

The Committee met at 5:15 p.m. in the Chamber.

MR. SPEAKER (Fitzgerald): I would like to welcome Members to the House of Assembly Management Commission.

I thank members for allowing this meeting to take place while the House is open, and everybody with busy schedules and just having come through a session of the House, but we all agreed at the last meeting that maybe Wednesday nights would be a good time to meet. This is what we thought would be an ideal time for us to have a quorum of the Management Commission members.

I would ask all members to introduce themselves before we begin the meeting, starting with Ms Marshall to my left.

MS E. MARSHALL: Beth Marshall, Topsail.

MS BURKE: Joan Burke, Government House Leader.

MR. TAYLOR: Trevor Taylor, The Straits & White Bay North.

MS MICHAEL: Lorraine Michael, Signal Hill-Quidi Vidi.

MS KEEFE: Marie Keefe, the Clerk's Office.

CLERK: Bill MacKenzie, Clerk of the House.

MS LAMBE: Marlene Lambe, Chief Financial Officer.

MR. SPEAKER: My name is Roger Fitzgerald, Chair of the Commission.

First of all, regrettably, Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition have indicated to me by correspondence that they would not be attending this Commission meeting because of the workload while the House of

Assembly is open. Also, in addition to that, they are evaluating their legal options as it relates to a decision of the House of Assembly Management Commission. Until they get legal advice, whether they would proceed with legal action, they have removed themselves from the Commission, but we do have a quorum and we will continue with the business of the Commission.

First on the agenda is the approval of the minutes for the November 18, 2008 meeting. Members have had a chance to read the minutes. If the minutes are in order, if there are no errors or omissions, the Chair would entertain a mover and a seconder that the minutes be adopted as circulated.

MS MICHAEL: So moved.

MR. SPEAKER: It is moved by Ms Michael, seconded by Ms Burke, that the minutes of the November 18 meeting be adopted.

All those in favour, 'aye'.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

MR. SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay'.

The motion is carried.

On motion, minutes adopted as circulated.

MR. SPEAKER: The next item on the agenda is the financial reports as of September 30, 2008. It is a carry-over from our last meeting, actually, and it is the reports of the revenue and expenditures of the House of Assembly and individual members.

We are joined today by Ms Marlene Lambe, the Chief Financial Officer of the House. Members again have had this particular item in their agenda and I would ask members, if there are questions to be asked or suggestions or comments to be made regarding the financial reports, those are for

reporting purposes only. There will be no motions to adopt or to refuse. It is for reporting purposes, but it is important that members are aware of each item that is expressed in the financial statement

Ms Marshall.

MS E. MARSHALL: One question - or perhaps we could have Ms Lambe give us some information on it - I notice that we are going to have projected savings of \$1.5 million, and \$1 million of that comes from the allowances and assistance account from the MHAs. Could you probably speak to that?

MS LAMBE: The amount that was in the budget for the 2008-2009 fiscal year was based on the calculations made by the Green commission on the uptake, I guess, and the cost of travel by members. It has been our experience in the last year, for the remainder of the last year and this year, that expenditures are a lot less than anticipated.

MS E. MARSHALL: So we were expecting \$3.5 million. That was our –

MS LAMBE: Yes, based on those. A large majority of that, too – or I should not say a large majority, but I think around \$350,000 or so - is related to the office accommodations.

MS E. MARSHALL: I was going to ask that.

MS LAMBE: We anticipated that more offices would be opening this year, because last year when we were doing the budget it was difficult to tell how many members would decide to have offices, so we included in the budget enough funding for a lot more offices than actually opened.

MS E. MARSHALL: Okay, thank you.

Could I ask one more question before we move on?

MR. SPEAKER: Ms Marshall.

MS E. MARSHALL: I did go through - you have statements for each member, and I was just looking at – not to pick Mr. Collins, Felix Collins, out, but I was just going over some general discussions with him and I notice that if you look at his, his comes to \$15,400. Yet, if you look at the rules, the Schedule that is attached to the House of Assembly Accountability, Integrity and Administration Act, it states \$14,400. Where would the other \$1,000 come from?

MS LAMBE: The difference between that would be, this number is net of HST.

MS E. MARSHALL: Okay.

MS LAMBE: All the amounts in the expense limits are net of HST, and the amounts in the rules are inclusive of HST.

MS E. MARSHALL: Okay, thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Further questions or comments?

Ms Burke.

MS BURKE: I want to ask a further question on the fact that the original estimate was \$3.5 million for allowances and assistance, and when we look at it - as Ms Marshall had indicated, and we got some answers but I guess I am looking for more detail - it looks like, from what we have here, that there would be \$1 million, or there is \$1 million, out of that budget that has not been spent.

I am just wondering, where was the \$1 million budgeted that we are not seeing it being spent? Like, what it is that was set that we thought we would be spending but it is not? Like, \$1 million out of budget of \$3.5 million is a significant portion. It is basically one-third of what was allocated there. I guess I would like a bit more definition around where we felt there would

be more expenditure versus what we are seeing.

MR. SPEAKER: The Clerk.

CLERK: I can address that in a general way, Minister, and then perhaps Ms Lambe can add some other matters.

When you look through the individual MHA reports for the forty-eight, almost invariably in the right hand column, which is the percentage expended to date - this is the mid-year report as of September 30 - ordinarily, if the budgeted amount was accurate, you would be seeing 50 per cent as the per cent expended to date in almost all those columns. As you flip through, you will see it is much less than that, ordinarily, except in some of the lease costs. So it actually seems to spread right across all the allowance categories.

There are a couple of key ones. Ms Lambe noted the uptake on offices because the original budget from the Green Commission allowed for the cost of forty-eight constituency offices, and of course, we are not near that. He also predicated the travel House in session on twelve weeks and all forty-eight members making a trip back to the district for each of those twelve weeks, and of course, we do not hit those sorts of 100 per cent numbers.

The intra-constituency - Ms Lambe, I do not know if there are some comments on that? That also is down, isn't it?

MS LAMBE: Yeah, it is for the same reason. Our projections are based on the actual expenditures to date allowing for a sixty-day time lag, because members can submit their claims within sixty days and then projecting it over the remainder of the year. We felt fairly comfortable with doing that this time because last year's experience, from October to the end of March, seemed to indicate the same sort of trend. It is quite possible, I guess, especially with the House not in session, that members could travel a

lot more in that part of the year and projections would not fall out. It would not be that much savings. The expenditures to date seem to indicate that there will be that much savings.

MR. SPEAKER: The Clerk.

CLERK: I guess, just to continue, the numbers the review commission put forward were essentially, probably the maximums. Remember, the rules came into effect October 9, 2007, just as we were starting the budget that fall but, of course, there was almost no uptake as members learned the rules and the House did not sit that fall and so on. So, by the time the budget was getting finalized in February or so, we really had no experience. We had no historical data to estimate. So the numbers that went in the current year budget were essentially as Green proposed, which are the maximums.

When you look at this now, now that we will have essentially a year under our belt, it is over budgeted. Ms Lambe has projected \$1 million savings. I think you would call that conservative?

MS LAMBE: Yes, it is conservative. It is assuming it is a sixty-day timeline (inaudible).

CLERK: So when we start budget talks, it seems clear we do not need \$3.5 million for allowance and assistance, if the one year of experience we have had is accurate. One little cushion - we could have twenty members tomorrow decide to open an office, so you do need to have a little flex, but it appears we do not need \$3.5 million.

MR. SPEAKER: Ms Marshall.

MS E. MARSHALL: Yes, I am just trying to think ahead. I mean it is possible it might be more than \$1 million.

CLERK: Yes.

MS LAMBE: Yes.

CLERK: Again, if you look through the members' statement and you look in that right-hand column, just flip the pages; it is astonishing how few of the categories at the mid-year point have hit 50 per cent of the allowance. It is rare to find 50 per cent. Now, maybe members are still learning rules and so on. One year is not a lot of experience, a lot of data but, from what we have seen, it is probably over budget, or members simply are being very frugal and –

MR. SPEAKER: Ms Michael.

