

# NEW NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

## PROCEEDINGS OF THE COMMITTEE TO ADVISE THE PRESIDING OFFICER

TUESDAY 18 AUGUST 1998 AT 9.30 AM

IN THE LONG GALLERY, PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS

**Present:** Lord Alderdice (Initial Presiding Officer)  
Mr D Ford  
Mr B Hutchinson  
Mr M McGimpsey (representing Mr R Empey)  
Mr F Molloy  
Ms J Morrice (representing Prof M McWilliams)  
Mr M Morrow  
Mr D Nesbitt (representing Mr J Wilson)  
Ms S Ramsey (representing Mr A Maskey)  
Mr P Robinson MP  
Mr C Wilson

**In attendance:** Mr N Carson  
Miss A Moore

Those present stood to observe a one minute silence.

### 1. ASSEMBLY RESPONSE TO THE OMAGH BOMB

**Silent Vigil:** The Initial Presiding Officer suggested it might be appropriate to allow anyone who was unable to attend the silent vigil at the City Hall the opportunity to attend a 15 minute vigil in the Central Hall commencing at 13.00. Agreed.

**Transition Programme:** It was agreed to suggest to the organisers of the Transition Programme that the seminar scheduled for Thursday 20 August be postponed until a later date.

**Recall of the Assembly:** The Initial Presiding Officer read a letter to the Committee from Mr Maskey suggesting an early meeting of all Assembly parties to discuss the implications of the Omagh bomb for the peace process. The matter was discussed in detail, but no consensus was reached. None of the parties were totally opposed to a re-call but only the DUP, Sinn Fein and the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition were actively in favour. All of the parties were clear that any re-call should be for the specific purpose of condemning this particular act of terrorism and expressing sympathy to the

bereaved and injured. Sinn Fein also wanted to express support for the peace process. The DUP however were not in favour of an event designed to underpin a peace process which they see as a failure. There was discussion around the possibility of framing a motion to which all the parties could sign up in advance. It was felt that this was likely to be difficult to achieve and the UKUP said they would refuse to support any motion with Sinn Fein. The UUP saw potential difficulty no matter what the specific purpose of a re-call was meant to be while the PUP and Alliance were very wary of a meeting which might inflame the heightened tensions in the community. The Initial Presiding Officer said he would forward the views expressed to the Secretary of State and asked that members give some thought to what other actions might be appropriate and to come back with suggestions.

## 2. PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS ROOM ALLOCATIONS

Floor plans of Parliament Buildings showing suggested room allocations were circulated with a view to agreeing allocations for the Ground and First floors. Some strong concerns were expressed regarding the "considerable requests" being made by the First Minister and Deputy First Minister for accommodation on the Ground and First floors. It was felt members' legitimate needs should be met before those of staff such as special advisors. The following allocations were agreed in principle:

Room	Allocated to
3 - 7	Executive
15 - 17	Head of the Civil Service and staff
23 - 24	Clerk to the Assembly
25	Deputy Clerk
26	Second Clerk
27	Clerks
28 - 32	Library
33	Vote Office
34	Alliance Party Whip
35	DUP Whip
36	UKUP Whip
37	UUP Whip
38	SDLP Whip
39	Sinn Fein Whip
40 - 41	Presiding Officer and staff
42	Photocopying
54	Business Office
107	PUP Whip
148	NIWC Whip

Allocations of the remaining rooms to be reconsidered. The Initial Presiding Officer asked Whips to let him know as soon as possible what their furniture

requirements will be so that Whips rooms can be made available for early occupation.

3. **UPDATE ON BUILDING WORK**

**Chamber:** The Initial Presiding Officer gave an update on progress. It is hoped that work will be completed by the end of August with testing of the sound system early in September. The seats are being recovered, benching and tables are being made. The carpet will go down once the benching is in place, small speakers will be installed on top of the benching and in each table. Microphones will be slung from the lightwells. It is felt that supplementary lighting may not be needed.

