

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

**WEDNESDAY, 11 JANUARY 2017, THE SENATE CHAMBER,
PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS**

Present: Mr Robin Swann MLA (Chairperson)
Mr Daniel McCrossan (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Robbie Butler MLA
Mr Trevor Clarke MLA
Mr Gordon Dunne MLA
Mr Alex Easton MLA
Ms Carla Lockhart MLA
Mr Trevor Lunn MLA

In Attendance: Ms Lucia Wilson, Assembly Clerk
Ms Elaine Farrell, Assistant Assembly Clerk
Ms Karen Barry, Clerical Supervisor
Mr Darren Weir, Clerical Officer

2.03 p.m. The meeting began in Open Session.

1. Apologies

None.

2. Chairperson's business

The Chairperson advised the Committee that the report on Managing Legal Aid was launched today.

3. Minutes of the meeting held on 7 and 15 December 2016

Agreed: The draft minutes of the meeting on 7 and 15 December 2016 were agreed.

4. Matters arising

None

5. Correspondence

Agreed: The Committee noted emailed items of correspondence from Mr Quinn and agreed that any future communications from him could be dealt with by the clerk on a case by case basis, with PAC specific issues brought to the attention of the Committee.

6. NIAO briefing on the General Report 2016

The following NIAO officials joined the meeting at 2.06 p.m.

Mr Kieran Donnelly, Comptroller and Auditor General
Ms Louise Mason, Chief Local Government Auditor
Ms Kerry Harkin, Assembly Liaison Officer

The officials briefed the Committee and this was followed by a question and answer session.

7. Inquiry into Non-domestic Renewable Heat Incentive (RHI) Scheme

Noted: The Committee noted the correspondence from Mr P Brannigan on RHI issues.

Noted: The Committee noted the Twitter message sent to the Chairperson on RHI issues.

Noted: The Committee noted the correspondence from Mr J Caddoo offering suggestions in light of the RHI Inquiry.

Agreed: The Committee noted the correspondence from Mr O McMullan on behalf of West Tyrone Against Wind Turbines; the Committee agreed to forward the Freedom of Information aspect of it to the Assembly's Governance Services for reply.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to move into Closed Session

2.47 p.m. The meeting moved into Closed Session.

The following NIAO officials joined the meeting at 2.47 p.m.

Mr Kieran Donnelly, Comptroller and Auditor General
Mr Tomás Wilkinson, Director
Mr Brian O'Neill, Audit Manager
Ms Kerry Harkin, Assembly Liaison Officer

The officials briefed the Committee and this was followed by a question and answer session.

Noted: The Committee noted the follow up correspondence dated 22 December 2016 from CEPA in respect of further RHI queries.

Noted: The Committee noted the follow up correspondence dated 3 January 2017 from Dr Andrew McCormick in respect of further RHI queries.

Agreed: The Committee noted two items of correspondence from Dr McCormick dated 11 January 2017 and agreed to request that the names of the corporate entities and public services that applied to the RHI Scheme.

2.59 p.m. Mr Dunne left the meeting.

3.03 p.m. Mr Dunne re-joined the meeting.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Justice to request details of a letter issued by a renewable energy firm to the Department in which concerns regarding the RHI scheme were raised.

8. Forward Work Programme

Agreed: The Committee agreed to schedule a further evidence session with Dr McCormick on 18 January 2017.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to hold a preparation session on 18 January 2017 at 11.00 a.m. in the Senate Chamber.

9. Any Other Business

A discussion took place regarding the retention/disposal of confidential meeting packs.

Mr Easton proposed that confidential packs for the RHI Inquiry are handed back to committee staff at the end of each meeting. This was seconded by Mr Dunne.

The Committee divided:

Ayes: Trevor Clarke, Alex Easton, Gordon Dunne and Carla Lockhart

Noes: Robbie Butler, Trevor Lunn, Daniel McCrossan and Robin Swann.

The motion fell.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that Members can return confidential packs at the end of each meeting to committee staff if they wish; staff will in turn shred the confidential pack. Members are free to retain their confidential packs if they wish.

10. Date, time and place of next meeting

The next meeting of the Public Accounts Committee will take place on Wednesday 18 January 2017 at 2.00 p.m. in the Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting adjourned at 3.25 p.m.

Mr Robin Swann (Chairperson)
Public Accounts Committee