

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY
BUSINESS COMMITTEE

TUESDAY 7 SEPTEMBER 2021
VIA MS TEAMS

MINUTES

The meeting began at 1.11pm.

Present:

The Speaker (Chairperson)

Mr A Allen
Ms C Bailey
Ms P Bradshaw
Ms J Bunting
Mr R Butler
Ms D Kelly
Mr C McGrath
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
Ms T Caul	Director of Legal, Governance & Research
Mr J McMillen	Head of Legal Services
Mr R Ramsey	Adviser to the Speaker
Ms F Leneghan	PS to the Speaker
Ms P Devlin	Assistant Assembly Clerk

1 Apologies

- 1.1 Apologies were received from Kellie Armstrong, Trevor Clarke and Sinéad Ennis.
- 1.2 The Speaker welcomed Ms Bradshaw to the meeting, noting that she had been nominated to attend in place of Ms Armstrong and was expected to become a full member of the Business Committee the following week.

2 **Speaker's Business**

- 2.1 The Speaker proposed that Members took the opportunity to consider a valid request he had received from more than 30 Members under Standing Order 11 to call an earlier meeting of the Assembly to debate a motion on Guidance to Schools on COVID-19.
- 2.2 The Speaker **noted** that Standing Orders required him to convene a meeting of the Assembly upon receipt of such a request and so he had arranged for the Assembly to sit at noon on Thursday 9 September.
- 2.3 Members **agreed** to allocate one and a half hours for the debate, with the usual speaking times.
- 2.4 Members **agreed** that the provisions previously agreed by the Committee to increase timings if amendments were accepted, and the grace period of up to 15 minutes to be used at the Speaker's discretion, would apply.
- 2.5 Members **noted** that amendments could be tabled to the motion up to 9.30am on 9 September.
- 2.6 Members **agreed** the Order Paper for the additional sitting on Thursday 9 September.

3 **Minutes of previous meetings**

- 3.1 The minutes of the meeting on 29 June were **agreed**.
- 3.2 The minutes of the meeting on 19 July were **agreed**.

4 **Matters Arising**

- 4.1 Ms Bunting expressed her gratitude to Mr O'Dowd for agreeing to chair the meeting on 29 June when competing diary commitments prevented her from doing so.

5 **Seating Arrangements in the Chamber**

- 5.1 Members were reminded that at the meeting on 29 June, they had agreed to defer taking a decision on social distancing measures in the Chamber until after recess, when they could take account of the most up to date guidance.

- 5.2 The Speaker expressed the view that it would be premature to make any decision about social distancing in the Chamber until there has been time to consider the practical implications of the Executive's most recent guidance, and proposed that they retain the current arrangements for the next week.
- 5.3 The Speaker advised that he had requested that officials prepared a paper for the Committee's consideration at the next meeting.
- 5.4 Members **agreed** to the proposed approach.

6 **Procedural Issues Arising from a Change of Party Affiliation**

- 6.1 The Speaker advised Members that on 5 July he had received notification from Alex Easton that he was resigning from the DUP and would be sitting as an Independent Unionist for the remainder of the mandate, and that in accordance with Standing Order 3(15) this change of party affiliation came into effect on Monday 12 July.
- 6.2 Members **noted** that as a result they needed to consider a number of aspects of Assembly business on which this change would have an impact and that an advice paper had been provided to inform their decision making.
- 6.3 Members **agreed** a revised seating plan for the Chamber, revised speaking lists and rotas for Private Members' Business.
- 6.4 The representative for the smaller parties and independent members advised that they wished to retain their seating arrangements as a group if possible.
- 6.5 A representative for the Alliance party noted that it was the only party that was separated by the seating arrangements and asked for this to be reviewed to allow party members to sit together.
- 6.6 The Speaker **agreed** to consider the issues raised and consult with officials to see if practical solutions could be found.
- 6.7 Members **noted** that the change of affiliation had implications for the DUP's statutory and standing committee membership, and **agreed** to allow the party some time to consider its preferred means of addressing those issues.

7 **Correspondence**

- 7.1 Members **noted** receipt of a letter from the First Minister and deputy First Minister in response to the Committee's request for information on legislation to be brought before the Assembly by the end of the mandate.

- 7.2 Members **noted** receipt of a letter from the Chair of the Committee on Procedures summarising its position on the introduction of Members' Statements.
- 7.3 The Speaker suggested that because a number of issues may have arisen over the summer recess which Members might wish to bring to the attention of the Assembly, Members' Statements should be scheduled on both 13 and 14 September.
- 7.4 Following discussion, Members **agreed** to schedule Members' Statements on the Order Papers for 13 and 14 September.
- 7.5 Members **agreed** that scheduling Members' Statements twice per week would not be considered the norm because of the high volume of legislation expected before the end of the mandate which must be prioritised.

8 Finalisation of the Order Papers for the Plenary Meetings in Week Commencing 13 September 2021

- 8.1 Members **noted** that due to unforeseen circumstances, the Minister of Health would no longer be available on week commencing 13 September and that the draft Order Papers before them were no longer appropriate.
- 8.2 Members **agreed** that officials would liaise with the Executive Office to reschedule Executive Business and issue revised papers for the Committee's consideration and agreement.
- 8.3 Members **agreed** that parties should select Private Members Business to be included on the revised Order Papers if there was sufficient time.
- 8.4 Members **noted** that the next selection for a Private Members motion was for Sinn Féin and the next adjournment topic selection was for DUP.
- 8.5 Members **agreed** that Sinn Féin could provide their chosen motion to the Business Office that afternoon.
- 8.6 The DUP selected the following adjournment topic:
- South Antrim Roads

9 **Provisional Arrangements for the Plenary Meetings in Week Commencing 20 September 2021**

9.1 Members **noted** that the Provisional Order Papers might also need to be amended in light of the unforeseen changes, and **agreed** that they would also consider these once alternative scheduling arrangements had been made.

10 **Any Other Business**

10.1 There was no other business.

11 **Date and time of next meeting**

11.1 Members **agreed** that the next meeting would take place on Tuesday 14 September in the Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings.

The Speaker brought the meeting to a close at 1.50pm

**The Speaker
Chairperson**