

## STANDING ORDER 7 - Business in Plenary Meetings

### Plenary Meetings

- 7.1 Plenary meetings of the Assembly must take place in public; and broadcasting access must be permitted in accordance with such arrangements as the Assembly may from time to time agree.
- 7.2 The Assembly must meet in plenary in accordance with Standing Orders 6 and 7.
- 7.3 If no meeting is timetabled for a particular date or time the Presiding Officer may, at the request of the First Minister, summon the Assembly to consider a matter of urgent public importance.
- 7.4 So far as is reasonably practicable, any documents provided for business taken in plenary meetings must be made publicly available.
- 7.5 Any documents referred to in Standing Order 7.4 must be made available to the Secretary of State for Wales at the same time as they are to Members.

### Order and Notice of Plenary Business

- 7.6 The aggregate of time allocated as between government and non-government business in plenary meetings in an Assembly year must, so far as is reasonably practicable, be in the proportion of 3:2.
- 7.6A Plenary meetings are normally to be held on Tuesdays and Wednesdays when the allocation of sitting time must be in accordance with Standing Orders 7.7 and 7.8.
- 7.7 Tuesday plenary meetings must:
  - (i) usually start at 2pm;
  - (ii) consider Assembly business under standing order 7.9(i) to 7.9(vii) and government business only; and
  - (iii) subject to standing order 7.15 or any procedural motion under standing order 7.27, finish no later than 5.30pm.
- 7.8 Wednesday plenary meetings must:
  - (i) usually start at 12.30pm;
  - (ii) consider government business from 12.30pm to 2pm, and Assembly and non-government business from 2pm; and

- (iii) subject to standing order 7.15 or any procedural motion under standing order 7.27, finish no later than 5.30pm.

7.9 For the purposes of standing orders 6, 7 and 11, Assembly business includes proceedings on:

- (i) motions under standing order 7.41 or 7.42;
- (ii) statements by the Presiding Officer;
- (iii) introduction of new Members;
- (iv) obituary tributes to former Members and others;
- (v) elections, nominations or appointments by the Assembly;
- (vi) personal statements;
- (vii) motions to amend standing orders;
- (viii) any urgent debate proposed by a member of the Assembly Commission, which relates to the Commission's functions, under Standing Order 7.57;
- (ix) oral questions to the Assembly Commission;
- (x) statements by the Assembly Commission about any matter coming within the responsibilities of the Commission;
- (xi) any matter under standing order 7.60; and
- (xii) debates on reports submitted by the Committee on Standards of Conduct.

7.10 For the purposes of standing orders 6, 7 and 11, government business includes proceedings on:

- (i) oral questions (other than oral questions to the Assembly Commission);
- (ii) any urgent debate proposed by a member of the government under Standing Order 7.57;
- (iii) statements by a member of the government;
- (iv) any budget motion;
- (v) legislation where the Member in charge of the legislation is a member of the government;

- (vi) any motion under Standing Order 24.4;
- (vii) any matter under standing order 7.61;
- (viii) a legislative consent motion under Standing Order 26.4;  
and
- (ix) any other motion moved by a member of the government (other than a motion relating to Assembly or non-government business).

7.11 For the purposes of standing orders 6, 7 and 11, non-government business includes proceedings on:

- (i) any urgent debate proposed by a Member who is not a member of the government under Standing Order 7.57;
- (ii) legislation where the Member in charge of the legislation is not a member of the government;
- (iii) any motion under Standing Order 24.2;
- (iv) any matters under standing order 7.62;
- (v) Short Debates under Standing Order 7.63; and
- (vi) any other motion moved by a Member who is not a member of the government (other than a motion relating to Assembly or government business).

7.12 The Presiding Officer must determine any question as to whether a matter is Assembly, government or non-government business.

7.13 Business must be called by the Presiding Officer and taken in the order in which it appears in the plenary agenda, subject to Standing Order 7.14.

7.14 The categories of business that may be taken at a plenary meeting without notice include:

- (i) business under standing orders 7.9(ii), (iii), (iv), (vi), (viii), (x);
- (ii) business under standing orders 7.10(ii), (iii);
- (iii) business under standing order 7.11(i);
- (iii) procedural motions under standing orders 7.22 to 7.28;  
and

(v) points of order relating to the conduct of business.

7.15 If an item of business is taken without notice, the Presiding Officer may make any necessary arrangements to adjust the timetable for business on that day (including by extending the length of the sitting).

### Motions

7.16 Business in plenary meetings must proceed on the basis of motions proposed, except for:

- (i) statements by the Presiding Officer;
- (ii) introduction of new Members;
- (iii) obituary tributes to former Members and others;
- (iii) oral questions;
- (iv) matters the Assembly resolves to consider under Standing Orders 7.57;
- (vi) where a Member proposes a topic for a Short Debate under Standing Order 7.63.

7.17 Except where Standing Orders provide otherwise, a motion:

- (i) must be tabled at least five working days before it is to be debated; and
- (ii) may be proposed by any Member.

7.18 Except where Standing Orders provide otherwise, amendments may be proposed to any motion and must be tabled at least three working days before the motion is to be debated; but the Presiding Officer may:

- (i) group related amendments and require them to be proposed as a group;
- (ii) determine the order in which amendments which arise in the same place in the motion are taken; and
- (iii) decline to select an amendment where he or she considers that the proper conduct of business makes it appropriate to do so.

7.19 The Presiding Officer may propose that motions be debated together, but if any Member objects to the proposal, the motions must be

debated separately.

- 7.20 A motion or amendment which refers to any document may not be tabled unless the document is available to all Members.
- 7.21 If it appears to the Presiding Officer that a motion or amendment has been tabled in breach of the requirements of Standing Order 7.20, the Presiding Officer must not permit it to be debated until the document has been made available to all Members and such further time has elapsed as the Presiding Officer considers appropriate.

### Procedural Motions

- 7.22 Procedural motions take precedence over other business and the provisions of Standing Order 7.17 relating to the notice period for tabling motions do not apply.
- 7.23 The Presiding Officer may permit a Member to speak briefly in favour of any procedural motion, and another Member to speak briefly against, and must then put the motion to the vote.
- 7.24 The following matters may be proposed in procedural motions:
- (i) the postponement of an item of business in accordance with standing order 7.25;
  - (ii) the referral of a matter to a committee;
  - (iii) the closure of debate in accordance with Standing Order 7.26;
  - (iv) the extension of the time allotted to an item of business, in accordance with Standing Order 7.27;
  - (v) the adjournment of an item of business under Standing Order 7.28; and
  - (v) such other matters as the Presiding Officer considers appropriate.
- 7.25 A motion to postpone an item of business may be proposed by:
- (i) the Member in charge of the item of business;
  - (ii) another Member nominated to the Presiding Officer in advance by the Member in charge of the item of business; or
  - (iii) in the case of government business, a member of the government.

If the motion is agreed to, the Presiding Officer must make arrangements for the adjustment of the timetable for business as he or she considers appropriate.

- 7.26 At any time after a motion or an amendment has been proposed, a Member may move that the motion or amendment should be voted on immediately; but the Presiding Officer may put that motion to the vote only if at least ten Members express support, and if he or she is satisfied that to do so would not be an abuse of the Assembly's procedures or an infringement of the rights of minorities in the Assembly.
- 7.27 A motion to extend the time allotted to an item of business by a specified period may be proposed by:
- (i) the Member in charge of the item of business;
  - (ii) another Member nominated to the Presiding Officer in advance by the Member in charge of the item of business; or
  - (iii) in the case of government business, a member of the government.

If the motion is agreed to, the whole of the business day is deemed to have been extended by the specified amount of time.

- 7.28 A motion to adjourn an item of business (either to a specified day or to no named day) may be proposed by:
- (i) the Member in charge of the item of business;
  - (ii) another Member nominated to the Presiding Officer in advance by the Member in charge of the item of business; or
  - (iii) in the case of government business, a member of the government.

### **Decisions on motions and amendments**

- 7.29 At the end of the time allotted to any item of business, the Presiding Officer must interrupt the business and:
- (i) if the business has been designated under standing order 6.8, proceed to the next item of business; or
  - (ii) in any other case, ask the Assembly to vote on any questions necessary to dispose of the business.

