

MEETING OF THE CHAIRPERSONS' LIAISON GROUP

TUESDAY 27 JANUARY 2015

Present: Mr Patsy McGlone MLA (Chairperson)
Mrs Anna Lo MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Mrs Michaela Boyle MLA
Mr Nelson McCausland MLA
Miss Michelle McIlveen MLA
Ms Maeve McLaughlin MLA
Mr Alex Maskey MLA
Mr Stephen Moutray MLA
Mr Jimmy Spratt MLA
Mr Robin Swann MLA

In attendance: Mr Trevor Reaney, Clerk/Chief Executive
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

Apologies: Mr Gerry Kelly MLA
Mr Daithí McKay MLA
Mr Alastair Ross MLA

12.50pm The meeting opened in closed session.

1. Apologies

Apologies are listed above.

2. Minutes of the meeting on 9th December 2014

The minutes of the meeting held on 9th December 2014 were agreed.

3. Matters Arising

Clerks mobile phone reception in Parliament Buildings

Members commented on the lack of reception for mobile phones recently issued to all committee clerks and the problems which had arisen as a result of the inability to contact clerks at certain times.

The Chairperson advised members that he had asked an Assembly Question in relation to the mobile phone reception issue. The Chief Executive advised the Group that he had been made aware of the situation and that work was ongoing to find a resolution to the problem.

Agreed: It was agreed that the Group would be provided with an update on progress as soon as possible.

12.53pm Mr McCausland joined the meeting

4. Budget 2015-16

Chairpersons received a briefing from the Clerk Assistants in relation to the recent ministerial budget statement which advised of reductions in the Commission's budget for 2015-16 and subsequent years. Damien Martin, Clerk Assistant, advised members that consideration is being given to how the necessary savings will be delivered and that the Liaison Group will be engaged throughout the process.

12.55pm Mr Maskey joined the meeting

Members noted that updates will be provided at future meetings of the Group.

12.58pm Mr Swann joined the meeting

The Chief Executive advised members that difficult decisions will be required and that significant efficiencies will have to be achieved in order to deliver on the required budget reductions, but that any efficiency should not result in the creation of additional roles or responsibilities for existing staff.

12.59pm Mr Spratt joined the meeting

5. Corporate project to cease printing Committee Reports

Chairpersons noted a briefing paper from the Senior Assistant Clerk in relation to the corporate project to cease printing committee reports in favour of online publication. Members noted that the project had been introduced as a result of the Committee Review Group's recommendation to cease the publication of reports in hard copy and move to online reports. It was noted that it would be important to avoid creating additional work for staff at a time of declining staff resources. Damien Martin, Clerk Assistant confirmed that the changes can be made without generating additional work for Assembly staff.

Agreed: It was agreed that Chairpersons would be updated at the meeting in April.

6. Broadcasting of Committee Meetings

Chairpersons noted a tabled paper by the Clerk Assistant that outlined the impact on committees of proposed changes to the Assembly's broadcasting contract. Chairpersons noted the extent of the additional work which had been carried out by the service provider to date, at no extra cost to the Assembly.

Members discussed the implication of the changes, which have been agreed by the Assembly Commission.

1.10pm Ms McLaughlin joined the meeting

Damien Martin, Clerk Assistant, advised the Group that Chairpersons would be contacted individually in relation to possible changes to meeting days and venues.

Miss McIlveen asked that consideration be given to the potential to rotate committee rooms when considering changes to meeting days and times.

1.15pm Miss McIlveen left the meeting

1.16pm Mr Moutray left the meeting

1.17pm The Chairperson left the meeting; the Deputy Chairperson assumed the Chair

Agreed: It was agreed that the Clerk Assistants would speak to Chairpersons individually to resolve the issue and that CLG would be updated thereafter.

7. Timescales for interaction between Assembly Committees and Departments

Members received a briefing from the Clerk Assistant and noted a final draft of the revised guidelines on timescales for interaction between Assembly Committees and Departments. Chairpersons noted that the draft guidelines had been produced following consultation between Clerk Assistants and OFMDFM officials and has been considered at Permanent Secretary level within departments. Damien Martin advised Chairpersons that, where issues relating to delays in issuing correspondence persisted and could not be resolved through conversations with DALOs or Permanent Secretaries, such issues might be brought before CLG. Chairpersons were advised that adherence to the guidance will be monitored.

Agreed: The draft guidance was agreed by the Liaison Group. It was further agreed that the agreed guidance be forwarded to the Executive for approval.

8. Analysis of Committee Strategic Plans

Members received a briefing from the Senior Assistant Clerk and noted a paper relating to the outcome of the recent round of strategic planning sessions by committees. The paper provided an analysis of strategic plans developed by the twelve statutory committees and the Public Accounts Committee.

1.28pm Ms McLaughlin left the meeting

1.38pm Mr Spratt left the meeting

Chairpersons discussed the merits of holding external committee meetings and how the success of such visits could be measured.

Agreed: It was agreed that the Clerk Assistants would give consideration to measuring the impact of holding external committee meetings and visits and to ascertain their impact in other jurisdictions.

9. Forward Work Programme

Agreed: Chairpersons noted, and agreed, the draft forward work programme.

10. Any other business

There was no other business.

11. Date, time and venue of next meeting

The next meeting of the Liaison Group is scheduled to take place on Tuesday 3 March 2015 at 12.45pm in Room 21, Parliament Buildings.

1.42pm The Chairperson adjourned the meeting.

Mr Patsy McGlone, Chairperson
3 March 2015