

COMMITTEE ON PROCEDURES

End of Session Report 2013 – 2014

Remit and Powers

1. The Committee on Procedures (the Committee) is a Standing Committee of the Northern Ireland Assembly established in accordance with paragraph 10 of Strand One of the Belfast Agreement and under Assembly Standing Order 54.
2. The Committee has the power to:
 - Consider and review on an ongoing basis the Standing Orders and procedures of the Assembly;
 - Initiate inquiries and publish reports;
 - Republish Standing Orders annually; and
 - Call for persons and papers.

Membership

3. The Committee has eleven Members including a Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson and a quorum of five. The membership of the Committee since its establishment on 23 May 2011 has been as follows:

Mr Gerry Kelly (Chairperson)¹

Mr Trevor Clarke (Deputy Chairperson)

Mr Jim Allister

Ms Paula Bradley²

Mr Samuel Gardiner

Mr Kieran McCarthy³

¹ With effect from 6 February 2012 Mr Gerry Kelly replaced Ms Sue Ramsey as Chairperson

² With effect from 16 September 2013 Ms Paula Bradley replaced Mr Mervyn Storey

³ With effect from 1 October 2013 Mr Kieran McCarthy replaced Mr Chris Lyttle

Mr Barry McElduff⁴ ⁵

Mr Oliver McMullan

Mr Alban Maginness

Lord Morrow

Mr George Robinson

End of Session Report

4. This annual report summarises the work of the Committee on Procedures from 1 September 2013 to 31 August 2014.
5. Coming into this parliamentary year, the Committee brought forward work matters from the previous year, such as Amending Bills after Further Consideration Stage, and the inquiry into the extent to which Standing Orders should permit the Attorney General to participate in proceedings of the Assembly.

Meetings

6. The Committee met on nine occasions during the period of the report. Four meetings were held in public session, and five were held in part public/part closed session. All meetings were held in Parliament Buildings.

Inquiries/Reviews

Review of the Business Week

7. The Committee carried out a Review of the Current Organisation of the Business Week of the Assembly. The review looked at whether opportunities existed to not only enhance Assembly effectiveness but also further its family friendly aspirations through better use of time during the normal business week.
8. The Committee concluded that the existing model of the business week in the Assembly is fit for purpose and recommended that no changes be made to the current organisation

⁴ With effect from 10 September 2012 Mr Phil Flanagan replaced Ms Sue Ramsey

⁵ With effect from 21 January 2013 Mr Barry McElduff replaced Mr Phil Flanagan

of the business week. On 27 May 2014 the Assembly approved the Committee's report on its Review of the Current Organisation of the Business Week.

Review of Topical Questions

9. Following the introduction of Topical Question Time in September 2013, the Committee received feedback and comments from Members on some urgent issues and, therefore, agreed to carry out an interim review of the process. The Committee consequently agreed that Standing Orders should be amended so that Topical Questions follow Oral Questions, and this was approved by the Assembly on 12 November 2013. The Committee is continuing with its wider review of the Topical Questions process and it is expected that the Committee's report on the review will be presented to the Assembly by the end of 2014.

Attorney General participation in proceedings of the Assembly

10. The Committee continued its inquiry into "the extent to which Standing Orders should permit the Attorney General for Northern Ireland (AGNI) to participate in proceedings of the Assembly". The aim of the inquiry is to inform the Committee on how best to interpret the existing legislation into Standing Orders; the extent to which the AGNI should be enabled to participate and how it could best be done. It is expected that the inquiry report will be presented to the Assembly in early 2015.

Review of Standing Orders and Procedures

11. In accordance with its agreed work programme, the Committee reviewed a number of Standing Orders and procedures of the Assembly, and the main items of business considered are summarised below.

Amending Bills after Further Consideration Stage

12. The Committee considered the issue of whether the Assembly required a change to Standing Orders to enable a Bill, taken outside competence as a result of amendments made during its passage, to be brought back within competence after Further Consideration Stage and before Final Stage.

13. The Committee agreed that Standing Orders should be amended to provide for a new, narrowly defined amending stage (Exceptional Further Consideration Stage) to occur in limited circumstances after Further Consideration Stage and prior to Final Stage. A new Standing Order (37A) was agreed by the Committee and the amendments were supported by the Assembly on 17 June 2014.

Emergence of new political parties or groupings during a mandate

14. The Business Committee wrote to the Committee asking it to consider issues relating to the emergence of new political parties or groupings during a mandate, including speaking arrangements.

15. Following consideration of the matter, the Committee agreed that, in relation to speaking arrangements, there should be no change to the role of the Speaker and the Business Committee, as set out in Standing Order 17. The Committee also considered a number of other issues relating to the emergence of new political parties or groupings during a mandate and agreed that Standing Orders do not need to be amended.

16. The Committee also considered the issue of having an Assembly grouping of independent Members and single party Members, or Technical Group, as this issue had arisen in the Assembly and Executive Review Committee report on the Review of D'Hondt, Community Designation and Provisions for Opposition, which included a recommendation that such a facility for smaller parties of the Assembly be reviewed. Having obtained the views of the five main parties on this matter, the Committee concluded, by majority, that Technical Groups should not be established at this time.

Committee Stage of Bills – Standing Orders 33(2) and 88(3)

17. Following consideration of briefing papers and statistical data regarding requests to extend the Committee Stage of Bills during this mandate, the Committee agreed that there should be no change to the period of 30 working days for committee consideration of a Bill, as set out in Standing Orders 33(2) and 88(3).

Electronic voting in the Chamber

18. The Committee considered the issue of electronic voting in the Chamber. Following consideration of the matter, including cost options to introduce electronic voting in the

Chamber, the Committee agreed not to propose any changes to the current system of voting.

Motions in Plenary

19. Apart from minor and technical changes, amendments to Standing Orders must be agreed by cross-community vote in the Assembly. Consequently, the majority of the Committee's output must be agreed by the Assembly before implementation.

20. The Committee had seven motions debated and agreed by the Assembly.

Expenditure

21. Details of the Committee's expenditure are attached at Annex A.

Key Priorities for the Next Session

22. The Committee has agreed a work programme for the coming session. The programme will include the following key priorities:

- Completion of the inquiry into the Attorney General participation in proceedings of the Assembly, and drafting of new Standing Orders
- Completion of the review of Topical Questions
- Possible review of the public petition procedures
- Amendments to Standing Orders following the passage of the NI Public Services Ombudsperson Bill
- Consideration of the jurisdiction and powers of Assembly Committees, particularly with regard to private organisations, where the matter under consideration relates to a transferred matter
- Possible amendments to Standing Orders on completion of the review into the budget scrutiny process by the Committee for Finance and Personnel
- Possible amendments to Standing Orders following the trial by the Committee for OFMDFM in relation to Subsidiarity monitoring and reporting

ANNEX A**Committee on Procedures****Expenditure for the period 1 September 2013 – 31 August 2014**

Budget area	Details	Expenditure
Printing of Committee reports	Review of the Current Organisation of the Business Week of the Assembly	£360.35
General expenses	Cost of lunch and refreshments for Committee meetings	£540.24
Total Expenditure		£900.59