



**Houses of the
Oireachtas Commission
Coimisiún Thithe
an Oireachtais**

*Minutes of Commission Meeting
Tuesday 16 December, 2014*

1. The eleventh 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 Bernard Durkan, Senator Marc MacSharry, Deputy Olivia Mitchell, Deputy Dan Neville, Deputy Jack Wall and Senator John Whelan.

Apologies were received from Deputy John Browne.

3. **NEW MEMBER OF COMMISSION**

The Ceann Comhairle welcomed Deputy Olivia Mitchell, as a new member of the Commission, to the meeting.

4. **MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

The minutes of the meeting of 18 November 2014 were agreed by the Commission.

5. **REPORT FROM THE FINANCE COMMITTEE**

- (1) **Financial Report for the reporting period January to October 2014**

In the unavoidable absence of the Chair of the Finance Committee for part of the meeting, the Finance Officer presented a report from the Finance Committee on expenditure for the period January to October 2014.

It was noted that the estimate for the current year was €108.9m. Actual expenditure incurred to end of October was €81.9m against a budget of €89.3m resulting in a budget variance of €7.4m. Based on current information the projected outturn for the whole year (2014) will be approximately €102m.

The Commission noted the report.

(2) Sanction for Virement between Subheads

The Commission:

- (i) granted sanction to vire 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) delegated authority to the Assistant Secretary, Corporate and Member Services, to vire additional funds between subheads in respect of expenditure incurred before 31 December 2014; and
- (iii) agreed to formally note the final position in relation to virement as soon as may be following the closure of the 2014 Account.

(3) Funding for necessary maintenance work in Leinster House

The Commission noted the need to advance the necessary repairs and maintenance issues in Leinster House. It agreed that essential repairs, including the immediate replacement of carpet on the Ground Floor, should be prioritised and advanced with an early update report provided to the Commission. Any available funds from the Oireachtas Commission Budget can be used for this purpose.

The Commission requested that the Office of Public Works be informed of its decision in this matter in order that the works can be completed at the earliest possible time.

6. MEMBERS' PUBLIC REPRESENTATION ALLOWANCE (PRA): AUDIT GUIDELINES

The Commission had before it revised Audit Guidelines on the audit of expenditure under the Public Representation Allowance (PRA) and a paper setting out options for undertaking the 2014 Audit. A letter setting out the views of the Audit Committee on the scope of the Audit was also considered.

The Commission:

- (i) noted and approved the amendments to the Guidelines and agreed that the Guidelines, as amended, would be circulated to Members;
- (ii) in relation to the Audit of the 2014 PRA to be conducted in 2015, agreed that:
 - (I) the Service put arrangements in place for the extension of the contract of the current external auditor for one year, as permitted under the contract;
 - (II) the current external contractor undertake the audit in 2015; and
 - (III) options for the conduct of future PRA audits be reviewed again next year.
- (ii) noted the significant amount voluntarily refunded under the Allowance; and

- (iv) agreed that the percentage of members subject to random audit remain at 10%.

7. UPDATE ON MATTERS RELATING TO THE CATERING SERVICES IN THE HOUSES

The Commission noted an update on matters relating to the catering services in the Houses of the Oireachtas, including the actions taken to reduce the outstanding catering account balances.

The Commission also noted that the vast majority of customers settle their catering accounts within the normal credit periods.

The Commission recalled and reaffirmed its earlier decision in this matter, that:

“... the maximum credit period would be one month from the date of the sale transaction. Where accounts remain outstanding after one month, no further credit would be extended until the account is paid in full. The Commission requested that payment options including deductions from salary or pension payments, as appropriate, be explored.

The Commission requested the Facilities Management Unit to make direct contact with the persons concerned with a view to agreeing a schedule of payments to pay off outstanding balances.”

The Commission noted the requirement to have outstanding amounts paid in full and the activities undertaken since the last update. It agreed that:

- (i) further contact would be made with customers with outstanding account balances requesting payment of amount owing and setting out payment options, as appropriate;
- (ii) no further credit would be extended to customers where accounts remain outstanding beyond the maximum credit period of one calendar month after the month in which the expense was incurred;
- (iii) where amounts remain owing, customers to be informed that credit is withdrawn with immediate effect until account balances are paid in full; and
- (iv) where appropriate, customers to be informed that these initiatives are being implemented at the direction of the Commission.

