



*Minutes of the Commission
Tuesday, 20th November, 2012*

1. The tenth 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, Deputy Catherine Byrne, Senator Paddy Burke, Cathaoirleach of the Seanad (Deputy Chairperson), Mr. Kieran Coughlan, Secretary General, Deputy Frank Feighan, Senator Marc MacSharry, Deputy Dan Neville and Deputy Jack Wall.

Apologies were received from Senator John Whelan.

3. **MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

The minutes of the meeting of 23rd October, 2012, were agreed by the Commission.

4. **MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES**

(a) JobBridge Initiative

The Commission noted that the Department of Social Protection is reviewing the eligibility criteria for the scheme and it is expected that the report will be available at the end of the year. The terms and conditions of the scheme, including eligibility criteria for political parties and individual members of the Oireachtas, will be reviewed. It was agreed that members would submit any views to the secretary and that, if necessary, a submission would be made, to be considered during the review, seeking a reversal of the decision regarding the ineligibility for political parties and individual members.

(b) Update from the Sub-Committee on Accommodation & Catering

The Commission noted an update from the Sub-Committee on the following matters:

(i) Building Works

The OPW are finalising a financial plan for the main building projects in the Leinster House Complex. The OPW will make a formal presentation to the sub-Committee in January 2013. The Commission will be updated following such presentation.

(ii) Visitor Facilities

A small study group has been set up to examine and make recommendations on the provision of visitor facilities. A report will be presented to sub-Committee in February 2013.

(iii) Parking

While the compound from the National Gallery has been removed, OPW are still not in a position to advise when they intend to request to use the area again. Some members are still parking inside the Moat area but this will come to an end when electronic bollards are installed to reinforce the Moat gates. Discussions are on-going with the OPW regarding the number of parking spaces allocated, as not all the spaces given the Oireachtas during the National Gallery works have been returned to OPW and some members wish to retain parking spaces in Agriculture House.

(iv) Catering

The new Food and Beverage Manager has taken up employment and intends to bring proposals on improvements to service to the sub-Committee in the near future.

(c) Update from the Sub-Committee on Communications

The Commission noted that proposals for a factual advertisement to provide information on the Houses of the Oireachtas and its members, is being designed and costed and will be presented to the sub-Committee on Communications when available.

(d) Role of Ushers and security matters

The Commission noted an update from the Superintendent of the Houses on security matters and the controls in place.

5. 2013 – 2015 BUDGET ALLOCATION

The Commission noted a letter from the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform [10-01-12] informing that a gross amount of €324m has been allocated for the three year period 2013 – 2015 against which receipts of the Commission would be netted off.

6. REPORT FROM THE PARLIAMENTARY SERVICES REVIEW GROUP ON UPCOMING LEGISLATION

The Commission had before it a report from the Parliamentary Services Review Group (PSRG) on the upcoming legislation to amend the Houses of the Oireachtas Acts. The Ceann Comhairle stated the proposed amendments to the Acts have serious consequences for the future and that, in his view, the focus should be on running the parliament and providing the services required by elected representatives to perform their parliamentary duties, all other operations are ancillary to that. The amendments proposed include: amending an appointment process for the Officers of the Houses set out in a 1959 Act; the option to separate the functions of the Clerk of the Dáil from the role of Secretary General; updating the format of the accounts, retention of the receipts of the Commission; the inclusion of external members on the Commission and the budget allocation for the year 2013 – 2015.

The Secretary General explained each of the proposed amending provisions and the reasons for their inclusion in the legislation to keep abreast of best practice and public service transformation and modernisation and to that end recommended the adoption of the report.

Deputy Feighan referred to the letter from the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in relation to the budget allocation (mentioned at no. 5 above) and asked if the Minister could proceed with the Bill regardless of the Commission's views. The Commission was advised that this was possible as the Minister was responsible for bringing forward the Commission legislation and, in that capacity, officials of his Department formed part of the PRSG with officials from the Service to agree changes at that level and now was consulting at the political Commission level before proceeding with the Bill.

Deputy Neville noted there had been an opening up of recruitment processes in other areas such as the judiciary but cautioned about being clear as to what decisions were required to be made by the Commission. Senator MacSharry stated that the Chambers of Commerce had also updated their recruitment practice and urged that any modern parliament should do the same and gave his full support to the provisions set out in the PSRG report. Deputy Wall expressed his reservations in relation to the appointment of external members to the Commission and wished to hear from the officials present who were members of the PSRG on their report.

This item and remaining agenda item to be considered at the next meeting. The meeting adjourned at 2.04 p.m.

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

Dated: