



Coimisiún Thithe an Oireachtais
Houses of the Oireachtas Commission

Minutes of the Commission
Wednesday, 9th July, 2008

1. The fifth 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*), 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 18th June, 2008, were agreed by the Commission.

Houses of the Oireachtas Annual Resource Plan, 2008-09- clarification.

Arising from the minutes, wherein the Commission had noted the delegated sanctioning arrangements from the previous Commission to the Secretary General for the creation of new temporary posts, the Commission was informed that the Management Committee had decided on 7th April, 2008, that annual growth numbers be capped at 2% of budgetary ceiling, and accordingly the Commission agreed to amend paragraph (2)(c) of the instrument of delegation to the Secretary General.

4. LEINSTER HOUSE CONSERVATION WORKS - MEETING WITH OFFICE OF PUBLIC WORKS.

Mr. Seán Benton (Chairman), Ms. Claire McGrath, Commissioner, Mr. John McMahon, Mr. Klaus Unger, Ms. Eithne Dunford and Mr. John Cahill, OPW, were admitted to the meeting.

The Commission was informed that the proposed conservation works to address structural and services deficiencies in Leinster House which, on the approval of the Commission on 14th February, 2008, were scheduled to commence this Summer, must be postponed for one year due to the Department of Finance stipulation that these works must now be undertaken adopting the Public Works Contract which requires fixed price lump sum tender prices. This form of contract requires absolute certainty in relation to every aspect of the work to be carried out and whilst it brings price certainty it adds to the lead-in time in getting the contract out. The consequence of this is that the OPW will not now be in a position to meet the original deadlines as approved by the Commission in February.

The OPW proposed that the schedule of conservation works now commence in July 2009 to be completed by September 2010. Mr. Benton confirmed that there is no risk associated with delaying the works by one year. In the meantime, the OPW proposed that interim urgent works be carried out this Summer.

The Commission agreed the OPW recommendation that the schedule of conservation works as already approved, including the decant of staff to temporary accommodation and the relocation of

Seanad Éireann to Committee Room 1, be now postponed for one year. The Commission further agreed that the necessary urgent interim works may be proceeded with during this Summer Recess.

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

5. REPORTS FROM THE JOINT ADMINISTRATION COMMITTEE.

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

- (a) Leinster House Security Review [05-05-08].

The Commission approved the recommendation of the Joint Administration Committee that the scope for the security review by the Gardaí proceeds as proposed to ensure that the security arrangements in place are effective in a parliamentary environment.

- (b) Accessibility upgrade works at Kildare Street forecourt, Leinster House [05-06-08].

The Commission approved the recommendation of the Joint Administration Committee that the upgrades to the plinth and ramps in the Kildare Street forecourt of Leinster House commence as proposed by the OPW.

- (c) Oireachtas Broadcasting Unit – proposal for replacement of Newsbase and Petasite systems [05-03-08].

The Commission approved the following recommendations of the Joint Administration Committee in relation to the Oireachtas broadcasting systems—

- (a) the replacement of the Newsbase and Petasite systems, and
- (b) the commencement of the procurement process (in accordance with the EU Procurement Directives) to purchase the new systems.

- (d) Provision of Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) telephony services in members' constituency offices [05-04-08].

The Commission noted that this matter was originally raised via the Informal Feedback Forum for Members.

The Commission approved the recommendations of the Joint Administration Committee that—

- (1) A pilot scheme for five members be established to test the viability of providing an Oireachtas telephone extension in the constituency office /home of each Member.
- (2) A review of the scheme take place after it has been in operation for six months.
- (3) Expenditure of up to €52,000 for the pilot scheme be sanctioned.
- (4) Members' permission be sought to log traffic on the circuits provided at the trial sites in order that data can be gathered for the cost / benefit review which will be undertaken at the end of the pilot scheme.
- (5) The ICT Unit be permitted to select participants on technological grounds related to distances of remote sites from Dublin and from their local exchanges and the types of equipment in use at the remote site.
- (6) The telephony allowances of Members participating in the pilot scheme be abated by 75% for the duration of the pilot scheme.

6. RATIONALISATION OF MEMBERS' ALLOWANCES.

The sub-Committee reported progress.

The Commission will revert to this issue at its next meeting.

7. THREE-YEAR BUDGETARY POSITION [2007-09]: IDENTIFICATION OF NEW INVESTMENTS.

The Commission had before it for consideration a memorandum on the Commission's current three year budgetary cycle [note05-01-08].

The Commission agreed to delegate to the Finance Committee for detailed consideration and decision the schedule of projects recommended by the Office for front-loading in the 2007-09 budgetary cycle and to report such decisions to the Commission at its next meeting.

8. ANY OTHER BUSINESS.

Bar-coding of Oireachtas pre-paid envelopes issuing to members of Dáil Éireann.

The Commission was informed that the Committee on Procedure and Privileges of Dáil Éireann at its meeting on 18th June, 2008, decided to discontinue the bar-coding of Oireachtas pre-paid envelopes issuing to members of Dáil Éireann.

9. ADJOURNMENT.

The meeting adjourned at 6 p.m.

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

Dated: