



Coimisiún Thithe
an Oireachtais
Houses of the
Oireachtas Commission

*Minutes of Commission Meeting
Monday 28 September 2020*

The eighth meeting of the Commission of 2020 took place at 11.30 a.m. online in MS Teams due to Covid-19 pandemic precautions.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Deputy Seán Ó Feargháil, Ceann Comhairle (Chair); Senator Mark Daly, (Cathaoirleach, Deputy Chair); Deputy Joe Carey; Deputy Francis Noel Duffy; Deputy Duncan Smith; Senator Seán Kyne; Deputy Jennifer Murnane O'Connor; Deputy Louise O'Reilly; Senator Ned O'Sullivan; Senator Mark Wall, and Peter Finnegan (Secretary General).

The Chair welcomed Deputy Jennifer Murnane O' Connor who was appointed as an ordinary member of the Commission on 23 September 2020 in accordance with section 8(3)(a) of the Commission Acts, following the appointment of Commission member Deputy James Browne as a Minister of State and who ceased to be a member of the Commission in accordance with Section 8(17) of the Commission Acts.

The Chair also welcomed Senator Seán Kyne, who was appointed as an ordinary member of the Commission on 25 September 2020 in accordance with section 8(3)(b) of the Commission Acts, following the resignation of Senator Paddy Burke as a member of the Commission.

1. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meetings of 5 August 2020, as amended, were agreed by the Commission.

The decision of the incorporeal meeting of the Commission held on 16 September 2020 to appoint Senator Ned O'Sullivan as a member of the Finance Committee of the Commission was noted formally by the Commission. Senator Ned O'Sullivan replaces Senator Paddy Burke on the Finance Committee.

PRINT USERS' COUNCIL – MEMBERSHIP

The Commission appointed Senator Seán Kyne to serve on the Printing Users' Council in place on Senator Paddy Burke.

2. REPORT FROM THE FINANCE COMMITTEE ON POLICY PROPOSALS IN RELATION TO THE ALLOCATION OF ADDITIONAL PARTY RESOURCES UNDER THE SCHEME FOR SECRETARIAL ASSISTANCE FOR MEMBERS

Senator Mark Daly, Cathaoirleach, and Chair of the Finance Committee presented the Report from the Finance Committee on the allocation of additional party resources under the Scheme for Secretarial Assistance proposals paper considered by the Committee on 22 September 2020. The Commission noted that Section 1 of the paper outlined three proposals, (a) or (b) or (c), for the Allocation of Additional Party Staff Resources for the 33rd Dáil as follows:

- (a) the proposals put forward at the meeting of the Commission on 29th July 2020;
 - o Fianna Fáil proposal: The Fianna Fáil proposal removes the requirement to cut the one-sixth of government allocations i.e 6 posts. The FF proposal also rounds to .25 of a post which increases the value for the Sinn Féin party by 0.25 of an SA.
 - o Labour Party proposal: The Labour Party proposal raises an issue regarding the minimum allocation of 0.5 to small parties and groups under which a group with four members receive the same allocation as the Labour Party with 11 members (6 Deputies, 5 Senators). It proposes increasing the Labour Party AA allocation from 0.5 to 1. A table was provided
- (b) Option to allocate an additional 6 SA posts on party strength across all parties,
- (c) Option to amend the existing formula to increase the allocation to Senators from 0.25 of a post to 0.35 of a post.

The Commission noted that the Finance Committee discussed the proposals and options at its meeting; noted correspondence received from Deputy Thomas Pringle on behalf of Independent Groupings of Dáil Eireann; noted the total points allocation for each party under the current formula and under each of the proposals as outlined in Section 1 of the paper, and noted that the Committee agreed to recommend Option 1(a) and Option 1(b) to the Commission for consideration and decision.

Following consideration and discussion by the members of the Commission, and unable to reach a consensus, a question was put to the members of the Commission if they agreed to the proposal to approve option 1(a) in Section 1 of the Scheme for Secretarial Assistance proposals paper, and associated estimated annual costs of €330,000.

The members determined by a majority vote to adopt Option 1(a) of Section 1 of the Allocation of Additional Party Resources under the Scheme for Secretarial Assistance proposals paper.

The Committee divided Tá 5 Níl 3 Abstain 3

Tá: Deputy Joe Carey, Senator Seán Kyne, Deputy Jennifer Murnane O'Connor, Senator Ned O'Sullivan, Senator Mark Wall. Níl: Deputy Francis Noel Duffy, Deputy Louise O'Reilly, Deputy Duncan Smith. Abstain: Deputy Seán Ó Feargháil, (Chair) Senator Mark Daly (Cathaoirleach, Deputy Chair); Peter Finnegan (Secretary General).

