



*Minutes of Commission Meeting
Tuesday 4 October 2016*

1. The fourth meeting of the Commission of 2016 took place at 12.00 a.m. in Room 2, Leinster House.

In the unavoidable absence of the Chairperson, the Deputy Chairperson chaired the meeting.

2. **MEMBERS PRESENT**

Senator Denis O'Donovan, Cathaoirleach of the Seanad (Deputy Chairperson), Deputy Joe Carey, Senator Paudie Coffey, Senator Gerard P. Craughwell, Deputy Timmy Dooley, Mr. Peter Finnegan, Secretary General, Deputy Martin Heydon, Deputy Catherine Murphy, Deputy Louise O'Reilly and Senator Ned O'Sullivan.

Apologies were received from Deputy Seán Ó Feargháil, Ceann Comhairle (Chairperson of the Commission).

3. **MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

The minutes of the meetings of 14 July 2016 were agreed by the Commission.

4. **FINANCIAL MATTERS: REPORTS FROM THE FINANCE COMMITTEE**

- (i) **Financial report for the reporting period January to August 2016.**

Senator Denis O'Donovan, Cathaoirleach and Chair of the Finance Committee, presented a report from the Finance Committee on expenditure for the period January to August 2016.

It was noted that expenditure to the end August was €75m against a budget of €85.4, showing an underspend of €10.4 (12%), of which €4.6m relates to pay and €5.8m relates to non-pay.

The Commission noted the report.

(ii) Draft 2017 Statement of Estimate for the Houses of the Oireachtas Commission.

The Commission considered the Draft Statement of Estimate for 2017.

It noted that the Draft Estimate for 2017 represents an increase of approximately 7% on the Estimate for 2016. The increase is mainly attributable to costs associated with implementation of the programme of Dáil reform.

The Commission:

- (i) approved the Statement of Estimate 2017, providing for gross expenditure of €127.4m, and noted that the Estimate will be presented to the Dáil on Thursday 6 October, for noting by way of motion, in accordance with the Houses of the Oireachtas Commission Acts 2003 to 2015. Deputy Martin Heydon, the Minister's Representative on the Commission, was nominated to move the motion in the Dáil.
- (ii) noted the Estimate summary and the explanatory note on the scope of each subhead.

(iii) Sanction for Virement between subheads.

The Commission:

- (i) granted sanction to vire between subheads where savings are anticipated to meet excesses occurring, as set out in subheads 1(e), 2(c), 5(b) and 6(b);
- (ii) noted that the excesses on the subheads in question, totalling €0.891 million, will be offset by projected net savings of €7.5 million;
- (iii) delegated authority to the Secretary General to vire additional funds between subheads in respect of expenditure incurred before 31 December 2016;
- (iv) agreed to formally note the final position in relation to virement as soon as may be following the closure of the 2016 Account; and
- (v) noted the final virement position in relation to the 2015 Account and associated explanations on the excesses.

5. SCHEME FOR SECRETARIAL ASSISTANCE

(i) Policy decisions in relation to the Scheme for Secretarial Assistance

The Commission considered a report from the Finance Committee outlining its policy decisions on the allocation of resources under the Scheme for the 32nd Dáil/25th Seanad.

The Commission:

- (a) approved the allocation of resources to political parties and to Technical Groups as proposed by the Finance Committee and outlined in the Report of the Meeting of the Finance Meeting of 18 July 2019.
- (b) approved the recommendation of the Finance Committee that the Commission request the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform to put in place the legislative basis required to provide resources to groups, as recommended by the sub-Committee on Dáil Reform in its report of 24 May 2016¹ that Technical Groups be allowed to avail of administrative support on the principle of equality of resourcing for all members.

(ii) Reimbursement of staffing costs under the Scheme for Secretarial Assistance

The Commission approved applications from two political parties for a reimbursement of staffing costs incurred during the interim period between the General Elections and the decision of the Finance Committee on the allocation of party resources under the Scheme for the 32nd Dáil/25th Seanad.

(iii) Staff Grading Structure under the Scheme

The Commission agreed to request the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform to create a new staff grade of "Senior Administrator" under the Scheme, at a level between the grades of Administrator and Chef de Cabinet. It noted that provision would be made for the new grade from within existing party staff allocations and points and therefore would not carry any additional costs.

In relation to "red circle" staff, the Commission also agreed to allow a degree of administrative flexibility in the allocation of points under the Scheme to allow for temporary marginal increases in the allocation, not exceeding 8 points, to cater for particular circumstances.

6. POLICY ON COMMUNICATING WITH MEMBERS THE DEAF COMMUNITY

The Commission was briefed on the Policy on Communicating with Members of the Deaf Community and the measures in place in the Houses to facilitate such communication, including the provision of sign language interpreter services when requested by members.

The Commission requested the Superintendent of the Houses to consult with relevant advocacy groups in further developing the Policy.

The Commission also welcomed the plans for the development of a wider Disability Strategy in consultation with all stakeholders.

¹ Final Report of the sub-Committee on Dáil Reform: *Recommendations, Groups, Resources for Members*, (Appendix 1, page 17).

7. TECHNOLOGY IN THE CHAMBERS PROJECT

The Commission was briefed on the ICT project underway to modernise the technical systems in the Chambers of both Houses and in the Committee Rooms.

The Commission noted that the Technology in the Chambers project is part of a significant programme of ICT investment to build an Enterprise Architecture for the Service and to develop the ICT systems in the Houses to make them more responsive to the needs of users.

The Commission welcomed the project and noted the enhancements to the technical systems in the Dáil Chamber following completion of the necessary work within the agreed timeframe and budget over the summer recess period.

8. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

(i) Refurbishment works to Georgian Leinster House

The Secretary General updated the Commission on the progress on the refurbishment works to Georgian Leinster House. He noted that discussions on the relocation of the Seanad Chamber to the National Museum for the duration of the works were ongoing and had escalated to political level at this point.

(ii) Provisional Schedule of Future Meetings

The Commission approved a provisional schedule of future meetings for the period to the end of 2016.

SEÁN Ó FEARGHAÍL, T.D.

Ceann Comhairle and Chairperson of the Commission

Dated: