

The Northern Ireland Assembly Commission

Meeting Venue: Meeting via Microsoft Teams

Meeting date: Wednesday, 20 December 2023

Meeting Time: 11.30 am



Assembly Commission Members:

Alex Maskey, Speaker (Chairperson)

Trevor Clarke MLA

John Blair MLA

Robbie Butler MLA

Nominated Members in attendance:

Sinéad Ennis MLA

Colin McGrath MLA

Officials present:

Lesley Hogg, Clerk/Chief Executive

Steven Baxter, Director of Corporate Services

Tara Caul, Director of Legal, Governance and Research Services

Gareth McGrath, Director of Parliamentary Services

Robin Ramsey, Adviser to the Speaker/Head of Corporate Support

Jonathan McMillen, Head of Legal Services

Janet Hughes, Clerical Supervisor

The meeting commenced at 11.33 am.

1. APOLOGIES

There were no apologies.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Lesley Hogg declared an interest in agenda item 5 which would be held in closed session, and stated that she would not be in attendance for that item of business. However, she asked to raise an issue in relation to a Department of Finance (DoF) budget exercise for 2024-25 under agenda item 6 - Any Other Business, before leaving the meeting.

3. CORRESPONDENCE – HISTORICAL INSTITUTIONAL ABUSE MEMORIAL

The Speaker noted that the Assembly Commission had agreed at its meeting on 13 February 2023, an initial position for The Executive Office (TEO) on a memorial to victims of historical institutional abuse, and that Robin Ramsey would engage with TEO officials on this matter on the Assembly Commission's behalf.

The Speaker subsequently referred Members to recent correspondence that he had received from TEO, seeking the Assembly Commission's agreement to work towards placing a bench in the Assembly Rotunda area of Parliament Buildings, as a permanent memorial to the victims and survivors of historical institutional abuse.

The Speaker asked Mr Ramsey to provide an update on the current position in relation to this matter.

Mr Ramsey advised that TEO had continued to engage with victims' groups and while a memorial bench in Parliament Buildings would only be one phase of the memorial initiatives that TEO intended to undertake, TEO intended to proceed with this phase.

Mr Ramsey stated that there were a few locations within the Assembly Rotunda that the bench could be placed and confirmed that all costs associated with the bench would be covered by TEO.

Mr Ramsey advised that a further update would be provided in due course and sought approval to continue to engage with TEO in order to take the matter forward. Members were content.

Action: Speaker to reply to correspondence from TEO, and Mr Ramsey to engage with TEO on placing a memorial bench in the Assembly Rotunda.

4. FURTHER CORRESPONDENCE FROM THE UNIONIST PARTIES ON THE CENTENARY STONE

The Speaker referred Members to correspondence that he had recently received from the Unionist party leaders, outlining their current position on the proposal to erect a Centenary Stone in the grounds of Parliament Buildings.

In light of this correspondence, the Speaker asked Members for their views, in order to establish if consensus could now be reached.

Following discussion, there was consensus among the three Assembly Commission Members, to proceed with the erection of the Centenary Stone, based on the proposal put forward by Unionist party leaders in their letter of 13 December 2023 i.e. that Unionist parties would fund the installation cost subject to it being within 10% of the original estimate of £18,000.

Mr Ramsey informed Members that officials would take the steps required to move the matter forward, including the drafting of a contract, finalising the detail of costs and plans and submitting the relevant planning applications. Mr Ramsey noted that the timeline for the outcome of the planning applications was outside of the Assembly Commission's control and said that Members would be updated on progress.

Action: Speaker to write to Unionist party leaders to advise them of the Assembly Commission's position in relation to their latest proposal on the erection of a Centenary Stone.

Change to agenda running order.

6. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Mrs Hogg informed Members of correspondence that had been received from the Department of Finance (DoF), requesting that the Assembly Commission undertake an information gathering exercise in relation to budget requirements for 2024-25, based on three different scenarios.

Mrs Hogg advised that officials were working on gathering the required information, which would require Assembly Commission approval prior to it being forwarded to DoF by the due date of 16 January 2024.

Mrs Hogg stated that a draft response would be prepared for consideration by Members, by way of a single item meeting or by written procedure.

Members noted the request.

Action: Officials to prepare a response for DoF in relation to the information gathering exercise for consideration by Members.

5. CLOSED SESSION

The meeting went into closed session for this agenda item. The Speaker asked Mrs Hogg, Steven Baxter and Gareth McGrath to leave the meeting.

Lesley Hogg, Steven Baxter and Gareth McGrath left the meeting at 11.48 am.