

## An Ceann Comhairle

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## The Speaker

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**To: All Assembly Members**

**15 February 2022**

Dear Member,

You will be aware that since October I have been involved in discussions with the Business Committee in relation to managing the legislative pressures facing the Assembly before the end of this mandate.

It is extremely positive that parties have publicly expressed their wish to ensure that the Assembly completes as much of the business in front of it as possible. In that context, I have been engaging further with the party whips and the representative of the smaller parties over the last two weeks. I want to thank all parties for their constructive engagement.

These are not simple matters as maximising the amount of legislation to be considered in the limited timeframe has to be balanced against the imperative that the Assembly is able to properly scrutinise legislation. No-one should underestimate the significant difficulties which arise from processing such a large volume of legislation in a short time. I want to recognise the very significant time and effort being committed by Assembly Members, parties and Assembly staff to deal with as much legislation as possible.

At its meeting today, the Business Committee has agreed a number of points in relation to the handling of business over the next two weeks. The purpose of these measures is to try to make the maximum use of existing Assembly time and to also seek to create some additional time. In the light of legislation being the priority for remaining plenary sittings, the Business Committee has agreed that:

- Business will be scheduled for additional sittings on Wednesday 23 February and Wednesday 2 March 2022. Any outstanding business on those days will be continued on the following Monday.
- It does not expect there to be time in the remaining sittings of the mandate to schedule Private Members' business and adjournment debates.
- I should write to Committees to note that while some committee business will have to be considered, it would be helpful if committees could avoid bringing non-essential motions for debate in the Assembly.
- I should write to Ministers to note that while they should continue to come to the Assembly to keep it informed on important and essential matters, Ministers should also consider the use of written statements in this period.



- It will return to considering the scheduling of Members' statements from week to week in this period rather than scheduling Members' statements automatically each Monday.
- It is content for business to be scheduled on the basis that the sponsors of each bill will seek to suspend Standing Orders to allow for a gap of only one week between Further Consideration Stage and Final Stage for each bill.

The situation will be reviewed in subsequent weeks when the number of sittings each week will be considered on a case by case basis. Any measures that the Business Committee has agreed now are designed to take account of the unique pressures of the last weeks of this mandate. They will not be considered as a precedent for Assembly business in the future.

I would also note that Members themselves have a part to play in ensuring that debates on legislation are conducted efficiently. Effective scrutiny does not necessarily require a lengthy speech.

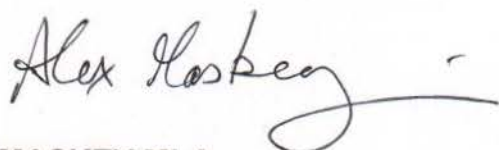
As things stand, I am confident that there is the opportunity for all of the Executive legislation to complete its passage through the Assembly, subject to the decisions of the Assembly. I also expect that the majority of the Private Members' Bills (PMBs) which will have completed their Committee Stage by the end of February will have the potential to complete their passage before dissolution. This will depend on the time taken by earlier business.

There are four PMBs which are either yet to have their Second Stage debates or which have only recently done so. While there may be an opportunity to allow for short Second Stage debates for those remaining bills, there is not the time remaining for those bills to receive committee scrutiny and then come forward to complete their remaining stages. Therefore, beyond the Second Stages, the Business Committee is not taking those bills into account for the planning of future plenary sittings.

It is the role of the Business Committee to try to give the Assembly the opportunity to properly consider legislation in the time ahead but it will be for the Assembly to decide which bills ultimately become law.

Of course, the challenge of dealing with the remaining legislation in the limited time before the election existed even before recent political developments. However, I will continue to work with the parties to ensure that as much legislation as possible can be considered before dissolution on 27 March 2022 while still ensuring that the Assembly can conduct its scrutiny role.

Yours sincerely,



**ALEX MASKEY MLA**