



*Coimisiún Thithe an Oireachtais  
Houses of the Oireachtas Commission*

*Minutes of the Commission  
Tuesday, 11<sup>th</sup> March, 2008*

1. The second meeting of the Commission of 2008 took place at 5.45 p.m. in Room 2, Leinster House.

**2. MEMBERS PRESENT.**

Deputy John O'Donoghue, Ceann Comhairle (Chairperson), 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. Apologies were received from Senator Paul Bradford.

**3. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING.**

The minutes of the meeting of 14<sup>th</sup> February, 2008, were agreed by the Commission subject to the following amendment to paragraph 7, to read as follows: "The Commission discussed proposals in relation to the rationalisation of members' allowances. The proposals, based on a downward revision to the Goodbody Recommendations and the Implementation Group Recommendations with regard to members' allowances, which have been the subject of consideration for a couple of years, but excluding any increase to members travel and subsistence allowances, were agreed in principle subject to being tabled for formal approval by the Commission at its next meeting and subject to receipt of a report on the audit issues arising. The Commission noted that any proposals adopted will require the consent of the Minister for Finance and the making of the necessary statutory regulations."

**4. RATIONALISATION OF MEMBERS' ALLOWANCES REVIEW.**

The Commission had before it a draft report proposing revisions to members' allowances.

*Divisions having been demanded in both the Dáil and Seanad Chambers, the meeting was suspended.*

*The meeting was resumed at 6.35 p.m.*

The Commission approved the Report, as amended, [02-04-08] and agreed that it now be forwarded to the Tánaiste and Minister for Finance for his consideration. In addition, the Commission noted and agreed the Audit Committee Report as set out at Appendix 2 of the document.

**5. PARLIAMENTARY CHANNEL - RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE JOINT ADMINISTRATION COMMITTEE.**

The Commission has before it two reports from the Joint Administration Committee proposing:

- (i) the commencement of test transmissions of a parliamentary channel on digital terrestrial television (DTT) on the basis of the DTT trial currently being undertaken by the Department of Communications, Marine and Natural Resources [02-01-08];

(ii) that a comprehensive feasibility study be carried out by an expert in the field of DTT with a view to the development of a separate parliamentary channel [02-01a-08].

The Commission approved both Reports and the recommendations contained therein.

## **6. COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION.**

### *(i) Houses of the Oireachtas Corporate Logo:*

The Commission had before it an information note on the Houses of the Oireachtas new corporate identity [02-02-08] following on from correspondence received from Deputies Paul Kehoe and Ulick Burke.

The Commission noted that the aim of the new logo is to communicate with the public under one cohesive and unified identity and that a public tendering competition was held in July 2007 to develop the design for the new logo.

The Commission agreed that the Office will use the new brand identity for all official purposes and that the use of the new identity by members is optional. The Commission agreed that members be advised that they may, if they so wish, continue to use their current headed paper and business cards.

### *(ii) Houses of the Oireachtas Public Events Programme:*

The Commission had before it an information note on the proposed Houses of the Oireachtas Public Events Programme [02-01-08]. Four separate events were proposed: (i) an Oireachtas Family Day in June (similar events are organised in other parliaments); (ii) an Oireachtas Festival of Politics in October (the Scottish parliament have hosted a similar event for the past 4 years – to be hosted in Leinster House and at selected venues nationwide); (iii) Oireachtas Stand at the National Ploughing Championships in September; and (iv) Oireachtas Stand at the Young Scientists Exhibition next January. The Commission noted that the programme was aimed at achieving greater public understanding and interest in the Houses of the Oireachtas and the work of members. The Commission welcomed the initiative and noted that the schools programme was currently being rolled out by the Ceannt Comhairle to schools nationwide.

The Commission approved the programme in principle and agreed with the recommendation that the Whips nominate a small group of members to assist with the design and implementation of the programme to ensure that it meets the needs of both Houses and members.

