



*Minutes of the Commission  
Tuesday, 28<sup>th</sup> February, 2012*

1. The second meeting of the Commission of 2012 took place at 12.00 p.m. in Room 2, Leinster House.

2. **MEMBERS PRESENT**

Deputy Seán Barrett, Ceann Comhairle (Chairperson), Deputy John Browne, Senator Paddy Burke, Cathaoirleach of the Seanad (Deputy Chairperson), Deputy Catherine Byrne, Mr. Kieran Coughlan, Secretary General, Deputy Frank Feighan, Deputy Dan Neville, Deputy Jack Wall and Senator John Whelan.

Apologies were received from Senator Marc MacSharry.

3. **MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

The minutes of the meeting of 31<sup>st</sup> January, 2012, were agreed by the Commission.

For the information of the Commission, the Ceann Comhairle advised that the survey of Oireachtas Office Holders by Mr. Muiris MacCarthaigh from the IPA has been completed and a report arising from the survey is due shortly.

4. **LEGAL RESPONSE TO IRISH MAIL ON SUNDAY**

The Commission noted legal advice provided and considered the contents of a letter to issue to the Irish Mail on Sunday.

5. **PROGRESS REPORT FROM THE SUB-COMMITTEE ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF A PARLIAMENTARY CHANNEL**

The Commission noted a progress report from the sub-Committee on the Development of a Parliamentary Channel.

**6. RESOURCES – CIVIL SERVICE STAFF OF THE SERVICE IN PLACE AT 29 FEBRUARY AND REQUIREMENTS FOR 2012**

The Commission considered the numbers of civil service staff in place at 29 February 2012 and requirements for 2012 [02-01-12].

The Commission:

(i) approved the creation of 1 new post, the filling of 3 existing vacancies and the conversion of a consultancy post to a contract basis,

(ii) approved minimum levels for –  
a. the Library and Research Service,  
b. the Service Officer, Clerical Officer and Junior Clerk grades,

and

(iii) noted that:

- the vacancy level is well within reach of the revised target recently announced by Government of 11.7% reduction in numbers by 2015,
- it is intended that the Head of Communications post be established as a permanent post,
- a review of Committee staffing requirements is to take place and a paper will be submitted to the Commission within the first half of this year and will include the recent request for research staff for the Seanad to deal with EU Affairs,
- the post of Restaurant Manager which will be vacant in 2012 will be filled, and
- the HR Unit is in contact with the Department of Social Protection to ascertain if political parties can avail of the JobBridge scheme.

**7. LEGAL FEES ASSOCIATED WITH ARTICLE 35 COMMITTEE**

The Commission had before it for consideration correspondence from the legal firm operating on behalf of former Judge Curtin. The Commission agreed that the Parliamentary Legal Advisor would supply a breakdown of the calculation of the legal costs on offer from the Commission and point out it was similar to the amount paid out to the Oireachtas legal advisors. It was further agreed that this amount was still available to be paid over if accepted and that the Parliamentary Legal Advisor could correct the point made in the correspondence concerning the application of the Rules of the Superior Courts.

**8. ESTABLISHMENT OF SUB-COMMITTEES**

The Commission established a sub-Committee on Accommodation and the following members were appointed to the sub-Committee: Deputy Catherine Byrne, Deputy Frank Feighan, Deputy Jack Wall (Chair) and Senator Marc McSharry.

It was also agreed that the sub-Committee on the development of the Parliamentary Channel would be renamed as the sub-Committee on Communications.

## **9. REPORT FROM THE JOINT ADMINISTRATION COMMITTEE**

The Commission had before it for consideration correspondence from the Joint Administration Committee (JAC) regarding the ICT Acceptable Usage Policy for members [02-04a-12].

The Commission:

- (i) agreed that the draft Acceptable Usage Policy be adopted as the Commission's policy and guidelines regarding members' use of ICT facilities which are provided by the Commission;
- (ii) approved the introduction of a footer on all outbound email memos originating from Commission email systems;
- (iii) approved the introduction of an Intrusion Detection and Prevention System (IDPS), together with the prerequisite baselining process which establishes what constitutes normal network activity;
- (iv) approved the introduction of PixAlert, software which monitors Commission PCs and laptops for inappropriate images, and
- (v) approved the introduction of limits on the size of email memos which may be sent from the Commission's email systems and agreed this would be reviewed in three months.

## **10. REPORT FROM THE FINANCE COMMITTEE**

The Commission had before it for consideration a financial report for the year ended 31 December 2011[02-05-12]. The Commission noted that:

- The 2011 provisional outturn of €119.88m shows a saving of €7m on the revised estimate of €127m (Original estimate of €113m and supplementary estimate of just under €14m) and includes –
  - Expenditure of €21.7m arising from the Dáil and Seanad elections, and
  - Actual costs of running the Houses in 2011 of just over €98.1m,
- A Supplementary Estimate of just under €14m was required in September 2011 on which a saving of €7m was eventually realised (Ciste Pension €1.5m, Secretarial Assistants overtime €1.2m and pay €0.8m, Members' allowances €0.9m, Office Contingency €1.2m, Broadcasting €0.57m and other administration staff salary and expenses €1.3m),
- The overall cost of the elections is estimated at €26.9m (2011 costs of €21.7m and provision in 2012 of €5.2m). The full election costs can be met from the overall 3-year budget provision of €360m,
- A saving of just over €17m is likely on the 3-year budget,
- Total expenditure in 2011 is €119.88m. The underlying rate of spend when election costs are excluded is €98.1m which would represent an 8%

reduction on the same period in 2010 (or 5% if election year savings are included),

- Reduction in members' salaries and allowances by €0.85m or 4% compared to the same period in 2010,
- Reduction in staff salaries by over €3.4m or 13% compared to the same period in 2009.

The Commission asked to be kept informed of efficiency measures underway by the Service.

The Commission also noted the recommendation from the Finance Committee regarding legislative changes to sub-head descriptions to aid transparency [02-05a-12].

## **11. INFORMATION ITEMS FOR NOTING**

(i) Response from Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform

The Commission noted the response from Minister Howlin in relation to a request for the office of member of the Commission to be prescribed as a "designated directorship" for the purposes of the Ethics Acts [02-06-12].

(ii) Report from the Superintendent on the number of members' staff located in Leinster House

This matter was deferred to the next meeting of the Commission.

## **12. ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

The Commission was informed that the issue of a countdown clock appearing on monitors showing time remaining for votes and speaking times was being technically examined and the Commission would be kept informed of developments.

SEÁN BARRETT, T.D.,  
Ceann Comhairle and Chairperson of the Commission.  
Dated: