



Coimisiún Thithe  
an Oireachtais  
Houses of the  
Oireachtas Commission

*Minutes of Commission Meeting  
Tuesday 24 September 2019.*

1. The ninth meeting of the Commission of 2019 took place at 11.30 a.m. in Room 2, 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, Deputy Martin Heydon, Deputy Catherine Murphy, Deputy Louise O'Reilly, Senator Ned O'Sullivan and Mr. Peter Finnegan, Secretary General.

3. **MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

The minutes of the meeting of 9 July 2019 were agreed by the Commission.

4. **PROGRAMME OF STRUCTURAL AND UPGRADE WORKS FOR GEORGIAN LEINSTER HOUSE**

**Status Report on the Structural Project**

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. The House was re-opened in August 2019 following completion of the main project. Fit out works and reoccupation of the House are ongoing. The Seanad chamber restoration and fit out was completed on schedule for the resumption of the Seanad sittings following the summer recess.

The Commission expressed its appreciation to Mr. John McMahon, OPW Commissioner, staff from the OPW Heritage and Building Services, and staff from the Facilities Management Unit in the Service for their work in overseeing the completion of the restoration work and effectively managing the logistical challenges involved in the project. Mr. McMahon thanked the Project Steering Group.

The Commission also expressed its gratitude to the Board of the National Museum of Ireland for facilitating the temporary relocation of Seanad Éireann to the National Museum for the duration of the project.

The Commission noted that a Working Group would be established to advance a programme of infrastructure projects across the parliamentary campus. It requested that a framework for managing the projects be prepared for its consideration.

## **5. FINANCIAL MATTERS:**

### **Draft 2020 Statement of Estimate for the Houses of the Oireachtas Commission.**

The Commission:

- (i) approved the Statement of Estimate 2020, providing for gross expenditure of €152.503m;
- (ii) noted that the Estimate would be presented to the Dáil on Wednesday 25 September 2019 for noting by way of motion in accordance with the Houses of the Oireachtas Commission Acts. Deputy Martin Heydon was nominated to move the motion in the Dáil; and
- (iii) noted the Estimate summary and the explanatory note on the scope of each subhead.

## **6. SCHEME FOR SECRETARIAL ASSISTANCE FOR MEMBERS**

### **Provision of additional resources to support members of Parliamentary Committees**

The Commission noted the results of the evaluation conducted by HR Services of the additional staff resources provided to political parties and groups represented on the Joint Committee on Climate Action. The additional staffing arrangement for the Committee was carried out as a pilot study to determine an appropriate support structure for Special Committees established by the Houses.

In the context of the Dáil Reform programme, and subject to administrative arrangements prepared by the Service, the Commission:

- (i) agreed to allocate 10 additional staff resources, at Administrative Assistant level or staff equivalent points, divided across the parties in the Houses as set out in Table 1 of the proposal of 24 September 2019 to support members of the parliamentary committees;
- (ii) approved expenditure, not exceeding €600,000 budget ceiling per annum, for the additional resources;
- (iii) approved the granting of the additional resources up to the end of the current Dáil and agreed that the allocation would be evaluated by HR Services upon the dissolution of the 32<sup>nd</sup> Dáil to assess the effectiveness of the staffing plan;
- (iv) requested the Service to prepare draft Regulations for the allocation of additional staff resources to parties in accordance with section 4(3) of the Houses of the Oireachtas Commission Acts 2003 to 2018, for approval.

## **7. ICT STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION**

### **Business Case for the development of a new IT Application under the Digital Parliament System to support the parliamentary business**

The Commission considered a business case seeking approval and funding for the development of a new IT application ('Statements') to streamline the processes for managing parliamentary business. The project forms part of *the Digital Parliament Systems Workflow*, a programme of integrated technology projects to modernise ICT systems in the Houses.

The Commission approved the business case and budget for the project of €0.68m.

## **8. LIBRARY AND RESEARCH SERVICE**

### **(i) Proposed changes to Library and Research Service Statement of Services**

The Commission had before it for consideration a revised Library and Research Service Statement of Services. The revised Statement of Services included modifications to the rules governing access to and use of the Library Reading Room to allow access to the Room by a member's staff when authorised in writing by their employer member, and to increase the permissible use of the Room for certain specific purposes. It noted that a protocol would be developed on the use of the Reading Room which would be presented to the Commission for approval.

The Commission:

- (i) approved the Library and Research Service Statement of Services 2019 - 2021;
- (ii) approved the revocation of the current Library and Research Service Rules and their deletion from the Standing Orders volumes of both Houses noting that governance of the Library and Research Service will in future be provided through the Statement of Services;
- (iii) requested that the Dáil Committee on Procedure and Seanad Committee on Procedure and Privileges be informed of its decision in this matter;
- (iv) requested that a six-month review of the operation of the revised rules governing access to and use of the Library Reading Room be undertaken and the report of the review be presented to the Commission.

**(ii) (a) Parliamentary Research Service Strategic Plan 2019 – 2021; and**  
**(b) Oireachtas Library Strategic Plan 2019 – 2024**

The Commission considered the draft Parliamentary Research Service Strategic Plan 2019 – 2021 and the draft Oireachtas Library Strategic Plan 2019 – 2024.

It welcomed the Plans and the specific initiatives focussed to support the four strategic objectives under the current Strategic Plan for the Service.

The Commission approved:

- (i) the Parliamentary Research Service Strategic Plan 2019 – 2021; and
- (ii) the Oireachtas Library Strategic Plan 2019 – 2024.

**9. INFORMATION ITEMS:**

The Commission noted the following information items:

- (i) Establishment of a Transition Year Students Work Experience Pilot Programme in the Houses of the Oireachtas Service:

The Commission requested that a paper be prepared setting out options in relation to Transition Year work experience placements with members of the Houses.

- (ii) An update on the implementation of the Oireachtas Work Learning (OWL) Programme in the Houses of the Oireachtas Service:

The Commission welcomed the implementation of the OWL Programme in the Houses of the Oireachtas Service and the steps currently being taken to expand the Programme to government departments and public sector bodies. It was noted that a Graduation Ceremony for participants who completed the first OWL Programme was scheduled to take place in Leinster House on 25 September 2019.

- (iii) An update on the workplace behaviour survey:

The Commission noted that the report on the workplace behaviour survey results would be presented at the next meeting.

## **10. ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

### **(i) Independent Audit Report on Public Representation Allowance**

The Commission was advised that the Independent Auditor's Report on the audit of the Public Representation Allowance (PRA) had been submitted to the Audit Committee in line with its statutory functions. It noted that draft revised Guidelines on allowable expenditure under the PRA would be circulated to the Commission for approval following the Audit Committee's consideration of the Auditor's Report.

### **(ii) Freedom of Information**

The Commission received an oral briefing on key aspects the Service's policy in relation to the processing of Freedom of Information requests.

### **(iii) Future meeting Schedule**

The Commission approved a revised schedule of future meetings for the period October to December 2019.

The meeting adjourned at 1.15 p.m.

SEÁN Ó FEARGHAÍL, T.D.

Ceann Comhairle and Chairperson of the Commission

Dated: