

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY
BUSINESS COMMITTEE

TUESDAY 3 MARCH 2020
IN ROOM 106, PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS

MINUTES

The meeting began at 1.05pm.

Present:

The Speaker (Chairperson)
Ms K Armstrong
Ms C Bailey
Mr K Buchanan
Ms S Ennis
Ms D Kelly
Mr C McGrath
Mr G Middleton
Mr A Muir
Mr J O'Dowd
Mr J Stewart

In attendance:

Dr A McGarel	Clerk of Business
Mr P Gill	Clerk Assistant
Ms L Hogg	Clerk/Chief Executive
Mr J McMillan	Head of Legal Services
Dr G McGrath	Director of Parliamentary Services
Mr R Ramsey	Adviser to the Speaker
Mr P Stitt	PS to the Speaker
Ms P Devlin	Assistant Assembly Clerk
Mr M O'Hare	Clerical Supervisor

Observers:

Mr D Kearney	Junior Minister
Mr G Lyons	Junior Minister
Ms K Morrison	Executive Office

1 Apologies

1.1 Apologies were received from Robbie Butler.

2 **Minutes of previous meetings**

2.1 The minutes of the meeting on 25 February 2020 were agreed.

3 **Matters Arising**

3.1 There were no matters arising.

4 **Finalisation of the Order Papers for plenary meeting on 9 & 10 March 2020**

Monday 9 March

Assembly Business

- 4.1 Members **noted** that a motion to amend Committee membership which had been tabled by the SDLP had been added to the draft Order Paper.
- 4.2 Members **agreed** that a further Committee membership motion for Sinn Fein should be added to the draft Order Paper.

Executive Committee Business

- 4.3 Members **noted** that four motions seeking the Assembly's approval for Statutory Rules, subject to confirmatory resolution, have been scheduled for the Minister for Communities.
- 4.4 Members **noted** that Final Stage of the Budget Bill has been scheduled ahead of the Communities motions at the request of the Executive.
- 4.5 Members **noted** that Question Time will be between 2pm and 3.30pm, and will be for the Minister for Communities and the Minister for the Economy.
- 4.6 Members **noted** that there had been notification of an Oral Statement from the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs on Green Growth, which was included in indicative timings.
- 4.7 Members **agreed** the draft Order Paper for Monday 9 March.

Tuesday 10 March

Executive Committee Business

- 4.8 Members **noted** that that one item of Business has been scheduled for the Communities Minister; a motion to approve regulations subject to confirmatory procedure on the Pensions Schemes Act 2015.
- 4.9 Members **noted** that Question Time would be scheduled for the Ministers of Education and Finance. Members **further noted** that a letter had been received from the Finance Minister advising that a prior commitment may result in him not being in the chamber for his question slot, and that he had made provision for the Communities Minister, Deirdre Hargey, to respond to questions on his behalf, should this occur.

Private Members' Business

- 4.10 Members **noted** that two Private Members' motions, Independent Review of Education and Childcare Strategy, and an adjournment debate on Expansion of Ulster University, Magee Campus, had been scheduled.
- 4.11 Junior Minister Lyons confirmed that Ministers would be available to respond to the private members' motions but the Economy Minister would not be available to respond to the adjournment debate.
- 4.12 Members **agreed** to defer the adjournment debate on Expansion of Ulster University, Magee Campus, until 24 March 2020.
- 4.13 Members **agreed** to schedule an all-party motion on Mental Health in the Workplace for a one hour debate. The Minister would be allocated 10 minutes to respond to the debate with 5 minutes for all other speakers. Junior Minister Lyons advised that the Education Minister would respond on behalf of the Minister for the Economy.
- 4.14 Members **agreed** the draft Order Paper for Tuesday 10 March.

5 Provisional arrangements for plenary meeting on 16 March

- 5.1 Members **noted** that because 17 March would be a public holiday, they had been provided with one draft provisional Order Paper for Monday 16 March.

Monday 16 March

Assembly Business

- 5.2 Members **noted** that Assembly Commission has requested a motion to debate its 2020-2021 budget, and advised that one hour should be sufficient time for debate. Members **noted** that the text of the motion is still to be confirmed.
- 5.3 Members **agreed** to schedule this motion.

Executive Committee Business

- 5.4 Members **noted** that a motion has been scheduled by the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to approve regulations subject to confirmatory procedure on Direct Payments to Farmers, and that whilst such items are by convention untimed, the indicative timing of 30 minutes reflects feedback from the Committee Clerk.
- 5.5 Members **noted** that a motion has been scheduled by the Minister of Finance on the Publication of the Renewable Heat Incentive Inquiry Report.
- 5.6 Member **agreed** to the Department of Finance's request to allocate a three-hour debate.
- 5.7 Members **noted** that Question Time is scheduled for the Executive Office and the Minister of Health.
- 5.8 Members **noted** that correspondence has been received from the Executive Office requesting to switch this slot on 16 March with the Minister for Infrastructure on 23 March, and that the Infrastructure Minister has agreed to this switch.
- 5.9 Members **agreed** that the Executive Office and Infrastructure Minister swap time slots.

Private Members' Business

- 5.10 Members **noted** that Mr Allister has requested that the Second Stage of his Functioning of Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill (NIA Bill 01/17-22) is scheduled.
- 5.11 Members **noted** that by convention this item would be untimed.
- 5.12 Members **agreed** that this item would be scheduled.

- 5.13 Members discussed timeframes for debates related to legislation which are by convention untimed, and **agreed** to consider the matter further upon receipt of the research paper which had been requested by the Committee.

6 Any Other Business

Order Papers and provisional Order Papers

- 6.1 Members **noted** that a request had been received from one of the parties for both Order Papers and Provisional Order Papers to be circulated to Members on Tuesday after Business Committee rather than on Wednesday, as would be the norm. Members **agreed** to this change.

Mr Trevor Lunn

- 6.2 Members **noted** that on 27 February 2020, Mr Trevor Lunn MLA informed the Speaker that he wished to change his party affiliation from Alliance to an independent Member and that this will take effect from 5 March.
- 6.3 Members **noted** that Standing Orders require the Business Committee to review the allocation of committee seats (on both statutory and standing committees) as soon as practicable following any numerical changes to party membership in the Assembly.
- 6.4 Members **noted** that a briefing paper explaining the procedural implications of Mr Lunn's decision had been prepared by the Clerk Assistant and was tabled. The Clerk Assistant summarised the main findings of this paper.
- 6.5 Members **noted** that following Mr Lunn's decision, the Alliance Party will now be entitled to six seats on statutory committees, a reduction of one seat, and three seats on standing committees, also a reduction of one.
- 6.6 The Alliance Party Whip advised Members that her party was content to relinquish its seat on the Committee for the Executive Office, which is currently occupied by Mr. Lunn, so that he can retain his place on that Committee.
- 6.7 Members **agreed** to await clarity on Mr. Lunn's position before taking decisions on standing committee membership and other procedural matters.

Research Paper

- 6.8 Members **noted** that research into practices in other legislatures on the timings of debates on legislation, which was requested by the Committee at its meeting of 17 February, has been delayed due to competing pressures.

7 **Date and time of next meeting**

- 7.1 Members **agreed** that the next meeting would take place at 1pm on Tuesday 10 March in Room 106.

The Chairperson brought the meeting to a close at 1.33pm

The Speaker
Chairperson