



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

*Minutes of Commission Meeting
Monday 27 September 2021*

The ninth 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; and Senator Mark Wall.

Apologies were received from Mr. Peter Finnegan (Secretary General).

2. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting of 12 July 2021 were agreed by the Commission.

3. REPORTS FROM THE FINANCE COMMITTEE

Senator Mark Daly, Cathaoirleach and Chair of the Finance Committee, presented the report from the Finance Committee in respect of the following:

(i) Financial and Output Reporting: January – August 2021

The Commission noted the financial report for the reporting period January to August 2021.

(ii) Draft 2022 Statement of Estimates for the Houses of the Oireachtas Commission.

The Commission:

- (i) approved the Statement of Estimates 2022 providing for gross expenditure of €160.7m;
- (ii) noted that the Estimate would be presented to the Dáil on Tuesday 28 September 2021 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 the Dáil on behalf of the Commission.

(iii) Commission Budget 2022-2024

The Commission considered the recommendation from the Finance Committee that a provision of €462.5 million be sought in respect of ongoing expenditure in running the Houses of the Oireachtas for the period 2022-2024.

The Commission agreed to submit a request to the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform that the sum of €462.5 million be allocated to meet current expenditure costs associated with running the Houses of the Oireachtas for the three-year period 2022 to 2024.

(iv) Houses of the Oireachtas Service Resource Plan

The Commission considered the Civil Service Staff Resources Plan 2018-2024 setting out the anticipated resource requirements for the Houses of the Oireachtas Service for the period to 2024.

The Commission approved, subject to normal governance procedures, additional resources of 111 posts giving a revised staffing ceiling of 640 posts to meet anticipated staffing resources required to support the Houses of the Oireachtas in the period up to 2024.

(v) Superannuation Scheme for Staff employed under the Scheme for Secretarial Assistance for Members

The Commission noted an information note on the pension scheme for staff employed under the Scheme for Secretarial Assistance to Members. It also noted that information seminars on pensions would be delivered to staff employed under the Scheme.

4. ICT STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION

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

The Commission noted the 2021 ICT Digital Transformation Projects Status and Expenditure Report: September 2021.

5. DIGNITY AND RESPECT POLICY

(i) Proposal to establish a Dignity and Respect Policy Steering Group

The Commission approved the establishment, terms of reference and membership of a Dignity and Respect Policy Steering Group to oversee the ongoing operation of the Dignity and Respect Policy. It agreed that the Steering Group would be established on a pilot basis for a period of one year initially after which the Commission will review the operation of the Group.

The Commission also agreed that the Steering Group would report to the Commission on the operation of the Protocol for Former Members' Access to Leinster House, as approved by the Commission at its meeting on 31 May 2021.

(ii) Political Staff Engagement Plan

The Commission noted a Staff Engagement Plan for political staff including the key initiatives planned to be implemented under the Plan.

6. FACILITIES MANAGEMENT

The Commission received an update from the Head of Facilities Management and the Office of Public Works (OPW). It agreed that the Finance Committee would consider the OPW plan for the Leinster House precinct and report on this to the Commission.

7. PLAN FOR SITTINGS IN LEINSTER HOUSE

The Commission noted the Plan for the resumption of the parliamentary sittings in Leinster House as approved by the Dáil Business Committee.

8. LEGAL BRIEFING FROM THE OFFICE OF THE PARLIAMENTARY LEGAL ADVISERS

The Commission was briefed by the Office of Parliamentary Legal Advisers (OPLA) in relation to legal matters.

In respect of judicial proceedings where Dáil Éireann is a Notice Party (entitled *Jonathan Dowdall v. The Director of Public Prosecutions, the Minister for Justice and Equality, Dáil Éireann, Ireland and the Attorney General (High Court: 2021/657/JR)*), it agreed to table a motion in the Dáil to seek authorisation for the Commission to conduct the defence of the proceedings pursuant to section 4(2)(f)(iv) of the Houses of the Oireachtas Commission Acts 2003 to 2018, and authorised the OPLA to defend the proceedings in respect of Dáil Éireann and to engage legal representatives in respect of the case.

9. 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) an information note on the operation of the Superannuation Scheme for Staff employed under the Scheme for Secretarial Assistance to Members;
- (c) an information note on the management of internal post in the Houses;
- (d) an information note on the employment status of contract workers in the Broadcasting Unit;
- (e) an update on the installation of remote access technology in meeting rooms in Leinster Houses.

Correspondence

The Commission noted the following correspondence:

- (a) email from Deputy Marc MacSharry in relation to the circulation of internal post; and
 - (b) the response issued by the Ceann Comhairle to Deputy MacSharry;
 - (c) letter from the Seanad Committee on Parliamentary Privileges and Oversight regarding the nomination of a member of Seanad Éireann to serve on the Commission's Advisory Working Group on Portraiture and other Art;
 - (d) letter from Senator Regina Doherty regarding the employment status of staff employed by Oireachtas service providers;
 - (e) letter from the Dáil Business Committee regarding the nomination of members of Dáil Éireann to serve on the *Advisory Working Group on Portraiture and other Art*;
 - (f) email from Deputy Louise O'Reilly requesting that media reports on harassment experienced by members of the Houses be considered by the Commission;
 - (g) email from Deputy Mattie McGrath concerning the allocation of resources to parties and groups by the Commission, and
 - (h) the response issued by the Ceann Comhairle to Deputy McGrath;
 - (i) letter concerning car parking at Leinster House;
 - (j) email from Senator Seán Kyne concerning remote access to in-person parliamentary party meetings in Leinster House;
 - (k) three packets received through the postal service containing sealed envelopes addressed to individual members of the Houses. The Commission requested the Secretariat to return the parcels to the return address provided.
- (ii) *Future meeting Schedule*

The Commission approved a provisional schedule of meetings for the period October to December 2021 as follows:

Monday 18 October @11.00 am via Microsoft Teams

Tuesday 16 November @11.30 am, Room 2, Leinster House

Tuesday 14 December @11.30 am, Room 2, Leinster House.

10. DATE OF NEXT MEETING: 18 October 2021.

SEÁN Ó FEARGHAÍL T.D.

Ceann Comhairle and Chairperson of the Commission

Dated: