

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY
BUSINESS COMMITTEE

TUESDAY 21 SEPTEMBER 2021
SENATE CHAMBER, PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS

MINUTES

The meeting began at 1.05pm.

Present:

The Speaker (Chairperson)
Ms C Bailey
Mrs R Barton
Ms P Bradshaw
Ms J Bunting
Mr R Butler
Mr T Clarke
Ms S Ennis
Mrs D Kelly
Mr A Muir
Mr J O'Dowd

In attendance:

Dr A McGarel	Clerk of Business
Mr P Gill	Clerk Assistant
Dr G McGrath	Director of Parliamentary Services
Mr S Kelly	Legal 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 Kearney	Junior Minister
Mr D McCreedy	The Executive Office

1 Apologies

1.1 Apologies were received from Colin McGrath.

2 Minutes of previous meeting

2.1 The minutes of the meeting on 14 September were **agreed** subject to a minor correction.

2.2 The Speaker formally welcomed Mrs Rosemary Barton to the Committee.

3 **Matters Arising**

3.1 There were no matters arising.

4 **Ad Hoc Committee on the COVID-19 response**

4.1 The Speaker reminded Members that the provision for the Ad Hoc Committee on the Covid-19 response would expire at the end of September and if the Committee wanted to extend the provision, it would be necessary to schedule a motion the following week.

4.2 Members **noted** that an options paper had been provided to inform their consideration of this issue.

4.3 Following discussion, Members **agreed** to extend the provision as a precaution until the end of the mandate, in line with the other temporary provisions within Standing Orders.

5 **Finalisation of the Order Papers for the Plenary Meetings in Week Commencing 27 September**

Monday 27 September

Public Petition

5.1 Members **noted** that a public petition for Mr Muir remained scheduled.

Assembly Business

5.2 Members **agreed** to schedule a motion to extend the provision for the Ad Hoc Committee on COVID-19 response, and that it would be treated as a business motion with no debate.

5.3 Members **agreed** to schedule a motion for the Alliance party to appoint Mr Dickson to the Board of Trustees of the Assembly Members' Pension Scheme.

5.4 Members **agreed** to schedule a Committee Membership motion for Sinn Féin.

5.5 Members **noted** that further Committee Membership motions may need to be scheduled following the Committee's deliberations on the reallocation of

committee seats later in the meeting, and that if so, these would be treated as business motions with no debate.

Executive Committee Business

- 5.6 Members **noted** that Executive business remained as scheduled the previous week.

Committee Business

- 5.7 Members **noted** that no Committee Business had been scheduled.

Private Members' Business

- 5.8 Members **noted** that no Private Members' Business had been scheduled.

Members' Statements

- 5.9 Having assessed scheduled business, Members **agreed** to schedule Members' statements.
- 5.10 The Speaker suggested that scheduling Members' Statements on Monday mornings would allow Members to raise matters that had arisen since the last sitting, without needing to submit requests for Matters of the Day or Urgent Oral Questions.
- 5.11 A Member added that this approach would allow Matters of the Day and Urgent Oral Questions to be used for exceptional items, as intended.
- 5.12 Members **agreed** the Order Paper for Monday 27 September.

Tuesday 28 September

Executive Committee Business

- 5.13 Members **noted** that no Executive business had been scheduled.

Committee Business

- 5.14 Members **noted** that no Committee Business had been scheduled.

Private Members' Business

- 5.15 Members **noted** that Private Members' Business remained as scheduled the previous week.

Members' Statements

- 5.16 Having assessed estimated timings for scheduled business, Members **agreed** to schedule Members' statements.
- 5.17 Members **agreed** the Order Paper for Tuesday 28 September.
- 5.18 Members discussed the Executive's legislative timetable, and the Speaker reminded the Committee that as 13 Executive Bills were currently being scrutinised by Committees they could not be progressed by the Executive.

6 Provisional Arrangements for the Plenary Meetings in Week Commencing 4 October

Monday 4 October

Public Petition

- 6.1 Members **agreed** to schedule the presentation of a Public Petition on opposition to a proposed badger cull for Mr Easton.

Executive Committee Business

- 6.2 Members **noted** that Question Time was scheduled for the Minister for Infrastructure and Minister of Justice.
- 6.3 Members **noted** that no other Executive business had been scheduled.
- 6.4 The junior Minister indicated that no other business was expected at that time.

Committee Business

- 6.5 Members **noted** that the Committee for Education was seeking to schedule a motion to extend the committee stage of the Integrated Education Bill.
- 6.6 Members **agreed** to schedule an untimed debate for the motion.

