



*Minutes of the Commission
Wednesday, 17th December, 2008*

1. The eighth meeting of the Commission of 2008 took place at 5 p.m. in Room 2, Leinster House.
2. **MEMBERS PRESENT.**

Deputy John O'Donoghue, T.D., Ceann Comhairle (Chairperson), Senator Pat Moylan, Cathaoirleach of the Seanad (Deputy Chairperson), Mr. Kieran Coughlan, Secretary General, Deputy Tom Hayes, Senator Cecilia Keaveney, Deputy Séamus Kirk, 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 12th November, 2008, were agreed by the Commission subject an amendment to paragraph 6, the final sentence of which should read as follows "Senator Jim Walsh dissented from the specific fee rate of €1,500 payable to counsel."

Oireachtas pre-paid envelopes.

Arising from the minutes, members were informed that supplies of pre-paid envelopes stamped with "Oireachtas Éireann" are now available to members again. Members may choose which type of stamped envelope they wish to collect each month – "Dáil Éireann", "Seanad Éireann" or "Oireachtas Éireann".

Facility to respond to multiple e-mails.

Arising from the minutes, members were informed that the ICT Unit has come up with a solution to enable members and staff issue single e-mail responses to multiple recipients. Members and staff will receive instructions and assistance from the ICT Unit on how to issue such an e-mail.

Commission minutes.

In relation to the circulation of Commission minutes, the Ceann Comhairle stated that the draft minutes of Commission meetings will henceforth be circulated to members of Commission as soon as they have been drafted so as to enable Commission members update their parliamentary party colleagues on issues discussed at Commission level. He stated he viewed it as important that Commission members assume the role of liaison by conveying the views of the parties at Commission meetings and in turn explaining the rationale for Commission decisions at parliamentary party meetings.

4. **LEINSTER HOUSE CONSERVATION WORKS.**

Deputy Martin Mansergh, Minister of State with responsibility for OPW, Mr. Seán Benton (Chairman), Commissioner John McMahon, and Mr. John Cahill, OPW, were admitted to the meeting.

Leinster House Conservation Works.

The Minister confirmed that the conservation works on Georgian Leinster House would not proceed in the immediate future in view of the current financial climate on the basis that the

cost of the conservation works would represent a significant amount of the OPW's discretionary budget for 2009. He confirmed that all necessary remedial works will be undertaken by the OPW to ensure the continued safety of the building and to address the risk associated with the deferment of the works. He stated that the decision in relation to funding for the conservation works would be reviewed in 2010 and in subsequent years if necessary.

Restoration of Leinster Lawn.

The Minister stated that the current temporary car park in Leinster Lawn may be in breach of the planning conditions of the LH 2000 development works and its restoration has been postponed to date in view of the Commission's decision to proceed with a proposal to construct an underground car park. He stated the underground car park project will not proceed in the medium term due to the financial climate. The OPW is committed to honouring this planning requirement to restore the lawn and is now seeking instruction from the Commission on how to proceed in view of the fact that the conservation works and the underground car park projects will not be proceeded with in the immediate future.

The options open to the Commission at this point are:

- (i) request the OPW to restore Leinster Lawn and to make appropriate arrangements to provide replacement car parking spaces in the vicinity of Leinster House; or
- (ii) request the OPW to seek an appropriate extension of the planning permission for the retention of the temporary car park at Leinster Lawn pursuant to Part IX of the Planning Acts.

A general discussion ensued on the implication of restoring the lawn and it was acknowledged that replacement and additional spaces would need to be found to compensate for the car parking spaces lost on foot of the restoration of the lawn due to the fact that the number of staff had increased in the past few years. Mr. Benton stated that some of the car parking spaces may be sourced from property already owned or leased by the OPW and additional spaces would have to be sourced in the vicinity of Leinster House – however, the OPW flagged that it would not be in a position to fund the leasing of additional spaces over and above the number of spaces permanently lost on foot of the restoration of the lawn. The OPW confirmed that it was committed to providing replacement parking for the spaces which were permanently lost from Kildare House when the Oireachtas printing facility was located there. The Minister stated that members should have priority in the allocation of car parking spaces in the Leinster House grounds. In relation to the spaces available in Agriculture House, the OPW confirmed that the car parking spaces will be freed up there when the current phase of decentralisation is completed in about 2.5 years time. They stated there are many demands for car parking spaces in that location but the Oireachtas will be given due priority if possible. Members questioned the value for money aspect of incurring the cost of restoring the lawn and incurring additional costs for the lease of car parking spaces in the current financial climate.

The Commission-

- (i) noted that the current temporary car park may be in contravention of the Part IX planning process which required the lawn to be re-instated following the completion of the LH 2000 development works;
- (ii) noted that the conservation works and the underground car park project are not likely to be commenced in the immediate future;
- (iii) prior to making a decision in this matter, requested the OPW to report back on the following issues to address concerns raised by members:
 - (a) in the event of the lawn being restored, an assurance is sought on the availability of car parking spaces for all members of the Houses of the Oireachtas in the Leinster House grounds;
 - (b) in the event of the lawn being restored, the alternative parking solutions and locations being proposed for staff who lose their car parking spaces as a result of the restoration;
 - (c) an analysis on the current parking usage figures and patterns in Leinster Lawn.

It was agreed the OPW would liaise with officials from the Houses of the Oireachtas to prepare a report for the Commission in this matter.

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

5. 90th ANNIVERSARY OF THE FIRST DÁIL – COMMEMORATION PROPOSALS (resumed).

The Commission had before it for consideration an updated programme of events proposed to commemorate the 90th Anniversary of the first sitting of Dáil Éireann [08-02a-08].

The Commission was advised that the date for the Special Joint Sitting of the Houses in the Mansion House is 20th January, 2009 as the Mansion House is unavailable on 21st January, 2009, the actual anniversary date. The Committees on Procedures and Privileges of both Houses have agreed the arrangements for the sitting on that day and the necessary motions to facilitate the sitting have been approved by both Houses.

The Commission approved the programme of events and noted that negotiations were ongoing in relation to the putting in place of arrangements to provide a live broadcast of the event. The Commission also requested that a commemorative medal be commissioned for existing members.

6. EFFICIENCY SAVINGS.

The Commission had before it for consideration an information note on the efficiency action programme [note08-01-08].

The Commission noted that an efficiency action programme is currently underway in the Office which is committed to identifying cost savings in the administrative and political expenditure areas. Some of these savings have already been built into the 2009 Estimate and additional possible savings have now been identified.

The Commission approved the list of additional savings identified in the administrative and political areas to come into effect for 2009 and requested the Office to report progress on the delivery of the savings identified.

7. FOI – PUBLICATION OF MEMBERS' EXPENSES DETAILS – OUTLINE DISCUSSION.

The Commission had before it for consideration an information note on the options for the automatic regular publication of members' expenses details [note08-02-08].

The Commission requested the Office to revert back with a comprehensive proposal outlining the various options for the voluntary publication of members' expenses details.

The Commission agreed that Commission members would consult with their parliamentary party colleagues to seek their views thereon prior to the next meeting.

8. ADJOURNMENT.

The meeting adjourned at 6.25 p.m.

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