



Houses of the
Oireachtas Commission
Coimisiún Thithe
an Oireachtais

*Minutes of the Commission
Tuesday, 11th March, 2014*

1. The second meeting of the Commission of 2014 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 (Deputy Chairperson), Deputy John Browne, Deputy Bernard Durkan, Deputy Frank Feighan, Deputy Dan Neville, Senator Tom Sheahan and Senator John Whelan.

Apologies were received from Senator Marc MacSharry.

3. **MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

The minutes of the meeting of 21st January, 2014, were agreed by the Commission.

4. **FUTURE OF SITE OF FORMER SIOPA**

The Commission considered a paper on the options for the development of An Siopa and approved a business case for the establishment of a facility for visiting tour groups to include tea/coffee/souvenirs. It was agreed that there would be a covered area assigned at the side of the building for use by the media. It was also agreed that the OPW would be requested to provide a water supply to the facility.

5. **REPORT FROM THE FINANCE COMMITTEE**

Senator Paddy Burke, Cathaoirleach and Chair of the Finance Committee, presented reports from the Finance Committee on expenditure, firstly from January – December 2013, and secondly to end January 2014. It was noted that, in this first year of the current three year budget, expenditure to the end of 2013 was €100.9m which represents an underspend against budget of €8.46m of which €2.4m related to pay and €6.1m related to non-pay.

It was also noted that the recent Dáil reform initiatives and the proposed banking inquiry were not factored into the current three year budget as they were unknown at the time of negotiation. It was acknowledged that the financial resources are very tight and will require careful monitoring.

Expenditure to the end of January 2014 was €8.354m which is an underspend against budget of €0.438m of which €156,000 related to pay and €282,000 related to non-pay.

It was also noted that, when compared to the same period last year, expenditure has increased by almost a €1m which again highlights the issue that the financial resources are very tight and will have to be monitored very carefully, particularly in view of the proposed banking inquiry and the associated costs.

The Commission noted both reports. At the request of the Cathaoirleach, it was agreed to increase the membership of the Finance Committee. It was agreed that Deputy Bernard Durkan be appointed to the Committee.

6. AUDIT OF MEMBERS' CLAIMS UNDER THE PUBLIC REPRESENTATION ALLOWANCE (PRA)

The Commission noted a paper regarding the various options on the audit of members' claims under the PRA. It was agreed to revisit the item later in the year before making any decision on the operation of future audits.

7. (a) ANNUAL RESOURCE PLAN – CIVIL SERVICE REQUIREMENTS FOR 2014

The Commission had before it the Annual Resource Plan for 2014 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 and the reduction has been maintained since then. However, it was noted the existing staffing levels are no longer sustainable. The drivers of growth include reform measures introduced by the Houses in 2013 and the anticipated Committee of Inquiry and the level of growth now requires a marginal increase in core numbers to enable demands to be met.

The Commission noted the internal controls, sanctioning arrangements and the numbers in place at end-January 2014; the progress in implementation of the provisions of the "Haddington Road" Agreement, and, in view of the shift from retrenchment to growth, that a Progress Report on recruitment and deployment will be made in the Autumn.

The Commission approved, subject to normal governance procedures, additional resources of:

- (i) 10 posts to core numbers to enable continued demand to be met and pressure points to be managed;
- (ii) an allocation of 11 posts to enable pre-Legislative Scrutiny and other Reform Measures to be supported (this cohort to be ring-fenced to end of Dáil term); and
- (iii) an allocation of 48 posts to be assigned for drawdown as the Committee of Inquiry progresses (this cohort to be ring-fenced for the duration of the Inquiry and related work required post-Inquiry).

(b)REPORT ON THE OPERATION OF THE SCHEME FOR SECRETARIAL ASSISTANCE

The Commission noted an update on the operation of the Scheme for Secretarial Assistance and that expenditure in future years may breach the €20m per annum ceiling set by the Commission for expenditure under the Scheme.

8. LETTER FROM THE JOINT COMMITTEE ON FINANCE, PUBLIC EXPENDITURE AND REFORM

As part of the pre-legislative scrutiny process, the Joint Committee on Finance, Public Service and Expenditure sought the views of the Commission on the General Scheme of the Houses of the Oireachtas Commission (Amendment) Bill 2014. As the Ceann Comhairle had separately been asked for his views as an Officeholder, it was agreed that the Ceann Comhairle and the staff would leave the meeting and allow other Commission members to reach a view for transmission to the Joint Committee.

9. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There being no other business, the meeting adjourned at 2.10 p.m.

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

Dated: