

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY
BUSINESS COMMITTEE

TUESDAY 31 MARCH 2020
IN MEMBERS DINING ROOM, PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS

MINUTES

The meeting began at 1.08pm.

Present:

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

In attendance:	Dr A McGarel	Clerk of Business
	Mr P Gill	Clerk Assistant
	Ms L Hogg	Clerk/Chief Executive
	Dr G McGrath	Director of Parliamentary Services
	Mr R Ramsey	Adviser to the Speaker
	Ms P Devlin	Assistant Assembly Clerk
	Mr M O'Hare	Clerical Supervisor

Observers:	Mr N Jackson	Executive Office
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1 Apologies

- 1.1 Apologies were received from Colin McGrath, John Stewart and Junior Ministers Lyons and Kearney. John Blair attended in place of Kellie Armstrong.

2 Minutes of previous meetings

- 2.1 The minutes of the meeting on 24 March 2020 were **agreed**.

3 **Matters Arising**

- 3.1 Members **noted** comments from the Clerk Assistant on proposed proxy voting arrangements.
- 3.2 Members **noted** that the UUP may not support the amendments to Standing Orders scheduled for that afternoon. They would not press for a division but would encourage the Committee on Procedures to keep the arrangements under review.
- 3.3 There were no further matters arising.

4 **Finalisation of the Order Papers for plenary meetings on week commencing 20 April 2020**

- 4.1 Members **noted** that there was currently no business on the draft Order Paper.
- 4.2 Members **noted** that the Executive Office had indicated there were two provisional items of business which may be brought to the Assembly on 21 April, subject to the Executive's approval.
- 4.3 Members **agreed** to schedule one plenary sitting on Tuesday 21 April, and to return to the Order Paper at a later stage.
- 4.4 Members **noted** that in recent weeks, departments had requested that items of business were added to Order Papers at short notice, and that because of the exceptional circumstances these were facilitated but that in future, if no plenary business was requested there may be no sitting scheduled.
- 4.5 The TEO representative advised that a programme of work for the Ad Hoc Committee on COVID-19 had been commissioned at the Executive meeting the previous day, and that he would convey the message regarding plenary business.

5 **Provisional arrangements for plenary meetings on week commencing 27 April**

- 5.1 Members **noted** that there were no requests for Executive or Committee business for either Monday 27 or Tuesday 28 April at this stage.
- 5.2 Members **agreed** to defer consideration of the provisional Order Paper.

6 **Any Other Business**

Chamber arrangements

- 6.1 Members **noted** that they had been provided with a new to-scale diagram of the Chamber seating arrangements that allow for a 2-metre distance between Members in line with current advice.
- 6.2 Members **noted** that there was still some confusion around seating arrangements.
- 6.3 Members **agreed** that party allocations would be added to each available seat on the plan, that copies would be displayed at all entrances to the Chamber, and that the information would be communicated to all Members via an All Party Notice.
- 6.4 Members **agreed** that a flexible approach should be taken by parties and that if someone wished to speak on a particular item of business, they should be able to approach other parties about taking their place.
- 6.5 Members **noted** that a request had been made for Members to indicate that they wish to speak by rising in their places, as remote working was causing some difficulty for party support staff in collating party speaking lists.
- 6.6 Members **agreed** that this approach had merit and that it would be permitted and reviewed for effectiveness.

Private Members' Bills

- 6.7 Members **noted** that the deadline for Private Members' Bills was to be left open.
- 6.8 Members **noted** that the longer the deadline for Bills at this stage of the mandate, the less time for them to complete their passage through the Assembly prior to dissolution.

Executive Business

- 6.9 Members **noted** that Assembly business was restricted to matters which were priority, but these need not exclusively relate to the COVID-19 situation. It was the responsibility of the Assembly to scrutinise anything the Executive scheduled.

7 **Date and time of next meeting**

- 7.1 Members **agreed** that the next meeting would take place at 1pm on Tuesday 21 April, the venue to be confirmed.

The Chairperson brought the meeting to a close at 1.39pm

Keith Buchanan
Acting Chairperson