



MEDIA RELEASE

AGRI-FOOD AND BIOSCIENCES INSTITUTE 2016-17

The Comptroller and Auditor General, Kieran Donnelly, today published a report on the results of his audit of the accounts of the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) for 2016-17. The report highlights failures in governance within AFBI which led to material financial transactions that were outside accepted practice in public sector financial management.

During 2015-16 AFBI entered into an agreement with the Centre for Innovation and Excellence in Livestock (CIEL). In 2015-16 and 2016-17 AFBI issued sales and pro-forma invoices worth £1.8 million to CIEL. AFBI provided these invoices in order for CIEL to secure funding in advance of year end deadlines for eligible spending. The invoices were intended to ensure that AFBI would be able to maximise funding in future years. However, no assets had been bought by AFBI at that time.

Mr Donnelly said *'The use of these invoices is particularly concerning.... [they] are outside the accepted practice in public sector accounting and were not reflected in the 2016-17 financial statements... AFBI failed to disclose their existence over several months during the course of the audit.... What is of most concern is that these actions were taken with the full knowledge of senior management and authorised by AFBI's [then] Chief Executive(s).'*

In the C&AG's view, this represents behaviour and standards that fall far short of those a public sector body should display.

The arrangement with CIEL was a new way of working for AFBI. The assets bought by AFBI using the £1.8 million funding from CIEL were delivered by December 2017. AFBI is committed to learning the lessons from these events to ensure that proper standards are met fully in the future.

Notes for Editors

1. The Comptroller and Auditor General is Head of the Northern Ireland Audit Office (the Audit Office). He and the NIAO are totally independent of Government. He certifies the accounts of Government Departments and a range of other public sector bodies. He has statutory authority to report to the Assembly on the economy, efficiency and effectiveness with which departments and public bodies use their resources. His reports are published as Assembly papers.
2. Background briefing can be obtained from the Northern Ireland Audit Office by contacting Neil Gray (028 9025 4345) or Garry Currie (028 9025 1126).