

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY
BUSINESS COMMITTEE

TUESDAY 9 MARCH 2021
SENATE CHAMBER, PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS

MINUTES

The meeting began at 1.02pm. (c) denotes attendance by conference call.

Present:

The Speaker (Chairperson)

Ms K Armstrong

Ms C Bailey

Mr K Buchanan

Mr R Butler

Ms P Cameron

Ms S Ennis

Ms D Kelly (c)

Mr A Muir

Mr J O'Dowd

In attendance:

Dr A McGarel

Mr P Gill

Ms L Hogg

Dr G McGrath

Ms A McKelvey

Mr R Ramsey

Ms F Leneghan

Ms P Devlin

Mr M O'Hare

Clerk of Business

Clerk Assistant

Clerk/Chief Executive

**Director of Parliamentary
Services**

Legal Advisor

Adviser to the Speaker

PS to the Speaker

Assistant Assembly Clerk

Clerical Supervisor

Observers:

Mr D McCreedy

The Executive Office

1 Apologies

1.1 Apologies were received from John Stewart.

2 Minutes of previous meetings

2.1 The minutes of the meeting on 2 March were **agreed**.

3 **Matters Arising**

- 3.1 The Speaker informed Members that he would be providing them with a paper on duration and timings for debates on primary legislation in the coming days, and that there would be a specific agenda item for next week's meeting to enable them to discuss the paper.
- 3.2 There were no other matters arising.

4 **Finalisation of the Order Papers for the Plenary Meetings in Week Commencing 15 March 2021**

Monday 15 March

Assembly Business

- 4.1 Members **noted** that a Committee membership motion had been tabled by the DUP and that by convention these were treated as business motions with no opportunity for debate or amendment.
- 4.2 Members **agreed** to schedule the motion.

Executive Committee Business

- 4.3 Members **noted** that question time was for the Minister of Education and Minister of Finance but that no other Executive Business was scheduled.

Private Members' Business

- 4.4 Members **noted** that they had agreed to schedule Second Stage of the Severe Fetal Impairment Abortion (Amendment) Bill for Mr Givan, which would be untimed.
- 4.5 Members noted that given the nature of the Bill, they had agreed not to schedule any other Private Members' Business.
- 4.6 Members **agreed** the Order Paper for Monday 15 March.

Tuesday 16 March

Executive Committee Business

- 4.7 Members **noted** that Executive business remained as scheduled at the last meeting.

Private Members' Business

- 4.8 Members **noted** that sufficient time was available to schedule Private Members' business.
- 4.9 Members **agreed** to schedule the following Private Members' motions with the usual timings:
- Welfare Support (DUP)
 - Supporting Students (Sinn Féin)
- 4.10 Members **agreed** to schedule the following adjournment debate:
- Post Primary Education Provision in South Belfast (Alliance)
- 4.11 Members **agreed** the Order Paper for Tuesday 16 March.

5 Provisional Arrangements for the Plenary Meetings in Week Commencing 22 March 2021

Monday 22 March

Executive Committee Business

- 5.1 Members **noted** that Question Time was scheduled for the Executive Office and Minister for Infrastructure.
- 5.2 Members **noted** that no other Executive business had been scheduled to date.
- 5.3 The TEO official indicated that no other business was expected at that time.

Committee Business

- 5.4 Members **noted** that no Committee Business had been requested but that there may be a request from the Committee for Standards & Privileges by next week.

Private Members' Business

- 5.5 Members **agreed** to defer consideration of Private Members' business until the next meeting.

- 5.6 Members **agreed** the Provisional Order Paper for Monday 22 March.

Tuesday 23 March

Executive Committee Business

- 5.7 Members **noted** that Question Time was scheduled for the Minister of Justice and also for the Assembly Commission.
- 5.8 Members **noted** that no other Executive Business had been scheduled to date.
- 5.9 The TEO official indicated that no other business was expected at that time.

Committee Business

- 5.10 Members **noted** that there was no Committee Business.

Private Members' Business

- 5.11 Members **agreed** to defer consideration of Private Members' business until the next meeting.
- 5.12 Members **agreed** the Provisional Order Paper for Tuesday 23 March.

6 Any Other Business

- 6.1 Members **noted** that they had been provided with a draft rota for Question Time which was based on two Ministers responding on Monday and one Minister on Tuesday, which the Committee had agreed as a trial arrangement since Christmas.
- 6.2 Members **noted** that on the two occasions where a bank holiday falls on a Monday, two Ministers have been scheduled to respond to questions on the following Tuesday.
- 6.3 Members were content to continue the arrangement and **agreed** the rota for Question Time.
- 6.4 Members **noted** that the current arrangements for the Ad Hoc Committee on Covid-19 response were scheduled to conclude at the end of March, and that the Speaker had asked officials to prepare advice for the Committee at next week's meeting on the options for extending this provision beyond that period.

- 6.5 Members **noted** receipt of statistics on written questions submitted to each Minister during the last three weeks and the inclusion of information on the number of Priority Written Questions.
- 6.6 Members **agreed** to note these statistics.
- 6.7 Members discussed issues related to the current seating arrangements in the Chamber, and **agreed** that whips should remind their Members of the seating plan, to liaise with other Members or parties when alternative arrangements are required and to observe social distancing when entering and exiting the Chamber, using the lobby doors where appropriate.
- 6.8 A Member expressed her thanks for the arrangements for remote participation in the Chamber, which she considered to be working well.
- 6.9 Members **noted** that the use of Points of Order in the Chamber was becoming an issue, as had been raised in the Chamber earlier that day.
- 6.10 The Speaker informed the Committee that he considered it appropriate to allow some latitude until it was established that the matters raised were valid points of order or otherwise, and that he had no hesitation in intervening when they were not and committed to address the issue as best he could.
- 6.11 There was no other business.

7 **Date and time of next meeting**

- 7.1 Members **agreed** that the next meeting would take place on Tuesday 15 March in the Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings.

The Speaker brought the meeting to a close at 1.19pm

The Speaker
Chairperson