



**Coimisiún Thithe
an Oireachtais
Houses of the
Oireachtas Commission**

*Minutes of Commission Meeting
Tuesday 2 Oct 2018*

1. The eighth meeting of the Commission of 2018 took place at 11.30 a.m. in Room 160, Leinster House.

2. **MEMBERS PRESENT**

Deputy Seán Ó Fearghaíl, Ceann Comhairle (Chairperson), Senator Denis O'Donovan, Cathaoirleach of the Seanad (Deputy Chairperson), Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy, Senator Gerard P. Craughwell, Deputy Timmy Dooley, Mr. Peter Finnegan, Secretary General, Deputy Martin Heydon, Deputy Louise O'Reilly.

Apologies were received from Senator Paudie Coffey, Deputy Catherine Murphy and Senator Ned O'Sullivan.

3. **MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS**

The minutes of the meeting of 10 July 2018 were agreed by the Commission. The minutes of the incorporeal meeting of 18 and 19 September 2018 were also agreed.

4. **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 briefed on the status and progress of the project. Installation of the specialist scaffolding to the building is now complete. The installation of a scaffolding scrim took place in August. Structural strengthening and fire-proofing works to floors are nearing completion. Work is ongoing on structural repairs to the lift shaft, installation of cable trays and wiring, repairs to windows, ceiling restraint works, restoration of stone masonry and repairs and cleaning to chimney pieces. Planning for a series of related projects to prepare the House for reoccupation following completion of the structural project is ongoing. Steps will be taken to mitigate the impacts of any necessary project changes or related delays on the planned schedule for completion of the project and reoccupation of the building.

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

5. FINANCIAL MATTERS: REPORTS FROM THE FINANCE COMMITTEE

(i) Financial report for the reporting period January to August 2018.

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 August 2018.

It was noted that expenditure to the end August was €80.8m against a budget of €87.9m, showing an underspend of €7.1m (8%), of which €1.8m relates to pay and €5.4m relates to non-pay.

The Commission noted the report.

(ii) Commission Budget 2019-2021

The Commission considered the recommendation from the Finance Committee that a provision of €422.3 million be sought in respect of ongoing expenditure in running the Houses of the Oireachtas for the period 2019-2021. It also considered the detailed explanations of the rationale for the overall sums sought.

The Commission agreed to submit a request to the Minister for Finance and Public Expenditure and Reform that the sum of €422.3 million be allocated to meet current expenditure costs associated with running the Houses of the Oireachtas for the three year period 2019 to 2021.

(iii) Houses of the Oireachtas Commission (Amendment) Bill 2018

The Commission noted that the Bill to provide the Commission's funding for the 3-year period 2019 to 2021 will be presented to the Houses by the Minister for Finance and Public Expenditure and Reform in the current parliamentary session.

The Commission considered a number of amendments proposed for inclusion in the Bill. These were recommended by the Working Group of officials established by the Secretary General to review the Commission Acts and are intended to facilitate the delivery of improved supports and services to the Houses and members.

The Commission agreed that:

- (a) subject to approval of the draft provisions by the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel, the proposed amendments be submitted to the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform with a request that a draft Bill including these provisions be presented to Cabinet for approval;
- (b) a sum of €422.270m be included in the provisions to be presented to the Minister as the sum required to fund the Commission for the three year period 2019 to 2021;
- (c) the Parliamentary Legislative Draftsman be permitted continue to make technical changes to the draft text in consultation with the Service, Office of the Parliamentary Counsel and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, prior to publication of the Bill;
- (d) official level discussions should take place between the Service and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform with a view to advancing the process; and
- (e) an update on the status of official level discussions with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and progress of the legislation be presented to the next Commission meeting.

6. MATERNITY LEAVE FOR MEMBERS OF THE HOUSES OF THE OIREACHTAS

Provision of support for members who wish to take leave of absence in the case of child birth or adoption of a child

The Commission considered a revised draft policy on the provision of support for members who wish to take leave of absence in the case of child birth or adoption of a child. It noted that the view of the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform had been sought on making provision in the relevant regulations under the responsibility of the Department for absence by members due to maternity or adoptive leave.

The Commission approved the draft policy for implementation and agreed that the policy would be modified as necessary when a response was received from the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform.

The Commission also approved an amendment to the Statutory Instrument to give legal effect to its decision to allocate an additional Secretarial Assistant under the Scheme for Secretarial Assistance to support a member for a period of maternity or adoptive leave.

7. PROVISION OF ADDITIONAL RESOURCES TO POLITICAL GROUPS REPRESENTED ON THE JOINT COMMITTEE ON CLIMATE ACTION

Draft Statutory Instrument under the Oireachtas (Ministerial and Parliamentary Offices) (Amendment) Act 2014

The Commission approved the allocation of 5.5 senior administrator posts to Parties and Groups represented on the Joint Committee on Climate Action in accordance with its decision taken at the meeting held on 10 July 2018 to provide additional staff resources to support members of the Special Committee. It also approved a Draft Statutory Instrument to give legal effect to its decision on the provision of additional staff resources and related matters under the Scheme for Secretarial Assistance in accordance with section 4(3) of the Houses of the Oireachtas Commission Acts 2003 to 2015.

The Commission also agreed to consider a proposal for the allocation of additional staff resources to political groups represented on the sectoral Joint Committees of the Houses, divided across Parties and Groups, to support members of the Committees.

8. DIGNITY AND RESPECT IN THE WORKPLACE

Dignity and Respect Statement of Principles and Policy

The Commission considered a revised draft Dignity and Respect Statement of Principles and Policy and related processes and procedures. The draft policy was amended following consultation with a representative group of members of the Houses, the Party Administrators and Group Coordinators' Forum, Departmental Council and trade union representatives.

The Commission approved the draft policy and implementation of the related processes and procedures, as presented, to give effect to the Policy.

The Commission also approved the recommendations of the members' consultation group, that members and political parties—

- (a) adopt the *Dignity and Respect Statement of Principles and Policy* and, thereby, agree to be bound by it including, where appropriate, recommendations of an *External Adjudication Panel* appointed under the complaints resolution procedure, and
- (b) where appropriate, conduct exit interviews with their employees to ascertain their reasons for leaving their posts.

9. INTERNSHIP PROGRAMME IN THE HOUSES

(i) Oireachtas Work and Learn (OWL) Access Programme

The Commission noted that the Oireachtas Work and Learn (OWL) Access Programme was launched in the Houses on 25 September. The Programme is designed as a one year supported employment programme for ten young people with intellectual disabilities. It will operate on a pilot basis initially with two organisations (*KARE* and *WALK*) that provide supported employment services for people with intellectual disabilities.

(ii) Update on the Internship Programme in the Houses

The Commission approved an increase in the number of intern place for students from University College Cork in the pilot phase of the programme, from two to four places, and the associated cost of €8,000 per annum.

10. ICT STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION

Update on delivery of new ICT Services and Projects in 2018

The Commission received an update presentation on the provision of members' ICT services and digital transformation projects in 2018. It noted that the installation of a new WiFi system in the Leinster House complex, including WiFi access for guests, is completed. The new WiFi system will be installed in members' constituency offices before the end of the year. The pilot programme for the migration to the new email system is ongoing and the full roll out of the new system is planned to commence, on a phased basis, at the end of October. The pilot programme for the migration to the new Windows system is scheduled for November and subsequent roll-out of the new system, on a phased basis, in early 2019. The digital transformation projects are progressing on schedule: nine projects are now live; two projects are in pilot stage; two projects are at analysis stage and two at implementation stage. Three projects have not yet commenced.

The Commission noted the ICT Projects Status Report.

11. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The meeting adjourned at 1.20 p.m.

SEÁN Ó FEARGHAÍL, T.D.

Ceann Comhairle and Chairperson of the Commission

Dated: