



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

*Minutes of Commission Meeting
Thursday 18 June 2020.*

1. The fourth meeting of the Commission of 2020 took place at 4.00 p.m. via video conference.

2. **MEMBERS PRESENT**

Deputy Seán Ó Feargháil, Ceann Comhairle (Chairperson), Senator Denis O'Donovan, Cathaoirleach of the Seanad (Deputy Chairperson), Deputy Martin Heydon, and Mr. Peter Finnegan, Secretary General.

3. **MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS**

The minutes of the meetings of 21 January 2020 and 27 April 2020 were agreed by the Commission.

4. **FINANCIAL MATTERS: REPORT FROM THE FINANCE COMMITTEE**

Financial report for the reporting period January to May 2020.

The Chief Financial Officer presented a financial report showing an analysis of expenditure against budget for the period January to May 2020.

It was noted that expenditure to the end May was €58,822m against a budget of €63,918m, which represents an underspend of €5,096,628m in this period.

The Commission also noted that while some of the underspend arose as a result of reduced activity during the reporting period, including planned expenditure that was not incurred due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this may be offset by additional expenditure arising in respect of measures that must be implemented in response to the pandemic.

The Commission also noted that the Annual Accounts had been submitted to the Comptroller and Auditor General (C&AG) pursuant to the Houses of the Oireachtas Commission Acts and were currently being audited by the C&AG for completion by end of June. The audited accounts will be presented with the Commission's annual report which will be laid before the Houses in accordance with section 6 of the Houses of the Commission Acts.

The Commission noted the financial report.

5. ICT STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION

(i) Digital Transformation Work Programme 2020

The Commission noted the Digital Transformation Work Programme 2020, the estimated budget for work planned and progress in the implementation of the work programme to date. It also noted that projects under the *Digital Parliament Programme* have been prioritised in the programme of work planned for 2020.

(ii) Business Case for the development of a Digital Parliament Committee Meetings Application

The Commission considered a business case seeking approval and funding for the development of a *Committee Meetings Application* under the Digital Parliament Work Programme.

The ICT project is focused on streamlining committee workflow processes to support the administration of the parliamentary committees.

The Commission approved the business case and budget for the project of €1,222,010m.

6. HOUSES OF THE OIREACHTAS BROADCASTING CONTRACT

The Commission considered a business case seeking approval and funding for the procurement of a new broadcasting contract to deliver televised facilities for the Houses of the Oireachtas Service. It noted that a single party framework agreement with negotiation is proposed to be established through an open tender procedure for the award of the contract. The proposed contract term is four years, commencing in January 2021, with an option to extend the contract for a maximum of 12 months.

The Commission approved the business case for the procurement of a new broadcasting contract.

7. COVID-19: HEALTH AND SAFETY IN THE HOUSES OF THE OIREACHTAS WORKPLACE

The Commission was briefed by the Head of Corporate and Members' Services on measures being put in place to mitigate the risk of COVID-19 infection in the Leinster House workplace.

The Commission noted that remote working arrangements had been implemented for staff to minimise the number of staff who need to attend Leinster House in order to comply with social distancing requirements, a COVID-19 Compliance Manager had been appointed, and the Occupational Health and Safety Committee has been reconstituted and is chaired at Principal Officer level. A COVID-19 Response Plan is currently being developed and all groups in the Leinster House workplace will be consulted as part of that process.

The Commission agreed that the Chairperson would write to the parliamentary group leaders to request them to nominate a member of their staff to act as a COVID Lead Representative for their respective group, to be consulted on and assist in the implementation of the COVID-19 Response Plan.

8. LEGAL MATTERS

(i) Statement pursuant to section 4(7A)(b) of the Houses of the Oireachtas Commission Acts 2003-2018

The Commission approved a statement to be laid before Seanad Éireann pursuant to section 4(7A)(b) of the Commission Acts 2003-2018 in relation to the case of *Gemma O'Doherty and John Waters v Minister for Health, Ireland and the Attorney General (Respondents), Ceann Comhairle, Dáil Eireann and Seanad Éireann (Notice Parties) (2020/271 JR)*.

(ii) Briefing on Legal Matters

The Commission was briefed by the Chief Parliamentary Legal Adviser on ongoing legal matters.

9. STRATEGIC PLAN 2019-2021

Annual Progress Report 2019

The Secretary General presented the first annual progress report on implementation of the Strategic Plan for 2019-2021 to the Commission pursuant to section 16 of the Houses of the Oireachtas Commission Acts (Commission Acts).

The Commission noted progress on implementation of the strategy in 2019.

It also noted that the Implementation Report will be published with the Commission's annual report which will be laid before the Houses pursuant to section 6 of the Commission Acts.

The Commission and the Secretary General expressed appreciation to staff of the Service for their work and achievements over the past year.

10. SCHEME FOR SECRETARIAL ASSISTANCE

Provision of additional resources to political groups to support members of the Parliamentary Committees

The Commission considered a proposal, prepared by the Head of HR Services for Members, on the allocation of additional staff resources to political groups to support members of the Houses in their Committee work in general, including to support members of the Dáil Special Committee on COVID-19 Response.

The Commission:

- (i) approved the allocation of 6.5 Administrative Assistant posts or equivalent points under the Scheme for Secretarial Assistance for Members as set out in the proposal;
- (ii) agreed that the staffing plan would be implemented on an administrative basis, as an interim measure initially, from the date of the Commission decision and will continue for the duration of the current Dáil;
- (iii) agreed that the allocation would be taken into consideration in the provision of resources by the Commission under the *Scheme for Secretarial Assistance for Members* for the 33rd Dáil and 26th Seanad, in accordance with section 4(3) of the Houses of the Oireachtas Commission Acts 2003 to 2018;
- (iv) agreed that accommodation arrangements for the additional staff will be met from within the party and group accommodation allocations and in line with COVID-19 arrangements, including remote working arrangements.

11. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Correspondence

The Commission noted correspondence from the following:

- (a) Deputy Marc Mac Sharry regarding the operation of system for recording members' attendance at Leinster House during the current COVID-19 emergency.

The Commission noted that members have been informed that the Ceann Comhairle and Cathaoirleach had decided that the system for recording members' attendance will resume on 30 June 2020 to align with the date that hotels are due to reopen in accordance with Phase 3 of the roadmap for reopening society and business. It also noted that the Chairperson will write to party and group leaders and to the Minister for Finance and Public Expenditure and Reform as part of the independent review of the system for recording members' attendance.

- (b) Deputy Martin Heydon regarding the provision of additional staff resources to support members of the Special Committee on COVID-19 Response.

12. HOUSES OF THE OIREACTHAS COMMISSION ANNUAL REPORT 2019

The Commission agreed that the draft annual report on its activities in 2019 would be circulated to members for approval. When approved the annual report will be laid before the Houses in accordance with section 6 of the Houses of the Oireachtas Commission Acts.

13. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 5.20 p.m.



SEÁN Ó FEARGHAÍL, T.D.

Ceann Comhairle and Chairperson of the Commission

Dated: 30/7/20