Private Members' Business

- 6.7 Members **noted** that sufficient time was available for up to two Private Members motions.
- 6.8 Members **agreed** to schedule two Private Members motions, as follows:

- Universal Credit Uplift (SDLP)
- Bespoke Sanitary and Phytosanitary Standards Agreement (SF)

Members' Statements

- 6.9 Members **agreed** to consider scheduling Members' Statements at next week's meeting before finalising the Order Paper.
- 6.10 Members **agreed** the Provisional Order Paper for Monday 4 October.

Tuesday 5 October

Public Petition

- 6.11 Members **agreed** to schedule the presentation of a Public Petition entitled 'Stop the badger cull' for Mr Blair.

Executive Committee Business

- 6.12 Members **noted** that Question Time was scheduled for the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs.
- 6.13 Members **noted** that the notice of Forthcoming Assembly Business from TEO indicated that the Executive has scheduled one item of business; Second Stage of the Adoption and Children Bill for the Minister of Health.
- 6.14 Members **agreed** to schedule an untimed debate for Second Stage of the Bill.
- 6.15 The junior Minister indicated that no other business was expected at that time.

Committee Business

- 6.16 Members **noted** that no Committee Business had been requested.

Private Members' Business

- 6.17 Members **agreed** to schedule a Private Members' motion for the DUP, the subject of which could be provided to Business Office after the meeting.
- 6.18 Members **agreed** to schedule the following adjournment debate topic for SF:
- Wastewater and Sewerage Infrastructure in North Antrim
- 6.19 Members **agreed** the Provisional Order Paper for Tuesday 5 October.

7 **Redistribution of Committee Seats**

- 7.1 Members **noted** that at the last meeting they had considered the implications of Mr Easton's resignation from the DUP, which included the reduction in the number of Committee seats to which the DUP were now entitled.
- 7.2 Members **noted** that Mr. Easton had now indicated that he would take up the position on the Committee for the Executive Office being vacated by the DUP, as an independent member.
- 7.3 As DUP members were content to do so, Members **agreed** to schedule a Committee membership motion for the DUP to replace one of their Members on the Committee for the Executive Office with Mr. Easton.
- 7.4 The Speaker advised Members that the DUP's membership of standing committees had to be reduced by one, and it would be for the Committee to decide how that vacant position is filled.
- 7.5 The Speaker advised that, subject to any alternatives that Members may wish to propose, options available to the Committee were to allocate the vacant seat to Mr Easton as an independent member, or allocate the seat to the SDLP as the party that is statistically most under-represented on standing committees as a result of rounding.
- 7.6 It was **proposed** that the Business Committee allocate the vacant seat to the SDLP.
- 7.7 Members **voted** on the proposal as follows:
For – 45 votes
Against – 44 votes
- 7.8 The proposal was, therefore, **agreed**.
- 7.9 DUP representatives confirmed that the party would give up a seat on the Committee on Standards and Privileges.
- 7.10 Members **agreed** to schedule a Business Committee motion on Monday 27 September appointing an SDLP member to the Committee on Standards and Privileges to replace a DUP member.

8 **Social Distancing in the Chamber**

- 8.1 Members **noted** receipt of a further advice paper on the practical implications of a hybrid approach to social distancing in the Chamber.
- 8.2 Following discussion, Members **agreed** to adopt a hybrid approach to social distancing in the Chamber, whereby the 2 metre social distancing, allowing up to 22 Members in the Chamber, would be retained for all business other than Question Time, during which the social distancing arrangements would reduce to 1 metre allowing at least 40 Members in the Chamber.
- 8.3 Alliance party representatives noted their objection to social distancing of less than 2 metres being allowed in the Chamber at this stage.
- 8.4 Members **noted** that plans for the revised seating arrangement would be circulated to Members and would be posted at all entrances to the Chamber from next week onwards.
- 8.5 Members were asked to encourage their colleagues to observe the guidelines provided in the Chamber on where they may sit during Question Time and at all other times.
- 8.6 A Member raised concerns about the apparent lack of ventilation in the Chamber earlier that day and suggested that it should be increased.

9 **Any Other Business**

- 9.1 There was no other business.

10 **Date and time of next meeting**

- 10.1 Members **agreed** that the next meeting would take place on Tuesday 28 September in the Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings.

The Speaker brought the meeting to a close at 1.37pm

The Speaker
Chairperson