



Coimisiún Thithe
an Oireachtais
Houses of the
Oireachtas Commission

*Minutes of Commission Meeting
Monday 30 November 2020*

1. The tenth meeting of the Commission of 2019 took place at 11.00 a.m. via MS Teams

2. **MEMBERS PRESENT**

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

3. **MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

The minutes of the meeting of 19 October 2020 were agreed by the Commission.

4. **INDUCTION BRIEFING FOR COMMISSION MEMBERS**

The Commission received an induction briefing from Mr. Paul Turpin (Governance Specialist) on best practice in governance in the public sector, including the role of the Commission and the responsibilities of Commission members.

5. **COMMISSION OPERATING PROTOCOLS**

The Commission adopted the following operating protocols, set out in the Appendices to these minutes, relating to the conduct of Commission business:

- (i) Protocol for Authorised Commission Reporting; and
- (ii) Protocol for Participating in Virtual Commission Meetings using Microsoft Teams.

6. PROGRAMME OF WORK FOR THE LEINSTER HOUSE PRECINCT

Mr. John McMahon, OPW Commissioner, briefed the Commission on work planned for the Leinster House Campus. The work includes:

- (i) the provision of covered bicycle parking spaces at the 'five-storey block' in the Leinster House campus. The work to install the covered parking facility will proceed in accordance with Part 9 of the Planning Regulations;
- (ii) the installation of additional electric vehicle charge stations subject to a report from the OPW Engineer on the electricity capacity available to support the additional load;
- (iii) work on repair of the roof of the National Museum which will begin in early 2021, and will necessitate the temporary installation of a compound/scaffolding and the loss of some parking spaces in Leinster House along the boundary wall of the Museum;
- (iv) the OPW summer works programme for Leinster House.

The Commission requested that a survey be undertaken to help assess the current and future demand for electric vehicle charging stations in the Leinster House complex.

7. COVID-19 Update

The Commission noted a verbal update from the Head of Facilities Management on oversight of the preventative measures in place the Leinster House complex in response to COVID-19 to ensure a healthy and safe work environment on the precinct.

The Commission agreed to write to party and group leaders in relation to the guidelines on the wearing of face masks in the work environment in compliance with the updated public health guidance, with effect from 1 December 2020, which provides that masks must be worn by everyone in all communal areas.

8. REPORT FROM THE FINANCE COMMITTEE

(i) Financial report for the reporting period January to September 2020

Senator Mark Daly, Cathaoirleach and Chair of the Finance Committee, presented the report from the Finance Committee for the reporting period January to September 2020.

(ii) Sanction for Virement between subheads.

The Commission:

- (i) granted sanction to vire between subheads where savings are anticipated to meet excesses occurring;

- (ii) delegated authority to the Secretary General to vire additional funds between subheads in respect of expenditure incurred before 31 December 2020; and
- (iii) agreed to formally note the final position in relation to virement as soon as may be following the closure of the 2020 Account.

9. DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION

The Commission noted:

- (i) a Progress Report on implementation of the Digital Transformation Projects in 2020 and related expenditure;
- (ii) the Digital Transformation Work Plan for 2021 and the estimated budget for work planned;
- (iii) that projects under the *Digital Parliament Programme* would be prioritised in the programme of work planned for 2021 with the aim of achieving quantifiable benefits for members and staff.

10. DIGNITY AND RESPECT POLICY FOR THE HOUSES OF THE OIREACHTAS

Proposal for a Review of the Operation of the Dignity and Respect Policy to date and Associated Procedures

The Commission agreed that a review of the operation of the *Dignity and Respect Policy* for the parliamentary workplace, and associated procedures under the Policy, be carried out. The Commission also approved the scope of the review which will commence in January 2021 and will include consultation with all stakeholders. In addition, depending on the results of the consultation, the Commission noted that a proposal on commissioning a survey of all who work in the parliamentary community will be submitted to it for approval following the consultation process.

11. SCHEME FOR SECRETARIAL ASSISTANCE FOR MEMBERS

Update on Pay Claim submitted for political staff

The Commission noted a verbal update on the pay claim submitted for political staff employed under the Scheme for Secretarial Assistance for members.

12. LEGAL BRIEFING FROM THE OFFICE OF PARLIAMENTARY LEGAL ADVISERS

The Commission:

- (i) was briefed by the Office of Parliamentary Legal Advisers (OPLA) in relation to legal matters;
- (ii) authorised the OPLA to defend legal proceedings and to engage Counsel in respect of an action taken against the Oireachtas.

13. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Correspondence

The Commission noted the following correspondence:

- (a) Email from a former political staff member regarding the Dignity and Respect Policy for Members of the Houses and Political Parties

The Commission noted that the matters raised in the correspondence would be considered in the planned review of the Policy.

- (b) Email from Deputy Louise O'Reilly in relation to (i) the Dignity and Respect Policy; and (ii) seeking to allow media filming on Merrion Street side of Leinster House

The Commission noted that media filming is governed by the Media Protocol for the Houses, as approved by the Dáil Committee on Procedure and the Seanad Committee on Procedure and Privileges. It also noted that a review of the Protocol is planned and agreed to refer the request to the Head of Communications for consideration in the review.

- (c) Letter from Deputy Holly Cairns in relation to employment rights for contract staff working in Leinster House.

The Commission received legal advice on the matter and noted that the Commission does not have an employment relationship with staff employed by externally engaged contracted service providers.

- (d) Letter from Senator Mark Daly, Cathaoirleach, requesting the allocation of staff to support the Seanad Special Committee on Withdrawal of the UK from the EU.

The Commission noted that staff had been assigned to support the Special Select Committee on Withdrawal of the UK from the EU.

- (e) Letter from Mr. Ken Murray in relation to the Oireachtas local media service.

The Commission requested a report on the Oireachtas local media communications plan for its meeting in January.

- (f) Email from Senator David Norris requesting that access to Leinster House (Kildare St) for members of the Houses of the Oireachtas be considered in the implementation of the new Dublin area bus network plan.

The Commission noted that the Service will write to the National Transport Authority to establish their plans for Kildare Street under the new Dublin area bus network plan.

- (g) Email from Senator Mark Wall requested information on eating and rest facilities available for cleaning staff.

The Commission was informed that the staff concerned may use the facilities that are available in the Leinster House complex and at each work location. The Facilities Management Unit would be requested to communicate this information to the staff.

- (h) Email from Senator Mark Daly, Cathaoirleach, proposing that the scope of the review of the Dignity and Respect Policy would include a review of the categories of persons covered by the Policy.

The Commission noted that the matters raised in the correspondence would be considered in the planned review of the Policy.

- (i) Email from Senator Mark Daly, Cathaoirleach, in relation to the artwork in Leinster House. The Cathaoirleach proposed that the *Joint sub-Committee on Art and Portraiture* would be re-established to make recommendations on the commissioning and display of portraits and artwork in Leinster House, in particular, portraits of women members of the Houses and artwork for display in the Seanad chamber.

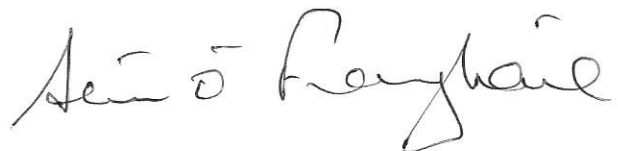
The Commission agreed to request the Dáil Committee on Procedure and the Seanad Committee on Procedure and Privileges to establish the *Joint sub-Committee on Art and Portraiture* to progress the proposal.

Future Meeting Schedule

The Commission approved an indicative schedule of future meeting dates for the period January-July 2021.

14. NEXT MEETING

The Commission noted the proposed incorporeal meeting in December to consider the revised Service Level Agreement (SLA) for the Print Service.



SEÁN Ó FEARGHAÍL, T.D.

Ceann Comhairle and Chairperson of the Commission

Dated:

APPENDIX A

PROTOCOL FOR AUTHORISED COMMISSION REPORTING

(Adopted by the Commission at its meeting on 30 November 2020)

Confidentiality of Information

1. The Commission is required by law, and in accordance with the *Code of Conduct for Commission Members*, to preserve the confidentiality of personal and sensitive information that is entrusted to it in the discharge of its governance responsibilities.
2. In order for the Commission to function effectively, members of the Commission must feel confident expressing their views on matters under consideration at meetings without concern that their views will be made public. Sensitive discussions at Commission meetings must remain confidential.

