

Note to Committee on Standards in Public Life – 30/06/09

Sinn Féin will seek to deal with the matters raised in your communication of Thursday 25th June 2009. These include;

- Dual Mandates – and the circumstances which give rise to them.
- Sinn Féin's abstentionist policy and the background to it.
- Our MP's constituency work.
- Expenses requirements for MPs to provide effective representation.

It is widely recognised, even by our political opponents, that Sinn Féin provides first class constituency services for our constituents. Sinn Féin MPs, while not taking seats in the British Parliament, represent our constituents every day of the week. We do so in Ireland and in London. In order to bring effective representation to our electorate they employ a number of staff. We also have office facilities and accommodation in London. For many years the British government refused to give Sinn Féin access to the facilities that every other MP receives as of right.

Sinn Féin holds that Britain has no right to involvement in Irish affairs. Not a single Irish vote was cast in favour of the British government partition of Ireland. Our primary political objective is the establishment of a 32 county Irish Republic.

The unique political environment within which we operate in Ireland and especially the North of Ireland has been recognised. The clearest evidence possible of that is to be found in the Good Friday and St. Andrews Agreement and in the referenda north and south which overwhelmingly endorsed the Good Friday Agreement. The Section 75 equality provisions in the NI Act (1998) are unique to these islands.

Our principle objectives at this time are:

- To maintain, sustain and develop the peace process
- To advance the political process in the terms agreed in the GFA and St Andrews Agreement
- To maintain and develop our political capacity and our organizational capacity to defend and advance these crucial matters

The stability of the political institutions is absolutely crucial to all of this.

Abstentionism

The issue of the Oath is important for us as Republicans. We are opposed to Monarchies. The Oath alone however is not the sole reason for our abstentionist position.

Abstentionism is a legitimate and publicly declared pillar of our Irish Republican politics. It is also supported by the vast majority of nationalists in the north of Ireland. Democrats respect the decision of the electorate. In our case we are elected by citizens as abstentionist MPs. That is their democratic right and one which must be protected and upheld.

We enter into a democratic political contract with the electorate at the ballot box. Our voters, like all others are taxpayers. They contribute to and are

entitled to have their MPs resourced to represent them to the same extent as other MPs.

Sinn Féin MPs Constituency expenses

All party employees including MPs get paid the average industrial wage. Sinn Féin MPs who are Executive Ministers do not claim for constituency travel costs. No Sinn Féin MPs have claimed:

- . The overnight allowance of £25.00 per day
- . The communication allowance of £10,000 per MP
- . Food Expenses

Our MPs do claim:

- . Staff costs
- . Additional Accommodation allowances

Sinn Féin constituency services

- Advocacy of citizenship and democratic rights
- Advocacy for families including where appropriate to the British Attorney General.
- Advocacy to British Ministers
- Promoting the case for increased international investment
- Defending workers rights
- Interacting with statutory agencies
- Campaigning for changes in policy and budget government priorities
- Facilitating interventions from statutory agencies, public bodies, and civic society within the constituency.
- Communication to constituents.
- Providing constituency surgeries.

Dual Mandates

The process of ending dual mandates is one which Sinn Féin supports. This has been dealt with in respect of the European Parliament.. Over the course of recent years we have been taking measures to phase out dual mandates between the Assembly and Local Government. New legislation which we supported and is due to shortly come into effect will eliminate these types of dual mandates entirely.

The remaining anomaly is between MPs and MLAs. This should also be dealt with. But the address of it has to be in the context of the particular and specific political realities in the north of Ireland.

Of principle concern to us here is the stability of the Good Friday Agreement institutions. The principle political institution – the Assembly – has been suspended from operation by the British government four times in the past decade. As politics beds down and the political institutions become stable it would be our expectation that the situation relating to dual mandates will change. This is work in progress.