

MEETING OF THE CHAIRPERSONS' LIAISON GROUP

TUESDAY 3 MARCH 2015

- Present: Mr Patsy McGlone MLA (Chairperson)
Mrs Anna Lo MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr William Irwin MLA
Mr Nelson McCausland MLA
Miss Michelle McIlveen MLA
Mr Daithí McKay MLA
Mr Stephen Moutray MLA
Mr Mike Nesbitt MLA
Mr Robin Swann MLA
- In attendance: Mrs Nuala Dunwoody, Clerk Assistant
Mr Damien Martin, Clerk Assistant
Mr Trevor Allen, Senior Assistant Clerk
Mr Oliver Bellew, Assistant Assembly Clerk
Mr George McClelland, Clerical Supervisor
Mr Michael Greer, Clerical Supervisor
Mr Kevin Shiels, Politics Plus (Agenda item four only)
- Apologies: Mrs Michaela Boyle MLA
Mr Jimmy Spratt MLA

12.50pm The meeting opened in closed session.

1. Apologies

Apologies are listed above.

2. Minutes of the meeting on 27th January 2015

The minutes of the meeting held on 27th January 2015 were agreed.

3. Matters Arising

Broadcasting of Committee Meetings

Chairpersons noted an update on the broadcasting arrangements for the duration of the existing broadcasting contract. Members were advised that the Justice Committee had agreed to move its weekly meeting from a Wednesday afternoon to a Thursday afternoon.

12.52pm Mr McCausland joined the meeting

Mobile Phone Connectivity

Chairpersons noted that the Assembly Procurement Office was involved in discussions with the current mobile phone service provider in relation to network coverage in Parliament Buildings. The Group was advised that an independent survey commissioned by Building Services deemed that, due to the structure of the Building, no award to a single service provider would be likely to result in significant improvements and would fall short of 100% coverage. Members were advised that the only solution to improving the signal for the phones would be to install boosters within the building. It is anticipated that there would be a significant cost in installing these boosters but that the Procurement Office was involved in discussions with the service provider to ascertain the degree to which they would be prepared to meet the costs. Chairpersons were advised that the Assembly Commission would consider the next steps once this information was made available.

12.56pm Mr McKay joined the meeting

Agreed: Members discussed the ongoing difficulties with the phone reception and indicated that they were also experiencing interference from the mobile phones when they were using their landlines. It was agreed that the Clerk Assistants' Office would also raise this issue with Building Services. The Clerk Assistants' Office agreed to provide a further update on this issue in due course and, in the interim, to investigate the possibility of using applications that would make use of the wireless network to make calls and to send and receive texts.

12.59pm Miss McIlveen joined the meeting

Timescales for Interaction between Assembly Committees and Departments

Chairpersons noted correspondence from the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister relating to timescales for interaction between Assembly committees and departments.

Agreed: It was agreed that chairpersons would keep a watching brief on the timeliness of correspondence and papers from departments, and report any persistent difficulties to the Clerk Assistants' Office.

4. Politics Plus - update

Kevin Shiels, Politics Plus, updated chairpersons on the joint initiative with chairpersons from the Welsh Assembly, which took place in Parliament Buildings at the end of January.

Chairpersons noted that a report on the event had been produced and would be circulated to them, through their Clerks, once it had been cleared by the chairpersons who had taken part in the initiative.

1.08pm Mr Swann joined the meeting

Chairpersons who had taken part in the event shared their experiences with the Group.

5. Budget 2015/16 and SP15+- update

Gareth McGrath, Director of Clerking and Reporting, updated chairpersons on discussions which had taken place in relation to the budget allocation for 2015/16 and subsequent years. Members noted that a strategic and financial planning exercise was underway and that its findings would be relayed to the Group when they became available.

1.19pm Mr Moutray left the meeting

1.27pm Mr Nesbitt and Mr Irwin left the meeting

1.28pm Miss McIlveen left the meeting

Agreed: The Clerk Assistants' Office undertook to clarify the availability for Assembly Secretariat Staff to avail of the Civil Service's Voluntary Exist Scheme (VES).

6. Guidance on oaths in committee

Chairpersons noted a paper by Damien Martin, Clerk Assistant, in relation to draft guidance for committees wishing to take evidence from witnesses under oath.

Agreed: Members discussed the issue of witnesses under oath appearing before committees in more than session/meeting. It was agreed that the guidance would be updated to reflect the discussions.

7. Forward Work Programme

Agreed: Chairpersons noted, and agreed, the draft forward work programme, subject to an amendment to reflect the decision to hold the next meeting of the Group in April 2015.

8. Any other business

There was no other business.

9. Date, time and venue of next meeting

The next meeting of the Liaison Group is scheduled to take place on Tuesday 14 April 2015 at 12.45pm in Room 21, Parliament Buildings.

1.40pm The Chairperson adjourned the meeting.

Mr Patsy McGlone, Chairperson

14 April 2015