

**NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY**  
**BUSINESS COMMITTEE**

**MONDAY 16 MARCH 2020**  
**IN ROOM 106, PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS**

**MINUTES**

*The meeting began at 6.04pm.*

**Present:**

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

**In attendance:**

<b>Dr A McGarel</b>	<b>Clerk of Business</b>
<b>Mr P Gill</b>	<b>Clerk Assistant</b>
<b>Ms T Caul</b>	<b>Director of Legal, Governance and Research Services</b>
<b>Ms L Hogg</b>	<b>Clerk/Chief Executive</b>
<b>Mr J McMillan</b>	<b>Head of Legal Services</b>
<b>Dr G McGrath</b>	<b>Director of Parliamentary Services</b>
<b>Mr R Ramsey</b>	<b>Adviser to the Speaker</b>
<b>Mr P Stitt</b>	<b>PS to the Speaker</b>
<b>Ms P Devlin</b>	<b>Assistant Assembly Clerk</b>
<b>Mr M O'Hare</b>	<b>Clerical Supervisor</b>

**Observers:**

<b>Mr D Kearney</b>	<b>Junior Minister</b>
<b>Ms K Morrison</b>	<b>Executive Office</b>

**1 Apologies**

1.1 Apologies were received from John Stewart.

## 2 **Minutes of previous meetings**

2.1 The minutes of the meeting on 10 March 2020 were agreed.

## 3 **Matters Arising**

3.1 There were no matters arising.

## 4 **Finalisation of the Order Papers for plenary meetings on week commencing 23 March 2020**

4.1 Members discussed the emerging public health situation, and **agreed** that although they would schedule plenary business for the next two weeks in the usual way, they did so with the caveat that non-essential business was subject to immediate removal if the situation progressed and Order Papers would be changed and agreed electronically should it become necessary.

### **Monday 23 March**

#### **Assembly Business**

4.2 Members **noted** that no Assembly Business was scheduled.

#### **Executive Committee Business**

4.3 Members **noted** that a motion has been scheduled by the Minister for Communities to ask the Assembly to affirm The Pneumoconiosis, etc., (Workers' Compensation) (Payment of Claims) (Amendment) Regulations (NI) 2020.

4.4 Member **noted** that Question Time is scheduled for the Executive Office and the Minister of Justice.

4.5 Junior Ministers/TEO Officials advised that they were not aware of any additional business at that time.

#### **Committee Business**

4.6 Members **noted** that the Committee on Procedures has scheduled a motion to amend Standing Orders 49(2)(a) and 52(2)(a) which will formalise the decision to reduce the number of Members on Committees from 11 to 9 and that the debate is limited to one hour.

- 4.7 Members agreed that ten minutes would be allowed for the motion to be moved, ten minutes to wind and 5 for all other speakers.

#### Private Members' Business

- 4.8 Members **noted** that a Private Members' motion had already been selected.
- 4.9 Members **agreed** to schedule a further Private Members' motion with the usual timings.
- 4.10 The following motion was selected by Sinn Fein:
- Minibus Licencing
- 4.11 Junior Ministers/TEO Officials advised that Ministers were available to respond to the proposed business.
- 4.12 Members **agreed** the draft Order Paper for 23 March 2020.

### **Tuesday 24 March**

#### Public Petition

- 4.13 Members **agreed** that Paula Bradshaw could present a public petition on Making Pancreatic Cancer a Survivable Disease.

#### Assembly Business

- 4.14 Members **noted** that Question Time was scheduled for the Assembly Commission, which would add an additional 30 minutes to Question Time.

#### Executive Committee Business

- 4.15 Members **noted** that Question Time is scheduled for the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs and the Minister for Communities.
- 4.16 Junior Ministers/TEO officials advised that the Executive may request to schedule an LCM following the forthcoming introduction of a Coronavirus Bill in Westminster.
- 4.17 Members **agreed** that a motion to suspend Standing Order 15(1) should be added to the Order Paper for **Monday 23 March** to allow amendments to be tabled up to 9.30am on the morning the LCM is due to be debated.

#### Private Members' Business

- 4.18 Members **noted** that two items of Private Members Business had already been scheduled.
- 4.19 Members **noted** that the adjournment debate on Expansion of the University of Ulster had been rescheduled from the sitting on 10 March.
- 4.20 Junior Ministers/TEO Officials advised that Ministers were available to respond to the proposed business.
- 4.21 Members **agreed** the draft Order Paper for 24 March 2020.

5 **Provisional arrangements for plenary meetings on week commencing 30 March**

- 5.1 Members **noted** that they had been provided with provisional Order Papers for Monday 30 March and Tuesday 31 March 2020.

**Monday 30 March**

Assembly Business

- 5.2 Members **agreed** to schedule a Committee membership motion requested by the Alliance party.

Executive Committee Business

- 5.3 Members **noted** that the Executive has requested that a legislative consent motion is included seeking the Assembly's consent to extend those provisions of Westminster's Agriculture Bill which affect its legislative competence.
- 5.4 Members **noted** that Question Time is scheduled for the Executive Office and Minister for the Economy.
- 5.5 Members **noted** that the Minister of Finance will deliver an oral statement on the Budget and that this will appear on indicative timings but not the Order Paper.
- 5.6 Junior Ministers/TEO Officials advised that they were not aware of any additional business.

Private Members' Business

- 5.7 Members **agreed** to schedule Private Members' Business and the following Private Members' motions were scheduled:

- Social Security Support during the COVID-19 Pandemic (UUP)
- Northern Ireland (Executive Formation etc.) Act 2019 (DUP)

5.8 Junior Ministers/TEO Officials advised that Ministers were available to respond to the proposed business.

5.9 Members **agreed** the Provisional Order Paper for Monday 30 March 2020.

## **Tuesday 31 March**

### Assembly Business

5.10 Members **noted** that no Assembly Business had been requested to date.

### Executive Committee Business

5.11 Members **noted** that Question Time is scheduled for the Ministers of Education and Finance.

5.12 Junior Ministers/TEO Officials advised that they were not yet aware of any additional business.

### Private Members' Business

5.13 Members **agreed** to schedule Private Members Business.

5.14 The following Private Members' motion was scheduled:

- Illegal Landfill at Mobuoy Road (SF)

5.15 The following Adjournment Debate topic was selected:

- New Acute Mental Health facility at Omagh Hospital and Primary Care Complex

5.16 Junior Ministers/TEO Officials advised that Ministers were available to respond to the proposed business.

5.17 Members **agreed** the Provisional Order Paper for Tuesday 31 March 2020.

## 6 **Correspondence**

- 6.1 Members **noted** correspondence from the Minister of Health seeking to switch his Question Time slot on 19 May 2020 with that of the Minister of Finance on 18 May 2020. The Finance Minister has consented to the switch.
- 6.2 Members **agreed** to facilitate this request.

## 7 **Any Other Business**

- 7.1 Members discussed a range of issues related to the current public health matter and possible options that could be explored if it should become necessary.
- 7.2 Members noted that urgent decisions and legislation may be required in a range of areas in the coming weeks, so there was a need to keep the Assembly functioning.
- 7.3 Members discussed options for mitigating risk whilst continuing to carry out Assembly business. These were as follows:
- A reduction in the number of sittings, with only urgent/Executive business being scheduled.
  - Management of the number of people in the Chamber.
  - Proxy voting for plenary matters.
  - Parties taking steps to minimise the volume of questions so that these do not impact on the capacity of departments to manage the public health situation.
  - Requesting regular statements from Ministers by way of update, particularly the Health Minister and the First and deputy First Ministers.
- 7.4 Junior Ministers/TEO Officials were reminded that notification of business for week commencing 20 April should be made available for consideration on 24 March and business on 27 April should be made available for consideration on 31 March to accommodate Easter Recess.
- 7.5 Junior Ministers/TEO Officials were reminded that Ministers were expected to make themselves available for Assembly business every Monday and Tuesday that the Assembly was sitting.

8 **Date and time of next meeting**

- 8.1 Members **agreed** that the next meeting would take place at 1pm on Tuesday 24 March in Room 106.

*The Chairperson brought the meeting to a close at 6.40pm*

**The Speaker**  
**Chairperson**