



*Minutes of Commission Meeting
Tuesday 17 April 2018*

1. The second meeting of the Commission of 2018 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), Senator Paudie Coffey, Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy, Senator Gerard P. Craughwell, Mr. Peter Finnegan (Secretary General), Deputy Martin Heydon, Deputy Catherine Murphy and Deputy Louise O'Reilly.

Apologies were received from Senator Ned O'Sullivan.

3. **MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

The minutes of the meeting of 6 March 2017 were agreed by the Commission.

4. **INDEPENDENT REVIEW OF SERVICES TO OFFICE HOLDERS**

The Chairperson reminded members of the importance of completing the survey from the Institute of Public Administration (IPA) as part of the independent review of the provision of services to office holders being conducted by the IPA on behalf of the Service. The survey results and information received in follow-up meetings with office holders will provide valuable feedback to the Service and will be used to improve services and supports to members where this is required.

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 project is progressing on schedule. The installation of specialist scaffolding to the Leinster Lawn and Kildare Street facades is complete and the installation of over-roof scaffolding has commenced. Structural strengthening and fire-proofing works to floors are ongoing. Stone cleaning of the building facades has commenced. The covered walkway, linking LH2000 with the new access at the *Markievicz* Hall entrance, was completed in mid March 2018.

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

6. PARLIAMENTARY BUDGET OFFICE

Appointment of External Advisory Group

The Commission considered a proposal to establish an External Advisory Group composed of independent experts to provide technical and methodological advice on economic and fiscal matters to the Parliamentary Budget Office (PBO).

The Commission:

- (i) approved the formation of an External Advisory Group to provide technical and methodological advice on economic and fiscal matters to the PBO;
- (ii) agreed that the Group should comprise up to six members and achieve an appropriate balance across the range of expertise required;
- (iii) noted that the members of the Group would act on a pro bono basis; and
- (iv) approved the reimbursement of expenses incurred by members of the Group related to the work of the PBO.

7. MEMBERS' PUBLIC REPRESENTATION ALLOWANCE

Revised audit guidelines on the audit of expenditure under the Public Representation Allowance (PRA)

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 the draft letter from the Chairperson of the Commission to be circulated with the Guidelines; and
- (iii) noted that, as the contract with the existing external auditor had expired, the Service proposed to initiate a public tender competition for the appointment of a suitably qualified external auditor to conduct the next independent audit of the PRA.

8. ICT STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION

Business Case for the development of Phase 2 of the Integrated Parliamentary Procedural System

The Commission considered a business case seeking approval and funding for the development of Phase 2 of the Integrated Parliamentary Procedural System. The ICT project forms part of *Oireachtas 2020 - A Digital Transformation Programme*, a programme of development to modernise ICT systems in the Houses.

The Commission approved the business case and budget for the project of €1.32 m.

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) noted the results of the survey of members undertaken 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;
- (ii) approved the recommendations arising from the review and agreed that the Service should implement the proposed actions subject to the availability of suitable accommodation where required;
- (iii) agreed that the programme be expanded, on a pilot basis, to include five more intern places allocated to three further third-level colleges offering courses that could be combined with an internship in the Houses of the Oireachtas;
- (iv) approved the development of a Disability Access Programme in the Houses on a pilot basis for 10 young people with intellectual disabilities and agreed that the programme be implemented with two organisations that provide supported employment services for people with intellectual disabilities, *KARE* and *WALK*, and commence in September 2018; and
- (v) approved the estimated annual expenditure of €60,000 to implement the recommendations.

10. DIGNITY AND RESPECT IN THE WORKPLACE

Update on development of a Statement of Principles to promote the maintenance of dignity and respect in the parliamentary workplace

The Commission received an update 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:

- (i) noted progress on the development of a Statement of Principles, including the consultation that HR Services had undertaken to date with the Party Administrators, Political Groups and trade unions and agreed that this consultation should continue with a view to finalising the Statement of Principles;
- (ii) noted the further actions proposed to be undertaken in finalising the Statement and requested HR Service to provide an update on progress in this matter at its July meeting.

11. COMMISSION FUNDING ALLOCATION 2019-2021

The Commission was informed that official level discussions with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform on the Commission's funding allocation for the next three years, 2019-2021, would commence in the near future.

It noted that a Working Group in the Service, chaired by the Head of Corporate and Members' Services, was reviewing the Commission's legislative framework in light of the necessity to enact new legislation to provide the Commission's three-year funding allocation. The Bill for this purpose is expected to be presented to the Houses later in the year by the Minister for Finance and Public Expenditure and Reform.

The Chairperson requested members to forward any proposal for consideration in the legislation review to the Secretariat by 2 May 2018. The Working Group will submit recommendations to the Commission for approval on completion of its review.

12. AUDIT COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT 2017

The Commission noted the 2017 Annual Report of the Audit Committee which was presented to it in accordance with section 14A(10)(c) of the Commission Acts 2003-2015. The Annual Report of the Audit Committee will be published with the Commission's Annual Report 2017.

13. STRATEGIC PLAN 2016-2018

Second Annual Progress Report 2017

The Secretary General presented the second annual progress report on implementation of the three-year Strategic Plan for 2017-2019 to the Commission as required by section 16 of the Houses of the Oireachtas Commission Acts 2003 to 2015.

The Commission noted progress on implementation of the strategy. The Secretary General and the Commission expressed appreciation to the staff of the Service for their work over the past year.

14. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Correspondence

Email from the Oireachtas Women's Parliamentary Caucus

The Commission noted a request from the Women's Parliamentary Caucus to conduct a survey of Oireachtas staff on inappropriate workplace behaviour. It agreed that this matter would be addressed in the implementation of the Statement of Principles on Dignity and Respect in the Parliamentary Workplace.

Members' ICT Services

The Commission requested an update on the provision of members' ICT services in 2018 at its next meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 1.00 p.m.

SEÁN Ó FEARGHAÍL, T.D.

Ceann Comhairle and Chairperson of the Commission

Dated: