

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY
BUSINESS COMMITTEE

TUESDAY 15 FEBRUARY 2022
SENATE CHAMBER

MINUTES

The meeting began at 1.09pm.

Present:

The Speaker (Chairperson)
Ms C Bailey (via Starleaf)
Mrs R Barton
Ms P Bradshaw
Ms J Bunting
Mr R Butler
Mr T Clarke
Ms S Ennis
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
Dr G McGrath	Director of Parliamentary Services
Ms L Hogg	Clerk/Chief Executive
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 No apologies were received.

2 **Minutes of previous meeting**

2.1 The minutes of the meeting on 8 February 2022 were **agreed**.

3 **Matters Arising**

3.1 The Speaker noted the following points for maximising plenary time over the next 2 weeks which had been agreed by whips:

- The Speaker should write to committee chairpersons to note that legislation will be the priority for the remaining plenary sittings in the mandate and that while there will be some business which committees will have to continue to bring forward, it would be helpful if committees could avoid bringing non-essential motions for debate in plenary.
- The Speaker should write to Ministers to note that legislation will be the priority for the remaining plenary sittings in the mandate and that while Ministers should continue to come to the Assembly to keep it informed on important and essential matters, Ministers should also consider the use of written statements in this period.
- The Business Committee will return to considering the scheduling of Members' statements from week to week in this period rather than scheduling Members' statements automatically each Monday.
- The Business Committee does not expect there to be time in the remaining sittings of the mandate to schedule Private Members' motions and adjournment debates.
- The Business Committee will schedule business for additional sittings on Wednesday 23 February and Wednesday 2 March. Any outstanding business on those days will be continued on the following Monday. The situation will be reviewed in subsequent weeks and the sittings each week will be considered on a case by case basis.
- The Business Committee is content for business to be scheduled on the basis that the sponsors of each bill will seek to suspend Standing Orders to allow a gap of one week between Further Consideration Stage and Final Stage for each bill.
- Any approaches agreed now are designed to take account of unique pressures of the last weeks of the mandate and will not be considered as precedent for Assembly business in the future.

3.2 There were no other matters arising.

4 **Finalisation of the Order Papers for the Plenary Meetings in Week Commencing 21 February**

Monday 21 February

Members' Statements

- 4.1 Members **agreed** that Members' Statements would remain scheduled.

Assembly Business

- 4.2 Members **agreed** to schedule a Business Committee motion to suspend Standing Orders 10(2) to 10(4) at the start of the sitting.

Executive Committee Business

- 4.3 Members **noted** that questions to the Executive Office had been removed from the rota until the posts of First Minister and deputy First Minister are filled, and on 21 February questions to the Minister for the Economy had been rescheduled in place of them.
- 4.4 Members **noted** that the Minister for the Economy would make a statement on the Review of Invest NI and that this had already been confirmed with Speaker's Office.
- 4.5 Members **noted** that Further Consideration Stage of the Climate Change (No. 2) Bill had been deferred until 28 February.
- 4.6 Members **noted** that otherwise Executive Business remained as scheduled at the last meeting.
- 4.7 Members **noted** that in accordance with Assembly convention, the First Stage of the Budget Bill will be shown on the Order Paper.

Private Members' Business

- 4.8 Members **noted** that there was insufficient time available for Private Members' business.
- 4.9 Members **agreed** the Order Paper for Monday 21 February.

Tuesday 22 February

Assembly Business

- 4.10 Members **agreed** that the first item of business would be the completion of any unfinished Executive business from Monday.

Executive Committee Business

- 4.11 Members **noted** that Education questions had not been able to take place that day, and **agreed** to reschedule questions to the Education Minister after those to the Health Minister.
- 4.12 Members **noted** that questions to the Education Minister had already been published and would remain the same unless a Member successful in the ballot who had already submitted a question, wished to submit a replacement.
- 4.13 Members **noted** that the Minister for the Economy would make a statement on the British Irish Council Energy Meeting and that this had already been confirmed with Speaker's Office.
- 4.14 Members **noted** that all other Executive business remained as scheduled at the last meeting.
- 4.15 Members **noted** that at the last meeting they had discussed the possibility of applying time limits on individual contributions to the second stage of the Budget Bill and had agreed to defer a decision pending further information on previous practice from officials.
- 4.16 Members **noted** receipt of a summary of the duration of previous second stages of budget bills, and that these had always been untimed. Members **noted** that debate times have ranged from two and a half hours to eight hours with around four and a half hours being the most frequent.
- 4.17 On the basis that whips had committed to manage contributions to debates by their Members, Members **agreed** not to apply limits to individual contributions to the second stage debate of the Budget Bill.
- 4.18 Members **noted** that because the Minister of Education was seeking accelerated passage for the General Teaching Council (Directions) Bill, their prior agreement was that no time limits would apply to individual contributions.
- 4.19 Members **agreed** that if the motion seeking accelerated passage for the Bill did not pass, time limits on individual contributions would then be applied to second stage.
- 4.20 Members **agreed** to allow up to 20 minutes for the Minister to move and 10 minutes for the wind, up to 15 minutes for the Committee Chair and up to 10 minutes for all other contributors.

Private Members' Business

- 4.21 Members **agreed** that insufficient time was available to schedule Private Members' business.

- 4.22 Following discussion, Members **agreed** to reschedule the lunchtime suspension on a Tuesday to 1.30-2.00pm and commence Business Committee meetings at 1.30pm to avoid resuming ordinary business in the Chamber for a short period before Question Time.
- 4.23 Members **agreed** the Order Paper for Tuesday 22 February.

Wednesday 23 February

Assembly Business

- 4.24 Members **agreed** to schedule any unfinished Executive business from Tuesday as the first item of business on Wednesday's Order Paper.
- 4.25 Members **agreed** to schedule a motion from the Assembly Commission to consider its 2022-25 budget, and allowed one hour for the debate with ten minutes to move and wind and five minutes for all other speakers.

Private Members' Business

- 4.26 Members **agreed** to schedule an untimed debate for Further Consideration Stage of the Autism (Amendment) Bill.
- 4.27 Members **agreed** to schedule an untimed debate for Further Consideration Stage of the Integrated Education Bill.
- 4.28 Having agreed Further Consideration Stage of both bills should be included on the Order Paper, Members **agreed** that the Autism (Amendment) Bill should be listed first as it was likely to be the shorter of the two items.
- 4.29 Members **noted** that the Speaker had asked the Bill Office to extend its amendment deadline for both bills to 9.30am on Friday 18 February as neither had been notified on a Provisional Order Paper.

5 Provisional Arrangements for the Plenary Meetings in Week Commencing 28 February

Monday 28 February

Members' Statements

- 5.1 Members **agreed** that Members' Statements would be provisionally scheduled and confirmed at the next meeting.

Public Petition

- 5.2 Members **agreed** to schedule a public petition for Mr. Muir entitled 'Save Stonebridge, Conlig'.

Assembly Business

- 5.3 Members **agreed** that, as there would be no sitting on a Thursday, the first item of business on Monday's Order Paper would be the conclusion of unfinished business from Wednesday 23 February.
- 5.4 Members **agreed** to schedule a Business Committee motion to suspend Standing Orders 10(2) to 10(4) at the start of the sitting to enable it to continue beyond 7pm.

Executive Committee Business

- 5.5 Members **noted** that Question Time was scheduled for the Minister for Infrastructure and Minister of Justice.
- 5.6 Members **noted** that the Executive had listed seven items of business:
- A statement from the Minister for the Economy on the High Street Scheme
 - The Energy Performance of Buildings (Certificates and Inspections) (Amendment) Regulations (NI) 2022
 - Consideration Stage of the Budget Bill
 - Final Stage of the School Age Bill
 - Consideration Stage of the General Teaching Council (Directions) Bill
 - Further Consideration Stage of the Betting, Gaming, Lotteries and Amusements(Amendment) Bill
 - Further Consideration Stage of the Climate Change (No. 2) Bill
- 5.7 Members **noted** that the statement from the Minister for the Economy had been confirmed with the Speaker's Office.
- 5.8 Members **agreed** to schedule untimed debates for all other items.
- 5.9 Junior Minister Kearney confirmed that no additional business was expected at that time.

