



Houses of the
Oireachtas Commission
Coimisiún Thithe
an Oireachtais

*Minutes of the Commission
Wednesday, 11th February, 2009*

1. The second meeting of the Commission of 2009 took place at 5.30 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), Senator Paul Bradford, Mr. Kieran Coughlan, Secretary General, Deputy Tom Hayes, Senator Cecilia Keaveney, Deputy Séamus Kirk, Deputy Michael Mulcahy, Deputy Dan Neville, Deputy Pat Rabbitte and Senator Jim Walsh.

3. EXPRESSION OF SYMPATHY.

The Ceann Comhairle expressed on behalf of the Commission a vote of sympathy to Deputy Dan Neville on the recent death of his wife Goretti.

4. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING.

The minutes of the meeting of 20th January, 2009, were agreed by the Commission, subject to an amendment to paragraph 4, the following sentence to be inserted after "perspective." in line 5: "The system for deductions for non-attendance is to be worked out in discussions between officials from the Department of Finance and the Office of the Houses of the Oireachtas."

5. RESTORATION OF LEINSTER LAWN.

Deputy Martin Mansergh, Minister of State with responsibility for OPW, Commissioner John McMahon and Mr. Frank Fingleton, OPW, were admitted to the meeting.

Arising from its decision of 17 December 2008, the Commission was circulated at the meeting with details of the current and historic parking availability for the Leinster House precinct under cover of correspondence from Minister of State Mansergh. As there had been no prior notice of same, the Commission agreed that no definitive decision would be taken on the issue in order to give members time to consider the documentation.

In the course of a general preliminary discussion with the Minister of State and the OPW representatives, they confirmed that:

- (a) the remedial works required to address the structural and services deficiencies at Leinster House will, due to the current financial constraints, be carried out by OPW on a phased basis, mainly during recess periods in the coming years;
- (b) OPW will employ its own direct labour force, where possible, in carrying out the restoration works to the lawn which should reduce costs to approximately €400,000. The planned timescale for conducting the lawn restoration works is the summer recess 2009.

The Commission thanked Minister of State Mansergh and his officials for their attendance at the meeting and they withdrew from the meeting.

As an input to its further consideration of this matter, the Commission agreed to request the following information from the OPW:

- (i) details of the impact of the works required to address the structural and services deficiencies at Leinster House on car parking facilities for the Houses of the Oireachtas; and
- (ii) a detailed briefing on the Part IX planning process and clarification of the options for extending the use of the lawn area as a temporary car park.

6. REPORTS FROM FINANCE COMMITTEE:

- (a) **Financial Report for Quarter ended 31st December, 2008** [02-01-09]:

Deputy Seamus Kirk, Chairperson of the Finance Committee, presented the report of the Finance Committee.

The Commission noted the report.

- (b) **Revised thresholds for notes to appropriation accounts** [02-01a-09]:

The Commission noted that the Department of Finance has increased the financial thresholds that govern the declaration of certain matters in the accounts of bodies that prepare their accounts in the appropriation accounting format. The Commission prepares its accounts in this format on the direction of the Minister for Finance who is given this authority under the Commission Act. Accordingly the changes will be reflected in the accounts of the Commission for 2008. The Commission's Statement of Accounting Policies will be amended to reflect the changes. The Commission noted the changed thresholds as technical compliance requirements and that the attention of the Audit Committee will be drawn to the changes.

- (c) **Correspondence received from the Minister for Finance requesting a meeting between the Special Group on Public Service Numbers and Expenditure and the Secretary General of the Office of the Houses of the Oireachtas, Mr. Kieran Coughlan, and the response of the Ceann Comhairle thereto** [02-02-09, 02-02a-09].

The Commission noted correspondence received from the Minister for Finance requesting a meeting between the Special Group on Public Service Numbers and Expenditure and the Secretary General of the Office of the Houses of the Oireachtas and the response of the Ceann Comhairle thereto. A general discussion on the current budgetary situation and on the forthcoming preparations for negotiations for the next three-year budget ensued and the Commission agreed that it was the appropriate forum to discuss and formulate policy on these issues. The Commission noted the efficiency action programme currently underway in the Office will be reported to the Commission on an ongoing basis and that to date for 2009 it has identified approximately €1.8m in savings in both the administrative and political areas. A written memorandum of the discussions at the meeting between the Secretary General and the Special Group on Public Service Numbers and Expenditure will be circulated to Commission members following the meeting.

7. RATIONALISATION OF MEMBERS' ALLOWANCES.

The Commission noted that a response from the Minister for Finance to the Commission's proposals in relation to the rationalisation of members' allowances is still awaited.

8. PUBLIC RELATIONS SERVICES.

Members deferred consideration of this item to the next meeting. The Commission requested a more detailed breakdown of the budget for the implementation of the Communications Strategy and it also requested further details on the Education Programme.

9. ADJOURNMENT.

The meeting adjourned at 6.40 p.m.

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