8. REQUEST FOR CONSENT FOR THE JOINT COMMITTEE OF INQUIRY INTO THE BANKING CRISIS TO ENGAGE THE SERVICES OF PERSONS WITH TECHNICAL KNOWLEDGE OR EXPERTISE

The Commission considered a letter from the Chairman of the Joint Committee of Inquiry into the Banking Crisis, Deputy Ciarán Lynch, requesting the consent, in writing, of the Commission for the Joint Committee to engage the services of persons with technical knowledge or expertise in accordance with section 67(2) of the Houses of the Oireachtas (Inquiries, Privileges and Procedures) Act 2013.

Pursuant to the said section 67(2), the Commission agreed to grant its consent for the Joint Committee to engage the services of persons as set out in Annex I to these minutes.

The Commission also noted that further requests would, as appropriate, be made in due course by the Joint Committee in accordance with section 67(2) of the Act.

9. APPROVAL FOR PAYMENT OF TRAVEL COSTS FOR EXPERT WITNESSES GIVING EVIDENCE TO THE JOINT COMMITTEE OF INQUIRY INTO THE BANKING CRISIS

The Commission considered a letter from the Chairman of the Joint Committee of Inquiry into the Banking Crisis, Deputy Ciaran Lynch, requesting its approval for the payment of travel costs for a particular category of expert witness giving voluntary evidence to the Joint Committee of Inquiry into the Banking Crisis.

The Commission provided its approval for the making of necessary travel arrangements and payment of related travel costs for expert witnesses as set out in Annex II to these minutes.

In granting its consent the Commission underlined the importance of ensuring that public resources are applied in the most cost efficient and effective manner. In that context it noted that the Houses of the Oireachtas Travel Policy would be complied with in making the necessary travel arrangements.

10. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Proposed Schedule of Future Meetings

The Commission approved a schedule of future meetings for the period January to July 2015.

There being no other business, the meeting adjourned at 1.30 p.m.

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

Dated:

ANNEX I

GRANT OF CONSENT PURSUANT TO SECTION 67(2) OF THE HOUSES OF THE OIREACTHAS (INQUIRIES, PRIVILEGES AND PROCEDURES) ACT 2013

Pursuant to section 67(2) of the Houses of the Oireachtas (Inquiries, Privileges and Procedures) Act 2013, the Commission grants its consent, in writing, to the Joint Committee of Inquiry into the Banking Crisis to engage the services of persons with technical knowledge or expertise, as set out hereunder, being technical knowledge or expertise that is relevant to the functions required to be performed by the Committee, to assist it in performing those functions:

- **Services Relating to the Context Phase of the Inquiry:** FTI Consulting (Ireland) Limited in association with Professor Karl Whelan;
- **Services Relating to the Investigation of Matters Pertaining to the “Nexus Phase” of the Inquiry Covering Banking Systems and Practices, Regulatory Systems and Practices and Crisis Management Systems and Policy Responses:** Mr. Peter Rossiter, Ms. Helen Bunbury, Mr. Pat McLoughlin, Mr. Michael Monaghan, Mr. Michael Mitchell, Ms. Helen Caulfield, Mr. Martin Corcoran, Mr. Martin Roche, Mr. Gerry Cribben;
- **Legal Services Relating to the Inquiry:** Mr. Charles Meenan SC, Mr. Patrick McCann SC, Ms. Patricia O’Sullivan Lacy BL and Mr. Niall O’Hanlon BL.

ANNEX II

APPROVAL FOR PAYMENT OF TRAVEL COSTS FOR EXPERT WITNESS GIVING EVIDENCE TO THE JOINT COMMITTEE OF INQUIRY INTO THE BANKING CRISIS

The Commission notes that expenses of witnesses appearing before an Inquiry, including travel expenses, will be paid in accordance with the Guidelines on Inquiry Expenses issued by the Commission.

In respect of the particular category of expert witness as set out hereunder, the Commission provides its approval for the making of necessary travel arrangements and payment of related travel costs by the Secretariat to the Joint Committee of Inquiry into the Banking Crisis, or otherwise reimbursement of travel costs, and the reimbursement of vouched travel expenses reasonably incurred for expert witnesses as follows:

- an individual expert witness;
- whose attendance at Committee meetings involves travel from abroad;
- who voluntarily gives evidence to the Committee, and
- whose evidence is considered to be essential to the Inquiry.

The Commission underlines the importance of ensuring that public resources are applied in the most cost efficient and effective manner. In this regard it notes that the Houses of the Oireachtas Travel Policy will be complied with in making the necessary travel arrangements.