



***Coimisiún Thithe an Oireachtais***  
***Houses of the Oireachtas Commission***

*Minutes of the Commission*  
*Wednesday, 12<sup>th</sup> December, 2007*

1. The eleventh meeting of the Commission of 2007 took place at 3 p.m. in Room 2, Leinster House.
2. **MEMBERS PRESENT.**  
Deputy John O'Donoghue, Ceann Comhairle (Chairperson), Senator Paul Bradford, Mr. Kieran Coughlan, Secretary General, Deputy Tom Hayes, Senator Cecilia Keaveney, Deputy Séamus Kirk, Senator Pat Moylan, Cathaoirleach of the Seanad, Deputy Michael Mulcahy, Deputy Dan Neville, Deputy Pat Rabbitte and Senator Jim Walsh.
3. **MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING.**  
The minutes of the meeting of 28<sup>th</sup> November, 2007, were agreed by the Commission.
4. **SECRETARIAL FACILITIES FOR PARTIES AND MEMBERS - REVIEW OF S.I. 888/04 IN LIGHT OF NUMBERS IN THE 30<sup>TH</sup> DÁIL AND TO PROVIDE FOR APPROPRIATE GRAPHIC DESIGN SERVICE (resumed).**

The Commission resumed consideration of a discussion document in this matter [11-01-07].

Following discussion, the Commission agreed that an informal group be established to –

- (i) consult with all parties, including those not represented on the Commission; and
- (ii) consider and make recommendations to the Commission at its next meeting on allocations for each party in the light of such consultations.

Deputy Dan Neville, Deputy Pat Rabbitte and Senator Jim Walsh were appointed to be members of the group.

Consideration of the discussion document was deferred pending the outcome of the group's recommendations.

**5. JOINT COMMITTEE ON THE CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT ON CHILDREN – LEGAL FEES.**

The Commission was informed that correspondence has been received from the Joint Committee on the Constitutional Amendment on Children seeking sanction for the engagement of legal advice to assist the Joint Committee in carrying out its work.

The Commission noted that the Finance Committee is authorised to sanction, on the Commission's behalf, legal fees payable by or on behalf of the Committees of the Houses. It was further noted that, as a flexibility mechanism where the Committee stands adjourned for a relatively prolonged period, the Secretary General has authority to sanction legal fees up to an agreed limit, subject to prior consultation with the Chairperson of the Finance Committee [*Commission decision of 14<sup>th</sup> October, 2004*].

The Commission agreed that the limit of the Secretary General's authority in this context should be set at €200,000, and noted that the correspondence in question has been referred to the Finance Committee.

## **6. CHAMBER AND ACCOMMODATION PLANS - MEETING WITH OFFICE OF PUBLIC WORKS.**

*Mr. Seán Benton, Chairman, Ms. Claire McGrath, Commissioner, Mr. John McMahon, Mr. Klaus Unger, Mr. Jim O'Sullivan, Mr. Bobby Carthy and Mr. Martin O'Gorman, Office of Public Works, were admitted to the meeting.*

The Commission was briefed on developments on the following issues:

### ***Kildare Place Energy Centre***

The Commission was informed that this issue must be addressed in the short-term as the boiler/heating facilities are now nearing the end of their functional life span. The OPW proposed that a new energy centre for the Leinster House precinct would be located underground in Kildare Place thereby creating opportunities for the development of the Fisheries Yard site and Agriculture House. This energy centre would also serve the National Museum, National Library, Government Buildings, Agriculture House, Department of Enterprise and Employment as well as the Leinster House complex.

### ***Options for future development of Dáil Chamber***

In the context of progressing the vision for the development of the Leinster House precinct, the OPW presented the Commission with two possible locations for a new Dáil Chamber - (a) on the Merrion Street side of Leinster House and (b) in the Fisheries Yard area, both possible developments being linked to other projects, i.e, the underground car park and the energy centre.

### ***Underground car park***

The Commission was informed that re-instatement of Leinster Lawn is required by the planning conditions of the LH 2000 development and that, if the underground car park is not proceeded with, the lawn must be restored and additional parking spaces leased in the vicinity to replace those displaced as a result of the restoration of the lawn.

The Commission was further informed that economic analysis of a shared PPP approach to constructing a two storey underground car park with 500 spaces below Leinster Lawn, suggests that the return on capital investment to the private sector under various scenarios is unfavourable.

OPW currently lease a considerable number of car parking spaces for public sector employees in the vicinity of Leinster House - if the new car park were proceeded with and access extended to these public sector employees, this would enable OPW to surrender their leases on these outside sites (as well as avoid the need to lease new sites for displaced Leinster House parking). In this way, full payback on this project would be achieved after 30 years. In addition, the development of an underground car park would mean that there would be no surface car parking on either the Kildare Street or Merrion Street sides of Leinster House and the areas could be opened up and developed as public spaces thereby improving immensely the amenity of Leinster House.

### ***Fire protection work in Leinster House***

The Commission was informed that structural difficulties have been identified in Leinster House and in particular on the first and second floors. The OPW undertook to revert to the Commission with a detailed programme of remedial works and an analysis of the implications, if any, of these works on the day-to-day operation of the building. While the structure is not considered to be dangerous to the occupants of the building, urgent works

were required to preserve the fabric and historical integrity of the building. Plans would be developed so as to minimise disruption and so as not to interfere with the business of the Houses. It was noted that rooms on the second floor have already been vacated for structural reasons, awaiting works to rectify the position.

The Commission approved the OPW recommendation that the energy centre for the Leinster House precinct be located underground in the Fisheries Yard/Kildare Place area, thereby freeing up that area for future development and agreed that work should commence immediately on the project.

The Commission welcomed the presentation on the options for the development of the Dáil Chamber and the underground car park. Members required more time to reflect on the issues raised and it was agreed to revert to these issues early in the New Year.

*The Commission thanked Chairman Benton and his officials for their attendance at the meeting and they withdrew from the meeting.*

## **7. ADJOURNMENT.**

The meeting adjourned at 4.15 p.m.

JOHN O'DONOGHUE, T.D.,  
Ceann Comhairle and Chairperson of the Commission.

Dated: