

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE
MINUTES OF MEETING OF THURSDAY, 17 February 2022

The Committee met in **Public** Session at 09.33 a.m., 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 (Leas-Chathaoirleach), James O'Connor, Séan Sherlock.

Apologies: Deputies Jennifer Carroll MacNeill and Verona Murphy.

Permanent

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

1. Witnesses Examined

Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage

- Mr. Graham Doyle, Secretary General
- Ms. Áine Stapleton, Assistant Secretary, Social Housing Delivery Division
- Ms. Maria Graham, Assistant Secretary, Planning Division
- Ms. Caroline Timmons, Assistant Secretary (Acting) - Housing Affordability Inclusion & Homeless Division
- Ms. Lorraine O'Donoghue, Principal officer – Local Government Division
- Ms. Marguerite Ryan, Finance Officer

Department of Public Expenditure and Reform

- Ms. Clare Costello, Principal

Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General

- Ms. Paula O'Connor, Deputy Director of Audit

Matters for discussion

- Appropriation Account 2020
Vote 34 - Housing, Local Government and Heritage
- Comptroller and Auditor General's 2020 Report on the Accounts of the Public Services
Chapter 3. Central government funding of local authorities
Chapter 8. Oversight of the housing assistance payment (HAP)
- Local Government Fund Account 2020

The Committee suspended at 11.01.

The Committee resumed in **Public** Session at 11.11.

It was agreed that the Clerk would request any follow-up information and carry out any agreed actions arising from the meeting. It was also agreed to note and publish the opening statement and briefing documents provided to the Committee for the meeting.

The Committee suspended at 12.34.

The Committee resumed in **Private** Session at 13.33.

Sensitive (for consideration in private session)		
R1032 PAC33	Correspondence received from an individual, dated 20/01/2022	It was agreed to advise the correspondent of the Committee's decision.
R1040 PAC33	Correspondence received from an individual, dated 01/02/2022	It was agreed to advise the Joint Committee on Finance that the matter might be best referred to the Local Government Audit Service or the Committee on Housing, Local Government and Heritage.
R1059 PAC33	Correspondence received from an individual, dated 31/01/2022	It was agreed to proceed as agreed by the Committee.

The Committee resumed in **Public** Session at 14.44.

2. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 3 February and 11 February 2022 were agreed.

3. Financial Statements and Accounts

The Committee noted nine sets of financial statements and accounts which were laid before the Dáil between 31 January 2022 and 11 February 2022.

The Committee has a standing agreement to request explanations for any significant non-compliant procurement or delays in laying accounts before the Houses of the Oireachtas.

Ref	Body/main purpose	Accounting period/ turnover	Date certified	Date laid	Audit opinion/notes
1	Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology (click here to view accounts)	2019/2020 €89 million	24 Nov 2021	31 Jan 2022	Clear audit opinion
2	Health Research Board (click here to view accounts)	2020 €44 million	3 Dec 2021	31 Jan 2022	Qualified audit opinion Accounts give a true and fair view, except that they account for the costs of retirement benefit entitlements of staff only as they become payable (standard for many health bodies). (click here for further information)

3	Laois and Offaly Education and Training Board (click here to view accounts)	2020 €71 million	9 Dec 2021	3 Feb 2022	Clear audit opinion
4	National Economic and Social Development Office (click here to view accounts)	2020 €1.9 million	2 Dec 2021	4 Feb 2022	Clear audit opinion
5	Sport Ireland (click here to view accounts)	2020 €177 million	10 Nov 2021	4 Feb 2022	Clear audit opinion
6	Environment Fund (click here to view accounts)	2020 €16.4 million	15 Dec 2021	4 Feb 2022	Clear audit opinion
7	Climate Action Fund (click here to view accounts) <i>Note: first year of account</i>	2020 €48 million	20 Dec 2021	7 Feb 2022	Clear audit opinion
8	Fís Éireann/Screen Ireland (click here to view accounts)	2020 €33 million	8 Nov 2021	9 Feb 2022	Clear audit opinion
9	National Gallery of Ireland (click here to view accounts)	2020 €13.5 million	23 Nov 2021	9 Feb 2022	Clear audit opinion

4. Correspondence

Correspondence received		
A – Briefing Documents and Opening Statements		Decision
R1067 PAC33	Briefing document received from Graham Doyle, Secretary General, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, dated 11/02/2022	Note and publish.
R1068 PAC33	Correspondence received from Graham Doyle, Secretary General, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, dated 11/02/2022	Note and publish.
R1069 PAC33	Correspondence received from Graham Doyle, Secretary General, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, dated 14/02/2022	Note and publish.
R1071 PAC33	Correspondence received from Graham Doyle, Secretary General, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, dated 14/02/2022	Note and publish.

