



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

*Minutes of Commission Meeting
Monday 29 March 2021*

The fourth 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; Deputy Duncan Smith, Senator Mark Wall; and Mr. Peter Finnegan (Secretary General).

2. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS

The minutes of the meeting of 1 March 2021 were agreed by the Commission.

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

The Commission resumed consideration of the independent review of the attendance recording system aligned to the payment of the travel and accommodation parliamentary allowance.

The Commission had been circulated in advance with:

- (i) The report of the Independent Review, which included the terms of reference for the review as agreed by the Commission in December 2019;
- (ii) A briefing note setting out the background to the review; and
- (iii) An executive summary of the report.

Following discussion it was agreed, as the next steps, that:

- (i) members of the Commission would discuss the Review's recommendations with their parties and groups;
- (ii) the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform would be consulted to ascertain if any changes are proposed to be made to the current allowance scheme that may impact on the attendance recording system;
- (iii) a note on the information gathered from the desk-based study undertaken of attendance recording systems used by parliaments internationally would be circulated to members;
- (iv) a copy of the report of the Independent Review would be provided to the Audit Committee.

4. HOSTING BY THE HOUSES OF THE OIREACHTAS OF INTERPARLIAMENTARY MEETINGS AND CONFERENCES

The Commission considered a proposal that the Houses of the Oireachtas would host a programme of interparliamentary meetings and conferences over the period 2022 – 2024 in furtherance of their interparliamentary relations.

The Commission approved the proposal in principle and referred it to the Finance Committee for detailed consideration. It requested the Committee to report back to the Commission with its recommendation.

5. SERVICE LEVEL AGREEMENT FOR THE PRINT FACILITY

Proposed Amendments to the Service Level Agreement

The Commission resumed consideration of the proposed amendments to the Service Level Agreement (SLA) submitted to it by the Print Users' Council (PUC) with respect to the definition of 'corporate material' as set out in paragraph 9(2) of the SLA.

It also considered a statistical analysis of print requests referred to the Office of Parliamentary Legal Advisers (OPLA) for consideration, and the outcome with respect to these requests, for the period January 2020 to March 2021.

Following discussion it was agreed to refer the proposed amendments back to the Print Users' Council for further consideration. It requested the Print Users' Council to convene an early meeting with a view to reporting back to the next meeting of the Commission.

6. LEGAL BRIEFING FROM THE OFFICE OF PARLIAMENTARY LEGAL ADVISERS

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

Legal proceedings initiated in the Workplace Relations Commission

In respect of legal proceedings initiated in the Workplace Relations Commission [*Francis E Kearney -v- Members of the Joint Committee on Health & Ors* (Ref: CA - 00042558-001)], the Commission agreed to sponsor the tabling of motions in the Dáil and Seanad to seek authorisation, pursuant to section 4(2)(f)(iv) and (v) of the Commission Acts, for the Commission to conduct the defence of the proceedings on behalf of the members concerned arising solely out of the performance by them of their parliamentary functions as members of Dáil Éireann and Seanad Éireann.

In respect of two related equal status claims initiated in the Workplace Relations Commission against members of staff of the Service, the Commission agreed to defend the proceedings in respect of the members of staff concerned (relating to an FOI request and a customer service complaint; Ref: CA - 00042639).

The Commission authorised the OPLA to act in the defence of the proceedings in the Workplace Relations Commission on behalf of the members of the Joint Committee on Health and members of staff of the Service.

Legal advice pursuant to section 4(2)(e)(i) of the Commission Acts

The Commission approved the provision of legal advice, in accordance with section 4(2)(e)(i) of the Commission Acts 2003-2018, to Deputy Mattie McGrath as regards matters arising from his membership of Dáil Éireann.

7. COVID-19 Update

The Commission received 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.

The Commission acknowledged and expressed appreciation for the ongoing work of the COVID-19 compliance team in implementing and ensuring compliance with COVID-19 safety measures in the parliamentary environment.

The Commission also agreed to write to party and group leaders in relation to compliance with the preventative measures in place to help limit the spread of COVID-19 within the parliamentary workplace.

8. SECURITY MATTERS

The Commission was briefed on security matters relating to the parliamentary precinct.

9. AUDIT COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT 2020

The Commission noted the Audit Committee Annual Report 2020 as presented to it in accordance with section 14A(10)(c) of the Commission Acts 2003-2018.

It also noted that the Audit Committee Annual Report will be published with the Commission's Annual Report 2020.

10. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

(i) Information items

The Commission noted the following:

- (a) an update on the SIPTU pay claim submitted for staff employed under the Scheme for Secretarial Assistance for Members
- (b) the Superannuation Scheme for staff employed under the Scheme for Secretarial Assistance for Members
- (c) an update on the review of the Dignity and Respect Policy currently underway

(ii) *Membership of the Working Group on the Houses of the Oireachtas Commemorative Programme for the 2021-2023 phase of the Decade of Centenaries*

The Commission requested the Secretary to write to the Committees on Parliamentary Privileges and Oversight of Dáil and Seanad Éireann to invite them to nominate members to serve on the *Working Group on the Houses of the Oireachtas Commemorative Programme for the 2021-2023 phase of the Decade of Centenaries*.

(iii) *The provision of a Family Room in the Leinster House complex*

The Commission noted that Facilities Management was currently assessing the suitability of potential accommodation for a Family Room in the Leinster House complex. It requested the Head of Facilities Management to establish what facilities are available in other Parliaments, including the costs involved, and to revert to the Commission with a recommendation.

(iv) *Correspondence*

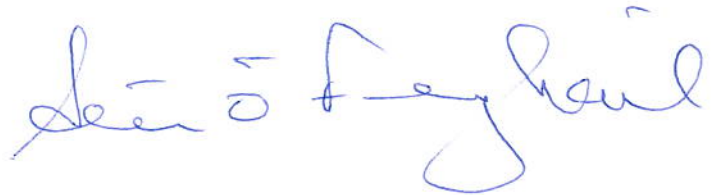
The Commission noted the following correspondence:

- (a) email from Mr. Ken Murray in relation to the Oireachtas local media service,
- (b) email from Deputy Seán Canney in relation to the Oireachtas local media service.

It was agreed to refer the correspondence to the Head of Communications.

11. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting will take place at 11.00 am on Monday 26 April 2021 via Microsoft Teams.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading 'Seán Ó Fearghaíl'.

SEÁN Ó FEARGHAÍL, T.D.

Ceann Comhairle and Chairperson of the Commission

Dated:

28-04-2021