

To: The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures

From: The Speaker

Date: 22 March 2021

Members' Statements

Your predecessor as Chairperson wrote to me in November 2020 in relation to the issue of Members' Statements. I was pleased to read that a majority of those who had responded to the Committee had indicated a need for a period of time in plenary for Members to put issues briefly on the record.

I noted the Committee's decision at that time to put its further consideration of Members' Statements on hold, to return to it at a more appropriate time and then move quickly when that time comes. Thankfully, the downward trend of COVID-19 infections is continuing, the scheduling of Assembly business has returned to normal and we look forward to restrictions being eased in due course. I would therefore respectfully suggest that now might be an appropriate time for the Committee to return to the issue of Members' Statements.

Over recent months I have received many applications for Matters of the Day that did not meet the necessary criteria but were still important matters if a Member had an appropriate opportunity to raise them. I would also note that considering requests for Matters of the Day and Urgent Questions involves significant time for Assembly officials and myself.

An item of business for Members' Statements would address the issue of the Assembly being unable to note such topical matters and might reduce the need to give thirty minutes of Assembly time to an individual issue under a Matter of the Day or an Urgent Question. It may also serve as a pressure valve to allow Members to air different issues which they will otherwise attempt to shoehorn into less directly relevant item of business or try to repackage as a Point of Order. I do not anticipate that Members' Statements would have a significant impact on the timing of other Assembly business, particularly as they may also reduce the need for Matters of the Day to be submitted or accepted. This approach would also allow a greater diversity of topical issues to be raised by Members at a single sitting.

I do not think the Committee would need to spend a long time on this proposal as it could be based on existing arrangements. The approach I currently take to calling Members on a Matter of the Day is not prescribed in Standing Orders. My approach is to invite Members who wish to speak to rise in their places in the Chamber. I then seek to ensure that Members from a wide range of parties are called. I recommend to the Committee that using the same approach for Members' Statements would give the Chair and Members maximum flexibility to respond to the circumstances of any given week while also ensuring that diverse voices are heard.

There is a high degree of synergy between the work of the Committee on Procedures and the work of the Speaker. I want the Committee to be clear that my door is open to it and that I am always keen to engage and provide the Committee with information to be as helpful as I can. Therefore, I am happy to write further to the Committee on any of the issues above that

it prioritises in its work programme. I will also continue to highlight areas which could be improved but which might require less time for the Committee to consider.