The Commission noted the Finance Committee recommendation that Section 2 of the Options paper be used as a basis for consultation with parties and groups on the arrangement for the future allocations of staffing resources to parties and groups under the Scheme for Secretarial Assistance for future Dáileanna and Seanad. The Commission agreed with this recommendation and directed that the consultation process commences immediately and that the Commission is kept updated on the progress of the consultation process.

The Commission noted and agreed that the correspondence received from Deputy Paul Murphy on behalf of Solidarity and People Before Profit; and the correspondence and submission received from Deputy Thomas Pringle on behalf of Independent Groupings of Dáil Éireann, be considered in the context of the review of future allocations under the Scheme.

The Commission also approved the allocation of 1 Secretarial Assistant to the Independents 4 Change party as a qualifying party under the Regulations.

The members of the Commission noted that that accommodation requirements are to be met within the current party allocations and parties were asked to note that, while social distancing requirements continue to apply, it would not be possible to accommodate any additional staff within the Leinster House complex.

Update on pay claim under Scheme for Secretarial Assistant

The Commission noted the update, as requested by Senator Mark Wall, on a pay claim under the Scheme for Secretarial Assistant and asked for a further update on progress at its next meeting.

3. STATEMENT OF ESTIMATES 2021

Senator Mark Daly, Cathaoirleach, and Chair of the Finance Committee presented the Report from the Committee on the draft Statement of Estimates for 2021. The Commission noted that the Committee considered the estimates at its meeting of 22 September 2020 and agreed the draft Statement of Estimates 2021 for forwarding to the Commission for consideration and approval.

Following discussion, the Commission:

- (i) approved the Statement of Estimate 2021, providing for gross expenditure of €154.524m gross

- (ii) noted that the Statement of Estimates for 2021 would be presented to the Dáil on Wednesday 30 September 2020 for noting by way of motion in accordance with the Houses of the Oireachtas Commission Acts. Deputy Francis Noel Duffy was nominated to move the motion in Dáil Éireann; and
- (iii) noted the Estimate summary and the explanatory note on the scope of each subhead.

4. Legal update from the office of the parliamentary legal adviser

The Commission was briefed by the Office of Parliamentary Legal Advisers on legal proceedings involving the Houses of the Oireachtas.

Following discussion, the Commission gave sanction for the continued defence of the *Gemma O'Doherty and John Waters* proceedings, as authorised by the Commission on 27 April 2020, due to the decision of the High Court being appealed to the Court of Appeal.

5. HOSTING THE EUROPEAN CONFERENCE OF PRESIDENTS OF PARLIAMENTS IN 2023

The Commission noted that the Houses of the Oireachtas would be hosting the European Conference of Presidents of Parliaments in Autumn 2023 and noted the estimated cost of hosting this event.

6. COVID-19 UPDATE

The Commission was briefed by the Head of the Facilities Management Unit on the implementation of, and compliance with, Oireachtas's Covid-19 workplace guidelines.

7. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Correspondence

The Commission noted the correspondence from the following:

(a) Deputy Pat Buckley requesting an investigation to be carried out on whether there were employees of the Houses of the Oireachtas present at the Oireachtas Golf Society event in the Station House Hotel in Clifden, County Galway, and on what basis-were they present.

The Secretary General updated the Commission on the matters raised by Deputy Buckley in his correspondence.

(b) Deputy Francis Noel Duffy on behalf of Oireachtas Green Party Staff.

The Commission noted that the Service would contact the OPW and the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) to examine the problem of trapped wildlife in the Leinster House 2000 courtyard and to make recommendations to the Service on how to resolve the problem. The Commission also asked that Facilities Management and OPW examine the level of noise emanating from the water feature in the LH 2000 Courtyard that is disruptive to staff in nearby offices who are keeping windows open as a Covid-19 preventative measure.

Dignity & Respect Policy and Principles

Senator Mark Daly, Cathaoirleach, asked that an update report on the implementation of the Dignity & Respect Policy and Principles be provided at the next Commission meeting.

Schedule of meeting

The Commission agreed to meet again on the following dates:

Monday 19 October 2020

Monday 30 November 2020

The meeting adjourned at 12.15 p.m.

SEÁN Ó FEARGHAÍL, T.D.

Ceann Comhairle and Chairperson of the Commission

Dated: 19 October 2020