

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

**TUESDAY 16 FEBRUARY 2021**  
**SENATE CHAMBER, PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS**

**MINUTES**

*The meeting began at 1.13pm.*

**Present:**

**The Speaker (Chairperson)**  
**Ms K Armstrong**  
**Ms C Bailey**  
**Mr K Buchanan**  
**Mr R Butler**  
**Ms P Cameron**  
**Ms S Ennis**  
**Ms D Kelly**  
**Mr C McGrath**  
**Mr A Muir**  
**Mr J O'Dowd**

**In attendance:**

<b>Dr A McGarel</b>	<b>Clerk of Business</b>
<b>Mr P Gill</b>	<b>Clerk Assistant</b>
<b>Ms L Hogg</b>	<b>Clerk/Chief Executive</b>
<b>Dr G McGrath</b>	<b>Director of Parliamentary Services</b>
<b>Mr J McMillan</b>	<b>Head of Legal Services</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:**

**Mr D McCreedy      The Executive Office**

**1      Apologies**

1.1      Apologies were received from John Stewart.

**2      Minutes of previous meetings**

2.1      The minutes of the meeting on 9 February were **agreed**.

### 3 **Matters Arising**

- 3.1 Members **noted** receipt of a response from the Executive about its business in the Assembly. The Speaker highlighted that Ministers have asked their officials to provide an update on business planned for the next few months, which is to be available by the next meeting.
- 3.2 The Speaker provided an update on arrangements for the introduction of hybrid proceedings in the Chamber, and advised that testing was ongoing and had gone well so far.
- 3.3 The Speaker invited whips to trial the remote participation arrangements themselves as part of the testing process. Members **agreed** that a session would be arranged on Friday 19 February at a time to be confirmed.
- 3.4 The Speaker advised that once he was satisfied that the system is ready for use, he would make the necessary provision in line with Standing Order 110A.
- 3.5 The Speaker discussed his current intentions with regard to when and by whom remote participation could be used in the short-term, but added that if the arrangements prove to work well, additional provision could be made.
- 3.6 A member noted that they had observed glare from the windows on the screens which had been mounted around the Chamber, and expressed concern that this may affect visibility during proceedings. The member asked that this be examined during the testing process and any necessary remedial action taken.
- 3.7 There were no other matters arising.

### 4 **Finalisation of the Order Papers for the Plenary Meetings in Week Commencing 22 February 2021**

#### **Monday 22 February**

#### **Public Petitions**

- 4.1 Members **noted** that John O'Dowd was seeking to present a Public Petition to the Speaker entitled 'Extend the Covid Disruption Payment' and that in accordance with Standing Order 22 this item would last no more than three minutes.
- 4.2 Members **agreed** to schedule the Public Petition.

### Assembly Business

- 4.3 Members **agreed** to schedule a Committee membership motion for the DUP and for it to be treated as a business motion with no amendment or debate.

### Executive Committee Business

- 4.4 Members **noted** that in addition to Question Time for the Executive Office and Finance two items of Executive business had been scheduled, as follows:
- The Draft Direct Payments to Farmers (Amendment) Regulations (NI) 2021
  - The Draft Direct Payments to Farmers (Simplifications) Regulations (NI) 2021
- 4.5 Members **agreed** to schedule a single untimed debate for both items as requested.

### Private Members' Business

- 4.6 Members **noted** that in response to public health guidance they had taken a decision to suspend Private Members' motions, but had agreed to consider scheduling motions this week if limited business was forthcoming from the Executive.
- 4.7 Members considered a proposal to schedule an All-Party motion, but **agreed** to schedule a Private Members' Motion via the d'Hondt selection process.
- 4.8 The following Private Members' motion was selected with the usual timings:
- Recovery and Investment Strategy (SDLP)
- 4.9 The TEO Official indicated that the relevant Minister would be available to respond.
- 4.10 Members **agreed** the Order Paper for Monday 22 February.

