



*Minutes of the Commission
Tuesday, 28th May, 2013*

1. The third 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), Deputy John Browne, Senator Paddy Burke, Cathaoirleach of the Seanad, Deputy Catherine Byrne, Mr. Kieran Coughlan, Secretary General, Deputy Frank Feighan, Senator Marc MacSharry, Deputy Dan Neville and Senator Tom Sheahan.

Apologies were received from Senator John Whelan.

3. **MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

The minutes of the meeting of 18th April, 2013, were agreed by the Commission.

4. **UPDATES FROM THE SUB-COMMITTEE ON ACCOMMODATION AND CATERING**

In the absence of the Chairman of the sub-Committee, this item was deferred.

5. **UPDATE ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF A PARLIAMENTARY CHANNEL**

The Commission were informed that a project team, that includes both UK-based parliamentary broadcasting experts and the current broadcasting contractors, is working on a project timeline that aims to have identified and acquired the technical infrastructure to launch the channel from September. At that point, continuous improvements will be rolled out including various levels of live captioning and production will be in operation along with views of proceedings happening in the other Chamber and/or Committee Rooms. The Commission were advised that eircom is also entering the television distribution market and has approached the Service in regard to carrying the Oireachtas channel.

6. **UPDATE FROM THE OFFICE OF THE PARLIAMENTARY LEGAL ADVISOR**

The Commission noted the update provided by the Office of the Parliamentary Legal Adviser and asked to be kept informed of developments.

7. PRESENTATION BY THE OPW ON PROPOSED WORKS FOR THE PERIOD 2013 - 2016

Mr. John McMahon, Commissioner, and Mr. John Cahill, Senior Architect OPW, provided an update for members on outstanding works to historic Leinster House. These include full re-wiring and floor strengthening works and would take one year to complete. It was noted that the OPW budget for capital works has been cut by approximately 90% in recent years and that it is not funded at this time to execute a major project of this nature. In recent times works have been carried out to the building to make it safe for the occupants and to minimise to greatest extent possible any risks to the fabric of the building. It was further noted that the most efficient way to address the outstanding deficiencies in the building was to undertake the works as a single project and that it would not be practical to do so on a phased basis. Relocation of the media studio from the top floor of historic Leinster House, which is a necessary part of the overall works required, was discussed and it was agreed that consideration would be given to how best this might be undertaken.

Mr. McMahon also notified the Commission of his intention to appear before the Commission before the summer recess to seek approval to access part of the Oireachtas car park adjoining Leinster Lawn to facilitate works to the National Gallery of Ireland. The Ceann Comhairle asked why funding was available now for those works while funds were not available to bring forward the works to Leinster House. Mr. McMahon advised that OPW is only partially funding those works as the vast majority of funding is being provided by the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht and by the National Gallery of Ireland.

8. REPORT OF THE PARLIAMENTARY SERVICES REVIEW GROUP (resumed)

The Ceann Comhairle sought agreement for a letter from the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (PER) which was circulated to Commission members by the Secretary General to be withdrawn. The Ceann Comhairle stated the letter was a personal letter to him and was addressed to him as Ceann Comhairle and not as Chairman of the Commission; he had not given his approval for it to be circulated and it did not form part of the Commission's papers for this meeting. The Secretary General stated that he had sought the letter from the Department when he had heard it had issued as it is relevant to this discussion of the Parliamentary Services Review Group's (PSRG) report. He stated that he had circulated the letter as he is obliged to ensure the Commission is fully informed, he believed it not to be a personal letter and he requested his dissention to the letter's withdrawal be recorded in accordance with the Commission Rules of Procedure.

The Ceann Comhairle stated he had met with the Minister for PER on the matter the previous day and advised that the Minister is to revert with proposals regarding the appointment mechanism. When the Minister has submitted his proposals, the Ceann Comhairle stated he would seek the views of Commission members and hold a meeting (a special meeting if necessary) on the matter to consider the Minister's proposals, the proposals contained in the PSRG's report and any suggestions from Commission members on this matter and any other suggested changes to the Commission Acts. The Minister and his officials would be asked to attend this meeting.

The Commission noted the report.

9. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

(i) Information Note on Ushers

The Commission noted the information note. It was agreed that an information note on the pay scales of all categories of Ushers employed would be requested and would be on the agenda of the next meeting.

(ii) Service Level Agreement for the Print Facility

The Commission noted the Service Level Agreement.

(iii) Library & Research Service Strategy 2013-15

The Commission noted the Library & Research Service Strategy 2013-15. It was agreed that the Library & Research Service should be informed that it provides an excellent service to members.

(iv) Standards in Public Office Commission

Senator MacSharry asked that representations of the Standards in Public Office Commission (SIPOC) be asked to attend a meeting of the Commission regarding the interpretation of its legislation and powers especially with regard to information supplied to the media regarding members. As a member of SIPOC, Mr. Coughlan suggested that a meeting of SIPOC with the Members' Interest Committee might be a more suitable forum. It was agreed to seek further information from SIPOC on the issue, following which it could be discussed at the most suitable forum.

(v) Remuneration of members

Senator MacSharry stated the need for the Commission to be in a position to make recommendations regarding the remuneration of members as it is currently not permitted under the Ethics in Public Office Acts. Whilst the matter is the responsibility of the Minister for Public Expenditure and Review, there is an incorrect perception that the Commission also has a role.

Senator MacSharry also suggested that the Commission should have its own remuneration committee as is the case with many other organisations. Mr. Coughlan suggested that such matters may be discussed by the Joint sub-Committee on Administration.

It was agreed that the Minister for Public Expenditure and Review should be asked to clarify the responsibilities on this matter and that he and his officials should be asked to attend a meeting to discuss the matter.

The meeting adjourned at 1.42 p.m.

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

Dated: