

Assembly Business Committee Speech—General Assembly 2022

Rev Donald McCorkindale

In preparing for GA2022, Assembly Business Committee anticipated, as is the case, that no legal COVID-19 restrictions would remain in place at the time of our meeting in Edinburgh. Yet, we acknowledge that advice remains and that there are different views about being in crowded spaces and so initiated the process leading to the Commission of Assembly's decision that we should meet in this 'hybrid' format. A thorough Risk Assessment has been kept under review and we are grateful for the support and advice of the Health and Safety Team in the central offices.

Meeting in hybrid format requires some changes to our standing orders - these are detailed in the Supplementary Reports (Order of Proceedings p75). Some other minor updates to Standing Orders appear at Appendix B to the main report. These changes come recommended by 'ABC' - and will be formally moved by Legal Questions Committee.

Section 8 of the report outlines possible areas for reform of General Assembly. Many Presbyteries, individuals and other groups, took up the invitation to engage in exploration around the Why, What, Where, When, Who and How of a reformed, changed, more effective, efficient General Assembly. Reflecting the breadth of opinion about the speed of change, the Committee lays before you some suggested areas for further reflection, particularly in the light of experience of this hybrid Assembly. To hear your experience of General Assembly engagement, we will invite all participants to respond to a short survey soon after the close of this Assembly. The survey will give an opportunity for your comment and reflection on the areas for consideration in Section 8. It is often said that the General Assembly can only change when the General Assembly decides to change. The committee hopes that together we can implement the right reforms towards a General Assembly that best serves the Church of Scotland, her Presbyteries and Congregations, the people of Scotland and beyond.

ABC has within its remit responsibility for the property here at the Assembly Hall, and the Moderator's Residence. The futures of both properties are under review: a business case is being developed towards the disposal of the Moderator's residence, and exploring future options; as well as an options appraisal on the long-term future of the Assembly Hall.

The Committee is delighted that 4 Overtures will be presented, advancing the work of presbytery restructuring. Along with new structures, the Committee seeks to ensure good communication, collaboration, reporting and accountability between Assembly and its Presbyteries. We are glad to have received several short videos sharing good news from around the Presbyteries - these will feature at various times during Assembly and, or on the Church website and social media.

As the number of Presbyteries decrease so the pattern of visits to Presbyteries by the Moderator changes and we present a revised schedule of visits for forthcoming years - giving presbyteries the heads up on plans to be made.

Commissioners are reminded that expenses towards 'in person' attendance will be paid to those who have attended 12 of the 15 sessions. No expenses are payable to those participating online.

The Committee is grateful to the Principal Clerk and all the staff of the Office of General Assembly. As George Whyte retires, one of many roles vacated is as secretary to the Assembly Business Committee. Thank you, George, for your good work, much of it behind the scenes, and we wish you well as you clerk this Assembly, and in the days until retirement on 10th June. We wish George and his wife Moira great joy, health and happiness as they begin this new chapter of life.

It was a privilege for me to lead the steering group which received many excellent applications, and after a rigorous process invited Rev Fiona Smith to be Principal Clerk Designate. In the ever-changing life of the Committee, we look forward to welcoming her back, now as our secretary.

As we say farewell to George, so too to Alison Mehigan whose term on the committee is completed, and to Susan Pym who for the last 2 and a half years has served most ably as Vice-Convener.

Another very active member of the Committee left earlier today. Lord Wallace, now as former Moderator no longer has a seat with us - but we do want to place on record our gratitude for his engagement in the life of the committee, and to add our appreciation to all that has been said already of the immense contribution he and his wife Rosie made during the past year.

Moderator, I present the report and supplementary report of the Assembly Business Committee - a committee on which you remain, and I move the Deliverance.