### Tuesday 23 February

### Executive Committee Business

4.11 Members **noted** that that in addition to Question Time for Health four items of Executive business had been scheduled, as follows:

1. A Ministerial Statement from the Infrastructure Minister on the NSMC Inland Waterways meeting
2. The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (No. 2) (Amendment No. 2) Regulations (NI) 2021
3. The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (No. 2) (Amendment No. 3) Regulations (NI) 2021
4. The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (No. 2) (Amendment No. 4) Regulations (NI) 2021

4.12 Members **agreed** to schedule a single untimed debate for all three Health Protection Regulations.

#### Private Members' Business

4.13 Members **noted** that time was available for Private Members business.

4.14 The following Private Members' motion was selected with the usual timings:

- North-South and East-West Trade (SF)

4.15 The TEO official indicated that the relevant Minister would be available to respond.

4.16 Members agreed not to schedule an Adjournment debate.

4.17 Members **agreed** the Order Paper for Tuesday 23 February.

## 5 Provisional Arrangements for the Plenary Meetings in Week Commencing 1 March 2021

### Monday 1 March

#### Executive Committee Business

5.1 Members **noted** that Question Time was scheduled for the Minister for Infrastructure and Minister of Justice.

5.2 Members **noted** that five items of Executive business had been scheduled, as follows:

1. A statement from the Minister for Infrastructure on the British Irish Council Joint Housing and Collaborative Spatial Planning Ministerial meeting.
2. A statement from the Minister for Communities on the British Irish Council Joint Housing and Collaborative Spatial Planning Ministerial meeting.
3. A motion from the Minister of Finance on the Supply Resolution: Spring Supplementary Estimates & Vote on Account.

5.3 Members **agreed** to allow four and a half hours for this debate, with 30 minutes for the Finance Minister to use between moving and winding, 10 minutes for the Chair of the Finance Committee and 7 minutes for all other speakers.

4. First Stage of the Budget Bill for the Minister of Finance.
5. First Stage of the Damages (Return on Investment) Bill for the Minister of Justice.

5.4 Members **noted** that by convention, the First Stage of the Budget Bill would be shown on the Order Paper.

5.5 Members **noted** that First Stage of the Damages (Return on Investment) Bill would not be shown on the Order Paper but would be included on the Indicative Timings when the Speaker received confirmation that the Bill is within the legislative competence of the Assembly.

5.6 The TEO official indicated that no other business was expected at that time.

#### Private Members' Business

5.7 Members **agreed** that insufficient time was available for Private Members business.

5.8 Members **agreed** the Provisional Order Paper for Monday 1 March.

## **Tuesday 2 March**

### **Executive Committee Business**

- 5.9 Members **noted** that Question Time was scheduled for the Minister of Agriculture Environment and Rural Affairs.
- 5.10 Members **noted** that one item of Executive business; Second Stage of the Budget Bill, had been scheduled.
- 5.11 Members **noted** that the item was by convention untimed but had been given an indicative timing of three hours.
- 5.12 A member expressed the view that the indicative timing might be optimistic and suggested applying a limit of 15 minutes to each individual contribution and 20 minutes to Committee Chairs.
- 5.13 The Speaker noted that work on the issue of applying timings to debates on legislation was ongoing. Following discussion, Members **agreed** not to apply time limits on the debate at this meeting but that whips would speak to their party colleagues about the proposal and report back at next week's meeting.

### **Private Members' Business**

- 5.14 Members **agreed** to defer consideration of Private Members business until the next meeting.
- 5.15 Members **agreed** the Provisional Order Paper for Tuesday 2 March.

## **6 Any Other Business**

- 6.1 Members **noted** receipt of statistics on written questions submitted to each Minister during the last three weeks and the inclusion of information on the number of Priority Written Questions.
- 6.2 Members **agreed** to note and continue to monitor these statistics.
- 6.3 There was no other business.

7 **Date and time of next meeting**

- 7.1 Members **agreed** that the next meeting would take place on Tuesday 23 February in the Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings.

*The Speaker brought the meeting to a close at 1.30pm*

**The Speaker  
Chairperson**