



*Minutes of Commission Meeting
Tuesday 31 January 2017*

1. The first meeting of the Commission of 2017 took place at 11.30 a.m. in Room 160, Leinster House.

2. **MEMBERS PRESENT**

Deputy Seán Ó Feargháil, Ceann Comhairle (Chairperson), 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 Louise O'Reilly and Senator Ned O'Sullivan.

3. **MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

The minutes of the meeting of 13 December 2016 were agreed by the Commission.

4. **PROGRAMME OF STRUCTURAL AND UPGRADE WORKS FOR GEORGIAN LEINSTER HOUSE**

The Commission received an update presentation from the Office of Public Works (OPW) on progress in relation to the programme of structural and upgrade works for Georgian Leinster House.

The Commission was informed that planning applications for the works to Georgian Leinster House and the works to facilitate the temporary relocation of the Seanad Chamber to an area of the National Museum would be submitted to the Planning Authority in mid February 2017. It is anticipated that the tender process for the project will be completed and contractors on site by July 2017. The project is due to be completed by Summer 2018.

The Commission was also informed of the risks inherent in the project, including planning, procurement, and contractor performance, and that appropriate measures will be put in place to mitigate these risks throughout the lifecycle of the project.

The Commission thanked the OPW staff for their work.

5. COMMUNICATIONS

(i) Communications Strategy 2017 – 2019

The Commission considered the Draft Communications Strategy for the Houses for the period 2017 – 2019. The Commission noted that the Communications Strategy is aligned with the Service's Strategic Plan, specifically Strategy 3 to "Promote Accessibility and Public Engagement", with a desired outcome for "a public that is well informed and more engaged with its Parliament".

The Commission welcomed the Strategy and the supporting initiatives on education, information, public engagement, outreach and visitor services, online and broadcasting services, social media and print media services.

The Commission suggested a number of actions to support implementation of the Strategy, including the provision of appropriate space within the Leinster House complex for media interviews with members of the Houses, appropriate space for school visits to the Houses, targeted outreach and engagement with schools, in particular schools that do not take the opportunity to visit Leinster House, tours of the Houses that are tailored for young people and school groups, and information and educational resource packs that are tailored for and accessible to young people.

The Commission noted that Oireachtas TV is now broadcast on a 24/7 basis with expanded coverage nationwide (98%). The Commission welcomed the imminent roll out of the newly developed website as well as developments in social media coverage.

The Commission was informed that implementation of a number of the initiatives under the Strategy was contingent on the availability of appropriate accommodation in the parliamentary precinct, in particular for a dedicated media facility, a dedicated educational and visitor area and a permanent exhibition space. The Commission requested that these matters be taken into account in the preparation of the new Accommodation Strategy for the Houses of the Oireachtas.

The Commission approved the Communications Strategy 2017 - 2019.

(ii) Proposed Commemoration of the Centenary of Women's Suffrage in Ireland – Votáil 100

The Commission approved a proposal to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the giving of voting rights to women in Ireland in parliamentary elections through a programme of events in the Houses during 2018. The Commission also approved the outline Programme of Commemorative Events.

The Commission agreed that the governance arrangements for the Programme should include an oversight board, chaired by a member of the Seanad, to have responsibility for oversight of the planning and delivery of the Commemorative Programme.

(iii) Commissioning of a Lapel Pin for Members of the Houses

The Commission requested the Service to explore the commissioning of a lapel pin for members of the Houses, which would be made available for purchase by members, and to report back to the Commission with prototype options, including costs. The Commission noted that the wearing of party political emblems is prohibited in the Houses.

6. COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSES

(i) Request from the Committee on the Future of Healthcare for sanction for funding to engage specialist assistance to support the Committee

Deputy Louise O'Reilly declared an interest in this item of business as a member of the Committee on the Future of Healthcare.

The Commission considered a Business Case to engage specialist assistance to support the Committee on the Future of Healthcare in completing its final report for presentation to the Houses in view of the specialised nature of the work involved.

Based on the procurement approach set out in the Business Case, the Commission granted approval to engage the *Trinity College Centre for Health Policy and Management* to provide policy advice and expertise to support the Committee in completing its programme of work.

(ii) Request from the Joint Committee on the Implementation of the Good Friday Agreement for sanction for payment of travel expenses in connection with the work of the Committee

The Commission considered a request for sanction for payment of travel expenses to Northern Ireland MPs, who participate in meetings of the Joint Committee on the Implementation of the Good Friday Agreement, in respect of a proposed official visit by a delegation from the Committee to the EU Institutions in Brussels.

The Commission expressed support for the work of the Committee. It noted that it has legal authority to cover expenditure for official travel by Oireachtas members and staff of the Service only, while it has no legislative basis to spend public monies to cover the travel expenses of members of another Parliament.

(iii) Resources to support a Special Select Committee of the Seanad

The Commission considered an email from Senator Gerard Craughwell regarding resources to support a Special Select Committee proposed to be established by the Seanad to examine the consequences of the UK's decision to leave the European Union.

The Commission was briefed on the provisional plans in place by the Committees Secretariat to provide support to the Committee when it is established. The Commission noted the new Committee's terms of reference have yet to be approved by the Seanad Committee on Procedure and Privileges.

7. RECOMMENDATION OF THE CATHAOIRLEACH OF SEANAD ÉIREANN TO THE COMMISSION ON THE APPOINTMENT OF THE CLERK OF SEANAD ÉIREANN

On the recommendation of the Cathaoirleach of Seanad Éireann, Senator Denis O'Donovan, the Commission appointed Mr. Martin Groves as Clerk of Seanad Éireann in accordance with section 6 of the Staff of the Houses of the Oireachtas Act 1959, as substituted by section 1 of the Houses of the Oireachtas (Appointments to Certain Offices) Act 2015.

The Commission congratulated Mr. Groves on his appointment.

8. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

(i) Covered Bicycle Parking Facility in the Leinster House campus

The Commission considered an email from Deputy Louise O'Reilly regarding the provision of a covered bicycle parking facility in the Leinster House campus. It noted that the Superintendent of the Houses had advised that the provision of a suitable facility would be taken into consideration on completion of the restoration works project to Georgian Leinster House.

(ii) Letter from the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform

The Commission noted a letter from the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform in response to the Commission's request for an amendment to its legislative framework to give the Commission the statutory power to provide secretarial resources to Technical Groups in the Houses.

(iii) Future Meeting Schedule

The Commission approved a schedule of future meetings for the period February to July 2017.

(iv) Publication of Commission Meeting Agenda

The Commission agreed to publish the agenda for Commission meetings on the website of the Houses, in advance of meetings, for the information of all members of the Houses.

(v) Independent Audit Process under the Public Representation Allowance PRA

The Commission requested an update on the independent audit process under the Public Representation Allowance (PRA) for its next meeting.

(vi) Legal Update from the Office of the Parliamentary Legal Adviser

The Commission was briefed by the Office of the Parliamentary Legal Adviser on legal proceedings involving the Houses of the Oireachtas.

The Commission noted the briefing.

SEÁN Ó FEARGHAÍL, T.D.

Ceann Comhairle and Chairperson of the Commission

Dated: