



**Northern Ireland
Assembly**

**Committee on Procedures
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The Speaker
Office of the Speaker
Room 39 Parliament Buildings
Stormont
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23 November 2020

Dear Alex,

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

In March 2020, the previous Chairperson wrote to inform you that the Committee on Procedures had agreed to make Members' Statements a priority in its work programme and would begin its consideration at its earliest opportunity. I would therefore like to update you on the Committee's consideration to date.

The Committee wrote to all Political Parties and Independent Members in March 2020 to seek their views on the potential arrangements for Members' Statements should the Committee decide to bring the necessary amendments to Standing Orders. In its correspondence, the Committee sought views on the following:

- 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, as well as whether it should be at a set time for each sitting or flexible;
- The process by which Members are chosen to make a statement;
- 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.

However, given the outbreak of Covid-19, the Chairperson wrote again to all Parties and Independent Members in June 2020 to inform them that the Committee had agreed to postpone its Inquiry on Members' Statements until the current circumstances relating to Covid-19 had abated. Thankfully, in September 2020, when the Assembly business resumed a more normal routine, the Committee were in a position to recommence its work programme. Therefore, I wrote again to all Parties and Independent Members to seek their views.

The Committee also commissioned research and received a briefing from RaISe at its meeting on 30 September 2020. The Committee found the briefing to be very informative and you can access the paper on the Assembly website at the following link:

<http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/globalassets/documents/raise/publications/2017-2022/2020/procedures/4720.pdf>

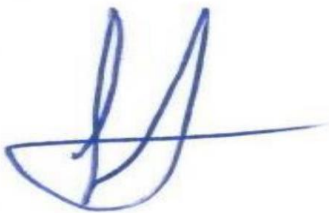
The Committee received responses from most of the Parties and Independent Members in which the majority indicated a need for a period of time in plenary for Members to put issues briefly on the record. Although most Parties are keen on the idea of introducing new procedures in some form or another, there are also widespread concerns in introducing them in the current circumstances surrounding Covid-19, when pressures on Assembly time already exist and are increasing.

Following deliberations at its meeting on 18 November 2020, the Committee agreed to put its further consideration of Members' Statements on hold for now and to return to it when there's a more appropriate time to do so – perhaps later in the mandate when hopefully the current restrictions have been relaxed.

The Committee is minded to move quickly on this issue when the time comes, as the majority of Parties have now expressed their views.

I will of course write again to update you on the Committee's further consideration in due course.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'LD', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Linda Dillon MLA
Chairperson, Committee on Procedures.