## **7. INQUIRY – COSTS OF LEGAL REPRESENTATION.**

The Commission agreed that exploratory settlements talks may be proceeded with in a case. In addition, as a flexibility measure, in the event of the Commission being adjourned if and when a settlement figure is agreed, the Commission agreed that the Secretary General, following consultation with the Chairperson of the Finance Committee, be authorised to approve the payment in the interim and to report back to the Commission thereon at its next meeting.

## **8. TRANSLATION SERVICES.**

### *(i) Cost and impact of translation of Acts.*

The Commission had before it a report on the impact of the Official Languages Act on the preparation of official translations of Acts of the Oireachtas [02-02-08]. It was noted that the coming into effect of the provisions of the legislation had not had a negative impact on the work of the section to date. The Commission noted the report.

*(ii) Review of Members' correspondence translation service.*

The Committee had before it a report on the provision of members' correspondence translation service [02-02a-08] which recommended the continuation of the scheme on its existing terms with the proviso that a further reviewed will be initiated if demand increases significantly. The Commission in approving the report requested that all members be advised of the existence of the service.

## **9. LEINSTER HOUSE OPENING HOURS REVIEW.**

The Commission had before it for consideration a report on the post-implementation review of Leinster House Saturday opening hours during sitting weeks which service came into effect in 2005 [02-03-08]. The Commission, in noting the report, agreed that there should be flexibility during Saturdays of non-sitting weeks, whereby if a member comes to the gate and there are people on site, then the member should be allowed into his/her office if he/she so requests. The Commission viewed that the extension of Saturday opening hours to non-sitting weeks is not warranted at this point in time due to the current level of take-up by members during sitting weeks.

## **10. ALLOCATION OF ACCOMMODATION TO MEMBERS FOLLOWING GENERAL ELECTIONS TO BOTH HOUSES.**

The Commission has before it for consideration a discussion paper on the allocation of accommodation to members following General Elections to both Houses [02-04-08]. The Commission noted that this issue had been raised by the members of the Informal Feedback Forum who had expressed concern at the fact that newly elected members are not provided with accommodation within a reasonable time following a General Election. The Commission agreed that it is reasonable to expect that every member would be assigned an office prior to the first sitting of the relevant House following a General Election. The Commission agreed in principle to the recommendations contained in the discussion document and, in view of the role the party whips have in relation to assignment of such accommodation, agreed that the paper should now be forwarded to them for their views.

## **11. ANY OTHER BUSINESS.**

*(i) Leinster House conservation works.*

The Commission noted and approved correspondence received from the Committee on Procedures and Privileges of Seanad Éireann regarding the temporary relocation of the Seanad to Committee Room 1 in LH 2000 during the period of the forthcoming Leinster House conservation works.

*(ii) Staffing at Assistant Secretary level in the Office of the Houses of the Oireachtas.*

Arising from previous Commission consideration of this matter on 1<sup>st</sup> March, 2007, the Commission noted correspondence received from the Clerk of the Seanad and the Clerk-Assistant of the Dáil regarding senior management grading in the Houses of the Oireachtas. The Commission was informed by the Secretary General that following earlier discussions the position put forward by the Department of Finance on today's date (11<sup>th</sup> March, 2008) is that they are now prepared, as indicated previously in its letter dated 13<sup>th</sup> June, 2006, to consider sanctioning the creation of the second Assistant Secretary post in the Houses of the Oireachtas on receipt of a statement of the duties envisaged for it and a description of the change and modernization programme under way, and on the basis that the post will be filled through the TLAC process. The Commission welcomed this development on the second Assistant Secretary post.

*(iii) Noreen McDonnell (Mini-CTC) legal costs settlement.*

The Commission noted correspondence received from the Tánaiste and Minister for Finance regarding the sanctioning of the payment of the costs in this case from Commission funds.

(iv) *Irish Parliamentary (Former Members) Society.*

The Commission noted correspondence received from the Irish Parliamentary (Former Members) Society regarding five former members who are not in receipt of a pension. The Commission, in noting that it has no remit in this matter as responsibility for the terms of the scheme rests solely with the Minister for Finance, agreed to a request from the Society to meet with the Commission.

## **12. ADJOURNMENT.**

The meeting adjourned at 7.30 p.m.

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

Dated: