



*Minutes of Commission Meeting
Tuesday 4 April 2017*

1. The third 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), Deputy Joe Carey, Senator Paudie Coffey, Senator Gerard P. Craughwell, Deputy Timmy Dooley, Mr. Peter Finnegan, Secretary General, Deputy Martin Heydon, Deputy Catherine Murphy and Deputy Louise O'Reilly.

Apologies were received from Senator Denis O'Donovan, Cathaoirleach of the Seanad (Deputy Chairperson), and Senator Ned O'Sullivan.

3. **MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

The minutes of the meeting of 7 March 2017 were agreed by the Commission.

4. **MEMBERS PUBLIC REPRESENTATION ALLOWANCE**

The Commission had before it revised Audit Guidelines on the audit of expenditure under the Public Representation Allowance (PRA).

The Commission:

- (i) approved the proposed amendments to the Guidelines, and agreed that the Guidelines, as amended, would be circulated to Members;
- (ii) approved a one-year extension to the external auditor's contract in accordance with the extension option under the terms of the current contract;
- (iii) agreed that the relevant period for the 2016 PRA Audit would be the period commencing on the date of election to Dáil Éireann to 31 December 2016 for Deputies, and the period from the date of election or nomination, as appropriate, to Seanad Éireann to 31 December 2016 for Senators.

5. 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 notice had been given of the works to Georgian Leinster House and for the temporary relocation of the Seanad Chamber to a part of the National Museum of Ireland. Observations were invited from members of the public in accordance with Part 9 of the Planning Regulations 2001. The notice of the proposed work had issued on 16 March 2017. The time period for receipt of observations in respect of the proposed works is six weeks from the date the notice issued. Any observations received will be taken into consideration in relation to the project. OPW has procedures in place to review the observations as they are received in order to allow the work to proceed in an efficient manner at the end of the consultation period. Preparation of the tender documentation is proceeding. It is anticipated that the request for tenders for the project will be issued in the near future, however a contract for the work will not be entered into until the planning application is approved by the planning authority.

The Commission was also informed that the OPW was engaging on an ongoing basis with relevant stakeholders and other interested parties in relation to the project.

The Commission thanked the OPW staff for their work.

6. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATION OF THE CAPACITY REVIEW OF THE OFFICE OF THE PARLIAMENTARY LEGAL ADVISER

The Commission considered the report and recommendations of the Capacity Review of the Office of the Parliamentary Legal Adviser (OPLA) that was carried out on the recommendation of the sub-Committee on Dáil Reform in pursuance of the sub-Committee's proposal to enhance the capacity of the OPLA in the areas of legal advices on policy for members of the Houses and drafting of Private Members' Bills.

Having regard to the recommendations of the Capacity Review of the OPLA, as approved by the sub-Committee on Dáil Reform, the Commission granted approval for the following:

- (i) to create a post of Head of the Office of the Parliamentary Legal Adviser at Assistant Secretary level, subject to the consent of the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform as required by section 12(3)(c) of the Commission Acts,
- (ii) to implement a revised structure in the OPLA to include the establishment of a new Private Members Unit with responsibility to provide legal advices on policy and legislative drafting services to members and to provide legal advices on policy to Committees of the Houses, and
- (iii) to create two additional Principal Officer posts with a legal qualification of Barrister or Solicitor and demonstrated capability with appropriate experience in the provision of high level public policy legal advices: one as Parliamentary Draftsman to head the newly created Private Members Unit and one additional Advisory Counsel post at Principal Officer level.

7. AUDIT COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

The Commission appointed Ms. Noreen Fahy (Accountant, Senior Finance Specialist with the Institute of Public Administration) to serve as a member of the Commission's Statutory Audit Committee pursuant to section 14(3)(c) of the Commission Acts 2003 – 2015.

8. PROPOSAL TO ESTABLISH A MEMBERS FEEDBACK GROUP

In view of its role in overseeing the provision of services to members of the Houses to support them carrying out their functions, the Commission approved a proposal from the Secretary General to establish a Members Feedback Group (MFG) to hear the views of members on how the Service is supporting them in carrying out their parliamentary and constituency/representative duties and to make improvements where required.

The MFG will be composed of 10 members, one member of each Party and Group represented in the Houses. Each Party and Group Leader will be invited by the Secretary General to nominate one member to participate in the MFG. The Commission was informed that the MFG would meet on a quarterly basis. The first meeting of the Group will be scheduled to take place after the Easter recess.

9. LEGAL UPDATE FROM THE PARLIAMENTARY LEGAL ADVISER

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

The Commission requested the Parliamentary Legal Adviser to arrange a briefing for all members of the Houses on the scope and exercise of parliamentary privilege in the conduct of parliamentary proceedings.

10. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Recruitment of Head of the Parliamentary Budget Office

The Commission noted that planning for the recruitment of the Head of the Parliamentary Budget Office (PBO) in the Houses of the Oireachtas Service was progressing following receipt of approval for the creation of the new position in February 2017 from the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, as required by section 12(3)(c) of the Houses of the Oireachtas Commission Acts 2003 to 2015. The recruitment process will commence in early May and will be based on an open competition conducted by the Top Level Appointments Commission (TLAC). The recruitment and selection process is expected to take approximately 14 weeks to complete.

SEÁN Ó FEARGHAÍL, T.D.

Ceann Comhairle and Chairperson of the Commission

Dated: