

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY
BUSINESS COMMITTEE

TUESDAY 9 JUNE 2020
IN THE SENATE CHAMBER, PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS

DRAFT MINUTES

The meeting began at 1.03pm. (C) denotes attendance via conference call

Present:

Mr J O'Dowd (Acting Chairperson)
The Speaker (C)
Ms K Armstrong
Ms C Bailey
Mr K Buchanan
Mr R Butler
Mrs D Kelly
Mr C McGrath
Mr G Middleton
Mr A Muir
Mr J Stewart

In attendance:

Dr A McGarel	Clerk of Business
Mr P Gill	Clerk Assistant
Ms L Hogg	Clerk/Chief Executive
Dr G McGrath	Director of Parliamentary Services
Mr R Ramsey	Adviser to the Speaker
Mr P Stitt	PS to the Speaker
Ms P Devlin	Assistant Assembly Clerk
Mr M O'Hare	Clerical Supervisor

Observers:

Mrs K Morrison Executive Office

1 Apologies

- 1.1 Apologies were received from Sinead Ennis and junior Ministers Lyons and Kearney.

2 Minutes of previous meetings

- 2.1 The minutes of the meeting on 2 June 2020 were **agreed**.

3 **Matters Arising**

- 3.1 There were no matters arising.

4 **Finalisation of the Order Paper for Plenary Meeting on 16 June 2020**

Tuesday 16 June

- 4.1 Members **noted** that that in accordance with their agreement that there should only be two plenary sittings in a week should Executive business require it, only one sitting was scheduled for the following week (Tuesday 16 June).

Assembly Business

- 4.2 Members **noted** that following Mr. Lunn changing his party affiliation, they had agreed that the Alliance Party would give up its seat on the Audit Committee and the seat would be reallocated to the smaller parties.
- 4.3 Members **noted** that the seat had remained vacant since the Alliance Party member had resigned from the Committee, but the smaller parties had now indicated their preference for Mr. Allister to be appointed to this seat.
- 4.4 Members **agreed** to schedule a motion for the Business Committee to appoint Mr. Allister to the Audit Committee, and **agreed** the draft motion which had been provided in their packs.
- 4.5 Members **agreed** that in accordance with convention this would be treated as a Business motion with no opportunity for debate.
- 4.6 Ms. Bailey **agreed** to move the motion on behalf of the Business Committee.

Executive Committee Business

- 4.7 Members **noted** that, in addition to the items scheduled at last week's meeting, the Executive Office had scheduled two further items of business:
- The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (Amendment No. 4) Regulations (NI) 2020 from the Executive Office; and
 - A Legislative Consent Motion for the Medicines and Medical Devices Bill from the Minister of Health.

- 4.8 Members **noted** that by convention both items would have no time limit applied as they relate to legislation.
- 4.9 Members **agreed** to schedule untimed debates for both items of business.
- 4.10 Members **noted** that following items of business had previously been scheduled:
- Consideration Stage of the Housing (Amendment) Bill.
 - Two Social Security Benefits Up-rating Statutory Rules subject to confirmatory resolution.
 - A motion to approve a Statutory Rule subject to confirmatory resolution on The Mesothelioma Lump Sum Payments.
 - Question Time for the Executive Office and the Minister for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs.
- 4.11 Members **noted** their previous position that, subject to the discretion of the Chair, supplementary questions should be limited to one for the Member who tabled the substantive question, with a view to ensuring all 15 Members who had been selected to ask a question get called to do so.
- 4.12 Members **agreed** that if it were to become apparent that the allotted time was not being fully used by this approach, the Chair could become more flexible with additional supplementary questions.
- 4.13 Members **noted** that if that approach was adopted, whips would be required to manage the attendance of their party members in the Chamber.

Private Members Business

- 4.14 Members **noted** that at the last meeting they had agreed to schedule a Private Members' motion for the DUP, but had deferred a decision on which motion to be scheduled.
- 4.15 Members **noted** that with the additional Executive Business and the Private Members motion, the adjournment time would be 7.30pm with the majority of items having no time limit applied.
- 4.16 Members **agreed** that the Private Members motion would be rescheduled for the following week.

4.17 Members **agreed** that a paper suggesting options for deferring Private Members' Business should be brought forward for discussion at a future meeting.

4.18 Members **agreed** the Order Paper for Tuesday 16 June.

5 **Provisional Arrangements for the Plenary Meetings During Week Commencing 22 June 2020**

5.1 Members **noted** that they had been provided with the Notice of Forthcoming Business from the Executive Office, and the listed items of Executive Business necessitated scheduling only one sitting for week commencing 22 June.

5.2 Members **agreed** to schedule one sitting on Tuesday 23 June.

Tuesday 23 June

Assembly Business

5.3 Members **noted** that no requests for Assembly Business had been received to date.

Executive Committee Business

5.4 Members **noted** that the NSMC Institutional Meeting Statement from the First and Deputy First Minister which had originally been proposed for 9 June had been rescheduled, but had not been included on the Indicative Timings as it was yet to be confirmed.

5.5 Members **noted** that the Minister for Communities had scheduled Further Consideration Stage of the Housing (Amendment) Bill.

5.6 Members **agreed** to schedule an untimed debate for the bill stage.

5.7 Members **noted** that the Minister of Justice had scheduled two Legislative Consent Motions, for the Air Traffic Management and Unmanned Aircraft Bill and for the Domestic Abuse Bill - Extra Territorial Jurisdiction.

5.8 Members **agreed** to schedule two untimed debates for the Legislative Consent Motions.

5.9 Members **noted** that Question Time would be for the Minister for Communities and the Minister for the Economy.

5.10 TEO Officials advised that no other business was currently expected.

Private Members Business

5.11 Members **agreed** that the DUP motion which had been deferred from 16 June would be rescheduled.

5.12 Members **agreed** that sufficient time remained to schedule a second Private Members motion and noted that the selection was for Sinn Fein.

5.13 DUP Members selected the following Private Members' motion:

- Mental Health and Wellbeing after COVID-19

5.14 Members **agreed** that Sinn Fein could defer selection of their motion until the next meeting.

5.15 Members **agreed** the Provisional Order Paper for Tuesday 23 June.

6 Review of Written Questions

6.1 Members **noted** that information on questions had been provided in their packs which included a breakdown of which departments had provided substantive responses, standard responses and no response.

6.2 Dr McGarel provided a summary of the information.

6.3 Members **noted** that considerable dissatisfaction remained over the quality of responses being received by Members.

6.4 Members **noted** that the Department for Communities had the highest number of unanswered questions of all departments since the voluntary suspension of written questions was relaxed on 28 April.

6.5 Members **agreed** that the Speaker would write to the Minister for Communities to establish whether there were reasons for the high number of unanswered questions.

7 Review of Summer Recess Arrangements

7.1 Members **noted** that following discussions at last week's meeting, the Speaker agreed to provide a paper to inform the Committee's consideration of arrangements for summer recess.

- 7.2 Members **noted** that the Speaker's paper had been circulated via email and had been provided in their packs, and that they had also been provided with information on arrangements for business over the summer across legislatures in the UK and Ireland.
- 7.3 The Speaker was invited to brief Members on the content of his paper.
- 7.4 Members **noted** their disappointment that the matter had been discussed with the media before a collective decision had been reached, and that the Committee should be able to have candid discussions in the knowledge that those discussions would remain in the Committee.
- 7.5 Members **agreed** that it is important that the Committee speaks with one voice and that all parties are committed to making themselves available as needed.
- 7.6 Members **agreed** that the Assembly stands ready to do whatever work is required of it during the summer period.
- 7.7 Members **noted** that the statutory period in relation to secondary legislation paused during recess periods.
- 7.8 Members **noted** that the Assembly could still be recalled if it was in recess, and that the Ad Hoc Committee could continue to meet throughout.
- 7.9 Members **noted** that the Assembly being in recess enabled staff to take leave.
- 7.10 It was **proposed** by Mr O'Dowd that the Business Committee move to vote on the Speaker's proposed plans for recess and that, amongst other things this would mean that:
- The Assembly would now sit in the week beginning 6 July.
 - On 7 July, the Business Committee would take a decision on any further plenary sittings to be held in July based on the legislation or other business that the Executive includes in the forthcoming notice of business submitted by Friday 3 July.
 - The Ad Hoc Committee on the COVID 19 Response would continue to operate for Ministers to make statements to the Assembly and take questions from Members throughout the summer.
 - While the Assembly would formally be recess in August, the Speaker would remain in frequent contact with the Executive throughout the summer to make the necessary arrangements for additional sittings for urgent and essential business as required.
- 7.11 Members **voted** on the proposal as follows:
- For – 82 votes
 - Against – 7 votes

7.12 It was **counter-proposed** by Ms Armstrong that there should be no recess for the summer period.

7.13 Members **voted** on the proposal as follows:

- For – 7 votes
- Against – 82 votes

7.14 Members **agreed** the proposed plan as outlined in the Speaker's paper and as set out above.

8 **Sitting days**

8.1 Members **noted** that as they had previously requested, a paper had been prepared by the Clerk Assistant outlining the current arrangements for sitting days and the implications of changing them.

8.2 Mr. Gill was invited to summarise the content of his paper.

8.3 Members **noted** the relevant background in relation to the current arrangements for sitting days.

8.4 Members **agreed** to consult with stakeholders who would be affected by a change in sitting days in order to establish their views.

9 **Any Other Business**

9.1 There was no other business.

10 **Date and time of next meeting**

10.1 Members **agreed** that the next meeting would take place on Tuesday 16 June in the Senate Chamber.

The Acting Chairperson brought the meeting to a close at 2.00pm

Mr Keith Buchanan
Acting Chairperson