

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY
BUSINESS COMMITTEE

TUESDAY 7 JULY 2020
IN THE SENATE CHAMBER, PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS

MINUTES

The meeting began at 1.04pm. (C) denotes attendance via conference call

Present:

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

Mr G Lyons	Junior Minister
Mrs K Loveland-Morrison	Executive Office

1 Apologies

1.1 There were no apologies.

2 **Minutes of previous meetings**

2.1 The minutes of the meeting on 30 June 2020 were **agreed**.

2.2 The minutes of the meeting on 6 July were **agreed**.

3 **Matters Arising**

3.1 There were no matters arising.

4 **Executive Business Required during July**

4.1 Members **noted** that they had agreed to consider the need for further sittings in July based on the needs of the Executive.

4.2 Members **noted** that the Notice of Forthcoming Business provided by the Executive Office contained 6 items of business for Tuesday 21, Monday 27 and Tuesday 28 July.

4.3 Members **noted** that the Bill Office advised that the bill stage listed for Monday 27 may be scheduled on Tuesday 28 under certain circumstances thereby removing the need for a sitting on Monday 27.

4.4 On that basis, Members **agreed** to consider Order Papers for 21 and 28 July.

Monday 21 July

Assembly Business

4.5 Members **noted** that they had previously decided that oral questions on 7 July would be the last before September when Question Time will resume in accordance with normal procedures.

4.6 Members **agreed** to schedule a business motion to suspend Standing Order 20(1) so that Question Time does not take place.

4.7 Members **agreed** that this would be treated as a business motion with no amendment or debate.

4.8 Members **noted** that the Assembly Commission had scheduled a motion to appoint a Commissioner for Standards.

- 4.9 Members **agreed** to schedule the motion and to allow 30 minutes for the debate.

Executive Committee Business

- 4.10 Members **noted** that the Executive Office had scheduled three items of business for Tuesday 21 July, as follows:

1. The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (Amendment No.9) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020; and
2. The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (Amendment No.10) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020

- 4.11 Members **agreed** to schedule a single untimed debate to consider both items.

3. Consideration Stage of the Executive Committee (Functions) Bill

- 4.12 Members **noted** that by convention this item would have no time limit applied, and that if amendments are tabled the debate may last a couple of hours, but if no amendments are tabled it may take less than 15 minutes.

- 4.13 Members **agreed** to schedule an untimed debate for Consideration Stage of the Bill.

- 4.14 Members **noted** that the Committee for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs had tabled a Committee motion on Climate Change.

- 4.15 Members **agreed** to schedule the Committee motion and to allow one and a half hours for the debate, with 10 minutes to move, 10 minutes to wind and 5 for all other speakers.

- 4.16 Members **agreed** that as the Business Committee would not need to meet, there would be no lunchtime suspension

- 4.17 Members **agreed** not to schedule Private Members Business.

- 4.18 Members **agreed** the Order Paper for Monday 21 July.

Tuesday 28 July

Assembly Business

- 4.19 Members **agreed** to table a motion to suspend Standing Order 20(1) so that Question Time would not take place.
- 4.20 Members **agreed** that this would be treated as a business motion with no amendment or debate.

Executive Committee Business

- 4.21 Members **noted** that the Executive Office had scheduled three items of business for week commencing 27 July, as follows:
1. Further Consideration Stage of the Executive Committee (Functions) Bill
- 4.22 Members **noted** that this had been requested by the Executive Office for Monday 27 July, but the Bill Office advised that providing no amendments are tabled it will be very brief and could be scheduled on Tuesday 28 July along with the Final Stage of the Bill.
- 4.23 Members **agreed** to schedule an untimed debate for this bill stage on 28 July.
- 4.24 Members **agreed** that if amendments were tabled at Further Consideration Stage, the Committee would reschedule the stage for Monday 27, and would remove the item from Tuesday's business.
- 4.25 Members **noted** that in the event of amendments being tabled, they would be asked to consider and agree an Order Paper for Monday 27 July, as well as a Revised Order Paper for Tuesday 28 July, and **agreed** to do so remotely if necessary.
2. Final Stage of the Executive Committee (Functions) Bill
- 4.26 Members **agreed** to schedule an untimed debate for this item.
3. An oral statement on the Bovine Tuberculosis Eradication Strategy by the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs.
- 4.27 Members **noted** that this statement was yet to be confirmed and would not be included on indicative timings until the Minister has indicated his intention to the Speaker in writing.

- 4.28 Members **agreed** that as the Business Committee would not need to meet, there would be no lunchtime suspension
- 4.29 Members **agreed** not to schedule Private Members Business.
- 4.30 Members **agreed** the Order Paper for Tuesday 28 July.

Periods of recess in July

- 4.31 Members **noted** that having agreed all necessary plenary sittings, they must consider what periods of recess will apply in July.
- 4.32 Members **noted** that Ministers will be able to bring statements to the Assembly on the two scheduled sitting days in July and on any day the Assembly is not sitting via the Ad Hoc Committee on COVID-19 response which can meet throughout recess.
- 4.33 Members **noted** that the First and deputy First Ministers or 30 Members may give notice to the Speaker at any time for the Assembly to meet at an earlier date than that to which it stands adjourned.
- 4.34 Members **noted** that there would be procedural implications if the Assembly does not formally go into recess for July. The Clerk Assistant gave Members a summary of procedural matters to be considered when reaching a decision.
- 4.35 Members **noted** that some Assembly and Committee Business would continue through July, but **agreed** that for procedural purposes, the Assembly will be considered to be in recess from 11 July, with the exception of Tuesday 21 and Tuesday 28 July (and Monday 27 July, if needed).

5 Social Distancing in the Chamber

- 5.1 Members **noted** that at the last meeting they had considered the Executive's new guidance on social distancing; reducing it to 1 metre where 2 metres is not possible and where appropriate mitigations can be set in place.
- 5.2 Members **noted** that reducing the distance to 1 metre would allow 48 Members to be present in the Chamber at any one time.
- 5.3 Members **noted** that the 'appropriate mitigations' which can be considered in this context are wearing of face masks or coverings by Members, and the installation of plastic screens or partitions between Members.

- 5.4 Members **agreed** that wearing face masks or coverings would potentially impact those with disabilities.
- 5.5 Members **agreed** that, because there are only a few plenary sittings anticipated over the summer months, they would continue with the current 2 metre distancing arrangements.
- 5.6 Members **agreed** to revisit the matter when the Assembly returns to its regular (two sittings per week) schedule in September.
- 5.7 Members **agreed** that, in advance of any mitigations being put in place, a risk assessment and a disability needs assessment should be requested.

6 **Review of Written Questions**

- 6.1 Members **noted** that information on questions tabled and responses from Ministers since 30 June had been provided in their packs.
- 6.2 Dr McGarel provided a summary of the information.
- 6.3 Members **noted** that the Executive Office had the highest number of unanswered questions of all departments.
- 6.4 Members **agreed** to write to the Executive Office to seek an explanation for this.

7 **Question Time Rota for September – December 2020**

- 7.1 Members **noted** that Standing Order 20(4) requires the Business Committee to determine which Minister should answer oral questions in the Chamber on a particular day.
- 7.2 Members **noted** their prior agreement that the final Question Time of this session would take place that afternoon and that normal procedures would resume when the Assembly returns in September.
- 7.3 Members **noted** that they had been provided with a draft Question Time rota for the period September to December 2020.
- 7.4 Members **agreed** the draft Question Time rota.

8 **Any Other Business**

- 8.1 Members **noted** that a number of responses had been received to their stakeholder consultation on changing sitting days, and had been included in their packs.
- 8.2 The Speaker gave a summary of the responses from Committees but advised that the Executive had not yet responded. The Speaker suggested that as the Executive was a key stakeholder, the Committee should defer consideration of the matter until its response was received.
- 8.3 Members **agreed** that they would consider the issue more fully in September, including the feedback they had received.
- 8.4 The Speaker offered his thanks to Members and staff, and wished them well for the summer period.
- 8.5 There was no other business.

9 **Date and time of next meeting**

- 9.1 Members **agreed** that details of the next meeting would be communicated in due course.

The Acting Chairperson brought the meeting to a close at 1.36pm

**The Speaker
Chairperson**