



*Minutes of Commission Meeting
Tuesday 7 March 2017*

1. The second meeting of the Commission of 2017 took place at 11.30 a.m. in Room 2, 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, Mr. Peter Finnegan, Secretary General, Deputy Martin Heydon, Deputy Louise O'Reilly and Senator Ned O'Sullivan.

Apologies were received from Deputy Catherine Murphy.

3. **MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

The minutes of the meeting of 31 January 2017 were agreed by the Commission.

4. **PUBLIC REPRESENTATION ALLOWANCE**

The Commission received an update presentation on the process involved in the independent audit of expenditure under Public Representation Allowance (PRA).

The Commission noted that the updated PRA Guidelines would be presented to it for approval at its next meeting.

In noting that the report of the independent auditor would be considered by the Audit Committee and published on the Oireachtas website, the Commission requested that a press release would accompany the report to explain the audit findings.

5. **PROPOSED OIREACHTAS CENTENARY PROGRAMME TO COMMEMORATE THE FIRST SITTING OF DÁIL ÉIREANN**

The Commission agreed that the Houses of the Oireachtas would commemorate in 2019 the centenary of the first sitting of Dáil Éireann through a programme of commemorative events in the Houses and in the Mansion House.

The Commission also agreed that a Working Group of the Commission would be established to have responsibility for political oversight of the Commemorative Programme. The Working Group would consist of four members as follows:

- (i) Deputy Seán Ó Feargháil, Ceann Comhairle (to serve as Chair of the Group);
- (ii) Deputy Joe Carey;
- (iii) Deputy Louise O'Reilly;
- (iv) Senator Ned O'Sullivan.

The Commission approved the initial outline programme of events, as amended, to commemorate the centenary of the first sitting of Dáil Éireann, and requested the Working Group to develop the programme further. The Commission noted that full costings and an implementation plan for delivery of the programme will be presented to it for approval following the Working Group's deliberations.

The Commission further agreed that consideration would be given to including an event to mark the 80th anniversary of the enactment of Bunreacht na hÉireann, the Irish Constitution.

6. 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 the planning applications for the works to Georgian Leinster House and for the temporary relocation of the Seanad Chamber to an area of the National Museum of Ireland would proceed in accordance with Part 9 of the Planning Regulations 2001. The planning documentation is currently being perfected and will be finalised within the next week. Preparation of the tender documentation is proceeding in line with the project timelines. Based on the timelines for the project, the work to Georgian Leinster House will commence in July 2017. The preparatory work for the temporary relocation of the Seanad Chamber to an area of the National Museum will be completed to facilitate Seanad sittings after the summer recess this year. The overall project is due to be completed at the end of the summer recess 2018.

The Commission noted that the planning process for the project was one month behind schedule and underlined the importance of managing the project according to the agreed timeframe. Mr McMahon, OPW Commissioner, confirmed that he has sufficient resources dedicated to the project.

The Commission was informed that the timeframe is based on certain assumptions, including contractor performance, and that these assumptions will be monitored as the project proceeds.

The Commission also underlined the importance of engaging with relevant stakeholders and other interested parties in relation to the project. It noted that the Ceann Comhairle and Secretary General had held meetings with a number of interested parties in this regard. The Commission was informed that the OPW was engaging in consultation with relevant parties on the project.

The Commission thanked the OPW staff for their work.

7. SCHEME FOR SECRETARIAL ASSISTANCE

The Commission noted that a claim had been submitted for the restoration of the two hours reduction to weekly overtime hours that may be claimed by political staff under the Scheme for Secretarial Assistance (the Scheme) that was introduced by the Commission as a cost saving measure in 2011.

The Commission sought further details on the basis for the claim. It requested the Head of Human Resources to liaise with the Party Administrators and their union and to revert to the Commission with further information at its next meeting.

8. REPORTS FROM THE FINANCE COMMITTEE

Senator Denis O'Donovan, Cathaoirleach and Chair of the Finance Committee, presented two reports from the Finance Committee:

(i) Financial report for the reporting period January to December 2016

The Commission noted that the provisional outturn for 2016 was €116m against a budget of €131m resulting in a budget variance of €15m (11%) of which €5.5m relates to pay and €9.5m relates to non-pay.

(ii) Financial report for the reporting period January 2017

The Commission noted that expenditure to the end January 2017 was €8.5m against a budget of €10.5, resulting in a budget variance of €2m (%), of which €0.8m relates to pay and €1.2m relates to non-pay.

The Commission noted the financial reports.

9. AUDIT COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

The Commission appointed Mr. Cyril Maybury to serve as a member of the Commission's Statutory Audit Committee pursuant to section 14(3)(c) of the Commission Acts 2003 – 2015.

10. LEGAL UPDATE FROM THE OFFICE OF THE PARLIAMENTARY LEGAL ADVISER

The Commission received an update from the Office of the Parliamentary Legal Adviser in relation to legal matters.

11. RECOMMENDATION OF THE CATHAOIRLEACH OF SEANAD ÉIREANN TO THE COMMISSION ON THE APPOINTMENT OF THE CLERK-ASSISTANT OF SEANAD ÉIREANN

On the recommendation of the Cathaoirleach of Seanad Éireann, Senator Denis O'Donovan, the Commission appointed Ms. Bridget Doody as Clerk-Assistant 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 Ms. Doody on her appointment.

SEÁN Ó FEARGHAÍL, T.D.

Ceann Comhairle and Chairperson of the Commission

Dated: