

To: The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures

From: The Speaker

Date: 19 February 2020

PROCEDURES TO RAISE CURRENT ISSUES IN PLENARY

At the plenary sitting on Monday 10 February 2020, I announced that I was publishing new Speaker's rulings on Matters of the Day and questions for urgent oral answer. The new rulings attempt to set out in more detail, for the benefit of Members, the factors that I will take into account when considering requests submitted to me and amend the process to ensure that I have more information from Members when making my decisions.

I used this opportunity to also set out my view that it may be worth considering whether our current procedures and criteria are the best way of providing the Assembly with the flexibility to respond briefly to important developments on a given day.

I am attracted to having a short period during which Members have the opportunity to put issues briefly on the record without requiring me to judge them against any particular criteria. I am aware that other legislatures have such arrangements. For example, I understand that in the House of Commons in Canada a 15-minute period is set aside each day for any Member who is not a Minister to make a statement on a subject of national, regional or local importance. Each statement lasts a maximum of one minute. I would be grateful if the Committee on Procedures would give consideration to the merits of introducing similar arrangements here at the Assembly.

While I believe that the introduction of such arrangements would give the Assembly and Members greater flexibility to respond to emerging issues, I also recognise that there are many practical issues which would first need to be considered before the Committee on Procedures might decide to bring forward the necessary amendments to standing orders. This includes:

- How frequently Members should have the opportunity to make statements;
- How long any period for statements should last;
- At what point during a sitting Members' statements should be scheduled;
- Whether there should be any role for either the Business Committee or me in relation to the scheduling of any period;
- What time limit there should be on each individual statement; and
- Whether there should be any formal restrictions on what Members might say in their statements.

I know that the Committee is meeting next week to determine its priorities and I would be grateful if the potential introduction of a regular period of time for statements by Members was included within the Committee's deliberations.

