

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY
BUSINESS COMMITTEE

TUESDAY 8 MARCH 2022
SENATE CHAMBER

MINUTES

The meeting began at 1.37pm.

Present:

	The Speaker (Chairperson)
	Ms C Bailey
	Ms P Bradshaw
	Mr K Buchanan
	Mr R Butler
	Ms S Ennis
	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 R Ellis	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 McCreedy** **The Executive Office**

1 **Apologies**

1.1 Apologies were received from Rosemary Barton, Joanne Bunting, Trevor Clarke, Colin McGrath and junior Minister Middleton.

1.2 The Speaker welcomed Mr Buchanan who was attending as DUP representative.

2 **Minutes of previous meeting**

2.1 The minutes of the meeting on 1 March 2022 were **agreed**.

3 **Matters Arising**

- 3.1 Members **noted** receipt of correspondence from the Committee for the Executive Office stating that it intends to complete its scrutiny of the Fair Employment (School Teachers) Bill by 9 March and asked Business Committee to consider scheduling the remaining stages of the Bill as soon as possible after that date.
- 3.2 Members **noted** receipt of correspondence from Mr Lyttle, noting that the TEO Committee intends to complete its Committee Stage on or before 9 March and asking the Committee to schedule the remaining stages of the Bill before the end of the mandate, dispensing with 5 days between stages requirement if necessary.
- 3.3 Members **noted** that the Speaker had received another Private Members' Bill; the Preservation of Documents (Historical Institutions) Bill, and that the sponsor was seeking introduction at the earliest opportunity.
- 3.4 Members **noted** receipt of a paper outlining how the above bills could be scheduled over the next two weeks but also highlighting the issues with doing so. The Speaker summarized the paper's contents and proposed that if the Committee decided to progress the two Bills, it should consider the Order Papers as drafted but with the understanding that officials would revisit them with a view to incorporating stages of these two bills.
- 3.5 The DUP representative advised that he had procedural concerns with finalising bills in such a short time frame and said that although he did not agree that the bills should be progressed, he would not push the matter to a division.
- 3.6 The representative of the smaller parties and independents also expressed concern about progressing the bills which she felt would set a dangerous precedent, but also noted that she would not stand in the way if the majority of Members wished to do so.
- 3.7 Following discussions, Members **agreed** to schedule all the stages of the Fair Employment (School Teachers) Bill and the Preservation of Documents (Historical Institutions) Bill in the weeks remaining of the mandate, thereby allowing the Assembly to decide if the bill should pass.
- 3.8 Members **agreed** to consider the Order Papers before them in the understanding that these would be updated to reflect their decision and recirculated to Members before being issued.
- 3.9 There were no other matters arising.

4 Finalisation of the Order Papers for the Plenary Meetings in Week Commencing 14 March

Monday 14 March

Members' Statements

- 4.1 Members **noted** that Members' Statements were not scheduled.

Assembly Business

- 4.2 Members **noted** that Assembly Business remained as scheduled at the last meeting.

Executive Committee Business

- 4.3 Members **noted** that the Minister of Finance was no longer available to respond to oral questions on 14 March and had deferred all of his previously scheduled business until 21 March.
- 4.4 The Committee **agreed** to reschedule the Minister's oral questions on 21 March.
- 4.5 Members **noted** that otherwise Executive Business remained as scheduled at the last meeting.

Committee Business

- 4.6 Members **agreed** that as time had become available following the deferral of Executive Business, the Committee on Procedures motions scheduled for Tuesday 15 March would be rescheduled alongside its other business on this date.

Private Members' Business

- 4.7 Members **noted** that Private Members' Business remained as scheduled at the last meeting.
- 4.8 Members **agreed** the Order Paper for Monday 14 March.

Tuesday 15 March

Assembly Business

- 4.9 Members **noted** that Assembly Business remained as scheduled at the last meeting.

Executive Committee Business

- 4.10 Members **noted** that Executive business remained as scheduled at the last meeting.

Committee Business

- 4.11 Members **noted** that the Committee on Procedures motions had been rescheduled for Monday.

Private Members' Business

- 4.12 Members **noted** that Private Members' Business remained as scheduled at the last meeting with two additional motions from Clare Bailey and Pat Catney seeking to suspend Standing Order 42(1) to allow Further Consideration Stages of their bills to be scheduled within 5 days of their Consideration Stages
- 4.13 Members **agreed** the Order Paper for Tuesday 15 March.

5 **Provisional Arrangements for the Plenary Meetings in Week Commencing 21 March**

Monday 21 March

Members' Statements

- 5.1 Members **agreed** that Members' Statements would not be scheduled.

Assembly Business

- 5.2 Members **noted** that the first item of business on Monday's Order Paper would be the conclusion of unfinished business from Tuesday 15 March.
- 5.3 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

- 5.4 Members **noted** that Question Time was scheduled for the Minister for Infrastructure and, as agreed previously, the Minister of Finance.
- 5.5 Members **noted** that the Executive had listed six items of business:
- The Occupational Pension Schemes (Administration, Investment and Charges and Governance) (Amendment) Regulations
 - The Coronavirus Act 2020 (Alteration of Expiry Date of Provisions Related to Local Authority Meetings) Order
 - The Rehabilitation of Offenders (Amendment) Order (NI)
 - The Rates (Exemption for Automatic Telling Machines in Rural Areas) Order (NI) 2022
 - The Rates (Temporary Rebate) (Amendment) Order (NI) 2022
 - The Coronavirus Act 2020 (Registration of deaths and still-births) (Extension) Order (NI) 2022
- 5.6 Members **agreed** to schedule untimed debates for all items.

Private Members' Business

- 5.7 Members **agreed** to schedule Further Consideration Stages of the Domestic Abuse (Safe Leave) Bill and Hospital Parking Charges Bill, subject to the passage of Consideration Stage of each Bill on 9 March.
- 5.8 Members **agreed** the Provisional Order Paper for Monday 21 March.

Tuesday 22 March

Public Petition

- 5.9 Members **agreed** to schedule a public petition for Mr. Gildernew entitled 'Keep the Firs Residential Care Home Open'.

Assembly Business

- 5.10 Members **agreed** that the first item of business for Tuesday would be to complete any unfinished business from Monday.
- 5.11 Members agreed to schedule a one-hour debate for an Assembly Commission motion on the appointment of a new Comptroller and Auditor General.

Executive Committee Business

- 5.12 Members **noted** that Question Time was scheduled for the Minister of Justice.
- 5.13 Members **noted** that the Executive had listed three items of business:
- Final Stage of the Support for Mortgage Interest etc (Security for Loans) Bill
 - The draft Police Act 1997 (Criminal Record Certificates: Relevant Matters) (Amendment) Order (NI) 2022
 - The draft Domestic Abuse Information-sharing with Schools etc. Regulations (NI) 2022
- 5.14 Members **agreed** to schedule untimed debates for all items of business.

Committee Business

- 5.15 Members **agreed** to schedule a 90-minute debate for a Committee for Finance motion on the RHI Action Plan.
- 5.16 Members **agreed** to schedule a 30-minute debate for an Audit Committee motion to agree the salary of the Comptroller and Auditor General

Private Members' Business

- 5.17 Members **agreed** to schedule Final Stages of the Defamation Bill and the Abortion Services (Safe Access Zones) Bill, subject to the sponsors tabling motions to suspend Standing Order 42 (1).
- 5.18 Members **agreed** the Provisional Order Paper for Tuesday 22 March.

Thursday 24 March

- 5.19 Members **noted** that if the sponsors were willing to table motions to suspend Standing Order 42 (1), Final Stages of the Climate Change Bill; Period Products (Free Provision) Bill; Domestic Abuse (Safe Leave) Bill; and Hospital Parking Charges Bill could be scheduled on this date.
- 5.20 Members **noted** that time had also been set aside by the Speaker to enable Members to mark the end of the mandate.
- 5.21 Members **agreed** the Provisional Order Paper for Thursday 24 March.

6 **Any Other Business**

- 6.1 The Speaker advised Members that a position of Deputy Speaker remained unfilled since the sad passing of Christopher Stalford in February and the NI Act required that in the event of a vacancy arising steps should be taken to fill it. However, the Speaker advised that he was conscious not only of the late stage in the mandate but also of the sad circumstances under which the vacancy had arisen.
- 6.2 The Speaker informed Members that he had discussed the matter with the DUP whose preference was not to proceed to fill the role at this stage and said he was content to respect the party's wishes if he had the support of the Business Committee in doing so.
- 6.3 Members agreed that the position of Deputy Speaker would remain unfilled until after the election in May 2022.
- 6.4 There was no other Business.

7 **Date and time of next meeting**

- 7.1 Members **agreed** that the final Committee meeting of the mandate would take place on Tuesday 15 March at 1.30pm in the Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings.

The Speaker brought the meeting to a close at 1.56pm

**The Speaker
Chairperson**