PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF MEETING OF TUESDAY, 28 SEPTEMBER 2021

The Committee met in Public Session at 09.32 a.m. (online remotely), a quorum being present.

The following Members were present:

Deputies: Brian Stanley (Cathaoirleach); Colm Burke; Matt Carthy; Cormac Devlin; Alan Dillon; Neasa Hourigan; Paul McAuliffe; Imelda Munster; Catherine Murphy; Verona Murphy.

Permanent Witness: Comptroller and Auditor General, Mr. Seamus McCarthy.

Apologies: Deputy Jennifer Carroll MacNeill

1. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 16 September, 21 September and 23 September 2021 were agreed.

2. Financial Statements & Accounts Received

Ref	Body/main purpose	Accounting period/ turnover	Date certified	Date laid	Audit opinion/notes
1	**Property Services Regulatory Authority** (click here to view accounts)	2020 €4.6 million	31 May 2021	17 Sep 2021	Clear audit opinion
2	**Bord Iascaigh Mhara** (click here to view accounts)	2020 €39 million	23 Jun 2021	20 Sep 2021	Clear audit opinion
3	**Sea-Fisheries Protection Authority** (click here to view accounts)	2020 €16.8 million	10 Jun 2021	21 Sep 2021	Clear audit opinion Attention is drawn to: • An organisational capability review report issued in April 2020. The review made a number of recommendations relating to inadequacies in data management, data analytics capability, IT capability and industrial relations capability. (click here for further information) • The results of an EU Commission audit that identified significant shortcomings in the weighing and reporting of pelagic fish landings and the lack of controls/enforcement over catches of bluefin tuna. (click here for further information) • Note 8 to the financial statements which discloses that salary overpayments of €861,000 have been written off. (click here for further information)

4	**Teagasc** (click here to view accounts)	2020 €190 million	24 Jun 2021	21 Sep 2021	Clear audit opinion

The Accounts and Statements were noted.

As previously agreed, the Committee will request explanations for any significant non-compliant procurement or delays in laying accounts before the Houses of the Oireachtas.

3. Correspondence

3. Correspondence received		
B - Correspondence from Accounting Officers and/or Ministers and follow up to PAC meetings		**Decision**
R0751 PAC33	Correspondence received from Maurice Buckley, Chairman, Office of Public Works, dated 04/08/2021	Note and publish. It was agreed to request an update and confirmation regarding the timing of quarterly updates to be provided to the Committee.
R0753 PAC33	Correspondence received from David Maloney, Secretary General, Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, dated 30/07/2021	Note and publish. It was agreed to request Revenue to: - provide an information note in relation to what Revenue can undertake in respect of the financial and sectoral implications of a voluntary PAYE system agreed by Revenue and courier firms in March 1997; - provide a copy of the material requested once the 2019 EU Commission inspection report on the control strategy for customs values and repayments is completed.
R0755 PAC33	Correspondence received from Eilish Hardiman, Chief Executive, Childrens Health Ireland, dated 29/07/2021	Note and publish. It was proposed to add the issue of expenditure on public relations in the public service to the Work Programme.
R0761 PAC33	Correspondence received from Marie-Claire Maney, Chairperson, Tax Appeals Commission, dated 10/08/2021	Note and publish.

3. Correspondence received		
R0762 PAC33	Correspondence received from Eoin Keehan, Assistant Principal, Finance Division, Department of Transport, dated 11/08/2021	Note and publish. It was agreed to request the Department of Transport to provide the following: - a copy of the Route Alignment Options and Feasibility Study to establish a DART tunnel route once it is completed; - an information note regarding how the Department plans to deal with individual homeowners and businesses who may be affected by the proposed Dart Tunnel route.
R0779 PAC33	Correspondence received from Katherine Licken, Secretary General, Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media, dated 06/09/2021	Note and publish. It was agreed to accept the Secretary General's offer to provide the Committee with a report on a Galway 2020 monitoring and evaluation project once it is complete.
R0782 PAC33	Correspondence received from Mark Griffin, Secretary General, Department of Environment, Climate and Communications, dated 11/08/2021	Note and publish. It was agreed to request the Department for an up-to-date briefing on expenditure on the National Broadband Plan in advance of the meeting on 14 October 2021.
R0788 PAC33	Correspondence received from Leo Varadkar, Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment, dated 19/07/2021	Note and publish. It was agreed to: - request the Department to confirm what specific analysis was undertaken in respect of growing energy demand due to data centre investments; - forward the correspondence to the Committee on Enterprise, Trade and Employment for any action it may deem appropriate.
R0793 PAC33	Correspondence received from Denis Egan, Chief Executive, Irish Horseracing Regulatory Board, dated 14/09/2021	Note and publish. It was agreed to request confirmation regarding a previous undertaking given to the Committee that the installation of CCTV at racecourses would be completed prior to the 2022 season.