Transparency and Accountability

3. As a public body whose budget is paid out of public funds, the Commission supports the principle of public access to information in a manner that enhances transparency and accountability of its work.
4. The Commission is subject to the Freedom of Information Act (FOI) and fulfils its legal duty to provide public access to Commission records in accordance with the provisions of the FOI legislation.
5. Before each Commission meeting, the agenda for the meeting is published on the Oireachtas website after it has been circulated to Commission members.
6. Following each Commission meeting the minutes of its previous meeting, as approved, are published on the website.

Confidential, Personal and Sensitive Information

7. Strict confidentiality must be observed in relation to Commission papers in order to protect confidential, personal and sensitive information in line with the Commission's legal obligations. Papers are prepared by the Service for and circulated to members solely to facilitate the discharge of their duties as Commission members. They are not provided to anyone outside the Commission.

Communication of Commission Decisions

8. A list of decisions taken by the Commission at each meeting is circulated to members as soon as is practicable after the meeting.
9. The draft minutes are circulated to members before each meeting and are placed on the agenda for formal approval at the next meeting.

10. Commission papers are official records of the Commission. They should not be disclosed to third parties.
11. If members receive media queries concerning any matter considered by the Commission, these queries may be referred to the Oireachtas Press Office for a response. The Public Relations Officer, Verona Ní Bhroinn (Phone 618 3881) will liaise with the Secretariat, the Chairperson and members, as necessary, in responding to such requests.
12. Commission members may contact the OCSG if they wish to clarify any matter relating to the work of the Commission. They may also direct any queries they receive to the Secretariat:

Michael Errity (Assistant Secretary): 618 3769

Máirín Devlin (Principal Officer, Office of the Commission and Secretary General): 618 4099

Anne-Marie Fahy (Secretary to the Commission) 618 3036.

13. Members of the Houses in general may email the Chairperson, any member of the Commission, or the OCSG if they wish to have a matter considered by the Commission.

APPENDIX B

PROTOCOL FOR COMMISSION MEMBERS AND OFFICIALS PARTICIPATING IN VIRTUAL COMMISSION MEETINGS USING MICROSOFT TEAMS

(Adopted by the Commission at its meeting on 30 November 2020)

This document sets out the key practices recommended in relation to the use of Microsoft Teams to ensure the confidentiality and security of meetings of the Houses of the Oireachtas Commission.

1. Attendance at Commission meetings is enabled by means of an email invitation issued by the OCSG Secretariat, which includes a link to facilitate connection to the meeting. This is issued to each Member of the Commission and relevant officials required to attend and should not be shared with others.
2. Agenda and briefing material are issued by email to Members of the Commission and should be treated as private and confidential and not shared with others.
3. Only those who are authorised to participate in the meeting or those who have a bona fide official reason for attending should connect to the meeting via Teams.
4. Members and officials should ensure they are in a private office/space and should not have others in the room during the private meeting. There are background features on MS Teams which can be used to support a meeting setting.
5. Members should connect to Teams meetings using their Oireachtas assigned email account. If for technical reasons a Member wishes to connect using their staff members account, the Secretariat should be advised of this in advance to ensure access is possible.
6. Members should activate their in-device camera for the duration of the meeting at which attendance is noted. Where there is a technical reason for not doing so the Secretariat or the Chairperson should be advised of this in advance or at the commencement of the meeting.
7. Use of a headset with microphone is recommended. This provides clearer audio for participants of the meeting. When not speaking, the microphone should be muted to ensure quality of sound and avoid background noises interrupting the meeting.
8. As a general rule, the following officials will attend Commission meetings; Michael Errity, Assistant Secretary, Corporate & Members' Services, Máirín Devlin, PO Office of the Commission and Secretary General and Anne-Marie Fahy, Secretary to the Commission.

9. The Chairperson will aim to commence the meeting promptly. The quorum for a meeting is four members. The Chair will introduce each agenda item and will invite members to contribute at the appropriate time.
10. Officials presenting to the Commission will be called to join the meeting for their particular agenda item only. When joining the meeting, officials should use their in-device camera and await direction from the Chairperson to contribute.
11. Where a division is called, it will be conducted by means of a rollcall of members. The casting of votes should be both heard and visually verified.
12. Technical support is available for members and political staff by emailing the Support Desk or call ext. 4444.