**Basement:** Work on the press facilities in the Basement is proceeding according to plan.

4. **MEETING WITH PRESS**

The Initial Presiding Officer advised the Committee that he is meeting the press on Friday 21 August. The members agreed to the setting up of a liaison group consisting of representatives of the press and political parties with the aim of providing appropriate press facilities and establishing the views of the press regarding policy matters. The Initial Presiding Officer will brief the Committee following the meeting on 21 August.

5. **VISIT BY PRESIDENT CLINTON**

Mr Carson informed the Committee of the proposed itinerary for a visit by President Clinton to Parliament Buildings on 3 September:

- ♦ The Prime Minister and President Clinton will arrive at Parliament Buildings late morning and be greeted by the First Minister and Deputy First Minister at the entrance before moving to the Members' Dining Room for a private meeting.
- ♦ The Initial Presiding Officer will escort the Prime Minister and President Clinton to meet members in the Long Gallery. It has not yet been decided if the President will make a speech at this point.
- ♦ After the meeting the Prime Minister and President Clinton will leave for the Waterfront Hall. Transport will be laid on to take members to the Waterfront Hall.

Some concern was expressed regarding access to the building and the possibility of intrusive searching of members. The Initial Presiding Officer said he would convey the views to the Secretary of State and that he would keep members informed as further details emerge.

6. **MATTERS ARISING FROM THE LAST MEETING**

The Initial Presiding Officer provided an update as follows:

**Office Costs Allowances:** A note is being issued to members to confirm that Secretariat has been paying, and will continue to pay, allowances without delay on invoices presented. As a result members should not be financially disadvantaged.

**Party Funding:** A letter has issued from the Secretary of State to party leaders and whips confirming funding for 6 months. Funding beyond the shadow period will be a matter for the Assembly Commission. Some concern was expressed about the size of the funding.

**Shadow Assembly Commission:** It is intended to table a motion in order to establish a Shadow Assembly Commission. The Committee were asked to think about the breakdown of its membership.

**Access Rights within Parliament Buildings:** It is hoped to put a further paper on the question of passes to the Committee soon.

**Access to the Library for Former Members:** It is understood that when the previous Assembly ceased to exist that its members lost their rights including access to the Library but where they have, on occasion, asked for assistance this has been given where possible.

**Tours of the Grounds and Buildings:** Arrangements are being made to ensure tours are available.

**Post Office and Bank Autoteller:** Responses are expected from Post Office Counters and the main banks.

7. **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

**Recall of the Assembly:** The Initial Presiding Officer reported that if the Assembly does meet before 14 September the most appropriate venue would be the Senate Chamber.

**General Enquiry Number:** The Committee were asked to consider the possibility of printing an advertisement to advise the public about an enquiry number.

**Photographs of Members:** The Initial Presiding Officer reported that an approach has been made by the Sunday Times about the possibility of taking photographs of all the members for publication in a guide to the Northern Ireland Assembly which the Sunday Times is producing. A similar request has come from Cyds Pix, this time for distribution on CD ROM to agencies and publishers. The Committee agreed to allow access to the premises to

the photographer from the Sunday Times during the first few meetings for the purpose of taking photographs of members.

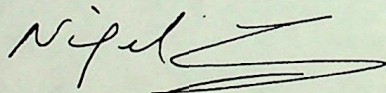
**Recycling Policy:** Ms Morrice suggested a recycling policy for the Assembly. The Initial Presiding Officer agreed to produce a paper for discussion.

**Brochure on Parliament Buildings:** The Initial Presiding Officer agreed to make copies available to Whips. It was agreed the publication needs to be updated but that this should be left until after the recess.

**Facilities for Functions:** Application forms are being prepared for parties wishing to hold functions in Parliament Buildings. The Initial Presiding Officer indicated that there would have to be some rules about such functions, eg, restricted to Friday evenings and weekends if using the Central Hall so as not to interfere with business.

8. **NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting will be held on Monday 24 August at 9.00 am.



**NIGEL CARSON**