

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

**TUESDAY 5 MAY 2020**  
**IN THE SENATE CHAMBER, PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS**

**MINUTES**

*The meeting began at 1.03pm. (C) denotes attendance via conference call*

<b>Present:</b>	<b>Mr K Buchanan (Acting Chairperson)</b> <b>The Speaker (C)</b> <b>Ms K Armstrong</b> <b>Ms C Bailey</b> <b>Mr R Butler</b> <b>Mrs D Kelly</b> <b>Mr C McGrath</b> <b>Mr G Middleton</b> <b>Mr A Muir</b> <b>Mr J O'Dowd</b>	
<b>In attendance:</b>	<b>Dr A McGarel</b> <b>Mr P Gill</b> <b>Ms L Hogg</b> <b>Dr G McGrath</b>  <b>Mr J McMillen</b> <b>Mr R Ramsey</b> <b>Ms P Devlin</b> <b>Mr M O'Hare</b>	<b>Clerk of Business</b> <b>Clerk Assistant</b> <b>Clerk/Chief Executive</b> <b>Director of Parliamentary Services</b>  <b>Head of Legal Services (C)</b> <b>Adviser to the Speaker</b> <b>Assistant Assembly Clerk</b> <b>Clerical Supervisor</b>
<b>Observers:</b>	<b>Mr D Kearney</b> <b>Mr N Jackson</b>	<b>Junior Minister</b> <b>Executive Office</b>

1 **Apologies**

1.1 Apologies were received from John Stewart and Sinéad Ennis.

2 **Minutes of previous meetings**

2.1 The minutes of the meeting on 28 April 2020 were **agreed**.

### 3 **Matters Arising**

3.1 There were no matters arising.

### 4 **Finalisation of the Order Papers for plenary meetings for week commencing 11 May 2020**

4.1 Members **noted** that they previously agreed that plenary sittings should be kept to the minimum required to conduct essential business.

4.2 Members **noted** that no business had been requested by the Executive for 12 May.

4.3 Junior Minister Lyons advised that the First and deputy First Ministers may wish to deliver a statement to the Assembly during plenary on Tuesday 12 May.

4.4 On that basis, Members **agreed** to schedule a single plenary sitting on Tuesday 12 May.

4.5 Members **noted** that a Ministerial Statement would not by convention be shown on the Order Paper but would appear on indicative timings.

4.6 Members **agreed** that the Order Paper for 12 May 2020 should issue so that Members are made aware that a sitting would take place on that day.

4.7 Members **noted** that if further business were to arise for 12 May, a revised Order Paper would be circulated electronically for their consideration.

### 5 **Provisional arrangements for plenary meetings during week commencing 18 May**

5.1 Members **noted** that no Assembly business had been requested.

5.2 Members **noted** a request to schedule a motion to approve a Statutory Rule on Direct Payments to Farmers from the Minister of Agriculture, Environment & Rural Affairs.

5.3 Members **agreed** that by convention, the debate on this Statutory Rule should be untimed.

- 5.4 Members **noted** that a Legislative Consent Motion on the Private International Law (Implementation of Agreements) Bill from the Minister of Justice had been requested.
- 5.5 Members **noted** that the Committee for Justice had now reported on this LCM and **agreed** that by convention the debate should be untimed.
- 5.6 Members **noted** a request to provisionally schedule a Legislative Consent Motion on the Corporate Governance and Insolvency Bill for the Minister for the Economy.
- 5.7 Members **noted** that this item was contingent upon the Bill being introduced at Westminster and **agreed** that by convention the debate should be untimed.
- 5.8 Members **agreed** to schedule one sitting on Tuesday 19 May and to schedule provisionally the requested business.
- 5.9 Junior Ministers/TEO Officials advised that there would possibly be a further request to schedule additional Health Regulations on this date, but this had yet to be confirmed.

## 6 **Review of Written Questions**

- 6.1 Members **noted** that at last week's meeting they had agreed to allow two written questions per Member per week, none of which should be for priority answer.
- 6.2 Members **noted** the information provided on the questions that had been tabled since this decision.
- 6.3 Members **agreed** that the number of questions submitted, the range of topics covered and the spread across departments was manageable.
- 6.4 Members **agreed** to review again next week.
- 6.5 Members **noted** a suggestion that time should be made available at a future meeting to consider how the Assembly will function coming out of 'lockdown'.

## 7 **Review of Ad Hoc Committee on COVID-19 response**

- 7.1 Members **noted** receipt of a memo from the Speaker to the Committee responding to all the points they had raised at the last meeting.

- 7.2 Members **noted** that the Speaker had written to the Executive to establish a regular routine of Ministerial updates on COVID-19 issues, through plenary sittings on Tuesdays and sessions of the Ad Hoc Committee on a Thursday afternoon.
- 7.3 Members **noted** that the Speaker had sought agreement from the Executive that every Minister should deliver a statement, broadly as often as they would appear in the Assembly for regular Question Time.
- 7.4 Members **noted** that, as trialled at the last Ad Hoc Committee meeting, the Chair will be actively seeking short questions and short answers and all Members who ask short initial questions will be able to ask a supplementary.
- 7.5 Members **agreed** the format at the last Ad Hoc meeting had been much more satisfactory for Members and to monitor the success of these arrangements.

## 8 **Correspondence**

- 8.1 Members **noted** receipt of a letter from the Committee for Infrastructure requesting that it prioritise the scheduling of a debate on SR 2020-31 The Electrically Assisted Pedal Cycles (Construction and Use) Regulations (NI) 2020.
- 8.2 Members **agreed** to respond to the Infrastructure Committee thanking them for their letter and advising them that the scheduling of departmental business is a matter for individual Ministers and, where appropriate, the Executive. The Business Committee will schedule the business when requested by the relevant department.

## 9 **Any Other Business**

- 9.1 Members **noted** a suggestion that officials passing papers to Ministers in plenary and in the Ad Hoc was contrary to COVID-19 hygiene guidance and that electronic transfer was more appropriate. It was suggested that this should be raised with the Speaker's Office and if it were to be allowed, Wi-Fi within the Chamber may need to be improved.
- 9.2 The Speaker recorded his thanks to officials for working to keep the Assembly functioning throughout the current crisis, and that as we are coming out of this situation thought should be given to how work can be done more safely.

10 **Date and time of next meeting**

- 10.1 Members **agreed** that the next meeting would take place at 1pm on Tuesday 12 May in the Senate Chamber.

*The Chairperson brought the meeting to a close at 1.25pm*

**Mr John O'Dowd**  
**Acting Chairperson**