

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY
BUSINESS COMMITTEE

TUESDAY 2 JUNE 2020
IN THE SENATE CHAMBER, PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS

MINUTES

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

Present:

- Mr K Buchanan (Acting Chairperson)**
- The Speaker (C)**
- Ms K Armstrong**
- Ms C Bailey**
- Mr R Butler**
- Mrs D Kelly**
- Mr C McGrath**
- 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
Mr P Stitt	PS to the Speaker
Ms P Devlin	Assistant Assembly Clerk
Mr M O'Hare	Clerical Supervisor

Observers:

Mr G Lyons	Junior Minister
Mrs K Morrison	Executive Office

1 Apologies

1.1 Apologies were received from John Stewart and Sinead Ennis.

2 Minutes of previous meetings

2.1 The minutes of the meeting on 26 May 2020 were **agreed**.

3 **Matters Arising**

- 3.1 Members **noted** that the Speaker had provided a response from the Executive Office on the Assembly's approach to summer recess, as well as a memo from the Speaker in his capacity as Chairperson of the Assembly Commission, and that both items were included in their packs.
- 3.2 The Speaker gave Members an overview of the correspondence from the Executive and the Assembly Commission.
- 3.3 Members **agreed** that the Speaker would circulate a paper on arrangements for summer recess for discussion and a decision at the next meeting.

4 **Resumption of Question Time**

- 4.1 Members **noted** that at the last meeting they had agreed in principle to resume oral questions on a phased basis.
- 4.2 Members **noted** that, on consideration of the proposals raised during the meeting, they had agreed after the meeting that two Ministers should be scheduled to answer questions each Tuesday, and for a rota for Ministers to respond to Oral Questions to issue.
- 4.3 Members **agreed** the following further arrangements:
- i. Topical questions should remain suspended until 4 July and a motion to suspend Standing Order 20A should be scheduled for 9 June;
 - ii. Each of the two Ministers in attendance should answer listed questions for 45 minutes.
 - iii. In general, only one supplementary question would be allowed and this would be from the Member who had tabled the question. However, this might be adjusted by whoever was in the chair if it was apparent that time would be available.
- 4.4 Members **agreed** that the suspension of Topical Questions should be revisited weekly and that all arrangements should be reviewed on 30 June.

5 Review of Written Questions

- 5.1 Members **noted** that information on questions submitted since 26 May had been provided in their packs. Dr McGarel provided a summary of the information.
- 5.2 Members **noted** that there was still some dissatisfaction over the quality of responses being received by Members.
- 5.3 Members **agreed** to request a further breakdown by Department of written questions which received a substantive response, a standard response or no response within the weekly statistics.

6 Finalisation of the Order Paper for Plenary Meeting on 9 June 2020

Tuesday 9 June

- 6.1 Members **noted** that they had decided to adopt a phased approach to resuming full Assembly Business, which was currently at stage 1: one sitting day each week unless Executive Business requires a second and the scheduling of Private Members' Business on any sitting day where Executive Business is unlikely to take up all of the time available.
- 6.2 Members **noted** that based on the business requested by the Executive in its notice of forthcoming business for the Assembly last week, one sitting was scheduled for Tuesday 9 June.

Assembly Business

- 6.3 Members **agreed** to schedule a motion suspending Standing Order 20A until 4 July.

Executive Committee Business

- 6.4 Members **noted** that, in addition to the items scheduled at last week's meeting, the First Minister and deputy First Minister had scheduled a statement on the North South Ministerial Council Institutional Meeting.
- 6.5 Members **noted** that following items of business had previously been scheduled:
- A motion seeking the Assembly's approval for the NI Criminal Injuries Compensation (Amendment 2020) Scheme (2009).

- A Legislative Consent Motion on the Birmingham Commonwealth Games Bill.

Private Members Business

- 6.6 Members **noted** that they had previously agreed to schedule two items of Private Members' Business, and that the selections were for SF and UUP.
- 6.7 SF and UUP Members selected the following Private Members' motions:
- Support for Sheep and Beef Farmers through the COVID-19 Pandemic (SF)
 - Stress Experienced by Northern Ireland Prison Service staff (UUP)
- 6.8 Junior Minister Lyons indicated that Ministers were available to respond.
- 6.9 Members **agreed** the Order Paper for Tuesday 9 June.

7 Provisional Arrangements for the Plenary Meetings During Week Commencing 15 June 2020

- 7.1 Members **noted** that they had been provided with the Notice of Forthcoming Business from the Executive Office, and the listed items of Executive Business necessitated scheduling only one sitting for week commencing 15 June.
- 7.2 Members **agreed** to schedule one sitting on Tuesday 16 June.

Tuesday 16 June

Assembly Business

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

Executive Committee Business

- 7.4 Members **noted** that the Minister for Communities had scheduled Consideration Stage of the Housing (Amendment) Bill.
- 7.5 Members **agreed** to schedule an untimed debate for the bill stage.

- 7.6 Members **noted** a request to schedule two motions from the Minister for Communities to approve Statutory Rules subject to confirmatory resolution on the Social Security Benefits Up-rating Order (NI) 2020 and the Social Security Benefits Up-rating Regulations (NI) 2020.
- 7.7 Members **agreed** to schedule one debate for both motions as the two items were related, and that the debate would be untimed.
- 7.8 Members **noted** that the Minister for Communities had scheduled a motion to approve The Mesothelioma Lump Sum Payments (Conditions and Amounts) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020.
- 7.9 Members **agreed** to schedule an untimed debate for the motion.
- 7.10 Members **noted** that Question Time would return on Tuesday 16 June, and would be for The Executive Office and the Minister for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs.
- 7.11 Junior Ministers/TEO Officials advised that no other business was currently expected.

Private Members Business

- 7.12 Members **agreed** that sufficient time was available to schedule one item of Private Members Business, and noted that the next selection was for the DUP.
- 7.13 Members **agreed** that DUP representatives could defer selection of their motions until the next meeting.
- 7.14 Members **agreed** the Provisional Order Paper for Tuesday 16 June 2020.

8 Any Other Business

- 8.1 Members **noted** that some smaller parties and independent Members considered that they were not being given sufficient opportunity to contribute to debates.
- 8.2 Members **agreed** to pass this comment to the Speaker for his consideration.

9 **Date and time of next meeting**

- 9.1 Members **agreed** that the next meeting would take place on Tuesday 9 June in the Senate Chamber.

The Acting Chairperson brought the meeting to a close at 1.24pm

Mr John O'Dowd
Acting Chairperson