



Seirbhís Thithe
an Oireachtais
Houses of the
Oireachtas Service

PAC-R-273

Office of Secretary General and Clerk of the Dáil
Leinster House
Kildare Street
Dublin 2
Tel: +353 1 618 3314 or 618 3438

31 January 2012

Ms Eimear Lavelle
Committee Secretariat
Committee of Public Accounts



Dear Eimear

I refer to your request for a response for further information relating to issues raised during my appearance at the Committee of Public Accounts on January 12th 2012.

In relation to the four issues on which the Committee sought further information, please find below responses to these issues and one point of clarification relating to an issue raised by Deputy Fleming regarding the duplication of IT data.

I hope the attached information meets the requirements of the Committee, however if further detail or clarity is required please do not hesitate to contact me.

Please note two other members of the Committee raised issues with me directly and I will be responding to them shortly.

Yours sincerely

Kieran Coughlan
Secretary General and Clerk of the Dáil

1. Health and Safety

The list of thirteen buildings which make up Leinster House complex, to include a note on the fire certificates in place for each site.

We have been in contact with the OPW in relation to this request as this matter falls within their remit, and will forward content of their report when it is received.

Pending the report from OPW, the understanding is that the Houses of the Oireachtas has exemption for certain buildings under the Building Control Regulations. Leinster House 2000 which is the newest build, however, does require a fire certificate which is held by the OPW. Any alterations or improvements to the OPW owned buildings have been compliant with fire safety standards, even if exempted from the certification process.

The situation in regard to property leased by OPW is also being pursued and will be reported on.

The individual buildings occupied by the Houses of the Oireachtas are:

Inside Perimeter

LH2000

Georgian Leinster House

1932 Annex

1966 Block

Engineering Block

Ministerial Block

Agriculture House

Outside Perimeter

Kildare House

Statoil

South Frederick St (Passport Office)

Buildings Recently Vacated

Setanta Centre

Phoenix House

2. Pay Slip Confidentiality

A note outlining the privacy settings in place for staff and Members viewing their pay-slips on-line.

Members and staff viewing their payslips on-line (ePayslips) do so through the Corepay portal on the Oireachtas Intranet Site. To log on to the Intranet, members and staff must log on with their username and password. Access to the Intranet is restricted to members, members' staff and staff of the Houses of the Oireachtas Service.

To access the Corepay portal, the user requires a username and password which may or may not differ from the log on username and password. A temporary password was

assigned to each user when the ePayslips system was introduced. However, on logging on, the user was then required to change the password to one known only to him/her. The password has to be at least five characters long and at least one of these characters must be a digit. Users are facilitated where they forget passwords or do not have routine access to email.

In order to further assure protection, a new control is being introduced shortly whereby users will be prompted to change their password after a period of approximately three months.

3. JobBridge Scheme

A note providing information of the capacity available to the Oireachtas Commission to take on interns under the JobBridge scheme for onward assignment to Members of the Houses and in particular to assist Members with Committee work and the plans to have such a resource put in place.

Internships with the Houses of the Oireachtas Service

JobBridge is a new National Internship Scheme that provides work experience placements for interns for a 6 month or 9 month period. In August 2011 the Service converted three existing FÁS work placement candidates to the JobBridge programme and has since then placed a further two interns in the Service.

It is a condition of the Scheme that no internship placements can be offered for roles which are currently vacant and therefore the Service cannot use the Scheme to supplement resource requirements as a result of the application of the moratorium. This limits opportunities for placements within the Service as there are vacancies in all general service grades at present.

In order to approve the five positions which have been placed in the Service under the Scheme, detailed roles were developed ensuring that they did not displace any employee or fill any vacancy. The current roles are in the Library and Research Service where three interns are working on a Committee and Bills cataloguing project and two interns in the Office of the Parliamentary Legal Advisor are working on projects in the area. Similar project based internships could be specified by the Committee Secretariat and HR Unit would then organise JobBridge for those roles.

Internships with Members/Parties

The HR Unit for Members is responsible for the administration of the Scheme for Secretarial Assistance, providing assistance to Members in their role as an employer. As a result of the current arrangements it is not possible for Members to apply for interns under the programme for themselves as they do not hold individual employer reference numbers with the Revenue Commissioners.

It may be more feasible to provide the interns to each party and allow members to access the resource through the Party Administrators. The HR Unit for Members can work with each Party to determine their requirements, develop the job profiles and recruit the positions. However, there is a significant overhead (e.g. weekly progress reporting) which would fall to the Party as the employer.

4. Houses of the Oireachtas Sittings

A note comparing costings for the current sitting times of both Houses to a model where the Houses would sit from 9.00 a.m. – 5.00 p.m. each day.

In relation to the issue of savings if sittings of the Houses were to move to a more 'normal working day' pattern, we have done some preliminary analysis on this and have identified indicative savings in the region of €440,000 annually arising from civil service overtime, taxis and energy costs. This excludes further potential savings (difficult to estimate pending re-tendering based on a pattern of changed hours) in televising and sound contract costs (though a 10% saving on both contracts would yield a further €190,000 per annum). It also excludes potential (further) reductions in overtime for Members/party staff which, if the reduction was 10% in the existing overtime bill of €2.55m, would yield further annual savings of approximately €250,000.

This analysis is preliminary and is based on altering the current sitting patterns of the Houses to a 10.00 a.m. to 6.00 p.m. model (9.45 a.m. to 6.00 p.m. are already the standard hours of attendance for staff of the Houses of the Oireachtas Service). The realisation of some of these savings would likely raise IR issues which would need to be resolved.

Point of clarification

I would also like to clarify one of the issues raised by Deputy Fleming in relation to the duplication of Oireachtas IT data to a remote secure site, and in particular the question from Deputy Fleming to Mr Conan McKenna as to what data is copied over to the remote secure site and what the arrangements are for backing up Members' constituency data. To clarify the point in particular in relation to backing up Members' constituency data, the position is set out below:

All data which is stored on the Houses of the Oireachtas Storage Area Network (SAN) in Leinster House, is duplicated constantly over to the remote secure site so that, if some problem occurs where the Leinster House data is lost or damaged, it may be recovered from the remote site. The data on the SAN includes any data saved by Members or their staff on our systems, including the constituency database information. The remote site to which our data is replicated is a secure site via a formal arrangement with another State agency which has ISO security accreditation. Access to facilities on that site is restricted to authorised persons only and the link over which the data is replicated is a secure and dedicated point to point fibre link. The replication does not include data stored locally by Members in their constituency offices and not saved to the Leinster House network. The replication of all data to a remote secure site is best practice business continuity/disaster recovery procedure in IT terms and is intended to protect our systems and our users from catastrophic failure from which we could not recover. All of Members' data on the Oireachtas Leinster House system is also subject to daily backups to tape and the tapes are taken off site for remote safe storage.