



Houses of the  
Oireachtas Commission  
Coimisiún Thithe  
an Oireachtais

*Minutes of Commission Meeting  
Tuesday 12 December 2017*

1. The ninth 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 Gerard P. Craughwell, Deputy Timmy Dooley, Mr. Peter Finnegan (Secretary General), Deputy Martin Heydon, Deputy Louise O'Reilly and Senator Ned O'Sullivan.

Apologies were received from Senator Paudie Coffey and Deputy Catherine Murphy.

3. **CHANGE IN MEMBERSHIP OF COMMISSION**

The Chairperson informed members that Deputy Joe Carey would resign from his position as an ordinary member of the Commission with effect from 12 December 2018. The Chairperson expressed thanks to Deputy Carey for his service on the Commission.

4. **MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

The minutes of the meeting of 14 November 2017 were agreed by the Commission.

The Commission approved the note of the incorporeal decision of the Commission of 27 and 28 November 2017 concerning the defence of legal proceedings in the case of *Costello v Oireachtas and others* [High Court record number: 2017/10667P.]

The Commission agreed to receive a legal briefing at its next meeting on the performance of its functions under the Commission Acts with respect to legal proceedings involving the Houses of the Oireachtas and members of the Houses in relation to matters arising solely from the performance by them of their parliamentary functions.

**5. PROGRAMME OF STRUCTURAL AND UPGRADE WORKS FOR GEORGIAN LEINSTER HOUSE: STATUS REPORT ON THE PROGRAMME OF WORK**

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 main contractor for the project is now on site and the work currently underway is focussing initially on internal components of the historic House. Specialist historical building scaffolding will be erected on the site in early January 2018 for external work to the building. A scaffolding "scrim", depicting a photo of the façade of the Georgian House, will be put in place to conceal the building while the renovation work is ongoing. A covered walkway, linking LH2000 with the new access at the *Markievicz* Hall entrance, will be built in early January 2018.

The Commission noted progress to date and thanked the OPW staff for their work.

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

**(i) Financial report for the reporting period January to September 2017.**

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 September 2017.

It was noted that expenditure to the end September was €81.9m against a budget of €93.3, showing an underspend of €11.4 (12%), of which €4.4m relates to pay and €7m relates to non-pay.

The Commission noted the report.

The Commission also requested the Service to report back to its next meeting on progress in delivering ICT projects and services under the Service's ICT Digital Transformation Programme.

**(i) 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 3(a), 4(a) and 6(b);
- (ii) noted that the excesses on the subheads in question, totalling €0.476 million, will be offset by projected net savings of €15.8 million;
- (iii) delegated authority to the Secretary General to vire additional funds between subheads in respect of expenditure incurred before 31 December 2017; and
- (iv) agreed to formally note the final position in relation to virement as soon as may be following the closure of the 2017 Account.

## 7. CATERING SERVICES IN THE HOUSES

The Commission approved the following arrangements for the administration of customer accounts in the catering services:

- (i) With effect from 1 March 2018, all customers wishing to avail of a credit facility will be required to provide either a credit/debit card payment authorisation or a salary deduction agreement, authorising the Oireachtas Service to arrange for any outstanding account balances to be charged to their credit/debit card or deducted from their salary;
- (ii) Beginning at the next Dáil and Seanad, a formal credit facility, subject to certain conditions, will be offered to members when they attend at Leinster House to sign the Roll of Members following the election. The granting of a credit facility to a member will be subject to their written agreement to the terms of the credit facility in advance, including their agreement to a method of payment, for example authorisation to have amounts due charged to a credit/debit card, deducted from salary, etc.

## 8. COMMUNICATIONS AND BROADCASTING:

### (i) Digitisation and online access to the broadcasting archive

The Commission approved the proposals presented, as set out below, for digitisation of the broadcasting archive of the parliamentary proceedings since 1990 and making the archive accessible and available online.

Period of Broadcast Recordings	Digitisation Plan
2015 -2017  This period is covered by MP4 online files.	Extend the 3 year rolling policy to a 5 year rolling or life of a Dáil policy.
2009 – 2014  Back up files held for quick browsing at 512Kbps.	Upload the LTO4 (MP4) proxies for this period to the web.
1990 - 2017	Extend the scope of the legacy project to include formatting the legacy archive for web use.

### (i) Update on the development of the Commemorative Programme in the Houses to commemorate the centenary of Women's Suffrage in Ireland – Vótáil 100

The Commission noted the programme of events planned in the Houses next year to commemorate the centenary of Women's Suffrage in Ireland.

## **9. INTERNSHIP PROGRAMME IN THE HOUSES**

### **Update on review of the Internship Programme**

The Commission considered a report on the review of the Internship Programme in the Houses.

The Commission:

- (i) approved the proposed actions arising from the review;
- (ii) noted that HR Services proposes to undertake a survey of members to establish their interest in having an intern placed with their office, including their capacity to do so within their current office accommodation and ICT resources in Leinster House;
- (iii) noted that proposals on extending the Internship Programme to a number of other third-level education institutions and on establishing an Access Programme (supported employment programme) will be submitted to the Commission in early 2018.

## **10. DIGNITY AND RESPECT IN THE WORKPLACE**

The Commission noted that HR Services were engaging with Party Administrators and Group Coordinators in the Houses on the development of a Statement of Principles, to complement existing policies, to promote the maintenance of dignity and respect in the parliamentary workplace.

The Commission noted progress towards the development of a Statement of Principles.

## **11. IRISH LANGUAGE STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION PLAN**

### **Programme for *Bliain na Gaeilge 2018***

The Commission noted the planned programme of events in the Houses during *Bliain na Gaeilge 2018* to strengthen engagement with the Irish language.

## **12. ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

### **(i) Correspondence**

- (a) *Letter from Dáil Committee on Procedure regarding the provision of funding for members to make constituency offices secure.*

The Commission noted that, in accordance with the relevant regulations enacted by the Minister for Finance, “security costs” for constituency offices (for example, CCTV installation), and “alarm monitoring” costs are allowable expenses under category 2 of the Public Representation Allowance.

- (a) *Letter from Deputy Louise O’Reilly regarding contracts of employment for certain staff working in the Houses of the Oireachtas Service.*

The Commission was informed that there are no staff members, employed directly by the Houses of the Oireachtas Service, working under zero hours employment contracts. It noted that external contractors, providing externally contracted services, employ staff directly. Such persons are employed by the external contractor and are not employees of the Service.

The Commission expressed the view that, so far as it is possible to do so, zero hours contracts of employment should be avoided in the procurement of services from external providers. While noting that the Service may not exclude a service provider from tendering for a publicly tendered contract solely on the basis that they employ staff on zero hours contracts, the Commission requested the Service to write to all external service providers to highlight the Commission’s view regarding the use of such contracts.

### **(i) Future Meeting Schedule**

The Commission approved a schedule of future meetings for the period January to July 2018.

The meeting adjourned at 12.40 p.m.

SEÁN Ó FEARGHAÍL, T.D.

Ceann Comhairle and Chairperson of the Commission

Dated: