

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

**TUESDAY 11 JANUARY 2022**  
**VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS**

**MINUTES**

*The meeting began at 1.02pm.*

**Present:**

**The Speaker (Chairperson)**  
**Mrs R Barton**  
**Ms P Bradshaw**  
**Ms J Bunting**  
**Mr R Butler**  
**Mr C McGrath**  
**Mr A Muir**  
**Mr J O'Dowd**  
**Ms R Woods**

**In attendance:**

<b>Dr A McGarel</b>	<b>Clerk of Business</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 McMillen</b>	<b>Head of Legal Services</b>
<b>Ms P Casey</b>	<b>Legal Services ESR</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>

**1 Apologies**

- 1.1 Apologies were received from Clare Bailey, Trevor Clarke, Sinéad Ennis and Dolores Kelly.
- 1.2 Ms Rachel Woods attended in place of Clare Bailey.

## 2 **Minutes of previous meeting**

- 2.1 The minutes of the meeting on 7 December 2021 were **agreed**.
- 2.2 The minutes of the additional meeting on 7 January 2022 were **agreed**.

## 3 **Matters Arising**

- 3.1 The Speaker noted that at the meeting on 7 December the Committee had discussed extending the 1-metre social distancing arrangement to cover ministerial statements, and reminded Members that due to the emergence of a new Covid variant they had agreed to defer a decision until January.
- 3.2 The Speaker advised that the latest Health Protection Regulations which came into force on 27 December require workplaces to put measures into place to ensure people maintain a distance of 2 metres from each other at all times. The Speaker advised that as this is not guidance but set out in regulations, it would be necessary to revert to social distancing of 2 metres in the Chamber for all items of business while these regulations remain in force.
- 3.3 The Speaker indicated that he would communicate with Members on this matter prior to next week's sittings.
- 3.4 Members agreed that, effective immediately, social distancing of 2 metres would apply to all items of plenary business.
- 3.5 There were no other matters arising.

## 4 **Finalisation of the Order Papers for the Plenary Meetings in Week Commencing 17 January**

### **Monday 17 January**

#### **Members' Statements**

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

#### **Executive Committee Business**

- 4.2 Members **noted** that the draft Grants to Water and Sewerage Undertakers Order (NI) 2021; draft Welfare Supplementary Payment (Extension) Regulations; Further Consideration Stage of the Parental Bereavement

(Leave and Pay) Bill; and an LCM for the Pension Schemes (Conversion of Guaranteed Minimum Pensions) Bill had been deferred until 24 January.

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

#### Private Members' Business

- 4.4 Members **noted** that no Private Members' business had been scheduled on the Provisional Order Paper but, as a result of changes to Executive business, time for Private Members business was now available.
- 4.5 Members **noted** that Consideration Stage of the Integrated Education Bill was on the Provisional Order Paper for Tuesday 18 January but as the Executive had since removed business for 17 January and added business for 18 January, there was less plenary time available on Tuesday 18 January and Consideration Stage of the Integrated Education Bill could be brought forward to Monday 17 January.
- 4.6 The DUP representative advised that the Integrated Education Bill was a very large and complex piece of legislation that had major ramifications for the education system as it currently exists, and expressed the view that reducing the time available to consider amendments was not prudent. She suggested an alternative bill stage should be scheduled in the time available.
- 4.7 The Alliance party representative advised that as the Integrated Education Bill was the furthest advanced of Private Members' Bills and there was time available, it should be scheduled.
- 4.8 Mr Butler declared an interest as a member of the Education Committee, before advising that while he supported the Bill in principle, he too had concerns about bringing it forward by a day.
- 4.9 The Speaker cautioned the Business Committee that with the legislative pressures facing the Assembly, it was important to make the maximum use of time, adding that Members from all parties have approached him routinely, keen to progress their proposed legislation. The Speaker advised that in the interests of fairness the Committee should base its scheduling decisions only on sufficient time being available and the order in which Bills were sitting in the legislative process.
- 4.10 A Member asked if there was scope for the plenary to extend beyond 9pm. The Speaker replied that late finish times affect those with some distance to travel more than those Members who are local and that allowing the business to span over two days was in keeping with the Committee's agreement to family friendly scheduling where possible.
- 4.11 Following discussions, the Committee **agreed** to reschedule Consideration Stage of the Integrated Education Bill for Monday 17 January.

- 4.12 The DUP recorded its opposition to the decision to reschedule the Bill.
- 4.13 The DUP representative advised that recently the marshalled list of amendments published by Bill Office had issued on a Friday, and asked the Speaker to ensure that the Bill Office issued the list for the Integrated Education Bill on Thursday to allow as much time as possible for scrutiny. The Speaker replied that he would liaise with officials to arrange this.
- 4.14 Members **agreed** to schedule a business motion to suspend Standing Order 10(2) to 10(4) at the start of Monday's sitting to enable it to continue beyond 7pm.
- 4.15 Members **agreed** that if the sitting were to run late, the Speaker would adjourn Monday's sitting and any unfinished business that remained would be taken as the first item of business the following day.
- 4.16 Members **agreed** the Order Paper for Monday 17 January.

### **Tuesday 18 January**

#### **Assembly Business**

- 4.17 Members **agreed** to schedule consideration of business not concluded on Monday 17 January as the first item of business.

#### **Executive Committee Business**

- 4.18 Members **noted** that since the last meeting, the Executive had listed two additional items of business, an accelerated passage motion for, and second stage of, the Welfare Supplementary Payments (Amendment) Bill.
- 4.19 Members **noted** that both items would by convention be untimed and if the Assembly consented to the Bill proceeding via accelerated passage, no time limits on individual contributions would be applied to the second stage debate.
- 4.20 If the Assembly did not give its consent for the Bill to proceed by accelerated passage and the second stage was moved, Members **agreed** to allow the Minister up to 20 minutes for the move and 10 minutes for the wind, 15 minutes for the Chair of the Committee and up to 10 minutes for all other contributors.
- 4.21 Members noted that all other Executive business remained as scheduled at the meeting on 7 December.

### Committee Business

- 4.22 Members **noted** that the Committee for the Economy was seeking to schedule a motion to extend the Committee Stage of the Domestic Abuse (Safe Leave) Bill.
- 4.23 Members **agreed** to schedule an untimed debate for the Committee motion.
- 4.24 Members **noted** that a motion from the Committee for the Executive Office on a Public Services Ombudsman Statement of Principles Concerning Complaints Handling Procedures remained scheduled.

### Private Members' Business

- 4.25 Members **noted** that Consideration Stage of Kellie Armstrong's Integrated Education Bill had been rescheduled for Monday but as agreed, would conclude at the start of Tuesday's sitting if necessary.
- 4.26 Members **noted** that at the meeting on 7 December, they had agreed to defer taking a decision on scheduling an adjournment debate until this meeting.
- 4.27 Members **agreed** to schedule an adjournment debate with the caveat that it could be postponed in the event that other business ran later than anticipated.
- 4.28 Members **agreed** to schedule the following adjournment debate:
- Road Safety on the A5 (Sinn Féin)
- 4.29 Members **agreed** the Order Paper for Tuesday 18 January.

## 5 Provisional Arrangements for the Plenary Meetings in Week Commencing 24 January

### Monday 24 January

#### 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 Minister for the Economy.
- 5.3 Members **noted** that the Executive had listed nine items of business:
- A statement from the Minister of Finance on January Monitoring
  - Consideration Stage of the Non-domestic Rates (Valuations) Bill
  - The draft Grants to Water and Sewerage Undertakers Order (NI) 2022
  - The draft Welfare Supplementary Payment (Extension) Regulations
  - Consideration Stage of the Organ and Tissue Donation Bill
  - Further Consideration Stage of the Parental Bereavement (Leave and Pay) Bill
  - Final Stage of the Social Security (Terminal Illness) Bill
  - Final Stage of the Animal Welfare (Service Animals) Bill
  - A Legislative Consent Motion for the Pension Schemes (Conversion of Guaranteed Minimum Pensions) Bill
- 5.4 Members **noted** that the statement on January Monitoring would be included on Indicative Timings when confirmed with the Speaker's Office in writing.
- 5.5 Members **agreed** to schedule untimed debates for all other items.
- 5.6 Members **noted** that Final Stage of the Animal Welfare (Service Animals) Bill was conditional upon Further Consideration Stage being passed on 17 January.

### Private Members' Business

- 5.7 Members **agreed** that insufficient time was available to schedule Private Members' business, and that they may wish to consider scheduling a motion to allow the sitting to run beyond 7pm at next week's meeting.
- 5.8 Members **agreed** the Provisional Order Paper for Monday 24 January 2022.

### Tuesday 25 January

#### Public Petition

- 5.9 Members **noted** that Ms. Dolan was seeking to present a public petition entitled 'Addressing flooding in Boho'.

5.10 Members **agreed** to schedule the petition for Ms. Dolan.

#### Executive Committee Business

5.11 Members **noted** that Question Time was scheduled for the Minister of Education.

5.12 Members **noted** that the Executive had listed two items of business:

- The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) Regulations (NI) 2021 (Amendment No.20) Regulations (NI) 2021
- The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) Regulations (NI) 2021 (Amendment No.21) Regulations (NI) 2021
- The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Wearing of Face Coverings) (Amendment No.8) Regulations (NI) 2021
- The Coronavirus Act 2020 (Extension of Powers to Act for the Protection of Public Health) Order (NI) 2021
- Consideration Stage of the Protection from Stalking Bill
- Final Stage of the Financial Reporting (Departments and Public Bodies) Bill

5.13 Members **agreed** to schedule a single untimed debate for the three Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) Regulations.

5.14 Members **agreed** to schedule untimed debates for all other items.

5.15 Members **noted** that Consideration Stage of the Protection from Stalking Bill was being notified to the Committee for planning purposes, but remained subject to Executive approval.

#### Committee Business

5.16 Members **noted** that no Committee business had been requested at that time.

#### Private Members' Business

5.17 Members **agreed** to schedule an adjournment debate for the DUP, the topic to be confirmed at the next meeting.

5.18 The SDLP representative advised that of the nine adjournment debates that had been scheduled since September 2021 six had been for response by the Minister for Infrastructure, and added that while the Minister had no issue in responding to these debates, he suggested that parties consider broadening their choice of adjournment topic.

5.19 Members **agreed** the Provisional Order Paper for Tuesday 25 January.

## 6 Any Other Business

- 6.1 A Member asked, in light of the dramatically increased Covid-19 infection rates and the limited timescales for passing legislation before the end of the mandate, if consideration had been given to facilitating Ministers who were required to self-isolate in bringing Bill stages to the Assembly via remote means.
- 6.2 The Speaker advised that provision for Ministers to do this was already included in the guidance on hybrid plenary sitting and that he would endeavor to facilitate a Minister in such circumstances.
- 6.3 A Member asked if any discussions had taken place on scheduling second stages of Private Members' Bills.
- 6.4 The Speaker advised that when Bills were ready and cleared and sufficient time was available they would be scheduled, and added that it was his intention for the Business Committee to consider an updated list of Bills and their status by the end of January.
- 6.5 There was no other Business.

## 7 Date and time of next meeting

- 7.1 Members **agreed** that the next Committee meeting would take place on Tuesday 18 January at 1pm in the Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings.

*The Speaker brought the meeting to a close at 1.37pm*

**The Speaker**  
**Chairperson**