

MEETING OF THE CHAIRPERSONS' LIAISON GROUP
TUESDAY 17 JUNE 2014

Present: Mr Robin Swann MLA (Chairperson)
Mr Michaela Boyle MLA
Mr Paul Frew MLA
Mr Paul Givan MLA
Mrs Anna Lo MLA
Miss Michelle McIlveen MLA
Ms Maeve McLaughlin MLA
Mr Jimmy Spratt MLA

In attendance: Dr Gareth McGrath, Director of Clerking
Mrs Nuala Dunwoody, Clerk Assistant
Mr Damien Martin, Clerk Assistant
Mrs Kathy O'Hanlon, Clerk to the Liaison Group
Mr Oliver Bellew, Assistant Assembly Clerk
Mr Michael Greer, Clerical Supervisor

Apologies: Mr Patsy McGlone MLA
Mr Alex Maskey MLA

12.52pm The Clerk took the Chair for the nomination of a temporary Chairperson.

Miss McIlveen proposed that Mr Spratt be elected temporary Chairperson. The proposal was seconded by Mr Frew.

Agreed: Chairpersons agreed that Mr Spratt be appointed temporary Chairperson.

1. Apologies

Apologies are listed above.

2. Minutes of the meeting on 13th May 2014

The minutes of the meeting held on 13th May 2014 were agreed.

3. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

4. Publication of Committee Documents

Chairpersons noted a paper by the Clerk in relation to the publication of committee documents. The Clerk briefed members on the Assembly's current position and gave an outline of practices in other jurisdictions. Chairpersons noted that any committee is free to publish documents that it has received, provided there are no embargoes or other restrictions in respect of confidentiality.

12.53pm The Chairperson joined the meeting and assumed the Chair

Agreed: Chairpersons agreed that the most resource efficient approach to the publication of information is to encourage committees to:

- publish written submissions relating to inquiries or Bills on receipt;
- publish papers relating to matters of public interest on their website under subject headings; and
- make papers not subject to confidentiality restrictions available on request.

5. Guide to submitting written evidence to Assembly Committees

12.51pm Miss McIlveen joined the meeting

Chairpersons noted a paper by the Clerk in relation to the publication of personal details contained within written submissions received by committees. The Clerk informed members that a consistent approach to this matter is required across all committees and that -the Assembly's Information Standards Officer had advised that personal data should not be published without clear consent.

Mr Spratt suggested that committees may wish to seek legal advice on submissions that they consider may be defamatory. It was also noted that anonymous submissions should not be accepted.

Agreed: Chairpersons noted and agreed that the 'Guide to Submitting Written Evidence to Assembly Committees' would be amended to advise that data which is considered to be of a personal nature will not be published.

6. Strategic Planning

Damien Martin, Clerk Assistant, outlined guidance on strategic planning for committees for the 2014-15 Assembly session. Chairpersons advised that they considered the strategic planning days held by committees at the beginning of the current session to be successful, as they enabled members to focus on establishing the committee's priorities for the session. It was noted that committee members are enthusiastic about scheduling similar planning days for the coming session.

7. 2013-14 Committee Expenditure & 2014-15 Committee Budget

Chairpersons noted a briefing paper by the Clerk detailing the indicative spend by committees during the 2013-14 financial year and also the budget for the 2014-15 year.

1.15pm Mr Givan left the meeting

1.19pm Ms McLaughlin left the meeting

Chairpersons expressed concern at the budget for committee travel and committee expenses for 2014-15, given that the outturn for the previous financial year was notably

higher for both budget headings. Chairpersons commented that, whilst committees needed to remain aware of budgetary pressures, key areas such as committee travel should not be restricted as they assist committee's work and can have greater financial benefits for the wider economy. Chairpersons also noted the budgetary provision for professional services, which includes special advisers.

Agreed: Chairpersons agreed that the budget should be closely monitored by the Clerk and Clerk Assistants, particularly in relation to committee travel and committee expenses.

8. Business Efficiency Programme – Update

Nuala Dunwoody, Clerk Assistant, updated members on the Business Efficiency Program and in particular the new Senior Assistant Assembly Clerk (SAAC) position.

Chairpersons noted that two pilots had been conducted to test the effectiveness of the new role and that whilst one pilot had been successful in the Business Office and Procedures Committee, the committee office equivalent needed to be re-assessed. As a result, a further pilot is being conducted in the Committees for Finance and Personnel and OFMDFM.

Nuala informed Chairs that a recruitment competition had begun for the permanent recruitment of five new SAACs in line with BEP recommendations.

Chairpersons commented on the need for stability in committee teams particularly during the consideration of bills and inquiries and noted their concern at the level of staffing changes that had taken place; such staffing changes may impact on the work of a committee.

1.29pm Mr Frew and Ms McIlveen left the meeting

As the quorum had been lost, the meeting was limited to taking briefings.

Chairpersons were asked to notify the Clerk Assistants and CLG of concerns or issues about the impact of this process.

9. Broadcasting of Committee Meetings

Chairpersons were briefed by the Clerk on broadcasting arrangements for committee meetings. The Clerk informed the Group that only three live streams were available for broadcasting committee and Assembly business at any one time but that recordings could be made for four meetings simultaneously.

Chairpersons commented that there was a need to ensure a form of rotation amongst the committees being streamed live on a weekly basis, and that committees should be advised when their meeting will not be streamed live.

10. Date, time and venue of next meeting

The next meeting of the Liaison Group is scheduled to take place on Tuesday 16 September 2014 at 12.45pm in Room 21, Parliament Buildings.

1.41pm The Chairperson adjourned the meeting.

Mr Patsy McGlone, Chairperson

16 September 2014