

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY
BUSINESS COMMITTEE

TUESDAY 2 MARCH 2021
SENATE CHAMBER, PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS

MINUTES

The meeting began at 1.07pm.

Present:

The Speaker (Chairperson)
Ms K Armstrong
Ms C Bailey
Mr R Butler
Ms P Cameron
Ms S Ennis
Ms D Kelly
Mr C McGrath
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
Ms T Caul	Director of Legal, Governance & Research Services
Mr R Ramsey	Adviser to the Speaker
Ms F Leneghan	PS to the Speaker
Ms P Devlin	Assistant Assembly Clerk
Mr M O'Hare	Clerical Supervisor

Observers: **Mr D McCreedy** **The Executive Office**

1 Apologies

1.1 Apologies were received from Keith Buchanan, John Stewart and Andrew Muir.

2 Minutes of previous meetings

2.1 The minutes of the meeting on 23 February were **agreed**.

3 **Matters Arising**

- 3.1 The Speaker informed Members that he had received an initial briefing from officials on managing the timings of debates on bill stages, and had been given a very detailed paper outlining many possibilities.
- 3.2 The Speaker advised that he would be given further briefing later in the week, but had asked officials to prepare a paper for the Committee outlining the options that could be delivered most easily. The Speaker advised that he would bring this to the Committee as soon as possible.
- 3.3 Members **agreed** that they were content with this approach.
- 3.4 There were no other matters arising.

4 **Finalisation of the Order Papers for the Plenary Meetings in Week Commencing 8 March 2021**

Monday 8 March

Public Petition

- 4.1 Members **noted** that a Public Petition for Karen Mullan calling for the Urgent Provision of a Detox and Centre of Excellence for Addiction in the Derry City and Strabane District Council Area had been scheduled.

Assembly Business

- 4.2 Members **noted** that a motion had been tabled by Paula Bradshaw under Standing Order 34 proposing that the NI Human Rights Commission be asked to advise on whether the Severe Fetal Impairment Abortion (Amendment) Bill is compatible with Human Rights.
- 4.3 The Speaker outlined the process for such a motion, noting that only the proposer of the motion and one opposing Member would be given the opportunity to speak, and that both would be allowed five minutes. In accordance with previous practice the Speaker indicated that he would offer Mr. Givan, as the Bill's sponsor, the opportunity to speak in opposition if he wished to do so.
- 4.4 Members **noted** that because the motion relates to the business of the Assembly there would be no debate or amendment and the question on the motion would be put immediately after the two contributions.
- 4.5 Following discussion, Members **agreed** to schedule the motion for Ms. Bradshaw.

Executive Committee Business

- 4.6 Members **noted** that the Minister of Health had scheduled First Stage of the Health and Social Care Bill, and that it would be included on the Indicative Timings when the Speaker received confirmation that the Bill is within the legislative competence of the Assembly.

Committee Business

- 4.7 Members **noted** that Committee Business remained as scheduled at the last meeting.

Private Members' Business

- 4.8 Members **noted** that they had agreed for an All-Party motion entitled 'Promoting a Gender-sensitive Assembly' to be scheduled to coincide with International Women's Day.
- 4.9 Members **agreed** that insufficient time was available to schedule any further Private Members' business.
- 4.10 Members **agreed** the Order Paper for Monday 8 March.

Tuesday 9 March

Public Petitions

- 4.11 Members **noted** that Alex Easton was seeking to present a Public Petition to the Speaker calling for a review of the Burial Grounds Regulations (Northern Ireland) and that in accordance with Standing Order 22 this item would last no more than three minutes.
- 4.12 Members **agreed** to schedule the petition for Mr Easton.
- 4.13 Members **noted** that the Committee on Procedures had a review of petitions on its forward work programme and **agreed** to write to the Committee to ask it to consider prioritising consideration of the current procedures for Public Petitions.

Executive Committee Business

- 4.14 Members **noted** that the Justice Minister had scheduled Second Stage of the Damages (Return on Investment) Bill.
- 4.15 Members **agreed** to schedule an untimed debate for Second Stage of the Bill.

- 4.16 Members **noted** that otherwise, Executive Business remained as scheduled at the last meeting.

Committee Business

- 4.17 Members **noted** that there was no Committee Business.

Private Members' Business

- 4.18 Members **agreed** not to schedule any Private Members' motions or an Adjournment debate.
- 4.19 Members **agreed** the Order Paper for Tuesday 9 March.

5 Provisional Arrangements for the Plenary Meetings in Week Commencing 15 March 2021

Monday 15 March

Executive Committee Business

- 5.1 Members **noted** that Question Time was scheduled for the Minister of Education and Minister of Finance.
- 5.2 Members **noted** that no Executive business had been scheduled to date.
- 5.3 The TEO official indicated that no other business was expected at that time.

Committee Business

- 5.4 Members **noted** that there was no Committee Business.

Private Members' Business

- 5.5 Members **noted** that Mr Givan was seeking to schedule Second Stage of his Severe Fetal Impairment Abortion (Amendment) Bill.
- 5.6 Members **noted** that the debate would by convention be untimed but that four hours had been allocated in the indicative timings.
- 5.7 Members **agreed** to schedule an untimed debate for Second Stage of the Bill.

- 5.8 Members **agreed** to defer consideration of other Private Members' business until the next meeting.
- 5.9 Members **agreed** the Provisional Order Paper for Monday 15 March.

Tuesday 16 March

Executive Committee Business

- 5.10 Members **noted** that Question Time was scheduled for the Minister of Health.
- 5.11 Members **noted** that the Minister of Health had scheduled second stage of the Health and Social Care Bill, which would by convention be untimed.
- 5.12 Members **agreed** to schedule an untimed debate for second stage of the Bill.
- 5.13 The TEO official indicated that no other business was expected at that time.

Committee Business

- 5.14 Members **noted** that there was no Committee Business.

Private Members' Business

- 5.15 Members **agreed** to defer consideration of Private Members' business until the next meeting.
- 5.16 Members **agreed** the Provisional Order Paper for Tuesday 16 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 Members discussed issues related to the quality of written questions which were being tabled by Members, and also the quality of the responses being received from Ministers.
- 6.4 Members **noted** that a range of training had been made available to both Members and party support, and could be arranged with the Business Office upon request. Members **noted** that a list of training options would be made available to them.
- 6.5 Members **agreed** that the availability of training should be communicated to Members.
- 6.6 The Speaker informed the Committee that the First Minister and deputy First Minister had written to him seeking to make a statement on the easing of restrictions at the earliest opportunity during that day's ongoing plenary.
- 6.7 The Speaker advised that as this was a very important statement in which Members would have a great deal of interest, he did not consider it appropriate that it should wait until the end of business, particularly given the possibility of a late adjournment time. The Speaker proposed that business should be paused at 3.45pm to allow for the statement to be made.
- 6.8 Members **welcomed** the Speaker's proposed approach.
- 6.9 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 9 March in the Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings.

The Speaker brought the meeting to a close at 1.33pm

The Speaker
Chairperson