

REPORT OF THE BUSINESS COMMITTEE

PROPOSAL TO CHANGE STANDING ORDERS

Introduction

On 28 January 2003 the Business Committee considered a paper on proposed revisions to Standing Order 6.9.

Background

Standing Order 6.9 deals with what could be termed “emergency debates”. The wording of the Standing Order has proved to be less clear than desirable, especially so far as the sequence of events is concerned. For that reason, the Business Committee agreed the proposed revisions set out at Annex A.

The redraft essentially reproduces all the ideas in the original paragraph, though the proposed revisions will have the effect of

- Clarifying as to when the application is to be made
- Introducing time-limits for speeches
- Requiring the Presiding Officer only to decide whether the matter is “of urgent public importance” and not whether it also “merits the Assembly’s immediate attention”
- Requiring the Presiding Officer to notify the Member and the Government when he intends to allow a Member to make an application
- Making it clear that the Presiding Officer has powers to alter the agreed timetable as necessary if the Assembly decides that a debate should take place.

Proposal

The proposed revisions were agreed by Business Committee on 28th January, 2003. The Assembly is invited to approve this reformulation of SO 6.9.

Annex A

Current Standing Order 6.9:

6.9. At any plenary meeting, with the Presiding Officer's permission previously obtained, a Member may propose that the Assembly should immediately consider a particular matter of urgent public importance. Permission shall be obtained in accordance with arrangements determined by the Presiding Officer. The Presiding Officer shall give a Minister an opportunity to comment on the request before ruling on it. If the Presiding Officer is satisfied that the matter merits the Assembly's immediate attention, he or she shall put the proposition to the vote (except that, if a Member other than a Minister has made the proposition, the Presiding Officer shall allow a Minister to reply before putting the proposition to the vote). If the Assembly resolves to consider the matter, it shall do so during that meeting or (if the Presiding Officer so decides) the one immediately following and the timetable for business shall be adjusted accordingly. If the matter is within the responsibilities of the House Committee, then for "Minister" in this paragraph, there shall be substituted "a Member of the House Committee answering on behalf of that Committee."

Revised Standing Order 6.9:

“At any plenary meeting and after questions for oral answer have been taken, a Member may propose in a speech lasting no longer than three minutes that the Assembly should consider a particular matter, provided that –

- (a) the Member has notified the Presiding Officer of his or her wish to do so and of the matter at least one hour before the beginning of the sitting;
- (b) if a Member other than a Minister has given the notification, the Presiding Officer has given a Minister an opportunity to comment in private to him or her on the matter; and
- (c) the Presiding Officer is satisfied that the matter is of urgent public importance, and has informed the Member (and, if necessary, the Minister) accordingly.

If a Member other than a Minister makes the proposition, the Presiding Officer shall allow a Minister to reply in a speech lasting no longer than three minutes. The Presiding Officer shall put the proposition to the vote immediately after it has been made or, if a Minister replies, after that reply. If the Assembly resolves to consider the matter, it shall do so at that meeting or (if the Presiding Officer so decides) at the one immediately following, and the Presiding Officer shall adjust the timetable for business as he or she thinks appropriate. If the matter is within the responsibilities of the House Committee, then for “Minister” in this paragraph, there shall be substituted “a member of the House Committee answering on behalf of that Committee.”