



Houses of the  
Oireachtas Commission  
Coimisiún Thithe  
an Oireachtais

*Minutes of the Commission  
Tuesday, 27<sup>th</sup> March, 2012*

1. The fourth 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 Catherine Byrne, Mr. Kieran Coughlan, Secretary General, Deputy Frank Feighan, Senator Marc MacSharry, Deputy Dan Neville and Deputy Jack Wall.

Apologies were received from Senators Paddy Burke, Cathaoirleach of the Seanad (Deputy Chairperson), Tom Sheahan and John Whelan.

3. **MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS**

The minutes of the meetings of 28<sup>th</sup> February and 7<sup>th</sup> March, 2012, were agreed by the Commission.

4. **MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES**

Deputy Jack Wall provided a progress report from the first meeting of the sub-Committee on Accommodation. The sub-Committee will report back to the Commission on progress made following a meeting with OPW on various accommodation matters.

Mr. Coughlan advised the Commission that the Department of Public Expenditure and Review had approved the assignment of a Liaison Officer from the Comptroller and Auditor General's Office to the Public Accounts Committee at HEO level. As a result, it will be necessary to suppress a vacancy to meet the cost of this post. It was agreed that the letter which is to be sent administratively to the Department concerning the establishment of this post should note the Commission's concern that the assignment was made without reference to the Commission notwithstanding the fact that the expected costs are to be met by the Commission and while vacancies throughout the Service have not been filled due to the strict application of the moratorium.

**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.

Senator MacSharry requested that the Communications Strategy be reviewed. The Commission was advised there is a new Communications Strategy being finalised and would be brought before the Commission for adoption in the near future. The issue of communications generally will also be discussed by the sub-Committee on Communications and the Commission will be kept updated.

**6. ANNUAL REVIEW OF THE SCHEME FOR SECRETARIAL ASSISTANCE**

The Commission considered the annual report on the operation of the Scheme for Secretarial Assistance [04-01-12]. The Commission considered the report and agreed that policy issues arising from the General Elections be reported to the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. The Commission agreed that any new measures in relation to retirement or redundancy packages should only take effect for new entrants to the Scheme; however it was acknowledged that it is a matter for the Minister and his Department. On the issue of a review of the rules relating to repayments by political staff of sums previously paid on returning to employment, the rate of compound interest applicable was raised and it was agreed that this should also be reviewed and should include the case of former members who are subsequently re-elected as similar rates and rules apply to their pension lump sums.

**7. INFORMATION ITEMS FOR NOTING**

- (i) Progress report on contacts with former members regarding the return of any pre-paid envelopes still in their possession

The Commission noted the progress report [04-02-12] and asked that members be supplied with the results of replies to the first correspondence so that they are aware of the value in returning the envelopes to the Commission. It was also agreed that the Joint Administration Committee be asked to further review the options to replace the monthly allocation of pre-paid envelopes.

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

The Commission noted the report [04-02a-12] and referred the matter to the sub-Committee on Accommodation for further consideration and report back to the Commission at its next meeting. The Commission noted the suggestion from Senator MacSharry that the Head of Communications would meet with political correspondents to discuss coverage of matters relation to the Oireachtas, with a strong emphasis on the Communications Unit being able to

provide timely factual reports to the media on topical items, e.g. tribunals, Freedom of Information requests, etc.

(iii) Letter from the Joint Administration Committee regarding the forthcoming review of the system for members' allowances

The Commission noted the letter from the Joint Administration Committee [04-02b-12] that it had concluded its consideration of the forthcoming review of the system for members' allowances and is awaiting the response of the Minister for Public Expenditure and Review to the Committee's proposals.

## **8. ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

The Commission noted that clarifications are being sought from the Department of Social Protection on the issue of assigning interns to members under the JobBridge initiative. Deputy Byrne requested to be supplied with a list of members who are in receipt of the Party Leaders Allowance and was advised that it is not possible to employ a person under the Parliamentary Standard Allowance however that it was possible to engage a person on a contract for services.

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