



Coimisiún Thithe an Oireachtais
Houses of the Oireachtas Commission

Sixth meeting

Wednesday 21st June, 2006 at 2 p.m.

Room 2, Leinster House

Minutes of the meeting

1. Members present

Dr. Rory O'Hanlon, T.D., Ceann Comhairle (Chairperson), Senator Ulick Burke, Kieran Coughlan, Secretary General, Deputy Brendan Howlin, Senator Rory Kiely, Cathaoirleach of the Seanad, Deputy Brian Lenihan, Minister of State, Senator Martin Mansergh, Deputy Paul McGrath, Deputy M.J. Nolan and Senator Joe O'Toole.

Apologies were received from Deputy Liz O'Donnell.

2. Minutes of the fifth meeting on 25th May, 2006

The minutes of the meeting were agreed.

3. Matters arising from the minutes

(1) Recommendations of IBR Strand 1 [Chapter 9]

The Commission had before it correspondence from the Department of Finance stating that the Minister for Finance had agreed to the creation of an Assistant Secretary post in the Office along the lines set out in the job description for the corporate services/strategic post, the post to be filled through the normal TLAC process for which civil servants at Principal level and equivalent are eligible. The letter also stated that the Minister did not accept that there was any justification for three posts at Assistant Secretary level but indicated that the Minister would be prepared to consider, at a suitable date in the future, whether a second post at that level would be warranted in the light of the impact of the change and modernisation programme currently underway.

Following discussion, the Commission –

- (1) welcomed the decision of the Minister for Finance as a recognition of the case for Assistant Secretary level grading in the Office;
- (2) agreed that the TLAC process for the sanctioned post should commence without delay and that the case for the second post would be revived in six months;
- (3) in accepting the Minister's decision as outlined in the letter, agreed that, as a matter of principle, the existing Officer of the House posts of Clerk of the Seanad and Clerk-Assistant of the Dáil should be encompassed as part of the duties of the two Assistant Secretary posts in the first tier of management reporting to the Secretary General/Clerk of the Dáil; and

- (4) noted that the conditions of the sanction for the appointment of the Assistant Secretary include an agreement to accept any alteration, development or reconfiguration of duties in the light of organisational changes and modernisation.

The Commission further agreed to consider at its next meeting possible means of ensuring parity among the posts concerned in the transition period to the new organisation structure of two Assistant Secretary posts.

(2) Simultaneous translation of Acts of the Oireachtas

The Commission had before it a note on discussions at official level to the effect that the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs has indicated that it would be prepared to:

- (1) provide a guarantee in writing to meet whatever funding is required to cater for the additional burden imposed by the Official Languages Act. This funding can be explicitly ringfenced in the next Commission Bill;
- (2) ensure access to the top translators on the panel in the competition currently underway to ensure that the Commission can meet all of the translation needs;
- (3) provide a guarantee, by Government decision, if required, that no further/additional work will be sent to the Commission (e.g. statutory instruments etc.); and
- (4) formally review the position in 3 years, including a proposal to create an independent agency.

The Commission decided that it would be prepared to change its stance on this issue in the light of written guarantees from the Government on the above undertakings by the Department, in the form of –

- (1) appropriate safeguarding of the Commission's budget to provide for the running of the Houses by ringfencing the required funding in the forthcoming legislation which is currently under preparation and is required to come into effect this year before the 2003 Act expires; and
- (2) a Government decision underpinning the above guarantees, particularly in relation to providing adequate funding for translation services and ensuring skills availability.

The Commission also noted the Minister's acknowledgement that, should the necessary translators not emerge from the recent recruitment campaign, the State must play a significant role in resolving any administrative difficulties resulting from a failure to comply with the provisions of the Act.

4. Emergency Accommodation Plan for Sitzings of the Houses of the Oireachtas

The Commission had before it a report [6-2-06] recommending Dublin Castle as the preferred location for the recovery of accommodation and services of the Houses in the event of one or more of the plenary and Committee Chambers becoming unavailable, due to fire, flooding, severe weather damage or any other reason.

The Commission approved the recommendation.

5. 2005 Annual Report of the Commission

The Commission had before it a draft annual report for 2005 in accordance with section 6 of the 2003 Act [6-3-06].

The Commission adopted the report.

6. Any other business

The Commission requested a report from the Director of HR on the appropriate grading for the post of private secretary to the Cathaoirleach of the Seanad.

7. The meeting adjourned at 3 p.m.

Dr. Rory O'Hanlon, T.D.,
Ceann Comhairle,
Chairperson of the Commission.

Dated: