

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

**TUESDAY 2 SEPTEMBER 2020**  
**IN THE SENATE CHAMBER, PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS**

**MINUTES**

*The meeting began at 1.02pm. (C) denotes attendance via conference call*

**Present:**

**The Speaker**  
**Ms K Armstrong**  
**Ms C Bailey**  
**Mr K Buchanan**  
**Mr R Butler**  
**Mrs D Kelly**  
**Mr C McGrath (C)**  
**Mr A Muir**  
**Mr J O'Dowd**  
**Mr J Stewart**

**In attendance:**

<b>Dr A McGarel</b>	<b>Clerk of Business</b>
<b>Mr P Gill</b>	<b>Clerk Assistant (C)</b>
<b>Ms L Hogg</b>	<b>Clerk/Chief Executive</b>
<b>Dr G McGrath</b>	<b>Director of Parliamentary Services</b>
<b>Ms T Caul</b>	<b>Director of Legal, Governance &amp; Research</b>
<b>Mr R Ramsey</b>	<b>Adviser to the Speaker</b>
<b>Ms F Leneghan</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>Mrs K Loveland-Morrison</b>	<b>Executive Office</b>
--------------------------------	-------------------------

**1 Apologies**

- 1.1 Apologies were received from Sinéad Ennis, Gary Middleton and junior Ministers Lyons and Kearney.

## 2 **Minutes of previous meetings**

- 2.1 The minutes of the meeting on 7 July 2020 were **agreed**.
- 2.2 The minutes of the meeting on 17 August 2020 were **agreed**.

## 3 **Matters Arising**

- 3.1 Members **noted** that they had previously discussed arrangements in the Chamber in light of the revised social distancing guidelines which allowed a reduction to 1 metre with appropriate mitigations.
- 3.2 Members **noted** that they had agreed to reconsider the matter after summer recess, taking account of the most up-to-date guidance.
- 3.3 Members **noted** that a paper and a risk assessment from the Head of Building Services had been provided in their pack.
- 3.4 Members **noted** the recommendations therein and **agreed** to consider the contents of the paper more fully and raise any issues they may have at the next meeting.
- 3.5 Members discussed a query regarding options available for Members who have to isolate following COVID contact to continue to participate in plenary business.
- 3.6 Members **agreed** to discuss the matter with their parties and that they would be given the opportunity to bring any views back to the next meeting.

## 4 **Finalisation of the Order Papers for the Plenary Meetings on Week Commencing 7 September 2020**

### **Monday 7 September**

#### **Assembly Business**

- 4.1 Members **noted** that the Assembly Commission had scheduled a motion to appoint a Commissioner for Standards.
- 4.2 Members **agreed** to schedule the motion and to allow 30 minutes for the debate.

### Executive Committee Business

- 4.3 Members **noted** that Question Time would return to its usual schedule on 7 September, when the Infrastructure and Justice Ministers would respond to oral questions.
- 4.4 Members **noted** that the standard Question Time format with supplementary questions from the outset would also resume from Monday.
- 4.5 Members **noted** that the Executive Office had not scheduled any other Executive Business for this date.

### Private Members' Business

- 4.6 Members **agreed** to schedule two Private Members' motions, and **noted** that the selections were for DUP and SDLP.
- 4.7 The following Private Members' motions were selected with the usual timings:
- Custodial Sentences for Attacks Against Emergency Workers (DUP)
  - Future Support for Businesses and Workers during COVID-19 (SDLP)
- 4.8 TEO Officials confirmed that Ministers would be available to respond to the selected motions.
- 4.9 Members **agreed** the Order Paper for Monday 7 September.

## **Tuesday 8 September**

### Assembly Business

- 4.10 Members **noted** that questions to the Assembly Commission had been scheduled.

### Executive Committee Business

- 4.11 Members **noted** that the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs and the Minister for Communities would respond to oral questions.
- 4.12 Members **noted** that the Executive Office had not scheduled any other Executive Business for this date.

### Private Members' Business

- 4.13 Members **agreed** to schedule two Private Members' motions, and **noted** that the selections were for Sinn Fein and Alliance.
- 4.14 The following Private Members' motion was selected with the usual timings:
- Local Economy and Post-Brexit Preparedness (SF)
- 4.15 Due to an overlap in subject matter with a previous debate within the last six months, Members agreed that the Alliance party whip would notify Business Office of their selected motion following the meeting.
- 4.16 Members **agreed** to schedule an Adjournment debate, and **noted** that the topic selection was for Sinn Fein.
- 4.17 The following Adjournment debate topic was selected with the usual timings:
- Recurring Flooding in the Newcastle Area (SF)
- 4.18 TEO Officials confirmed that Ministers would be available to respond to the selected motions.
- 4.19 Members **agreed** the Order Paper for Tuesday 8 September subject to confirmation of the Alliance selection.

## **5 Provisional Arrangements for the Plenary Meetings on Week Commencing 14 September 2020**

### **Monday 14 September**

#### Assembly Business

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

#### Executive Committee Business

- 5.2 Members **noted** that Question Time is scheduled for the Executive Office and the Minister for the Economy.
- 5.3 Members **noted** that the Minister of Health may make a statement to the Assembly on this date, but this was yet to be confirmed.

5.4 Members **noted** that no other Executive Business had been requested to date.

#### Private Members' Business

5.5 Members **agreed** to schedule two Private Members' motions, and **agreed** to be flexible in the event that further business arises in the intervening period.

5.6 Members **noted** that the selections were for DUP and SF.

5.7 The following Private Members' motions were selected with the usual timings:

- Living Over the Shops Scheme (DUP)
- Race Equality (SF)

5.8 Members **agreed** the Order Paper for Monday 14 September.

#### Tuesday 15 September

##### Assembly Business

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

##### Executive Committee Business

5.10 Members **noted** that the Ministers of Education and Finance would respond to oral questions.

5.11 Members **noted** that the Executive Office had not scheduled any other Executive Business for this date.

#### Private Members' Business

5.12 Members **agreed** to schedule two Private Members' motions.

5.13 Members **noted** that the selections were for UUP and DUP.

5.14 The following Private Members' motions were selected with the usual timings:

- Kickstart Scheme (UUP)
- Mental Health Crisis Support (DUP)

- 5.15 Members **agreed** to schedule an Adjournment debate, and **noted** that the topic selection was for DUP.
- 5.16 The following Adjournment debate topic was selected with the usual timings:
- Funding for the Crisis Intervention Service in Londonderry (DUP)
- 5.17 Members **agreed** the Provisional Order Paper for Tuesday 15 September.

## 6 **Any Other Business**

- 6.1 Members **noted** a response from the Minister for Communities to their correspondence regarding response times for written questions. The Speaker commended the Minister for responding rapidly to the Committee's concerns.
- 6.2 Members **noted** a letter from the Secretary of State to the Speaker advising that Westminster is to update the Flags Regulations (NI) 2000 to bring the list of designated flag flying days into line with GB.
- 6.3 Members **noted** that although Westminster is responsible for amending the regulations, the Assembly is required to report its views in advance of any amendment.
- 6.4 Members **noted** that this would require a motion to be tabled by the Business Committee for debate on 14 September.
- 6.5 Members **agreed** that they would consider a motion at next week's meeting for scheduling on Monday 14 September, and that a paper would be provided in advance of this.
- 6.6 Members **noted** that with the resumption of normal plenary scheduling and business, there would be less need for the Ad Hoc Committee on COVID response and pressure on committees would be alleviated if Thursday afternoon was available to them for scheduling business.
- 6.7 Members **noted** that the Ad Hoc Committee could still be convened if it was necessary but that they should move away from its use as a matter of routine.
- 6.8 Members **agreed** that the Speaker would write to the Executive to advise that with the return to normal business, there should be less regular use of the Ad Hoc.
- 6.9 Members **noted** clarification from the Clerk/Chief Executive on the use of masks by Members and staff in Parliament Buildings.

- 6.10 Members discussed the lack of Executive business that was currently forthcoming and **agreed** to write to the Executive to express the Committee's views.
- 6.11 Members discussed the impact a return to normal Assembly business might have on departments which may in the current circumstances have a lower than usual staff capacity. Members **noted** that it was not the Committee's role to review this issue and that it had not been raised during the Speaker's communications with the Executive over the summer about returning to normal business in September. Members **agreed** that should such issues arise, they could be raised through the relevant committees.
- 6.12 Members **noted** an update from the Speaker on the review of Assembly sitting days, and that the issue would come back to the Committee in the coming weeks.
- 6.13 Members **noted** that some Members had found during proxy voting that there was insufficient time for them to get back into the Chamber for subsequent votes. The Speaker committed to look at the current arrangements for voting.
- 6.14 Members **noted** that some felt that the long instructions prior to a vote in the Chamber were now sufficiently familiar to all Members and did not need to be recited in full prior to each vote. Members **agreed** that consideration should be given to revising the wording used prior to a vote.
- 6.15 There was no other business.

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

- 7.1 Members **agreed** that the next meeting would take place at 1pm on Tuesday 8 September in the Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings.

*The Speaker brought the meeting to a close at 1.27pm*

**The Speaker  
Chairperson**