



## TO ALL ASSEMBLY MEMBERS

20 October 2014

Dear Member,

### ARRANGEMENTS DURING THE VACANCY IN THE OFFICE OF SPEAKER

As the Assembly was unable to elect a Speaker on 13<sup>th</sup> October 2014, the House was informed that we would be meeting to agree arrangements during the current vacancy in the Office of Speaker. Having taken legal and procedural advice, we are now writing to all Members and placing this letter in the Library to summarise for the record how business will be handled during this period.

We want to stress that we are conscious of our responsibility to prioritise that the statutory and procedural functions of the Speaker continue to be exercised without disruption to Assembly business. In doing so, we also intend to stridently protect the impartiality, authority and confidentiality of the Office of the Speaker.

Each week, there will be a “lead” Deputy Speaker to oversee a number of procedural duties. These will include commencing plenary, chairing the Business Committee, signing off routine correspondence including Ministerial requests to make statements, selecting amendments to Private Members Motions and dealing with procedures such as the resignation and appointment of Ministers or Members.

We will seek to discuss requests to raise Matters of the Day and Urgent Questions before the “lead” Deputy Speaker takes the final decision to ensure consistency between us. Points of Order will be dealt with either by the “lead” Deputy Speaker that week or by whoever was in the Chair when an issue was raised. As much as possible we will be taking all decisions in line with existing procedures, rulings, precedents and conventions. However, particularly on any issues which are novel or contentious, we will normally seek to agree an approach on them before one of us takes the final decision.

In addition to this weekly rotation, other functions and engagements will be distributed between us. Every Bill which is submitted to the Office of the Speaker will be allocated to a specific Deputy Speaker who will deal with all the correspondence relating to that specific Bill and will take all the procedural decisions on its legislative competence and amendments as it progresses through the House.

Representational requests will also be shared between us but Members will understand that priority will be given to our statutory and procedural responsibilities. Therefore, the Office of the Speaker will not be proactively organising as many events for the foreseeable future.

If any of us are due to take decisions which may be perceived as conflicting with an interest such as a Committee membership, the Speaker's Office will allocate that decision to another Deputy Speaker. Similarly we will also be ensuring that we will not be tabling questions or participating or voting in plenary business as Members on which we expect to be exercising the functions of the Speaker. As when we have been serving in the Chair in past years, we will be making all our judgements and decisions from an impartial and procedural perspective with the aim of protecting the best interests of the House.

Members should be aware that during the vacancy in the Office of the Speaker, the Assembly Commission does not come within our legal remit and the Commission will continue to make its own temporary arrangements.

Finally, while we will be seeking to minimise any disruption to the core business of the Assembly, Members will appreciate that in this situation it cannot be a case of business as usual. We would particularly advise Members of that if they are considering approaching the Office on any issue. If any Member, including Ministers and Party Whips, wish to write to raise an issue they should continue to address the letter to the Speaker and the Speaker's Office will then allocate it to the appropriate Deputy Speaker who will be acting on it.

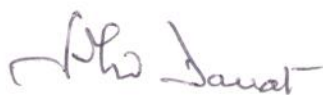
A similar approach will be taken to any requests made to the Office for meetings. It will not be permitted for meetings to be requested with a preferred Deputy Speaker and Members will find that standard queries will be dealt with by officials in the Speaker's office, Business Office or other relevant parts of the Assembly Secretariat. Where we judge that a meeting is required, Members will be contacted with an appointment and Members will appreciate that it will often not be possible to schedule meetings immediately.

We hope this is clear but if Members have any queries they should consult the Speaker's Office. We look forward to receiving the cooperation and support of Members throughout this period. We will review these measures as we move forward but we hope that these can be short term and temporary arrangements until the House resolves to elect a Speaker.

Yours sincerely,



**Roy Beggs MLA**  
Deputy Speaker



**John Dallat MLA**  
Deputy Speaker



**Mitchel McLaughlin MLA**  
Principal Deputy Speaker