Correspondence received		
R1072 PAC33	Correspondence received from Graham Doyle, Secretary General, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, dated 15/02/2022	Note and publish.
R1075 PAC33	Opening statement received from Graham Doyle, Secretary General, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, dated 15/02/2022	Note and publish.
B – Correspondence from Accounting Officers and/or Ministers and follow up to PAC meetings		Decision
R1030 PAC33	Correspondence received from Mark Griffin, Secretary General, Department of Environment, Climate and Communications, dated 27/01/2022	Note and publish.
R1031 PAC33	Correspondence received from Feargal Harnett, Government Accounting Unit, Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, dated 19/01/2022	Note and publish.
R1046 PAC33	Correspondence received from Robert Watt, Secretary General, Department of Health, dated 02/02/2022	<p>Note and publish.</p> <p>It was agreed to request further information including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - what controls are place in terms of sanctions regarding delays to the completion date for the National Paediatric Hospital; - an information note providing clarification regarding a potential conflict of interest between the legal firm who advised on the tender and may now be assisting the Board in dealing with claims; and - further details regarding the value of substantiated claims and clarification if the increase for those claims is inflation-related or otherwise. <p>It was also agreed to bring to the Secretary General's attention that commitments given to the Committee at the meeting on 16 December 2021 do not align with the response provided to question 6.</p>
R1047 PAC33	Correspondence received from Niall Cody, Chairman, Office of the Revenue Commissioners, dated 14/01/2022	Note and publish.
R1048 PAC33	Correspondence received from Bernard Gloster, Chief Executive, Tusla, dated 03/02/2022	Note and publish.
R1049 PAC33	Correspondence received from Brendan Gleeson, Secretary General, Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, dated 04/02/2022	<p>Note and publish.</p> <p>It was agreed to request further details regarding a legal review being undertaken by the Department in relation to the proposed relocation of a Horse Sport Ireland facility at Greenougue in Dublin, including the terms of reference and timeline for the review.</p>

Correspondence received		
R1054 PAC33	Correspondence received from Judge Rory MacCabe, Chairman, Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission, dated 08/02/2022	Note and publish.
R1061 PAC33	Correspondence received from Klaus-Heiner Lehne, President, European Court of Auditors, dated 03/02/2022	Note.
R1064 PAC33	Correspondence received from Vivienne Flood, Head of Public Affairs, RTE, dated 09/02/2022	<p>Note and publish.</p> <p>It was agreed to request further information including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - figures as to the amount earned by the top ten earners in the years from 2019 to date; - the number of people who are earning in excess of €150,000 annually from 2019 to date; - clarification whether the RTÉ Player is developed or maintained internally, and expenditure on purchasing, development and maintenance per year since its inception, as well as information regarding viewership figures; and - an information note regarding geo-blocking technology which results in certain content not being available through the RTÉ Player in Northern Ireland, and any steps being taken to address this. <p>It was also agreed to request that the Office of the Revenue Commissioners provide an information note regarding reported proposals that it will be the collection agent for the television licence fee.</p>
R1078 PAC33	Correspondence received from Robert Watt, Secretary General, Department of Health, dated 16/02/2022	Note and publish.
R1080 PAC33	Correspondence received from David Moloney, Secretary General, Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, dated 16/02/2022	<p>Note and publish.</p> <p>It was agreed to request further details including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - an information note regarding Pathfinder projects; - whether the Department considered addressing the procurement risk; - if the Department considered a successor database given the considerable public expenditure in the sector; - how much it would cost to develop a similar database and value for money considerations related to dispensing with the current database, which is a valuable resource; and - details of dialogue with the Department of Rural and Community Development and other stakeholders.
C - Correspondence from and related to private individuals and any other correspondence		

Correspondence received		
R1033 PAC33	Correspondence received from an individual, dated 27/01/2022	<p>Note.</p> <p>It was agreed to request the HSE and the Department of Education to advise if value for money is being achieved and what steps are being taken to address the issues raised in the correspondence.</p> <p>Advise the correspondent that they might also wish to bring the matter to the attention of the Committee on Education, as the Ministers referenced are accountable to that Committee.</p>
R1035 PAC33	Correspondence received from an individual, dated 30/01/2022	<p>Note.</p> <p>It was agreed to request a detailed breakdown of expenditure and associated spending decisions in relation to the buildings at Owenacurra Centre, Midleton, Co. Cork.</p>
R1036 PAC33	Correspondence received from an individual, dated 23/12/2021	<p>Note.</p> <p>See R1035 PAC33</p>
R1037 PAC33	Correspondence received from an individual, dated 31/01/2022	<p>Note.</p> <p>See R1035 PAC33</p>
R1039 PAC33	Correspondence received from an individual, dated 01/02/2022	<p>Note.</p> <p>See R1035 PAC33</p>
R1041 PAC33	Correspondence received from an individual, dated 01/02/2022	<p>Note.</p>
R1043 PAC33	Correspondence received from an individual, dated 01/02/2022	<p>Note.</p> <p>See R1035 PAC33</p>
R1045 PAC33	Correspondence received from an individual, dated 27/01/2022	<p>Note.</p> <p>See R1035 PAC33</p>
R1053 PAC33	Correspondence received from an individual, dated 07/02/2022	<p>Note.</p>
R1055 PAC33	Correspondence received from an individual, dated 07/02/2022	<p>It was agreed to advise the correspondent of the Committee's decision.</p>
R1058 PAC33	Correspondence received from an individual dated 09/02/2022	<p>Note.</p> <p>See R1035 PAC33</p>
R1059 PAC33	Correspondence received from an individual, dated 31/01/2022	<p>Note.</p>
R1060 PAC33	Correspondence received from an individual dated 02/02/2022	<p>Note.</p>
R1062 PAC33	Correspondence received from an individual dated 08/02/2022	<p>Note.</p>
R1063 PAC33	Correspondence received from an individual dated 04/02/2022	<p>Note.</p>
R1065 PAC33	Correspondence received from an individual, dated 09/02/2022	<p>Note.</p> <p>See R1035 PAC33</p>

5. Work Programme

It was agreed to enquire about provisionally scheduling a meeting with the Department of Health and the HSE on 24 March 2022.

It was agreed to proceed with the proposed schedule of meetings.

6. Any Other Business

There was no other business.

The Committee adjourned at 15.59 until Thursday 24 February 2022.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Brian Stanley". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Brian Stanley, T.D.
Cathaoirleach
2 March 2022