3. Correspondence received		
R0796 PAC33	Correspondence received from Gerard Dollard, Chief Executive Officer, Greyhound Racing Ireland, dated 16/09/2021	Note and publish. It was agreed to forward the correspondence to the correspondent who raised the matter with the Committee, and advise that this concludes the Committee's consideration of the matter.
C - Correspondence from and related to private individuals and any other correspondence		**Decision**
R0708 PAC33	Correspondence, dated 01/07/2021	Note. It was agreed to thank the correspondent for his correspondence and suggest that he bring the matter to the attention of the Revenue Commissioners.
R0721 PAC33	Correspondence, dated 07/07/2021	Note. It was agreed to advise the correspondent regarding the role of the Committee and its ongoing focus on expenditure on this project.
R0756 PAC33	Correspondence, dated 03/08/2021	Note. It was agreed to consider a future private meeting with the correspondent.
R0757 PAC33	Correspondence, dated 03/08/2021	Note. It was agreed to request an information note in relation to the process for the appointment of existing and previous special envoys to include the relevant line of expenditure their remuneration falls under in the appropriation accounts.
R0758 PAC33	Correspondence, dated 27/08/2021	Note. It was agreed to consider a future private meeting with the correspondent.

3. Correspondence received		
R0759 PAC33	Correspondence, dated 06/08/2021	Note. It was agreed to advise the correspondent that the Committee agreed to request that Screen Ireland provide the Committee with an update on its undertaking to contact the individual, as well as a breakdown of the percentage of its funding in recent years that has been allocated to companies associated with Board members.
R0764 PAC33	Correspondence, dated 09/08/2021	It was agreed to request the Department of Agriculture and Sport Ireland to provide information notes regarding compliance and governance controls in respect of grants to the body referenced in the correspondence.
R0785 PAC33	Correspondence, dated 13/09/2021	Note
R0790 PAC33	Correspondence, dated 16/08/2021	Note
R0797 PAC33	Correspondence, dated 16/09/2021	Note

4. Work Programme

It was agreed to proceed with the following engagements:

• Thursday 14 October 2021
Department of Environment, Climate and Communications - 2020 Appropriation Accounts

• Thursday 21 October 2021
Tusla - Financial Statements 2020

• Thursday 04 November 2021
Exchequer funding of RTÉ - relevant Broadcasting expenditure programme in Appropriation Account 2020: Vote 33 - Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media.

In advance of a proposed engagement with the Department of Transport, it was agreed to write to the Department, Transport Infrastructure Ireland, and the National Transport Authority to request project updates including delays, expenditure to date, and plans going forward in relation to the following:

- Metrolink Project
- DART line extension and underground
- All Ireland Strategic Rail Fleet
- BusConnects.

The Committee went into Private Session at 10:45 a.m.

5. Any Other Business

It was agreed to request further information from the HSE in relation to:

- expenditure on PCR and Antigen testing, and
- the Owenacurra Centre in Cork.

It was also agreed:

- to hold engagements with public bodies each Thursday from 9.30 to 12.30, and to resume at 13.30 to deal with correspondence and other business of the Committee.
- that for three-hour committee engagements in public session, the lead speaker will have 15 minutes and all other Members 10 minutes.

The Committee adjourned at 11.22 a.m. until 30 September 2021.

Brian Stanley, T.D.
Cathaoirleach
7 October 2021