



**Northern Ireland
Assembly**

Committee on Procedures

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From: Emer Boyle, Clerk to the Committee on Procedures
To: Alex McGarel, Clerk to the Business Committee
Cc:
Date: 05 October 2021
Subject: Committee on Procedures Ongoing Inquiry – Private Members’ Bills (PMBs)

1. At its meeting on 21 April 2021, the Committee on Procedures agreed ToRs for its Inquiry into PMBs. The Committee also received a briefing from RaISe and from the Bill Office in May and June 2021 and agreed to undertake a consultation, seeking views on the ToRs.
2. Correspondence was then sent to all Parties and Independent MLAs during the summer recess and was followed up by a reminder in mid-September 2021, highlighting the deadline of 13th October 2021.
3. Given the recent presentation to CLG on the volume of work within Committees at present, it would be useful to have the Business Committee’s views on this Inquiry.
4. I would be grateful for a response from the Business Committee on the attached terms of reference for the ongoing Inquiry into PMBs. To afford the Business Committee adequate time for consideration, could I suggest a further month and would request a response by Fri 12th November.

Emer Boyle
Enc.

Committee on Procedures Inquiry into Private Members' Bill (PMBs)

The Northern Ireland Assembly Committee on Procedures is undertaking an inquiry into the current procedures and support for Private Members' Bills offered by the Northern Ireland Assembly.

The Terms of Reference for the inquiry are below; and are supported by a briefing paper from the Bill Office outlining the current procedures in the Northern Ireland Assembly and a research paper on procedures and practices in other jurisdictions.

- (i) To examine whether the system of support currently in place for PMBs is fair, appropriate and a good use of public resources.
- (ii) To compare and contrast any variations and limitations of the right to table PMBs in other legislatures.
- (iii) To review whether the current arrangements are equitable or whether they could be improved by requiring a consistent level of involvement of the Bill Office as well as public consultation prior to the PMB being submitted.
- (iv) To consider whether committees, if they so choose, should be able to include the sponsor of a PMB as an ex-officio member of that committee during the appropriate stages of the passage of the PMB in order to allow the sponsor to ask questions of witnesses and thus provide necessary clarity to the committee.
- (v) To outline whether there are any issues arising from the nature of the special circumstances of the Assembly which need to be taken into account, and, based on the above to consider whether provision should be made in Standing Orders to clarify:
 - a. Whether there should be scheduled / dedicated plenary days for PMB business;
 - b. Whether there should be mechanisms by which a proposal must pass a simple majority or other measure of support before being provided with resources to be developed further; and
 - c. Whether there could be arrangements to allow Members to legislate as a group and for all their names to be attached to it
- (vi) How Assembly plenary time might be maximised and prioritised towards the end of the mandate, when the level of PMBs and Executive legislation are likely to create significant pressures on Assembly business.