

NEW NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

PROCEEDINGS OF THE COMMITTEE TO ADVISE THE PRESIDING OFFICER THURSDAY 16 JULY 1998 AT 9.00 AM IN THE LONG GALLERY, PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS

Present: Lord Alderdice (Initial Presiding Officer) - Chair
Mrs E Bell (representing Mr D Ford)
Mr I Davis (representing Mr J Wilson)
Mr M Durkan
Mr B Hutchinson
Mr A Maskey
Mr E McGrady MP
Prof M McWilliams
Mr F Molloy
Mr M Morrow
Mr P Robinson MP
Mr G Savage (representing Mr R Empey)
Mr C Wilson

In attendance: Mr N Carson
Miss A Moore

1. ASSEMBLY CHAMBER

Plan of the Chamber: A revised plan was circulated. The Initial Presiding Officer reported:

- it now seems possible that microphones can be suspended from the light wells in the Assembly Chamber which will resolve a number of problems;
- a revised mock-up of the tables is being prepared and should be available shortly;
- blue leather-finish vinyl has been chosen for the upholstery;

- it will not be possible to have specially made seating for the 2 front rows in time for 14 September and alternatives will therefore need to be considered.

After viewing options available it was agreed chairs currently in use within the building should be reupholstered in blue for use as a temporary measure.

Use of Attendants: Attendants will be required at some of the main doors to the Chamber. Seating has not been provided for them as yet. How to do so still needs to be resolved. It was agreed that 2 telephone points should be provided where messages for Members can be taken by the attendants and that a message board be placed in the south corner of the lobby. The Initial Presiding Officer reported that it may be useful to bring a member of the attendants staff from Westminster over to give advice and training on provision of an attendant service. The matter will be returned to at a later date.

2. ACCOMMODATION MATTERS

The Initial Presiding Officer confirmed that the 3rd and 4th floors will be made available to the Assembly as soon as the staff currently occupying the offices can be found alternative accommodation. The Initial Presiding Officer suggested allocation of floors as follows:

Ground Floor: Executive, Executive staff, Presiding Officer and Business staff;

First Floor: Ministers, Private Office staff and party leaders;

Second Floor: Party offices, Committee rooms and Committee Chairs;

Third Floor: Members and Members' staff;

Fourth Floor: Secretariat.

It was proposed that any Member not already provided with an office elsewhere in the building will have an office on the 3rd floor. There is not sufficient office accommodation to provide additional offices for support staff for each Member. Provision of office accommodation for party whips was also discussed.

Agreed: The overall plan would be revisited to see whether the parties could be provided with some office accommodation on the Ground floor near the Chamber.

Subject to review - mobile telephones will not be permitted in the Members' Dining Room, Private Dining Room, Long Gallery, Library and Assembly Chamber.

Mr C Wilson asked that thanks to Mr Carson and his staff for the move to Parliament Buildings be recorded.

3. PAPERS RELATING TO FORUM BUSINESS

Future Business: The Initial Presiding Officer noted that work is proceeding to create a "house style", that the conduct of the business of the Assembly is a matter which needs to be fed into the Committee on Standing Orders, and that Whips will need a direct line of communication into that Committee.

Minutes of Proceedings: Should be issued within the next few days. It is intended to keep them as simple as possible and to include an appendix for reference purposes showing the current state of all Northern Ireland Legislation at Westminster.

Official Report: The Initial Presiding Officer reported that work has been undertaken to find a suitable format for the Official Report of the Assembly. It

is proposed to produce future Official Reports in a 2 column format and to include a list of contents on either the front or rear cover.

The Initial Presiding Officer mentioned that as the Assembly has only limited privilege he has asked that (without prejudice) until further notice, no further copies of the Official Report of the first meeting be distributed.

The Initial Presiding Officer noted that transcription of the Irish language during the first meeting of the Assembly resulted in a delay in the issue of the Official Report because the transcription service had to be brought in from outside. The Initial Presiding Officer said that in order to ensure prompt issue of the Official Report he has asked for 2 members of staff on the Official Report team who can transcribe Irish. There was some discussion regarding provision of transcription services for both the Irish and Ulster-Scots languages.

Agreed: Two members of staff who can transcribe Ulster-Scots should also be sought.

4. PRESS AND MEDIA ISSUES

Draft guidelines on press matters were circulated to the Committee for consideration. To be returned to at the next meeting.

The Initial Presiding Officer reported that in the meantime the Long Gallery will be used for press conferences and in order that usage of the facility can be monitored asked parties to inform Gail McKibbin when they intend to hold press conferences. Parties were also asked to assist with security arrangements by escorting press while in the building.

Provision of recording facilities to the Assembly were discussed. Initial Presiding Officer pointed out that the Commission of the Assembly which will come into effect at the end of the shadow period will take over responsibility

for contractual arrangements, etc. The matter will be looked at in greater detail after the Summer recess.

5. PASSES

The types of passes for the Assembly were discussed briefly. The Initial Presiding Officer undertook to produce draft guidelines for consideration by the Committee.

6. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Shadow Commission

The Initial Presiding Officer asked the Committee to give some thought to the possibility of creating a Shadow Commission.

Assembly Website

A proposed layout for an Assembly website was circulated to the Committee for their consideration. To be discussed at the next meeting.

Headed Paper

The Initial Presiding Officer agreed to seek expert advice and produce examples for consideration by the Committee.

Office Accommodation Allowances

Guidelines for Office Accommodation Allowances was raised. It was felt quarterly payment in arrears was unhelpful.

Agreed: The possibility of an initial payment of £3,500 should be looked at and the remainder claimed monthly in arrears.

Mileage Claim Forms

Mr Robinson pointed out that the current mileage forms which require Members to detail each journey are time consuming. It was suggested less detailed forms should suffice. The Initial Presiding Officer agreed to look into the matter.

Party Funding

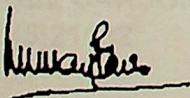
The Initial Presiding Officer agreed to raise the matter of funding of Political Parties with Mr Murphy MP on 17 July and to stress the urgency of the matter.

Meetings

Prof McWilliams asked that when times and dates of meetings are being changed that the smaller parties be consulted before the larger parties.

7. NEXT MEETING

The next meeting will be held on Monday 20 July at 9.00 am in the Long Gallery.



JN NIGEL CARSON
Deputy Clerk (Business)

FROM: NIGEL CARSON
ASSEMBLY SECRETARIAT
DATE: 17 JULY 1998

CC: Presiding Officer

Mr R Empey
Mr J Wilson
Mr E McGrady MP
Mr M Durkan
Mr M Morrow
Mr P Robinson MP
Mr A Maskey
Mr F Molloy
Mr D Ford
Mr C Wilson
Prof M McWilliams
Mr B Hutchinson

COMMITTEE TO ADVISE THE PRESIDING OFFICER

This is to advise you that the next meeting of the Committee to Advise the Presiding Officer will be held on Monday 20 July at 9.00 am in the Long Gallery, Parliament Buildings.

Signed NC

NIGEL CARSON
☎ (5)21132