



*Minutes of the Commission
Tuesday, 11th December, 2012*

1. The eleventh 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, Mr. Kieran Coughlan, Secretary General, Deputy Frank Feighan, Senator Marc MacSharry, Deputy Dan Neville, Senator Tom Sheahan, Deputy Jack Wall and Senator John Whelan.

Apologies were received from Senator Paddy Burke, Cathaoirleach of the Seanad.

3. **MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

The minutes of the meeting of 20th November, 2012, were agreed by the Commission.

4. **REPORT FROM THE PARLIAMENTARY SERVICES REVIEW GROUP ON UPCOMING LEGISLATION**

Members noted that a Bill had been published containing the financial aspects of the report. Accordingly further discussion on the balance of the report was deferred until 2013.

5. **OIREACHTAS (MINISTERIAL AND PARLIAMENTARY OFFICES) (SECRETARIAL FACILITIES) REGULATIONS 2012**

The Commission agreed the draft SI which gives legal effect to the allocation of staff resources for qualifying parties, the purchase of media tablet devices as part of the suite of equipment for members and the provision of additional resources for members in cases which the Commission considers exceptional circumstances exist, subject to such conditions as the Commission directs.

It was agreed that each case submitted for the provision of such additional resources would be considered by the Commission on its merits based on the recommendation of the Secretary General. It was agreed that informal discussions would be had with disability organisations regarding best practice relating to the provision of such additional resources. The Commission approved the application before it regarding additional resources for a Senator with hearing difficulties.

The Commission in acknowledging a letter from Deputy Eamonn Maloney regarding the purchase of media tablet devices for members noted that the media tablets formed part of the printing strategy which was targeting significant cost savings.

6. LETTER FROM THE MINISTER FOR PUBLIC EXPENDITURE AND REFORM FOLLOWING PUBLICATION OF THE PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE REPORT ON PUBLIC SERVICE ALLOWANCES

The Commission noted a letter from the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform arising from the publication of the Public Accounts Committee's Report on Public Service Allowances. Arising from the potential conflict under the Ethics Acts of the Commission, as a public body, considering the issues set out in the Minister's letter, it was agreed to refer the matter to the Joint Sub-Committee on Administration for its consideration of the issues before Christmas. The Commission will forward the views of the Joint Sub-Committee to the Minister in due course, however the Commission agreed the Joint Sub-Committee could meet with the Minister without reporting back to the Commission beforehand. Members expressed concern at the lack of details of the changes proposed in the Minister's letter and his budget speech, in particular the implications for allowable expenses for the vouched system, in particular the range of expenses allowable for Senators compared with Deputies. It was noted that the Minister's officials had been asked to provide details and clarity around the proposals and that a letter of clarification is expected.

7. REPORT FROM THE FINANCE COMMITTEE

In the absence of the Cathaoirleach and Chair of the Finance Committee, Deputy Neville presented a report from the Finance Committee on the 3 year budget allocation for 2013 – 2015 and proposals for savings from the Finance Unit. The report was noted.

The Commission approved:

- (i) the virement between subheads where savings are anticipated to meet excesses occurring provided that no virement occur in the case of subheads 2(d), 2(e) and 2(h);
- (ii) that authority to vire additional funds between subheads be delegated by the Commission to the Secretary General in respect of expenditure incurred before 31 December 2012; and
- (iii) to formally note the final position in relation to virement as soon as may be following the closure of the 2012 Account.

The Commission also noted the Finance Committee had agreed a proposal to change in scope for the Office-holders travel sub-head to allow for inward travel also at the invitation of the Ceann Comhairle/Cathaoirleach from within existing budget allocations.

8. CORRESPONDENCE

The Commission noted a letter from the Joint Committee on Health and Children regarding the creation of a smoking-free campus. It was agreed to request the Superintendent to ask smokers to use the designated smoking areas only and to erect no smoking signs outside both entrances to Leinster House and the AV Room.

9. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Members were reminded to return a statement of interest in accordance with their roles as designated directors under the Ethics in Public Office Acts 1995 & 2001. It was agreed the Secretary to the Commission would issue a reminder to members in this regard.

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

Dated: