

DÁIL ÉIREANN

AN COMHCHOISTE UM CHOIMIRCE SHÓISÍALACH, FORBAIRT POBAIL AGUS TUAITHE AGUS NA HOILEÁIN

JOINT COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL PROTECTION, COMMUNITY AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT AND THE ISLANDS

Dé Céadaoin, 30 Meán Fómhair 2020

Wednesday, 30 September 2020

Tháinig an Comhchoiste le chéile ag 1 p.m.

The Joint Committee met at 1 p.m.

Comhaltaí a bhí i láthair / Members present:

Teachtaí Dála / Deputies	Seanadóirí / Senators
Joe Carey,	Paddy Burke,
Joan Collins,	Róisín Garvey,
Paul Donnelly,	Eugene Murphy,
Charles Flanagan,	Mark Wall.
Claire Kerrane,	
Marc Ó Cathasaigh,	
Éamon Ó Cuív.	

Teachta / Deputy Denis Naughten sa Chathaoir / in the Chair.

Business of Joint Committee

Chairman: As it is our inaugural meeting, the committee is meeting in public session. We will shortly go into private session to discuss procedural matters and consider our work programme. I welcome members to the first meeting of the Joint Committee on Social Protection, Community and Rural Development and the Islands. As we all know too well, Ireland and the wider world have fundamentally changed since the previous committee was dissolved. We have all been affected by the Covid-19 pandemic and our lives have altered in ways that we could not have envisaged just a short time ago.

I want to take members back to last February for a moment. One of the consistent messages that I received on the doorsteps during the general election was the public frustration with accountability by our public service and public authorities. In an open and questioning culture, we need an effective and questioning parliament, but getting straight answers to straight questions is becoming more and more difficult in Dáil and Seanad Éireann, which was reflected by that public frustration.

It is important to remember that Deputies are not just messengers for the people, but to the people. This is neither fully understood nor effectively prioritised by our public service. I firmly believe that this accountability is being slowly lost through incremental disempowerment of Members of the Oireachtas. The sole means of accountability of officials is through this Oireachtas joint committee or parliamentary questions, which in many instances take months to get a reply. That is a far cry from what is required in terms of accountability. There is a failure to brief Deputies and Senators on actions being taken by agencies such as the HSE. Sometimes, the very last person to know is the Deputy whose constituents are being directly impacted. This is a cultural issue, as well as an administrative one. It is part of the cultural change that I want to help deliver so that the Oireachtas becomes an effective forum for the people who elected us all.

I will endeavour to be as fair and impartial as I can to all members of the committee and to witnesses who attend to assist in its work. I believe strongly that a united approach involving mutual respect, where members and witnesses are given the greatest possible opportunity to contribute and feel that their efforts are worthwhile, will yield the best results for us all.

Election of Vice Chairman

Chairman: One of the first tasks facing the committee is the election of Vice Chairman. However, I propose that we defer consideration of this business and first consider in private session and in detail the next business on the agenda, that being, organising and conducting committee business arising from the Covid-19 pandemic. Regarding the election of Vice Chairman, I propose that members email the clerk with nominations for the position by close of business this Friday, 2 October. The clerk will submit the nominations to me and I may be in contact with individual members in that regard. We will then proceed to elect the Vice Chairman at the next public session. Is that agreed? Agreed.

The joint committee went into private session at 1.04 p.m. and adjourned at 1.58 p.m. until 9 a.m. on Wednesday, 7 October 202