

**PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE**  
**MINUTES OF MEETING OF THURSDAY, 09 NOVEMBER 2023**

The Committee met in **Public** Session at 09:34 a.m, a quorum being present.

The following Members were present:

**Deputies:** Brian Stanley (Cathaoirleach), Colm Burke, Cormac Devlin, Alan Dillon, Alan Kelly, Paul McAuliffe, Catherine Murphy and Marc Ó Cathasaigh.

**Apologies:** Deputies, Imelda Munster and Verona Murphy

**Permanent**

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

**1. Witnesses Examined:**

**Department of Environment, Climate and Communications**

- Ms. Oonagh Buckley, Secretary General
- Mr. Barry Quinlan, Assistant Secretary
- Mr. Fergal Mulligan, Director of National Broadband Plan
- Dr. Richard Browne, Director of the National Cyber Security Centre (online)

**Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland**

- Mr. William Walsh, Chief Executive Officer
- Ms. Marion O'Brien, Director of Corporate Services
- Mr. Ciaran Byrne, Director of National Retrofit
- Mr. Declan Meally, Director of Business, Public Sector and Transport
- Ms. Margie McCarthy, Director of Research, Policy and Insights
- Mr. Joe Durkan, Head of Technical (online)

**Department of Public Expenditure, National Development Plan Delivery, and Reform**

- Mr. Ken Cleary, Principal Officer

**Matters for discussion:**

- **Appropriation Accounts 2022**
  - Vote 29 – Environment, Climate and Communications
- **Financial Statements 2022**
  - Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland
- **Report on the Accounts of the Public Services 2022:**
  - Chapter 8 – Performance of Certain Residential Retrofit Schemes

The Committee suspended at 10:51.

The Committee resumed in **Public** Session at 11:03.

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 statements and briefing documents provided to the Committee for the meeting.

The Committee suspended at 12:19

The Committee resumed in **Public** Session at 13:35.

The Committee went into **Private** session at 13:35

Correspondence received		
A – Briefing Documents and Opening Statements		Decision
R2219 PAC33	Kevin Bakhurst, Director General, RTÉ, dated 08/11/2023	It was agreed to write to RTÉ to propose that RTÉ provide a summary of the note of the meeting of 7 May 2020 without any prohibition on publication, public discussion, or inclusion of its contents of same in the Committee's report. It was also agreed to propose that RTÉ provide a copy of the original note, without redaction, on a confidential basis - this original note would not be circulated, published, discussed publicly, or retained but would instead be made available to Committee Members to view in private and for the purposes of verification only. It was agreed to request a response by end of business on 13 November 2023.
R2220 PAC33	Correspondence received from Clerk, Committee on Parliamentary Privileges and Oversight, dated 08/11/2023	It was agreed to Note and publish.

It was agreed to schedule a private meeting of the Committee at 11am on Tuesday 14 November to discuss RTÉ's response to the proposal agreed.

The Committee resumed in **Public** Session at 14:47.

## 2. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 26 October 2023 were agreed.

## 3. Financial Statements and Accounts

There were 7 sets of financial statements and accounts laid before the Dáil between 23 October and 3 November 2023.

Ref	Body/fund	Accounting period/turnover	Date certified	Date presented	Audit opinion/notes
1	<b>Health and Social Care Professionals Council</b> ( <a href="#">click here to view accounts</a> )	2022 €8.2 million	12 Sep 2023	24 Oct 2023	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).
2	<b>Medical Council</b> ( <a href="#">click here to view accounts</a> )	2022 €17.6 million	30 Jun 2023	24 Oct 2023	Clear audit opinion
3	<b>Social Insurance Fund</b> ( <a href="#">click here to view accounts</a> )	2022 €15 billion	27 Jul 2023	26 Oct 2023	Clear audit opinion  Attention is drawn to chapters in the Report on the Accounts of the Public Services 2022, which refer to <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>welfare payments in excess of entitlement under Social Insurance Fund schemes (<a href="#">click here to view the chapter</a>)</li> <li>the processes used to raise social welfare overpayments (<a href="#">click here to view the chapter</a>)</li> <li>the processes to recover social welfare overpayments (<a href="#">click here to view the chapter</a>)</li> <li>an actuarial review of the Social Insurance Fund (<a href="#">click here to view the chapter</a>)</li> </ul>
4	<b>National Library of Ireland</b> ( <a href="#">click here to view accounts</a> )	2022 €11.8 million	6 Jul 2023	27 Oct 2023	Clear audit opinion
5	<b>An Foras Teanga/The Language Body</b> ( <a href="#">click here to view accounts</a> ) <i>North South body</i>	2021 €21.7 million	21 Jul 2023	27 Oct 2023	Clear audit opinion
6	<b>Cavan and Monaghan Education and Training Board</b> ( <a href="#">click here to view accounts</a> )	2022 €103 million	30 Jun 2023	31 Oct 2023	Clear audit opinion
7	<b>Qualifications and Quality Assurance Authority of Ireland</b> ( <a href="#">click here to view accounts</a> )	2022 €14.2 million	29 Sep 2023	1 Nov 2023	Clear audit opinion

It was agreed to note the listings of the accounts and statements.

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.

#### 4. Correspondence

Correspondence received		
A – Briefing Documents and Opening Statements		Decision
R2210 PAC33	Correspondence received from William Walsh, Chief Executive Officer, Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland, dated 03/11/2023	Note and publish.
R2213 PAC33	Correspondence received from Oonagh Buckley, Secretary General, Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications, dated 07/11/2023	Note and publish.
R2217 PAC33	Correspondence received from William Walsh, Chief Executive Officer, Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland, dated 08/11/2023	Note and publish.
R2218 PAC33	Correspondence received from Ms Oonagh Buckley, Secretary General, Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications dated 08/11/2023	Note and publish.
B – Correspondence from Accounting Officers and/or Ministers and follow up to PAC meetings		Decision
R2143 PAC33	Correspondence received from David Gunning, Chief Executive, National Paediatric Hospital Development Board, dated 19/09/2023	Note and publish.
R2146 PAC33	Correspondence received from Eilish Hardiman, Chief Executive, Children's Health Ireland, dated 19/09/2023	Note and publish.
R2185 PAC33	Correspondence received from Ciaran Buckley, Executive Officer, Department of Agriculture, Food, and the Marine, dated 19/10/2023	Note and publish.
R2186 PAC33	Correspondence received from Katherine Licken, Secretary General, Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport, and Media, dated 19/10/2023	Note and publish.
R2189 PAC33	Correspondence received from Ciarán Breen, Director, State Claims Agency, dated 19/10/2023	Note and publish.  It was agreed to write to the State Claims Agency and request that the Committee be supplied with a copy of the audit of Casement Aerodrome in Baldonnell once it is released to the Department of Defence.
R2192 PAC33	Correspondence received from Kevin O'Brien, Government Accounting Unit, Department of Public Expenditure, National Development Plan Delivery and Reform, dated 24/10/2023	Note and publish.
R2194 PAC33	Correspondence received from Oonagh Buckley, Secretary General, Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications, dated 25/10/2023	Note.
R2195 PAC33	Correspondence received from Oonagh Buckley, Secretary General, Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications, dated 25/10/2023	Note and publish.

Correspondence received		
R2196 PAC33	Correspondence received from Francis O'Donnell, Chief Executive Officer, Inland Fisheries Ireland, dated 24/10/2023	Note and publish.
R2198 PAC33	Correspondence received from John McKeon, Secretary General, Department of Social Protection, dated 26/10/2023	Note and publish.  It was agreed to add a meeting with the Department of Social Protection and the Revenue Commissioners to the Work Programme in relation to the Public Services Card, the Social Insurance Fund and the classification of workers.
R2199 PAC33	Correspondence received from Fiona Ross, Group Chair, Córas Iompair Éireann, dated 27/10/2023	Note and publish.  It was agreed to write to CIÉ and request the following information: - Is it true that although wages have increased by 25% to 30%, pensioners have seen no increments whatsoever? - The Committee understands that there is €1.6 billion in CIÉ's pension funds, including €110 million in an emergency fund. What is the emergency fund being used for? - What is the current surplus in the pension plan?
R2200 PAC33	Correspondence received from Katherine Licken, Secretary General, Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport, and Media, dated 27/10/2023	Note and publish.
R2203 PAC33	Correspondence received from Donal King, Assistant Principal Officer, Department of Agriculture, Food, and the Marine, dated 31/10/2023	Note and publish.

Correspondence received		
R2204 PAC33	Correspondence received from Ray Mitchell, Assistant National Director, Health Service Executive, dated 31/10/2023	Note and publish.  It was agreed to request the following information: - A breakdown and explanation of figures in Table 3 relating to CHO8 - An explanation of why there are 34 surplus management roles and 11 surplus general support roles. - A breakdown of population per CHO. - A breakdown of population for the new regional health areas.
R2206 PAC33	Correspondence received from Mary Lawlor, Senior Communications and Public Affairs Manager, National Asset Management Agency, dated 31/10/2023	Note and publish.
R2208 PAC33	Correspondence received from Graham Doyle, Secretary General, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, dated 26/10/2023	Note and publish.
R2207 PAC33	Correspondence received from RTÉ, dated 31/10/2023	Note and publish.
R2211 PAC33	Kevin Bakhurst, Director General, RTÉ, dated 03/11/2023	Note and publish.
<b>C - Correspondence from and related to private individuals and any other correspondence</b>		<b>Decision</b>
R2190 PAC33	Correspondence received from Robert Tonney, dated 24/10/2023	Note and publish.
R2197 PAC33	Correspondence received from Robert Power, dated 26/11/2023	Note and publish.
R2205 PAC33	Correspondence received from Martin McMahon, dated 31/10/2023	Note and publish.

## 5. Work Programme

The Committee agreed its draft work programme.

## 6. Any Other Business

There was no other business.

The Committee went into **private** session at 15:28.

Sensitive - for consideration in Private session	Decision
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R2201 PAC33	Correspondence received from individual, dated 27/10/2023	It was agreed to decline to receive.
R2188 PAC33	Correspondence received from individual, dated 22/10/2023	It was agreed to decline to receive.
R2209 PAC33	Correspondence received from individual, dated 27/10/2023	It was agreed to decline to receive.

The Committee agreed to meet on Tuesday 14 November 2023 to discuss RTÉ response.

The Committee **adjourned** at 15.36 until Thursday 16 November 2023.



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Brian Stanley, T.D.  
Cathaoirleach  
16 November 2023