



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

*Minutes of Commission Meeting
Monday 26 April 2021*

The fifth 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 29 March 2021 were agreed by the Commission.

3. COMMUNICATIONS AND BROADCASTING

Approval for Renewal of the Contract for the Broadcast of Oireachtas TV on the Saorview Platform

The Commission granted approval to renew the contract for the broadcast of Oireachtas TV on the *Saorview* platform, to commence in June 2021. It also granted approval to extend the broadcast schedule under the contract to include broadcast of Oireachtas TV at weekends with the aim of expanding public access to the parliamentary proceedings.

The Commission also requested the Service to examine options to have Oireachtas TV carried by the Irish language television network, TG4.

4. SERVICE LEVEL AGREEMENT FOR THE PRINT FACILITY

Proposed Amendments to the Service Level Agreement

Deputy Louise O'Reilly, Chairperson of the Print Users' Council (PUC), provided a report on the meeting held by the PUC to consider proposed amendments to the Service Level Agreement (SLA) for the Print Facility.

The Chief Parliamentary Legal Adviser briefed the Commission on the purpose of the SLA and the print services that are provided to members under the scope of the SLA.

The Commission agreed that the SLA would remain in its existing form and the matter would be considered again after three months.

The Commission requested the Chief Parliamentary Legal Adviser to prepare a briefing note for the next meeting to include an overview of the Service Level Agreement, the print services provided by the print facility to Senators, and Senators' parliamentary duties and parliamentary allowances.

The Commission also noted the measures agreed by the Print Users' Council to support the effective operation of the SLA.

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

Review of the Operation of the Dignity and Respect Policy and Associated Procedures

The Commission received a presentation on the outcome of the review conducted of the *Dignity and Respect Policy* for the parliamentary workplace and associated procedures under the Policy.

The Commission:

- (i) noted the information and feedback received from the stakeholder consultation undertaken as part of the review of the Policy;
- (ii) agreed that, subject to the provision of the additional resources, Members' HR Unit undertake the actions set out in Table A in the Appendix to further strengthen the Policy;
- (iii) agreed that Members' HR Unit progress the actions set out in Table B in the Appendix, as appropriate.
- (iv) noted that it is not proposed to undertake a survey across the parliamentary community at this time and that the available resources will focus instead on implementing the agreed actions in order to support and foster a culture of dignity and respect in the parliamentary workplace;
- (v) noted that consultation is underway with the Former Members' Association on the *Draft Protocol for Former Members' Access to Leinster House*, following which the draft Protocol will be submitted to the Commission for approval.

6. UPDATE FROM FACILITIES MANAGEMENT SERVICES

The Commission received a verbal update from the Head of Facilities Management on the following:

- (i) COVID-19;
- (ii) ATM service in LH2000;
- (iii) Bicycle facilities in the Leinster House complex.

7. STRATEGIC PLAN 2019-2021

Annual Progress Report 2020

The Secretary General presented the second 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 2020.

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.

8. TAOISEACH'S APPOINTMENT OF THE CAPTAIN OF THE GUARD, HOUSES OF THE OIREACHTAS:

The Commission was briefed on the procedure for appointment to the post of Captain of the Guard, Houses of the Oireachtas, in accordance with section 7 of the *Staff of the Houses of the Oireachtas Act 1959*, as amended.

9. LEGAL BRIEFING FROM THE OFFICE OF PARLIAMENTARY LEGAL ADVISERS

The Commission was briefed on legal matters involving the Houses of the Oireachtas.

10. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

(i) Information items

The Commission noted an update on:

- (a) the SIPTU pay claim submitted for staff employed under the Scheme for Secretarial Assistance for Members;
- (b) the Houses of the Oireachtas Commission (Amendment) Bill 2021.

(ii) Correspondence

The Commission noted the following correspondence:

- (a) letter from the Dáil Committee on Parliamentary Privileges and Oversight submitting nominations to serve on the Working Group on the Oireachtas Commemorative Programme for the 2021-2023 phase of the Decade of Centenaries;
- (b) letter from the Dáil Committee on Parliamentary Privileges and Oversight in relation to the portraits and artwork in Leinster House.

(iii) *Appointment to the All-Party Consultation Group on Commemorations*

The Commission agreed to write to the Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media to request that the Cathaoirleach, Senator Mark Daly, be appointed to serve as an ex-officio member of the *All-Party Consultation Group on Commemorations*.

11. DATE OF NEXT MEETING: 31 MAY 2021.

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

SEÁN Ó FEARGHAÍL, T.D.

Ceann Comhairle and Chairperson of the Commission

Dated:

15.6.21

APPENDIX

Review of the Dignity and Respect Policy for the Parliamentary Workplace

TABLE A: Actions agreed to be undertaken to support the policy

Issue	Proposed Action	By whom
Raising Awareness of the Policy	(i) Create generic one-page flyer outlining the main points of the Policy for customisation by Party/Member (ii) Provide electronic posters that can be printed off and posted in constituency offices (iii) Use notice boards (in LH) and common areas (eg lifts/buildings/bathrooms) to publicise and remind staff and Members of Policy. (iv) Plinth – make D&R policy and services more prominent on the Plinth. (v) Policy displayed in party meeting rooms and also an agenda item for Party meetings - to increase ownership of Policy (vi) Send around the list of Complaint Recipients by email	HR Members/ Political Parties HR Members/ Communications Unit Political Parties HR Members
Overcoming barriers to making a complaint	(vii) Provide skills training to staff to empower staff to address the power imbalance between Member and staff.	HR Members/ Training Unit
Are support services provided adequate such as the D&R Helpline; Mediation; Investigation?	(viii) More promotion of services and visible awareness campaign.	HR Members
Review the groups covered under the scope of the policy	(ix) Review induction material provided to students to expand the section on Dignity and Respect	HR Members
Voluntary adoption of the Policy	(x) Write to the Party Administrators/Whips informing which Members have not adopted policy	HR Members

TABLE B: Actions agreed to be progressed, as appropriate

Issue	Proposed Action	By Whom
Barriers to making a complaint	(i) Review the Fianna Fáil submission, and feedback proposing changes to the one-to-one employer/employee working arrangement <i>and</i> the Code of Practice for Employers and Employees on the Prevention and Resolution of Bullying at work (SI 674/2020) (ii) Where a complaint is upheld, staff should have an entitlement to access severance where they wish to leave	Oireachtas Commission/HR Members/ OPLA D/PER

	(iii) As an alternative to the D&R helpline or complaint recipient, provide a trained point of contact for advice on the Policy etc.	HR Members / Parties
Increase participation in Training	<p>Mandatory Training:</p> <p>(iv) Make D&R training mandatory – possibly linked to resources</p> <p>(v) Make D&R webinar on Plinth mandatory for members and staff including a question & answers and certificate of completion (<i>based on covid training model</i>)</p> <p>(vii) Mandatory employers training including responsibilities and consequences</p> <p>(vii) Have a designated D&R day – AV room run training all day, record attendance, etc. and publish a list of all Members who have attended training.</p>	<p>Oireachtas Commission/ HR Members/ Training Unit /Training Unit/Parties/Members/OPLA</p> <p>Oireachtas Commission /HR/HR Members</p>
Are support services provided adequate such as the D&R Helpline; Mediation; Investigation?	(viii) Dedicated space for political staff to make calls to the support services – lack of privacy cited as a barrier.	Oireachtas Commission/ FMU/Members HR
Consider the establishment and the role of a representative steering group to oversee ongoing implementation of the policy	(ix) Consider the merit of establishing this forum, including the role, remit and membership, resourcing etc.	Oireachtas Commission
Exit interviews	(x) Undertake review of issues involved and bring separate paper to the Oireachtas Commission on feasibility.	HR Members/ OPLA/Oireachtas Commission.
Review the groups covered under the scope of the policy	<p>(xi) Code of conduct for former Members – separate process underway</p> <p>(xii) Review the arrangements for students in the D&R Policy</p>	<p>Oireachtas Commission.</p> <p>Members' HR/OPLA/ Oireachtas Commission</p>
Voluntary adoption of the Policy	<p>(xiii) Consider establishing a public registry of Members who have adopted the policy.</p> <p>(xv) Link adoption of the policy to resourcing Members (FF submission)</p>	<p>Oireachtas Commission</p> <p>HR Members/ Data Protection Officer/ Oireachtas Commission/ OPLA</p>