

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY
BUSINESS COMMITTEE

TUESDAY 30 NOVEMBER 2021
SENATE CHAMBER, PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS

MINUTES

The meeting began at 1.03pm.

Present:

The Speaker (Chairperson)
Ms C Bailey
Mrs R Barton
Ms P Bradshaw
Ms J Bunting
Mr T Clarke
Mrs D Kelly
Mr G Kelly
Mr C McGrath
Mr A Muir

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
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
Mr M O'Hare	Clerical Supervisor

Observers:

Mr G Middleton	Junior Minister
Mr D McCreedy	The Executive Office

1 Apologies

- 1.1 Apologies were received from Robbie Butler, Sinéad Ennis and John O'Dowd.
- 1.2 The Speaker welcomed Mr Gerry Kelly to the meeting, and explained that he had been nominated to attend in place of Mr O'Dowd and Ms Ennis.

2 **Minutes of previous meeting**

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

3 **Matters Arising**

3.1 There were no matters arising.

4 **Finalisation of the Order Papers for the Plenary Meetings in Week Commencing 6 December**

Monday 6 December

Members' Statements

4.1 Members **noted** that Members' Statements remained scheduled.

Public Petition

4.2 Members **noted** that a public petition remained scheduled for Mr. Allister.

Executive Committee Business

4.3 Members **noted** that Consideration Stage of the Non-domestic Rates Valuations (Coronavirus) Bill could not proceed on this date as the Assembly did not consent to the Bill proceeding via accelerated passage, and so had been removed from the draft Order Paper.

4.4 Members **noted** that the Health Regulations, which the junior Minister had indicated may be scheduled for week commencing 6 December, were now listed for the week commencing 13 December.

4.5 Members **noted** that all other Executive Business remained as scheduled at the last meeting.

Private Members' Business

- 4.6 Members **noted** their prior agreement to schedule Second Stage of the Hunting of Wild Mammals Bill for John Blair, with the caveat that it would be deferred if additional business was scheduled by the Executive.
- 4.7 Members **agreed** that, as additional Executive Business had not been listed for debate, Second Stage of the Hunting of Wild Mammals Bill would remain scheduled.
- 4.8 Members **agreed** that the overall debate would be untimed, but limits on individual contributions to the debate would apply.
- 4.9 On the basis that the Bill contains a number of policy objectives and had generated considerable interest among stakeholders, Members **agreed** that Mr. Blair would have 30 minutes to move and 15 minutes to wind; the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs would have up to 20 minutes should he choose to respond, and the Committee Chair and all other contributors would have up to 15 minutes.
- 4.10 Members **agreed** the Order Paper for Monday 6 December.

Tuesday 7 December

Executive Committee Business

- 4.11 Members **noted** that the Minister for Communities had formally notified the Speaker of her intention to make a statement on the British Irish Council Indigenous and Minority Languages Sectoral meeting.
- 4.12 Members **agreed** to schedule an untimed debate for a Legislative Consent Motion relating to the Advanced Research and Invention Agency Bill from the Minister for the Economy.
- 4.13 Members **noted** that otherwise Executive Business remained as scheduled at the last meeting.

Private Members' Business

- 4.14 Members **agreed** that insufficient time was available for Private Members' business.
- 4.15 Members **agreed** the Order Paper for Tuesday 7 December.

5 **Provisional Arrangements for the Plenary Meetings in Week Commencing 13 December**

Monday 13 December

Members' Statements

5.1 Members **noted** that Members' Statements were scheduled as usual.

Executive Committee Business

5.2 Members **noted** that Question Time was scheduled for the Executive Office and the Minister of Health.

5.3 Members **noted** that the Executive had listed three items of business:

- A statement from the Minister of Health on the NSMC Health and Food sectoral meeting
- The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) Regulations (NI) 2021 (Amendment No. 19) Regulations (NI) 2021
- First Stage of the Welfare Supplementary Payments (Loss of Universal Credit or Housing Benefit) Bill

5.4 Members **noted** that the statement would be included in the Indicative Timings once confirmed with the Speaker's Office.

