



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Business Office Guide to Services

March 2017

INTRODUCTION

The Business Office provides services to Members in relation to:

- Motions for inclusion on the No Day Named List
- Amendments to Motions
- Oral Questions
- Written Questions
- Questions for Urgent Oral Answer
- Adjournment Debates
- Matters of the Day

The leaflet introduces each of these services and highlights any associated deadlines.

MOTIONS

A motion is a means by which a Member or Members can initiate an Assembly debate, in which a course of action is proposed and/or an Assembly decision sought on a relevant issue. Motions may be tabled by Ministers (on behalf of the Executive), Committee Chairs and Deputy Chairs (on behalf of Committees) and by private Members.

Motions can be tabled in the Business Office at any time when the office is open. A motion may not be tabled during recess. Motions received **before 4.00pm** will appear on the daily list of motions and amendments for that day. Motions for consideration by the Business Committee, if not already on the No Day Named List, should be **tabled by 12 noon** on the Tuesday the Business Committee is scheduled to meet. Motions may be tabled in hard copy, or by email to business.office@niassembly.gov.uk

They should be tabled by the Member(s) in whose name(s) they are to appear, or on their behalf by an authorised member of staff. A Member tabling a motion should also suggest a short title that summarises the motion, and this will appear on the No Day Named List and on the Order Paper.

AMENDMENTS TO MOTIONS

The objective of an amendment may be to modify a motion so as to increase its acceptability to the Assembly, in the opinion of the tabling Member(s), or to present to the Assembly a different (but related) proposition as an alternative to the original motion.

Amendments can be tabled in the Business Office at any time when the office is open. Amendments may not be tabled during recess. Amendments may be tabled in hard copy, or by email to business.office@niassembly.gov.uk. They should be tabled by the Member(s) in whose name(s) they are to appear, but they may also be tabled on behalf of a Member by one of their authorised staff.

Members may table proposed amendments as soon as a motion appears on the daily list of motions. However, after a motion appears on the Order Paper, the following **deadlines** apply:

- Motions scheduled for debate at a Monday sitting: Amendments must be tabled in the Business Office no later than **9.30am** on the preceding Thursday.
- Motions scheduled for debate at a Tuesday sitting: Amendments must be tabled in the Business Office no later than **9.30am** on the preceding Friday.

QUESTIONS FOR ORAL ANSWER

The purpose of Assembly questions is to ask for information or to press for action. Questions may be asked of a Minister or a Member representing the Assembly Commission.

Question Time (**questions for oral answer**) takes place in the Assembly from 2.00pm on those Mondays and Tuesdays on which the Assembly is sitting. Ministers from four Departments participate in Question Time each week, with two slots on Monday and two slots on Tuesday. Question Time comprises 30 minutes of questions listed for oral answer, followed by 15 minutes of topical questions. A rota, approved by the Business Committee, is published on AsslSt and is available from the Business Office. The rota sets out the dates on which specific Ministers and Members representing the Assembly Commission are scheduled to answer questions. The Question Time rota also indicates the deadlines for submission of Members' names for the oral and topical questions ballots, and the deadline for the submission of questions for oral answer.

Members wishing to table a question for oral answer should arrange for their names to be submitted to the Business Office for inclusion in the question ballot, by the **deadline of 1.00pm each Tuesday**. Members successful in this ballot are notified by the Business Office and have until the **deadline of 1.00pm on the Thursday** to submit the text of their questions for publication in the list of questions for oral answer.

TOPICAL QUESTIONS

Members wishing to ask a topical (unseen) question, should arrange for their names to be submitted to the Business Office for inclusion in the topical questions ballot, by **the deadline of 10.30am each Wednesday**. The names of the 10 Members successful in the ballot will be published by 1.00pm that day. Topical questions are not tabled in the Business Office, notified to Ministers or published in advance.

QUESTIONS FOR WRITTEN ANSWER

Members may table questions for written answer on any day the Business Office is open. Questions may not be tabled during recess.

Members, or their authorised representatives, may table up to 5 questions for written answer per day, one of which may be a question for priority written answer in 2, 3, 4 or 5 working days. Non-priority questions for written answer are normally due for answer 10 working days after the day of publication. Questions for written answer are tabled using the AIMS self-service system **<https://NIA.services>**. Questions may also be submitted in hard copy in the Business Office or by email to members.questions@niassembly.gov.uk

Questions received by **3.00pm** will appear on the daily list of questions. Questions received after 3.00pm will be included on the next day's daily list.

QUESTIONS FOR URGENT ORAL ANSWER

On any sitting day, a Member may seek leave of the Speaker to ask a question for urgent oral answer, where the question:

- is of an urgent nature; and
- relates to a matter of public importance.

The selection of a question for urgent oral answer is at the discretion of the Speaker, however, the Minister, (or Member of the Assembly Commission) to whom it is addressed must be given a minimum of four hours notice. Questions for urgent oral answer are usually taken after Question Time. A question for urgent oral answer may be tabled in hard copy or by email, by Members, authorised staff or their party whip, to business.office@niassembly.gov.uk by **10.30am on a sitting day**.

ADJOURNMENT DEBATES

The purpose of an adjournment debate is to promote discussion on a matter without requiring the Assembly to come to a decision. They are usually, but not exclusively, constituency focused and fall into an area for which a Minister has responsibility.

Adjournment topics can be tabled in the Business Office at any time when the office is open. Topics for adjournment debates may not be tabled during recess. A Member may not table more than one adjournment topic per week, and the topic must be tabled at least eight calendar days before it is debated.

Adjournment topics may be tabled in hard copy, or by email to business.office@niassembly.gov.uk. Adjournment debate topics received by **4.00pm** will be published on the daily list of topics for adjournment debate. A weekly adjournment debate list is considered by the Business Committee comprising all the topics received in the previous week up to **12 noon on the day** (usually Tuesday) **that the Business Committee meets.**

MATTERS OF THE DAY

On any sitting day, a Member may seek leave of the Speaker to make a statement to the Assembly on a subject which:

- relates to a matter which occurred and has come to public attention since the Assembly last stood adjourned;
- relates to a matter which is of exceptional public interest; and
- relates to a matter which directly affects the people of Northern Ireland.

The specific subject matter of the proposed statement should not be scheduled for consideration by the Assembly. Matters of the Day may be tabled in hard copy, or by email, by Members, authorised staff or their party whip, to business.office@niassembly.gov.uk by **9.30am on a sitting day.**

SUBORDINATE LEGISLATION AND DOCUMENTS LAID AND PRESENTED

The Business Office also provides services to Departments and other bodies and organisations in relation to laying and presenting documents and subordinate legislation.

Copies of:

- Documents Laid and Presented; and
- Statutory Rules

are available from the Business Office.

FURTHER ADVICE

More detailed advice is available from the Business Office, in Room 32 of Parliament Buildings. The office is open Monday to Friday from 9.00am to 5.00pm, or until the Assembly rises, whichever is later. Members are welcome to seek advice on any of the services provided by the Business Office.

The Clerks of Business can be contacted as follows:

Roisin Kelly Tel: (028 905) 21398

Alex McGarel Tel: (028 905) 21534

Ali Ross Tel: (028 905) 21436

The Senior Assistant Clerk responsible for the Business Office Table Section, Nick Mitford Tel: (028 905) 21257, can also provide advice.

KEY BUSINESS OFFICE DEADLINES

ASSEMBLY QUESTIONS

<i>Names for oral question ballot</i>	Tuesday 1.00pm.
<i>Names for topical question ballot</i>	Wednesday 10.30am.
<i>Text of oral question</i>	Thursday 1.00pm.
<i>Text of written questions</i>	3.00pm each day.

MOTIONS

<i>For publication on the daily list</i>	4.00pm each day.
<i>For inclusion on the No Day Named List and consideration by the Business Committee</i>	12 noon on Tuesday.

MATTERS OF THE DAY

<i>For consideration by the Speaker</i>	9.30am each sitting day.
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URGENT ORAL QUESTIONS

<i>For consideration by the Speaker</i>	10.30am each sitting day.
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ADJOURNMENT DEBATES

<i>For publication on the daily list</i>	4.00pm daily.
<i>For inclusion on the weekly list and consideration by the Business Committee</i>	12 noon on Tuesday and at least 8 calendar days before it is debated.

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