

## An Ceann Comhairle

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## The Speaker

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**To: All Assembly Members**

**7 April 2020**

Over the last weeks, I have written to you a number of times in relation to the management of Assembly business during this public health crisis. The approach taken, with the agreement of all the parties, has been to ensure that business is conducted in a way that focuses on issues arising from the COVID 19 pandemic while ensuring that the Assembly sets an example in terms of following the public health guidance around social distancing and other issues.

I have received advice from my Health Trust that due to my cardiac history I should stay at home and avoid face to face contact for least twelve weeks. While I admit to feeling conflicted about doing this while fulfilling my duties as Speaker, I have concluded that it is important to follow the guidance provided by those who, under the wider authority of the Executive and the Assembly, are tasked with giving such advice to our community. I will therefore be staying at home for at least the next twelve weeks.

This does not prevent me from conducting the majority of my responsibilities as Speaker - we have all had to quickly adapt to the practice of conducting most business at home. Since the Assembly sitting last Tuesday, I have been in frequent contact with my office every day, who are also working remotely when the Assembly is not sitting, and I have had a range of virtual meetings with senior officials. I will continue to work in this way. Members should therefore continue to contact the Speaker's Office if there are any issues which you wish to bring to my attention.

In relation to plenary sittings and sessions of the Ad Hoc Committee, these cannot be chaired remotely, but these meetings will be in good hands with the Deputy Speakers taking the chair in rotation in the usual way. There are also deputising arrangements for the Business Committee and the Assembly Commission but I will be exploring ways to participate in these meetings remotely. Apart from that, I intend conduct as much as possible of the work that goes on behind the scenes and to take all of the decisions that I am normally required to take outside of the Chamber.

I regret that I will not be in the chair for the first meeting of the Ad Hoc Committee on the COVID 19 response this afternoon as it is an important measure to ensure that the Assembly is kept updated and can question Ministers. However, Members can rest assured that I will continue to engage with the Executive to emphasise the importance of the Assembly's scrutiny role at this difficult time.

I want to again record my thanks to all the Assembly staff who have been working hard to ensure that Assembly business can continue and adapts in these challenging circumstances. Finally, I made clear last week that we can probably not express enough from the Assembly our gratitude to those in the health service and all the public services who are demonstrating tremendous commitment and courage, all in the common cause of saving lives in our community. It is incumbent on all of us to do what we can to protect our own health, reduce the risk of infection to others and thereby reduce the burden to our health service.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Alex Maskey". The signature is written in a dark ink and includes a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

**ALEX MASKEY MLA**