



Coimisiún Thithe an Oireachtais
Houses of the Oireachtas Commission

Minutes of the Commission
Wednesday, 30th April, 2008

1. The third meeting of the Commission of 2008 took place at 5 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 and Deputy Pat Rabbitte. Apologies were received from Senator Jim Walsh.

3. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING.

The minutes of the meeting of 11th March, 2008, were agreed by the Commission.

Legal representation costs.

Arising from the minutes, the Commission noted that a settlement had been reached in a case for legal representation costs.

4. IRISH PARLIAMENTARY (FORMER MEMBERS') SOCIETY – PENSIONS OF FORMER MEMBERS.

The Commission had before it correspondence received from Mr. Alexis Fitzgerald, Irish Parliamentary (Former Members') Society (IPS), regarding five former members who are not in receipt of a pension.

Mr. Alexis Fitzgerald and Ms. Myra Barry, representatives of the IPS, were admitted to the meeting.

Regarding the request from the IPS for a once-off ex-gratia payment to address the fact that these former members had insufficient service to qualify for a pension when they left the Oireachtas, the Commission re-iterated the fact that it has no remit in the matter and cannot offer any solution to the representatives of the IPS in the absence of the agreement of the Minister for Finance as to do otherwise, the Commission would be acting without legal authority.

The Commission noted that in relation to the transfer of service option under the pension scheme, it is open to the former members concerned to make contact with the Members' Pension Section of the Office to ascertain whether they can avail of the provisions of Part 10 of the 2001 Act, which allows for the transfer of public service pre or post membership of the Houses to reckon for pension purposes.

The Commission, in again expressing empathy with the five former members who have between 4 and 7.5 years distinguished parliamentary service, agreed to make further representations to the new Minister for Finance recommending sanction of the IPS request for a once-off ex-gratia payment to resolve this issue.

5. REPORTS FROM FINANCE COMMITTEE:

- (a) Financial Report for Quarter ended 31st March, 2008:

Deputy Seamus Kirk, Chairperson of the Finance Committee, presented the report of the Finance Committee [03-02-08].

The Commission noted the report.

- (b) 2007 Commission Accounts:

The Commission noted the 2007 Accounts as signed by the Secretary General and submitted to the Comptroller and Auditor General by 31st March, 2008, pursuant to the Houses of the Oireachtas Commission Acts 2003 and 2006 [03-03-08].

6. ICT STRATEGY, 2008-2010.

The Committee had before it for consideration a draft three-year ICT Strategy for the Houses of the Oireachtas Commission, 2008-2010, as well as a summary document detailing the key elements of the draft Strategy [03-04-08, 03-04a-08].

The Commission noted that the ICT commitments set out in the Strategy are directly linked to the Commission's four main strategic commitments – serving sittings, serving members, promoting parliament and better management.

The Strategy, including the associated flexible resourcing policy proposed therein whereby additional posts or assignments, where absolutely necessary, will be met from existing ICT budgets by means of a delegation to the Secretary General, was agreed by the Commission.

7. REPORTS FROM THE JOINT ADMINISTRATION COMMITTEE.

The Commission had before it the following reports from the Joint Administration Committee:

- (a) Report on folding/inserting machines for members on Leinster House campus and in constituency offices [03-05-08].

The Commission approved the recommendation of the Joint Administration Committee that the Office purchase two additional folding/inserting machines for the Leinster House campus and noted that the request for an increase in the constituency allowance to allow Deputies purchase this equipment for use in their constituency offices has now been subsumed by the Commission proposal on revised allowances to the Minister for Finance.

- (b) Report on Web Services for members [03-06-08].

The Commission noted that the request from the Joint Administration Committee for an increase in the constituency office allowance to allow members the option to purchase web design, hosting and maintenance services as required has also been subsumed by the Commission proposal on revised allowances to the Minister for Finance.

In relation to web design, the Commission was informed that under the Communications Strategy a new design is being developed for the Houses of the Oireachtas website and the views and needs of members in this regard will be advanced via the Joint Administration Committee.

The Commission further noted that the Joint Administration Committee has reserved its right to request an increase in members allowances in respect of these two matters in the event that the proposal submitted by the Commission to the Minister for Finance is unsuccessful.

(c) Report on direct payment of hotel costs for members on official travel [03-07-08].

The Commission approved the following recommendations from the Joint Administration Committee in respect of the payment of members' accommodation costs for official travel:

- (i) the basic cost of members' accommodation, including breakfast for the duration of official travel, be paid directly by the Office (Travel Section) using an official credit card;
- (ii) the proposed change be initially on a pilot basis for a period of one year, allowing for a review before full implementation;
- (iii) the existing arrangements in respect of the remainder of any bill continue to be settled on check-out in respect of miscellaneous expenses e.g. telephone costs, room service etc. by members individually.

(d) OPW Report on heating and ventilation in LH2000 [03-08-08].

The Commission, based on recommendations from the Joint Administration Committee following consultation with the OPW, approved the following course of action proposed by the OPW to address the air conditioning problems in LH 2000:

- (i) the application of a protective film on glass to protect against heating from solar gain;
- (ii) the improvement of the operation of the automatic windows by installing option of a manual control which also has a setting to activate the windows if high temperatures are reached while the office is vacant;
- (iii) the installation of an air circulation system which will pump fresh air into the corridors.

8. PROGRESS REPORT ON THE OPERATION OF THE CENTRALISED PRINT FACILITY.

The Commission had before it for consideration a progress report on the operation of the centralised print facility [03-09-08].

The Commission noted the progress report which concluded that the performance of the facility has improved significantly – in fact performance has almost doubled since 2005 [from 55% capacity in 2005 to 92% capacity in 2007] – and a survey of members who regularly use the facility has indicated a 96% satisfaction rating with the overall service.

9. ADJOURNMENT.

The meeting adjourned at 5.45 p.m.

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

Dated: