representative organisations, including the Northern Ireland Chamber of Commerce, as part of the Energy inquiry.

The Committee undertook preparation for the evidence session with the Department for the Economy, scheduled for 28 May 2026.

The Chair thanked the officials for attending. The officials left the meeting 2.52pm.

Agreed: Members agreed to consider further whether to request Chamber of Commerce representatives to provide oral evidence to the Inquiry, after they had received oral evidence from Departmental Officials on 28th May.

10. Draft Forward Work Programme

The following official joined the meeting at 2.52pm:

- Dorinnia Carville, Comptroller and Auditor General.

The Comptroller and Auditor General briefed the Committee on the report 'A Strategic Review of the Planning Appeals Commission', which the Audit Office launched earlier in the afternoon, and on the report 'The Use of Temporary Nursing Staff' which the Audit Office expected to publish the following week.

The Clerk briefed Members on the forward work programme.

Agreed: Members agreed the draft forward work programme.

11. Any Other Business

The Clerk advised Members of the Commonwealth Association of Public Accounts Committees (CAPAC) Conference which is to take place in Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago, from 9 June to 10 June 2026, and that Members have the option of attending by video conference.

Members were advised that the Comptroller and Auditor General would be attending by video conferencing to speak on good working relationship examples between the Public Accounts Committee and the Audit Office.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Chair would join the Comptroller and Auditor General by video conference for the presentation.

Agreed: Members will advise the Clerk of their availability to attend the conference by videoconference.

Agreed: Members agreed that the meeting pack for 28 May 2026 would be issued on Tuesday 26 May 2026, rather than Monday 25 May 2026, to allow for the bank holiday.

12. Date, time and place of next meeting

The next meeting will take place in the Senate Chamber on Thursday 28 May 2026 at 2.00pm.

The meeting was adjourned at 3.21pm.

Daniel McCrossan

Chairperson, Public Accounts Committee

28 May 2026