



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

*[DRAFT] Minutes of Commission Meeting
Monday 1 March 2021*

The third meeting of the Commission of 2021 took place at 11.00 a.m. via MS Teams.

1. 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; Senator Mark Wall; and Mr. Peter Finnegan (Secretary General).

Apologies were received from Deputy Duncan Smith.

2. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS

The minutes of the meeting of 25 January 2021 and the note of the meeting, which was held incorporeally and took place on 1-3 February 2021, were agreed by the Commission.

3. REPORT OF THE INDEPENDENT REVIEW OF THE SYSTEM FOR RECORDING MEMBERS' ATTENDANCE AT LEINSTER HOUSE

The Commission received a presentation from the Mr. Trevor Reaney, Independent Reviewer, on his review of the attendance recording system aligned to the payment of the travel and accommodation parliamentary allowance.

It was agreed that the report of the independent review would be circulated.

The Commission thanked Mr. Reaney for undertaking the review.

4. REPORTS FROM THE FINANCE COMMITTEE

(i) Financial and Output Reporting - October to December 2020

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

It was noted that the provisional outturn for 2020 is €136m against a full year estimate provision of €152m showing a total positive variance of €16m (11%) against budget.

The Commission noted the financial report.

The Commission also noted the final position in relation to virement of funds between subheads, as authorised by the Commission, in respect of expenditure incurred before 31 December 2020.

(ii) Oireachtas Local Media Communications Plan

Senator Mark Daly, Cathaoirleach and Chair of the Finance Committee, presented a recommendation from the Finance Committee that the Commission approve the draft questions for a survey of members of the Houses to be carried out in respect of the Oireachtas Local Media Plan.

It was noted that the recommendation was included on the agenda as a separate item - Item No. 4: *Houses of the Oireachtas Local Media Communications Plan*.

5. HOUSES OF THE OIREACHTAS COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

Houses of the Oireachtas Local Media Communications Plan: Recommendation from the Finance Committee

The Commission approved a recommendation from the Finance Committee on the series of questions for a survey of members of the Houses to inform future plans on raising public awareness of the parliamentary work of members.

6. ICT Strategy Implementation

(i) Digital Transformation: ICT Projects Status and Expenditure Report (Feb 2021)

The Commission noted the 2021 ICT Digital Transformation Projects Status and Expenditure Report (Feb 2021).

(ii) Members' ICT User Group

The Commission noted a proposal to establish a Members' ICT User Group, made up of a cross section of members representing parties and groups in the Houses, with the aim of providing input to and feedback on the development of a Members' Portal to support members' parliamentary work.

The Commission appointed Senator Mark Wall to be its representative on the Members' ICT User Group.

7. SERVICE LEVEL AGREEMENT FOR THE PRINT FACILITY

Proposed Amendments to the Service Level Agreement (SLA)

The Commission agreed to resume consideration of this item at its next meeting. It requested that a report detailing the print requests refused by the Print Manager based on legal advice, and an explanation of the reasons for the refusal of each request, be circulated for consideration at the meeting.

8. LEGAL BRIEFING FROM THE OFFICE OF PARLIAMENTARY LEGAL ADVISERS

The Commission received a briefing on current legal proceedings and related matters.

9. COVID-19 Update

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

10. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

(i) *Update on SIPTU Pay Claim submitted for Political Staff*

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

Separately, it was agreed that a background note on the pension arrangements for political staff would be provided for the next meeting in response to a query raised regarding political staff pensions in the course of the meeting.

(ii) *Correspondence*

The Commission noted the following correspondence:

(a) email from Senator Fiona O'Loughlin (Chair of the Women's Parliamentary Caucus) in relation to the provision of facilities in the Leinster House complex, and

(b) the response issued by the Ceann Comhairle to Senator O'Loughlin's email.

(c) email from Senator Fiona O'Loughlin (Chair of the Women's Parliamentary Caucus) requesting the provision of a family room in the Leinster House complex;

The Commission noted that the Finance Committee considered this request at the meeting on 22 February. The Committee requested the Service to establish what facilities are available in other Parliaments and the costs involved. An information note will be prepared for consideration by the Commission at the next meeting.

(d) Letter from Minister Catherine Martin to the Ceann Comhairle requesting that Oireachtas TV would broadcast the St. Patrick's Festival Programme; and

(e) the response issued by the Ceann Comhairle to the Minister's letter;

(f) email from Senator Mark Daly (Cathaoirleach) in relation to the following matters. The Commission also noted the current position in respect of each item:

(I) request received from *FedNet* broadcast news organisation for media accreditation to broadcast the parliamentary proceedings;

It was noted that the Broadcasting Unit and Communications Unit held a meeting with *FedNet* on 22 February. Arising from the discussions with *FedNet*, the Head of Communications is currently assessing the proposal and any implications arising and will report back to the Commission in due course.

(II) OPW works programme for the Leinster House Precinct;

It was noted that in respect of the remaining building works at Kildare Street, the OPW propose to use a framework procurement process to advance this work. The Level 5 restrictions currently in place prevent this work being advanced at present.

(III) Dignity and Respect Policy review:

It was noted that the consultation with stakeholders is ongoing. To date, meetings have taken place with the Party Administrator's Group, the Members Consultation Group, SIPTU and the Women's Parliamentary Caucus. The information and feedback received from these meetings is currently being collated and analysed. In addition, the Office of Parliamentary Legal Advisers is considering legal matters regarding the voluntary nature of the Policy and other

matters arising in the course of the consultation.

(IV) Membership of sub-Committee on Art and Portraiture;

It was noted that the sub-Committee on *Art and Portraiture* is established jointly by the Dáil and Seanad Committees on Parliamentary Privileges and Oversight. The Commission referred this matter to the Dáil and Seanad Committees and has followed up on the request.

11. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting will take place at 11.00 am on Monday 29 March 2021 via Microsoft Teams.



SEÁN Ó FEARGHAÍL, T.D.

Ceann Comhairle and Chairperson of the Commission

Dated:

14.7.21