- 7.30 If business has been designated at any day's sitting under standing 6.8, at the specified time (or times) the Presiding Officer must interrupt the business and ask the Assembly to vote on any questions necessary to dispose of the business so designated.
- 7.31 If the Presiding Officer interrupts business at a specified time under standing order 7.30, the time taken to vote on the questions necessary at that specified time does not count against the time allotted to the business which has been interrupted.
- 7.32 If proceedings on an item of business conclude before the end of the time allotted to it, the next business (if any) must then be taken.
- 7.33 Members must cast their votes individually and in person (but are not obliged to vote).
- 7.34 Where the Presiding Officer is satisfied that no Member wishes a recorded vote to take place on any motion or amendment, he or she may announce a provisional decision in respect of that motion or amendment. If any Member objects, a recorded vote must be taken in accordance with standing order 7.35. If no Member objects, that provisional decision becomes the decision of the Assembly on that motion or amendment.
- 7.35 Subject to Standing Order 7.34, the Presiding Officer must put a motion or an amendment to a vote by electronic means; or failing that, either:
- (i) if the Presiding Officer so decides, by show of hands, provided no more than two Members object to the Presiding Officer's decision; or
  - (ii) by roll call, in alphabetical order, of the Membership.
- 7.36 When at least three Members, before a vote is taken, so request, the bell must be rung. If votes are to be taken immediately after one another, the bell need not be rung more than once. Five minutes after the bell began ringing the vote or votes must be taken.
- 7.37 A vote is not valid unless at least ten Members participate. If fewer than ten Members participate, that business must be held over (and the Presiding Officer must make arrangements for the adjustment of the timetable for business as he or she considers appropriate) and the Assembly must proceed to the next item of business.
- 7.38 In determining the number of Members participating in a vote, those recording an abstention are to be regarded as participating.

- 7.39 The names of Members voting, including those recording an abstention, must be included in the record of the Assembly's plenary proceedings.
- 7.40 A report of the vote must be made available as soon as possible after the vote has taken place.

#### Motions of no-confidence etc

7.41 If a motion:

- (i) that the Presiding Officer be removed from office; or
- (ii) that the Deputy be removed from office

is tabled by at least six Members, time must be made available as soon as possible for the motion to be debated; and in any event such a debate must take place within five working days of the motion having been tabled.

- 7.42 If a motion that the Welsh Ministers no longer enjoy the confidence of the Assembly is tabled by at least six Members, time must be made available as soon as possible for the motion to be debated; and in any event such a debate must take place within five working days of the motion having been tabled.

#### Personal Statements

- 7.43 The Presiding Officer may allow a Member to make a personal statement, following notice in writing to him or her.
- 7.44 A personal statement must be brief, factual and must not be subject to debate.

#### Oral Questions

- 7.45 Members may table oral questions to the First Minister, to each Welsh Minister and to the Counsel General, about any matters relating to his or her responsibilities (except that oral questions may be tabled to the Minister with responsibility for government business only about matters relating to his or her responsibilities other than for business (if any)).
- 7.46 Members may table oral questions to the Assembly Commission about any matter relating to the Commission's responsibilities.
- 7.47 Time must be made available in plenary meetings for:



- (i) the First Minister to answer oral questions once, and for a maximum of 45 minutes, in each week that the Assembly meets in plenary;
  - (ii) each Welsh Minister and the Counsel General to answer oral questions in relation to his or her responsibilities, at least once, and for a maximum of 30 minutes, in every four weeks that the Assembly meets in plenary (except that the Minister with responsibility for government business is only to answer questions under standing order 7.47(ii) if he or she has responsibilities for matters other than government business); and
  - (iii) the Assembly Commission to answer oral questions at least once, and for a maximum of 30 minutes, in every four weeks that the Assembly meets in plenary;
- 7.48 A Deputy Minister may at the request of the First Minister, a Welsh Minister or the Counsel General answer any oral question on any matter on which he or she assists the First Minister, a Welsh Minister or the Counsel General (as the case may be).
- 7.49 Where it is not reasonably practicable for the First Minister, a Welsh Minister or the Counsel General to answer oral questions on a day when he or she would normally do so, another Welsh Minister may, after prior notification to the Presiding Officer, answer those questions
- 7.50 Questions must be tabled at least five working days but not more than ten working days before they are to be answered.
- 7.51 Questions are accepted at the discretion of the Presiding Officer, who must have regard to any written guidance which the Assembly may adopt.
- 7.52 Each Member may table no more than two oral questions to a particular Welsh Minister or the Counsel General (or, in the case of the questions to the First Minister or the Assembly Commission, no more than one question) for answer at any plenary meeting.
- 7.53 The order of oral questions must be determined as follows:
- (i) for questions accepted before a deadline agreed by the Business Committee on the first day on which they may be tabled, by random means;
  - (ii) for questions accepted after the deadline agreed by the Business Committee on the first day on which they may be tabled, by the order in which they are received.

- 7.54 The Presiding Officer must call the Member asking the question to ask a supplementary oral question, and may then call other Members to ask related supplementary oral questions.
- 7.55 At the end of the period allocated to oral questions or at such other time as the Presiding Officer may determine, the Presiding Officer may call a Member to ask a question for which notice under Standing Order 7.50 has not been given if:
- (i) the Presiding Officer and the member of the government concerned, or the Assembly Commission, as the case may be, have been given prior notice of at least two hours before the question is to be asked, and
  - (ii) the Presiding Officer is satisfied that the question is of urgent public importance.
- 7.56 Where any oral question is not reached, the Member must receive a written answer on the same day. The written answer must be published in the record of plenary proceedings.

#### Urgent debates

- 7.57 At any plenary meeting, a Member may move in a speech lasting no longer than three minutes that the Assembly should consider a particular matter, provided that:
- (i) 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 meeting;
  - (ii) where the matter does not relate to the functions of the Assembly Commission, if a Member other than a member of the government has given the notification, the Presiding Officer has given a member of the government an opportunity to comment in private to him or her on the matter;
  - (iii) where the matter relates to the functions of the Assembly Commission, if a Member other than a member of the Assembly Commission has given the notification, the Presiding Officer has given the Assembly Commission an opportunity to comment in private to him or her on the matter; and
  - (iv) the Presiding Officer is satisfied that the matter is of urgent public importance, and has informed the Member (and, if necessary, the member of the government or the Assembly Commission, as appropriate) accordingly.

- 7.58 Where the matter does not relate to the functions of the Assembly Commission, if a Member other than a member of the government moves the motion, the Presiding Officer must allow a member of the government to reply in a speech lasting no longer than three minutes. The Presiding Officer must put the motion to the vote immediately after it has been moved or, if a member of the government replies, after that reply. If the Assembly resolves to consider the matter, it must do so at that meeting or (if the Presiding Officer so decides) at the one immediately following, and the Presiding Officer must make arrangements for the adjustment of the timetable for business as he or she considers appropriate.
- 7.59 Where the matter relates to the functions of the Assembly Commission, if a Member other than a member of the Assembly Commission moves the motion, the Presiding Officer must allow the Assembly Commission to reply in a speech lasting no longer than three minutes. The Presiding Officer must put the motion to the vote immediately after it has been moved or, if the Assembly Commission replies, after that reply. If the Assembly resolves to consider the matter, it must do so at that meeting or (if the Presiding Officer so decides) at the one immediately following, and the Presiding Officer must make arrangements for the adjustment of the timetable for business as he or she considers appropriate.

#### Provisions relating to Plenary Business

- 7.60 Time must be made available in each Assembly year for debates on the following items of Assembly business:
- (i) the UK Government's legislative programme (in accordance with section 33 of the Act);
  - (ii) the annual report of the Assembly Commission;
  - (iii) the annual report of the Committee on Standards of Conduct;
  - (iv) the annual report of the Equal Opportunities Commission;
  - (v) the annual report of the Commission for Racial Equality;
  - (vi) the annual report of the Disability Rights Commission; and
  - (vii) the annual report of the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales.
- 7.61 Time must be made available in each Assembly year for debates on the following items of government business:

- (i) the policy objectives and legislative programme of the Welsh Assembly Government; and
- (ii) the annual report of the Children's Commissioner.

7.62 Time must be made available in each Assembly year for the following items of non-government business:

- (i) motions proposed on behalf of political groups who are not political groups with an executive role (and the time allocated to each political group for motions proposed by it must so far as possible be in proportion to the group's representation in the Assembly);
- (ii) debates on reports submitted by any Committee, other than a committee established as a consequence of Standing Orders 22.16(i), 22.18, 23.22 or 23.31(ii), or the Committee on Standards of Conduct;
- (iii) legislation where the Member in charge of the legislation is not a member of the government.

### Short Debates

7.63 The Presiding Officer must hold a ballot to determine the name of the Member, other than a member of the government, who may propose a topic for a Short Debate lasting no more than 30 minutes in each week that the Assembly meets in plenary.

7.64 The Member who has succeeded in the ballot must notify the Presiding Officer of the topic not later than five working days before it is to be debated.

7.65 In the debate:

- (i) the Member who succeeded in the ballot may speak;
- (ii) a member of the government (or, if the matter is within the responsibilities of the Assembly Commission, a member of the Commission) may respond; and
- (iii) no other Member may speak unless he or she has the permission of the Member who succeeded in the ballot or is permitted to intervene by the Member responding.