



REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON STANDING ORDERS AND DÁIL REFORM

Amendments to Standing Orders relating to Committees

Adopted by the Committee
22nd July 2020

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Standing Orders 94, 95 and 96 – scope of activity and powers of Select Committees and functions of Departmental Select Committees

That Standing Orders 94, 95 and 96 be deleted and substituted with the following:

‘Scope and context of activities of Select Committees.

94. (1) The Dáil may appoint a Select Committee to consider and, if so permitted, to take evidence upon any Bill, Estimate or matter, and to report its opinion for the information and assistance of the Dáil. Such motion shall specifically state the orders of reference of the Committee, define the powers devolved upon it, fix the number of members to serve on it, state the quorum, and may appoint a date upon which the Committee shall report back to the Dáil.

(2) It shall be an instruction to each Select Committee that—

- (a) it may only consider such matters, engage in such activities, exercise such powers and discharge such functions as are specifically authorised under its orders of reference and under Standing Orders;
- (b) such matters, activities, powers and functions shall be relevant to, and shall arise only in the context of, the preparation of a report to the Dáil;
- (c) it shall not consider any matter which is being considered, or of which notice has been given of a proposal to consider, by the Joint Committee on Public Petitions in the exercise of its functions under Standing Order 125(1)¹; and
- (d) it shall refrain from inquiring into in public session or publishing confidential information regarding any matter if so requested, for stated reasons given in writing, by—
 - (i) a member of the Government or a Minister of State, or
 - (ii) the principal office-holder of a State body within the responsibility of a Government Department or
 - (iii) the principal office-holder of a non-State body which is partly funded by the State,

Provided that the Committee may appeal any such request made to the Ceann Comhairle, whose decision shall be final.

(3) It shall be an instruction to all Select Committees to which Bills are referred that they shall ensure that not more than two Select Committees shall meet to consider a Bill on any given day, unless the Dáil, after due notice to the Business Committee by a Chairman of one of the Select Committees concerned, waives this instruction.

Functions of Departmental Select Committees.

95. (1) The Dáil may appoint a Departmental Select Committee to consider and, unless otherwise provided for in these Standing Orders or by order, to report to the Dáil on any matter relating to—

- (a) legislation, policy, governance, expenditure and administration of—

¹ Retained pending review of the Joint Committee on Public Petitions.

- (i) a Government Department, and
 - (ii) State bodies within the responsibility of such Department, and
- (b) the performance of a non-State body in relation to an agreement for the provision of services that it has entered into with any such Government Department or State body.

(2) A Select Committee appointed pursuant to this Standing Order shall also consider such other matters which—

- (a) stand referred to the Committee by virtue of these Standing Orders or statute law, or
- (b) shall be referred to the Committee by order of the Dáil.

(3) The principal purpose of Committee consideration of matters of policy, governance, expenditure and administration under paragraph (1) shall be—

- (a) for the accountability of the relevant Minister or Minister of State, and
- (b) to assess the performance of the relevant Government Department or of a State body within the responsibility of the relevant Department, in delivering public services while achieving intended outcomes, including value for money.

(4) A Select Committee appointed pursuant to this Standing Order shall not consider any matter relating to accounts audited by, or reports of, the Comptroller and Auditor General unless the Committee of Public Accounts—

- (a) consents to such consideration, or
- (b) has reported on such accounts or reports.

(5) A Select Committee appointed pursuant to this Standing Order may be joined with a Select Committee appointed by Seanad Éireann to be and act as a Joint Committee for the purposes of paragraph (1) and such other purposes as may be specified in these Standing Orders or by order of the Dáil: provided that the Joint Committee shall not consider—

- (a) the Committee Stage of a Bill,
- (b) Estimates for Public Services, or
- (c) a proposal contained in a motion for the approval of an international agreement involving a charge upon public funds referred to the Committee by order of the Dáil.

(6) Any report that the Joint Committee proposes to make shall, on adoption by the Joint Committee, be made to both Houses of the Oireachtas.

(7) The Chairman of the Select Committee appointed pursuant to this Standing Order shall also be Chairman of the Joint Committee.

(8) Where a Select Committee proposes to consider—

- (a) EU draft legislative acts standing referred to the Select Committee under Standing Order 133, including the compliance of such acts with the principle of subsidiarity,
- (b) other proposals for EU legislation and related policy issues, including programmes and guidelines prepared by the European Commission as a basis of possible legislative action,
- (c) non-legislative documents published by any EU institution in relation to EU policy matters, or
- (d) matters listed for consideration on the agenda for meetings of the relevant Council (of Ministers) of the European Union and the outcome of such meetings,

the following may be notified accordingly and shall have the right to attend and take part in such consideration without having a right to move motions or amendments or the right to vote:

- (i) members of the European Parliament elected from constituencies in Ireland,
- (ii) members of the Irish delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, and
- (iii) at the invitation of the Committee, other members of the European Parliament.

(9) A Select Committee appointed pursuant to this Standing Order may, in respect of any Ombudsman charged with oversight of public services within the policy remit of the relevant Department consider—

- (a) such motions relating to the appointment of an Ombudsman as may be referred to the Committee, and
- (b) such Ombudsman reports laid before either or both Houses of the Oireachtas as the Committee may select: Provided that the provisions of Standing Order 130 apply where the Select Committee has not considered the Ombudsman report, or a portion or portions thereof, within two months (excluding Christmas, Easter or summer recess periods) of the report being laid before either or both Houses of the Oireachtas.²

Powers of Select Committees.

96. Unless the Dáil shall otherwise order, a Committee appointed pursuant to these Standing Orders shall have the following powers:

- (1) power to invite and receive oral and written evidence and to print and publish from time to time—
 - (a) minutes of such evidence as was heard in public, and
 - (b) such evidence in writing as the Committee thinks fit;

² Retained pending review of the Joint Committee on Public Petitions.

- (2) power to appoint sub-Committees and to refer to such sub-Committees any matter comprehended by its orders of reference and to delegate any of its powers to such sub-Committees, including power to report directly to the Dáil;
- (3) power to draft recommendations for legislative change and for new legislation;
- (4) in relation to any statutory instrument, including those laid or laid in draft before either or both Houses of the Oireachtas, power to—
 - (a) require any Government Department or other instrument-making authority concerned to—
 - (i) submit a memorandum to the Select Committee explaining the statutory instrument, or
 - (ii) attend a meeting of the Select Committee to explain any such statutory instrument: Provided that the authority concerned may decline to attend for reasons given in writing to the Select Committee, which may report thereon to the Dáil, and
 - (b) recommend, where it considers that such action is warranted, that the instrument should be annulled or amended;
- (5) power to require that a member of the Government or Minister of State shall attend before the Select Committee to discuss—
 - (a) policy, or
 - (b) proposed primary or secondary legislation (prior to such legislation being published),

for which he or she is officially responsible: Provided that a member of the Government or Minister of State may decline to attend for stated reasons given in writing to the Select Committee, which may report thereon to the Dáil: and provided further that a member of the Government or Minister of State may request to attend a meeting of the Select Committee to enable him or her to discuss such policy or proposed legislation;

- (6) power to require that a member of the Government or Minister of State shall attend before the Select Committee and provide, in private session if so requested by the attendee, oral briefings in advance of meetings of the relevant EC Council (of Ministers) of the European Union to enable the Select Committee to make known its views: Provided that the Committee may also require such attendance following such meetings;
- (7) power to require that the Chairperson designate of a body or agency under the aegis of a Department shall, prior to his or her appointment, attend before the Select Committee to discuss his or her strategic priorities for the role;
- (8) power to require that a member of the Government or Minister of State who is officially responsible for the implementation of an Act shall attend before a Select Committee in relation to the consideration of a report under Standing Order 197;

(9) subject to any constraints otherwise prescribed by law, power to require that principal office-holders of a—

(a) State body within the responsibility of a Government Department or

(b) non-State body which is partly funded by the State,

shall attend meetings of the Select Committee, as appropriate, to discuss issues for which they are officially responsible: Provided that such an office-holder may decline to attend for stated reasons given in writing to the Select Committee, which may report thereon to the Dáil; and

(10) power to—

(a) engage the services of persons with specialist or technical knowledge, to assist it or any of its sub-Committees in considering particular matters; and

(b) undertake travel;

Provided that the powers under this paragraph are subject to such recommendations as may be made by the Working Group of Committee Chairmen under Standing Order 120(4)(a).'

Standing Orders 107 and 109 – Committees meeting in Private

That Standing Order 107 be amended by the addition of the following paragraph after paragraph (2):

‘(3) Where a Standing, Select or Special Committee, by Order, meets in private, such meeting may be held on such specified videoconferencing platform as may be approved and provided by the Houses of the Oireachtas Commission: Provided that minutes of Private Meetings will be proposed and decided at the next (public) Meeting of the Committee.’

That Standing Order 109 (*‘Quorum of Select Committees’*) be amended by the inclusion in paragraph (4) of ‘or, for the purpose of Standing Order 107(3) taking part in proceedings on such specified videoconferencing platform as may be approved and provided by the Houses of the Oireachtas Commission,’ after ‘present’, and by the addition of the following proviso:

‘Provided further that references in Standing Orders to being present, taking part in proceedings, attending and participating shall be construed accordingly.’

