



**Northern Ireland
Assembly**

CHAIRPERSONS' LIAISON GROUP

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

TUESDAY 1 DECEMBER 2020

The Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings

- Present:** Dr Steve Aiken OBE MLA
Ms Paula Bradley MLA
Mr William Humphrey MLA, Chairperson
Mr Chris Lyttle MLA
Ms Michelle McIlveen MLA
Ms Emma Sheerin MLA
- Apologies:** Mr Paul Givan MLA
Mr Mervyn Storey MLA
- In Attendance:** Mrs Lesley Hogg (Clerk to the Assembly/Chief Executive)
Dr Kevin Pelan (Clerk Assistant)
Mr Keith McBride (Assembly Clerk)
Mr Trevor Allen (Senior Assistant Clerk)
Ms Clodagh Miskelly (Senior Assistant Clerk)
Mrs Bronagh Irwin (Assistant Clerk)

The meeting commenced at 1.30 pm in closed session.

1. Apologies

As above.

2. Chairperson's Business

No matters of Chairperson's business were raised.

3. Minutes of previous meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting of 3 November 2020, as circulated and agreed by correspondence, were noted.

4. Matters Arising

1.34 pm Ms Bradley joined the meeting

Strategic Planning Meeting

Chairpersons noted a draft agenda for the strategic planning meeting that is scheduled for 19 January 2021.

External Committee Meetings

Chairpersons considered legal advice in relation to external meetings and visits during the current pandemic. The Group noted that an Assembly Commission employee with appropriate training should sign off the risk assessment and this training will commence over the coming weeks. This will allow committees to undertake external committee meetings and visits in the new year, providing a risk assessment is completed and any risks are suitably mitigated.

Use of the Assembly Chamber for Committee Meetings

The group discussed their previous correspondence with the Speaker which sought additional meeting space for committee meetings that would enable all Members, staff and witnesses to be present. Chairpersons noted that the use of the Chamber can be accommodated and the Clerk is clarifying seating arrangements for committee meetings in the Chamber.

In addition, the Group expressed the view that an additional committee room is required that would enable additional committee meetings to take place and use StarLeaf. Logistical and infrastructure challenges were noted. However, the Group agreed that this was a priority, given the heavy workload anticipated in the coming year.

Agreed: Chairpersons agreed to write to the Speaker to outline the pressures on committees to have additional and longer meetings due to workloads and the Group's views on the need for an additional committee room that is able to have a video broadcast and use the Starleaf system.

5. Overview of the services that Communications Office provides to Committees

Chairpersons received a briefing from Ms Susie Brown, Head of Communications, who provided an overview of the services offered by the Communications Office and how this can enhance committee engagement.

1.57 pm Ms McIlveen left the meeting

1.58 pm Dr Aiken left the meeting

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

The Chairperson thanked Ms Brown for her presentation and thanked her and her staff for the services provided to Committee in recent months.

The Chairperson also discussed a forthcoming Commonwealth Parliamentary Association conference and the planning that Communications Office can do to raise the profile of the event.

6. Member Development – interim plan 2020-21 session

This item was deferred to the next meeting.

7. Any Other Business

The Chairperson advised that a Member had requested that Chairpersons are made aware of best practice in relation to the use of video-conferencing and those with hearing loss. Ms Bradley mentioned a briefing on the Video Relay Service that the Committee for Communities will receive in January that will have relevance to this issue.

Chairpersons noted that the Clerking and Member Support Office will ensure that best practice is detailed in the relevant guidance to witnesses and Members on the use of the video-conferencing facility.

8. Date, Time and Place of Next Meeting

The next meeting will be held on Tuesday 19 January 2021 at 12:30 pm in the Members' Dining Room, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 14.08 pm.

William Humphrey MLA
Chairperson, Chairpersons' Liaison Group