



**Northern Ireland  
Assembly**

**Committee on Procedures  
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The Speaker  
Office of the Speaker  
Room 39 Parliament Buildings  
Stormont  
Belfast BT4 3XX

26 February 2021

Dear Alex,

**Strategic Planning**

Since the return of the Assembly in January 2020 the Committee on Procedures has undertaken a number of important areas of work in relation to the Assembly's Standing Orders.

You will be aware of the Committee's amendments to Standing Orders to provide for the reduction of committee membership from eleven to nine and the amendment to Standing Order 45 which provides that a party can enter the Official Opposition under the Act up to 2 years following the formation of the Executive. The Committee has also reacted to the current Covid-19 pandemic and introduced temporary proceedings (Standing Orders 110-116) to allow Assembly and committee business to continue in these unforeseen circumstances. These include proxy voting provisions and more recently the introduction of hybrid proceedings in the chamber.

The Committee is now in a position to revisit the areas of work it may wish to consider for the remainder of the mandate. At its meeting on 17 February 2021, the Committee held a strategic planning session during which it agreed to continue its Inquiry on the Legislative Consent Motion procedures and its review to introduce proxy voting on a more permanent basis.

During its strategic planning session, the Committee discussed PMBs, including taking note of the volume of Private Members' Bill (PMBs) currently introduced or under development and considered that it may be a challenge for all of these PMBs to pass through the Assembly by the end of this mandate. The Committee also took cognisance of your request on 3 February 2020 which asked the Committee to consider amending provisions in Standing Orders so that further improvements to the PMB system could be in place after the 2022 election. The Committee had previously agreed it would be sensible to wait for a period of time before conducting this review, to assess how your key changes and guidance for the 2020-22 session had worked in practice. Therefore, prior to carrying out further work in relation to PMBs, the Committee would welcome an update from you in relation to these matters,

In addition, the Committee referred again to your letter of 16 September 2020 which sought an update on those parts of NDNA which the Committee will potentially have a role to play in. In particular, the Committee noted the commitment in NDNA that Standing Orders be amended to allow any person to conduct their

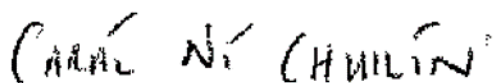
business before the Assembly or an Assembly Committee through Irish or Ulster Scots. You will recall that, in anticipation of an Executive legislative timetable which may have an impact on the current Standing Orders of the Assembly, the Committee previously wrote to the Executive to seek an update on the Executive's plans to bring forward legislation and the commitments within NDNA which will have an impact on the current Standing Orders of the Assembly. To date, the Committee has not received an update from the Executive.

Whilst the Committee acknowledges that the Covid-19 pandemic has impacted on the progression of issues, the Committee is of the view that a considerable amount of time has passed since I first wrote to the Executive in February 2020. The Committee is also of the view that it needs to be informed of any forthcoming legislation in order to effectively be able to prioritise and plan its work for the remainder of the mandate.

Irrespective of any response from the Executive, the Committee will wish to consider the issue of Standing Orders to allow any person to conduct their business before the Assembly or an Assembly Committee through Irish or Ulster Scots. Should the Committee decide to prioritise this area of work and draft amendments, the provisions could potentially go beyond Members speaking in the chamber or committees in Irish or Ulster Scots and the Committee may therefore look at the conduct of other Assembly business. The Committee noted that NDNA provides that a simultaneous translation system should be made available in the Assembly to ensure that a person without Irish or Ulster Scots is not placed at a disadvantage. The Committee acknowledges that the Assembly Commission will have responsibility for providing such services and therefore would intend to liaise closely with the Commission on these matters as required.

I hope you find this update helpful.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "CARÁL NÍ CHUÍLIN". The letters are slightly slanted and connected in a cursive style.

**Carál Ní Chuílin MLA**  
**Chairperson, Committee on Procedures.**