Committee Business

- 5.10 Members **agreed** to schedule a two-hour debate for the Public Accounts Committee motion on its Committee Reports and Memoranda of Reply, with

15 minutes each for move and the wind, 20 minutes for the Minister of Finance to respond, and seven minutes for all other contributions.

Private Members' Business

- 5.11 Members **agreed** that insufficient time was available to schedule Private Members' business.
- 5.12 Members **agreed** the Provisional Order Paper for Monday 28 February.

Tuesday 1 March

Assembly Business

- 5.13 Members **agreed** that the first item of business for Tuesday would be to complete any unfinished Executive and Committee business from Monday.

Executive Committee Business

- 5.14 Members **noted** that Question Time was scheduled for the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs.
- 5.15 Members **noted** that the Executive had listed eight items of business:
- A statement from the Minister for the Economy on Project Stratum
 - A statement from the Minister of Justice on Inter-Governmental Agreement on Criminal Justice Cooperation
 - The Coronavirus Act 2020 (Extension of Provisions Related to Courts, Tribunals and Inquests) Order
 - The Greenhouse Gas Emissions Trading Scheme (Amendment) Order 2022
 - Further Consideration Stage of the Motor Vehicles (Compulsory Insurance) Bill
 - Further Consideration Stage of the Justice (Sexual Offences and Trafficking Victims) Bill
 - Final Stage of the Welfare Supplementary Payments (Amendment) Bill
 - Consideration Stage of the Support for Mortgage Interest etc. (Security for Loans) Bill
- 5.16 Members **noted** that the statement from the Minister for the Economy had been confirmed with the Speaker's Office, and that the statement from the Minister of Justice had yet to be confirmed.

- 5.17 Members **agreed** to schedule untimed debates for all legislative business.
- 5.18 Junior Minister Kearney advised that no additional business was expected at that time.

Committee Business

- 5.19 Members **agreed** to schedule an untimed debate for the Committee for the Economy to extend Committee Stage of the Employment (Zero Hours Workers and Banded Weekly Working Hours) Bill.
- 5.20 Members **agreed** to schedule one and a half hours for a Committee on Procedures debate on amending Standing Orders.

Private Members' Business

- 5.21 Members **agreed** to schedule Second Stage of the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Amendment) Bill for Mr. Carroll.
- 5.22 Members **agreed** the Provisional Order Paper for Tuesday 1 March.

Wednesday 2 March

Assembly Business

- 5.23 Members **agreed** that the first item of business would be to complete any unfinished business from Tuesday.

Private Members' Business

- 5.24 Members **noted** that the next PMB stage to be scheduled was the Consideration Stage of the Climate Change Bill, but that Further Consideration stage of the Climate Change (No. 2) Bill had already been scheduled on Monday and for practical reasons, amending stages of the two bills should not be scheduled in the same week.
- 5.25 Members **agreed** to include Consideration Stage of the Climate Change (No. 1) Bill on an Order Paper in week commencing 7 March regardless of Executive Business.
- 5.26 Members **agreed** to schedule Consideration Stage of the Defamation Bill for Mr Nesbitt.
- 5.27 Members **agreed** to schedule Consideration Stage of the Abortion Services (Safe Access Zones) Bill for Ms Bailey.

5.28 Members **agreed** to schedule Second Stage of the Fair Employment (School Teachers) Bill for Mr Lyttle.

5.29 Members **agreed** the Provisional Order Paper for Wednesday 2 March.

6 **Any Other Business**

6.1 Members **noted** that they would be provided with further information on social distancing in the Chamber when it had been considered by the Assembly Commission.

6.2 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 22 February at 1.30pm in the Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings.

The Speaker brought the meeting to a close at 1.41pm

**The Speaker
Chairperson**