



Houses of the
Oireachtas Commission
Coimisiún Thithe
an Oireachtais

*Minutes of the Commission
Tuesday, 19th February, 2013*

1. The first meeting of the Commission of 2013 took place at 12.00 p.m. in Room 2, Leinster House.

2. **MEMBERS PRESENT**

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

Apologies were received from Deputy John Browne, Deputy Catherine Byrne, Senator Marc MacSharry, Senator Tom Sheahan and Senator John Whelan.

3. **MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

The minutes of the meeting of 11th December, 2012 were agreed by the Commission.

4. **MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES**

It was noted that a report on building projects in Leinster House had been received from the OPW by the sub-Committee on Accommodation the previous day and the sub-Committee would be meeting shortly to consider same

It was also noted that at its next meeting, the Finance Committee will be briefed by the Finance Officer on a revised 3-year estimate arising from the Houses of the Oireachtas Commission Act.

The Ceann Comhairle noted that in his letter of 10 December 2012, the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform had clarified his intentions in relation to changes to members' allowances and expenses but that the new SI had not yet been signed by the Minister. Deputy Wall updated on a meeting that the Joint Sub-Committee on Administration had had with the Minister where a number of matters were discussed.

5. **REPORT FROM COMMISSION SUB-COMMITTEE ON COMMUNICATIONS ON PARLIAMENTARY CHANNEL PRODUCTION**

The Communications Sub-Committee had met on 14th February to consider a report on improving the production of the parliamentary channel. This would result in Live Captioning to explain in plain English the business of the Dáil, Seanad and Committees. Captioning will also help to improve the quality of the webcasting of proceedings which future proofs the investment in so far as this is possible at this stage.

The aim of this is to make the channel more appealing to viewers and allow them to better follow the proceedings. It will also make the channel more attractive to potential distributors such as Sky Ireland.

There are once-off costs in the region of €220,000 associated with the proposal, as well as estimated annual costs of €200,000. It was noted that the actual costs should be notified to the Commission once these become available. The Ceann Comhairle reported that he had had a recent meeting with the Head of Sky Ireland and a formal follow-up meeting has been proposed.

6. REVISED AUDIT GUIDELINES FOR MEMBERS

The Commission had before it an updated version of the Audit Guidelines for members which had been prepared to provide clarification to Members arising from the latest audit in 2012.

It was noted that the legislative source for the audit guidelines is SI 84 of 2010, with the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform being the statutory and regulatory authority in respect of this regulation. The role of the Houses of the Oireachtas Service is confined to the administration of the schemes established by the SI and application of the rules of those schemes as set out in the regulations.

The Commission noted the revised guidelines.

7. ANNUAL RESOURCE PLAN – CIVIL SERVICE REQUIREMENTS FOR 2013

The Commission had before it the Annual Resource Plan for 2013 that set out the anticipated resource requirements for the next 12 months.

It was noted that staffing numbers had fallen by over 11% since 2009 as a result of the Commission agreeing to apply the principles of the Government Moratorium (on recruitment) in full. The reduction in numbers is also reflected in the reduction in costs with an overall reduction since 2009 of almost 11% predicted for 2013. The Commission noted that the current negotiations underway at a central level may result in further payroll savings.

It was further noted that the Service continues to deliver its commitment to “do more with less” with overall numbers having reduced by 11% while outputs have increased significantly.

The Commission agreed to-

- (a) Note the achievement of the target 11.7% reduction in staff numbers to be achieved by end-2014
- (b) Note that further payroll savings which may be achieved from the negotiations underway are not included in the Estimate for 2013
- (c) Approve the delegation of all matters relating to the appointment and management of staff up to Principal Officer Standard Level only to the Secretary General.

8. LETTER FROM MINISTER VARADKAR REGARDING ‘GREENING’ OF LEINSTER HOUSE

The Commission had before it as letter from Minister Varadkar asking that Leinster House be among the State buildings to be included in the ‘greening’ initiative to run from the evening of Friday 15th March to the night of Monday 18th March.

The proposal was agreed.

9. APPOINTMENT OF REPLACEMENT MEMBER TO THE AUDIT COMMITTEE

The Commission agreed to appoint a replacement member to the Audit Committee, that member being Deputy Kevin Humphries who has been nominated by the Labour Party.

10. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There was no other business arising.

11.NEXT MEETING

The next regular meeting was provisionally scheduled for **Thursday 18th April 2013, at 12 noon.**

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

Dated: