

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

**TUESDAY 12 MAY 2020**  
**IN THE SENATE CHAMBER, PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS**

**MINUTES**

*The meeting began at 1.40pm. (C) denotes attendance via conference call*

<b>Present:</b>	<b>Mr J O'Dowd (Acting Chairperson)</b> <b>Ms K Armstrong</b> <b>Ms C Bailey (C)</b> <b>Mr K Buchanan</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 Stewart</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>Mr K McBride</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>Assembly Clerk</b> <b>Assistant Assembly Clerk</b> <b>Clerical Supervisor</b>
<b>Observers:</b>	<b>Mr D Kearney</b> <b>Mrs K Morrison</b>	<b>Junior Minister</b> <b>Executive Office</b>

1 **Apologies**

1.1 Apologies were received from the Speaker and Sinéad Ennis.

2 **Minutes of previous meetings**

2.1 The minutes of the meeting on 5 May 2020 were **agreed**.

### 3 **Matters Arising**

- 3.1 Members were reminded of a suggestion at the last meeting that Business Committee gives some consideration to how the Assembly will function coming out of 'lockdown'.
- 3.2 Members **noted** a proposal by the Speaker to bring forward options to a meeting in the coming weeks when it is known how the statement to the Assembly by the First and deputy First Ministers will impact on the functioning of the Executive and the Assembly.
- 3.3 Members **noted** that this should happen sooner rather than later, as it would be important for the Assembly to work at pace with the arrangements outlined by the First and deputy First Ministers.
- 3.4 Members **agreed** that the options paper should contain some idea of when Private Members Business could again be brought to the House.
- 3.5 There were no other matters arising.

### 4 **Finalisation of the Order Papers for plenary meeting on 19 May 2020**

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

#### Assembly Business

- 4.2 Members **noted** that no requests for Assembly business had been received.
- 4.3 Members **noted** that the SDLP wished to schedule a motion to appoint Matthew O'Toole to the Public Accounts Committee.
- 4.4 Members **agreed** to schedule the motion.

#### Executive Committee Business

- 4.5 Members **noted** that they had previously agreed to schedule a motion from the Minister of Agriculture, Environment & Rural Affairs to affirm The Direct Payments to Farmers (Crop Diversification Derogation) Regulations, which would be untimed.
- 4.6 Members **noted** a request to schedule a motion to approve The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (Amendment) Regulations from the Executive Office.

- 4.7 Members **noted** that a Legislative Consent Motion on the Private International Law (Implementation of Agreements) Bill from the Minister of Justice had now been confirmed.
- 4.8 Members **agreed** that that as both items relate directly to legislation the debates would, by convention, be untimed.
- 4.9 Members **agreed** the Order Paper for Tuesday 19 May, subject to the inclusion of a Committee Membership Motion for the SDLP.

## 5 **Provisional Arrangements for the Plenary Meetings During Week Commencing 25 May 2020**

### Assembly Business

- 5.1 Members **noted** that no requests for Assembly Business had been received to date.

### Executive Committee Business

- 5.2 Members **noted** that a large number of items of Executive business had been requested in the Notice of Forthcoming Assembly Business, which had been provided in their papers.
- 5.3 Members **noted** a request to schedule a Supply Resolution – Further Vote on Account debate from the Minister of Finance.
- 5.4 Members **agreed** to schedule four hours for the debate, with 30 minutes for the Minister to divide between moving and winding as he prefers, 15 minutes for the Chair of the Finance Committee and 10 minutes for all other speakers.
- 5.5 Members **noted** a request to schedule the First Stage of the Budget No.2 Bill from the Minister of Finance.
- 5.6 Members **noted** a request to schedule First Stage of the Housing (Amendment) Bill from the Minister for Communities.
- 5.7 Members **noted** a request to schedule two motions from the Minister for Communities to approve Statutory Rules subject to confirmatory resolution on The Child Support Miscellaneous Amendments No. 3 and No. 4 Regulations (NI) 2019.
- 5.8 Members **noted** that the Committee for Communities had considered both SRs and had no objections and **agreed** to schedule one debate for both motions which would be untimed.

- 5.9 Members **noted** a request to schedule a Legislative Consent Motion on the Pensions Schemes Bill from the Minister for Communities, and **agreed** that the debate should be untimed.
- 5.10 Members **noted** a request to schedule a motion for the Housing (Amendment) Bill to proceed by accelerated passage and that this item would be conditional upon the Bill having been successfully introduced earlier in the sitting.
- 5.11 Members **agreed** that the debate on the motion should be untimed.
- 5.12 Members **noted** a request to schedule two Legislative Consent Motions; on the Sentencing (Pre-Consolidation Amendments) Bill from the Minister of Justice and on the Corporate Insolvency and Governance Bill from the Minister for the Economy.
- 5.13 Members **agreed** that debates on both items should be untimed.
- 5.14 Members **noted** a request from the Minister of Finance to schedule Second Stage of the Budget No.2 Bill, subject to its successful passage earlier that day.
- 5.15 Members **agreed** the debate on the Second Stage of the Budget No.2 Bill should be untimed.
- 5.16 Junior Ministers/TEO Officials advised that no other business was currently expected.
- 5.17 Members **agreed** to issue a Provisional Order Paper for a sitting on 26 May 2020 showing the Executive business requested but before an Order Paper was agreed next week, departments would be asked to reschedule some items of business for that date to reduce the risk of a very late sitting.

## 6 **Review of Written Questions**

- 6.1 Members **noted** that information on written questions, which had been requested by the Committee on a weekly basis, had been provided in their packs. Dr McGarel gave a brief summary of the findings.
- 6.2 Members **noted** that despite the reduced number of questions, some remained unanswered within timeframe and that there remained dissatisfaction amongst Members around the quality of responses received.
- 6.3 Some Members **noted** that it was becoming increasingly difficult for whips to ask Members to adhere to the voluntary moratorium on written questions when they continue to get inadequate responses from departments, which

undermines the service they can provide to their constituents at a very difficult time.

- 6.4 Members **agreed** that the Speaker would write to the Executive highlighting these concerns.

## 7 **Any Other Business**

- 7.1 Members **noted** that remote access to this meeting via Starleaf, which had been used on a trial basis, was not of an acceptable quality and was not useful in supporting Members who are currently unable to attend in person.

- 7.2 Members **noted** that the system was not yet fully set up and work was yet to be done on integrating the software with existing audio equipment in the Senate Chamber, but that the system is expected to be in place for live testing next week.

- 7.3 Members **agreed** that the matter should be raised with the Assembly Commission.

- 7.4 Members **noted** concerns which had been expressed regarding WiFi access in the Assembly Chamber.

## 8 **Date and time of next meeting**

- 8.1 Members **agreed** that the next meeting would take place at 1pm on Tuesday 19 May in the Senate Chamber.

*The Chairperson brought the meeting to a close at 2.03pm*

**Keith Buchanan**  
**Acting Chairperson**