Standing Order 121 – Committee on Members’ Interests of Dáil Éireann

That Standing Order 121(5) be amended by the insertion of the following proviso:

‘Provided that, Standing Order 106 shall apply for the purposes of consultation provided in section 5(1) and issuance of guidelines pursuant to section 12(1)(c) of the Ethics in Public Office Acts 1995 and 2001’.

Standing Orders 122 and 124 – Joint Administration Committee and Parliamentary Steering Group on EU Affairs

That Standing Order 122 be deleted.

That Standing Order 124 is amended by the deletion of paragraph (1) and, in paragraph (2) by the deletion of 'Notwithstanding the generality of paragraph (1):—'.

Standing Order 218 — Committee of Public Accounts

That Standing Order 218 be deleted and substituted by the following:

‘218. (1) There shall stand established, following the reassembly of the Dáil subsequent to a General Election, a Standing Committee, to be known as the Committee of Public Accounts, to examine and report to the Dáil upon—

- (a) the accounts showing the appropriation of the sums granted by the Dáil each year to meet the public expenditure and such other accounts as they see fit (not being accounts of persons included in the Second Schedule of the Comptroller and Auditor General (Amendment) Act 1993) which are audited by the Comptroller and Auditor General and presented to the Dáil on an annual basis, together with any reports by the Comptroller and Auditor General thereon;
- (b) the Comptroller and Auditor General’s reports on his or her examinations of economy, efficiency, effectiveness evaluation systems, procedures and practices; and
- (c) other reports carried out by the Comptroller and Auditor General under the Act.

(2) In considering particular accounts pursuant to paragraph (1)(a), the Committee shall examine whether, having regard to changes in—

- (a) the volume or quality of services or other outputs delivered, and
- (b) associated expenditure,

over time, it can be demonstrated that value for money has or has not been achieved.

(3) The Committee shall bring conclusions and recommendations reported to the Dáil pursuant to paragraph (1)(a) in relation to particular accounts to the attention of the relevant Committee established pursuant to Standing Order 95.

(4) The Committee may suggest alterations and improvements in the form of the Estimates submitted to the Dáil and shall bring any such suggestions as reported to the Dáil to the attention of the Committee on Budgetary Oversight.

(5) The Committee may proceed with its examination of an account or a report of the Comptroller and Auditor General at any time after that account or report is presented to Dáil Éireann.

(6) The Committee shall have the power to send for persons, papers and records.

(7) Paragraphs (4) to (9) inclusive of Standing Order 96 shall not apply to the Committee.

(8) Every report which the Committee proposes to make shall, on adoption by the Committee, be laid before the Dáil forthwith whereupon the Committee shall be empowered to print and publish such report together with such related documents as it thinks fit.

(9) The Committee shall present an annual progress report to Dáil Éireann on its activities and plans.

(10) Notwithstanding the provisions of paragraph (1) of this Standing Order, the Committee shall have the power to examine and report upon a specific matter of general public interest relating to the appropriation of public moneys, which is not comprehended by appropriation accounts or reports of the Comptroller and Auditor General within the meaning of paragraph (1), subject to—

- (a) a positive determination having been made by the Committee on Remit Oversight under Standing Order 93A³ pursuant to a request by the Committee of Public Accounts under

³ References to SO 93A and 93B are references to the new Standing Orders proposed for consideration in September.

Standing Order 93B for an extension to its orders of reference for the purpose of examining the matter; and

- (b) the approval of the Dáil by way of an appropriate motion under Standing Order 93B to instruct the Committee in conducting its examination of the matter.

(11) The Committee shall refrain from—

- (a) enquiring into in public session, or publishing, confidential information regarding the activities and plans of a Government Department or office, or of a body which is subject to audit, examination or inspection by the Comptroller and Auditor General, if so requested either by a member of the Government, or the body concerned; or
- (b) enquiring into the merits of a policy or policies of the Government or a member of the Government or the merits of the objectives of such policies.

(12) The Committee may, without prejudice to the independence of the Comptroller and Auditor General in determining the work to be carried out by his or her Office or the manner in which it is carried out, in private communication, make such suggestions to the Comptroller and Auditor General regarding that work as it sees fit.

(13) The Committee shall consist of thirteen members, none of whom shall be a member of the Government or a Minister of State, and four of whom shall constitute a quorum. The Committee and any sub-Committee which it may appoint shall be constituted so as to be impartially representative of the Dáil.'