5.5 Members **agreed** to schedule an untimed debate for the Health Protection Regulations.

5.6 Members **noted** that First Stage of the Welfare Supplementary Payments (Loss of Universal Credit or Housing Benefit) Bill was scheduled subject to Executive approval and would only be shown on indicative timings once it has been confirmed that it is within the competence of the Assembly.

5.7 The junior Minister indicated that no other business was expected at that time.

Private Members' Business

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

5.9 Members **agreed** the Provisional Order Paper for Monday 13 December.

Tuesday 14 December

Executive Committee Business

- 5.10 Members **noted** that Question Time was scheduled for the Minister for Infrastructure.
- 5.11 Members **noted** that the Executive had listed four items of business:
- Consideration Stage of the Social Security (Terminal Illness) Bill
 - Consideration Stage of the Animal Welfare (Service Animals) Bill
 - Further Consideration Stage of the Parental Bereavement (Leave and Pay) Bill
 - Final Stage of the Criminal Justice (Committal Reform) Bill
- 5.12 Members **agreed** to schedule untimed debates for all of these items.
- 5.13 Members **noted** that Consideration Stage of the Social Security (Terminal Illness) Bill would proceed only if the accelerated passage motion scheduled for 7 December was passed by the Assembly.
- 5.14 The junior Minister indicated that no other business was expected at that time.

Private Members' Business

- 5.15 Members **agreed** to schedule an untimed debate for Consideration Stage of the Severe Fetal Impairment Abortion (Amendment) Bill for Mr. Stalford.
- 5.16 Members **agreed** to defer taking a decision on scheduling an adjournment debate until the next meeting.
- 5.17 The DUP asked the Committee to consider allowing Mr Stalford's adjournment debate, which had not been introduced the previous week due to illness, to be rescheduled.
- 5.18 Members **agreed** to revisit the request at the next meeting.
- 5.19 Members **agreed** the Provisional Order Paper for Tuesday 14 December.
- 5.20 An Alliance party representative asked when the deadline for amendments to the Integrated Education Bill would be if its Consideration Stage was scheduled for w/c 17 January, and was advised that it would be 12 January.

6 Question Time Rota for January – March 2022

- 6.1 Members **noted** that Standing Order 20(4) requires the Business Committee to determine which Minister should answer oral questions in the Chamber on a particular day.
- 6.2 Members **noted** that they had been provided with a draft Question Time Rota based on the current pattern of three Ministers per week responding to oral questions, with two on a Monday and one on a Tuesday with the exception of those Tuesdays on which the Assembly Commission is due to answer questions.
- 6.3 Members **agreed** the Question Time rota for January – March 2022.
- 6.4 Members **noted** that names for the ballot for the first question time in January should be submitted to Business Office on Thursday 16 December.

7 Correspondence

- 7.1 Members noted receipt of correspondence from the Committee on Procedures, seeking the Business Committee's views on the temporary provisions which were introduced to allow Assembly and Committee proceedings to continue during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- 7.2 Members agreed to take some time to discuss the matters raised therein with their parties, and to return to discuss a response at a future meeting.

8 Any Other Business

- 8.1 The Speaker advised that there were only four more sittings before Christmas recess and by the time of the first scheduled sittings in January a number of bills will have been introduced and would be awaiting their second stage.
- 8.2 The Speaker informed Members that in order to address the likely backlog arising from this, he was proposing an additional sitting on 11 January specifically to facilitate second stages debates, and if Members were content, draft papers would be brought to the next Committee meeting for consideration.
- 8.3 Members **agreed** to the proposed additional sitting on 11 January.
- 8.4 A Member noted that currently 1-metre distancing arrangements applied in the Chamber during Question Time and Urgent Oral Questions, and sought clarification on what arrangements applied during Ministerial Statements. The

Speaker advised that the 2-metre distancing arrangements currently applied to statements.

- 8.5 Members discussed extending the 1-metre arrangements to Ministerial statements, and **agreed** to revisit the issue at the next meeting so that Committee members from Sinn Féin could contribute their views.

9 **Date and time of next meeting**

- 9.1 Members **agreed** that the next Committee meeting would take place on Tuesday 7 December in the Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings.

The Speaker brought the meeting to a close at 1.20pm

The Speaker
Chairperson