MS MICHAEL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This is not an issue to discuss at the moment but because we are talking about members' statements, it is something I would like to raise, that I would like to put on the agenda for the next time because I did not get it in in time.

I would like us to have a discussion with regard to ads. Now, everyone is going to say: oh, not ads again. The thing is, I have become aware of ads by one MHA anyway, electronic ads on Facebook and I am just curious about that, because that is pretty expensive. So I would just like us to look at – because when we talked about ads, we looked at ads in booklets and stuff that would be like \$50, \$60. I would just like to bring that issue in, in terms of electronic advertising for the next agenda.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

Further comments on the expense reports and the financial statements, financial reports as put forward in the agenda?

If not, it is for reporting purposes only. As the Clerk and the Chief Financial Officer said, there has been quite an amount of savings there that was projected and that members have accessed. If you look at the columns there, you will see that some members have spent absolutely nothing of

their constituency allowance. Nobody has gone over the amount that they are supposed to spend, or most people have not even spent close to it.

The Clerk.

CLERK: Sorry, Mr. Speaker. There is one other point, and perhaps I will ask some advice from Ms Lambe. This of course was the mid-year September 30 report, December 30 would be the three-quarter year, and late January we might have that?

MS LAMBE: Yes, it should be ready (inaudible).

CLERK: So as we are looking - as you are finalizing the budget late January, we will have the three-quarter year projections. So we will see whether that particular allowance and assistance is \$1 million, \$1.2 million, or whatever it is, we will update it at the end of December.

MR. SPEAKER: The next item on the agenda would be under Tab 3. It is a letter of an appeal from the hon. Member for Placentia & St. Mary's regarding his constituency travel budget.

The essence of the request is that this particular member, I guess, would be classed as an MHA 1. We have four classifications that Chief Justice Green put forward in the way where members live in relationship to their district.

The Member for Placentia & St. Mary's lives in the capital region, represents a constituency outside of the capital region, is allowed to make twenty trips per year when the House is closed and one trip per week when the House is open. It has caused him some concern being unable to represent his constituents by the mere fact that he is limited to twenty trips a year to his district to be reimbursed with his travel allowance.

The request is that we consider allowing his travel budget, which is \$14,400 to be put

forward in block funding where he would still have to provide receipts and travel documentation, including any meals or accommodations in order to access that particular funding. The other concern that he raises here - again, specific to his and other members situations as well - is that when he makes his twenty trips to his district when the House is closed, that he has to travel approximately forty kilometres each way, which would relate to eighty kilometres, at each particular trip without receiving any compensation for it because the boundaries of his district do not start until he reaches the Salmonier Line. He does not get paid, or cannot get reimbursed for his travel from his residence here in the capital area until he comes to the boundary of his district, and only then with twenty trips per year when the House is closed.

I would like to ask for members' comments, suggestions. There has been no recommendation made because the Commission staff have been reluctant to make a recommendation because of the request. While we are dealing with a request, an appeal from one particular member, there are other members involved in exactly the same situation. So it is not an isolated case, but it is a case that is causing - not only this member, but other members - some concern and financial hardship in being able to have a fair amount of money existing in their budget, but being unable to access it because of the heading that it is placed under.

Ms Michael.

MS MICHAEL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I think this is quite complicated. There are so many pieces to it. Just as earlier on we made a decision for this type of request, except this one is much more complicated, we made a decision to refer the issue to the Members' Compensation Review Committee, which has not been set up yet. It begs the question about getting it set up because we have a number of things now

that are sort of on the table that we have already said should go to that committee. It does seem to me that this does belong in that committee, because I think there is a lot of work to be done to look at all of the implications and all the pieces. That is what I was wondering. There must be others who are in similar situations, so there is the question of the part that is a commute like the issues around paying for commuting. I think that is a basic question and I think that would be the thing that the Member's Compensation Review Committee could be able to dig into and look at.

Right now, that is where I would stand with this issue.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

Any further comments?

Ms. Marshall.

MS E. MARSHALL: I have an inquiry.

The House of Assembly, the service, had sent a survey out to the members because staff were going to look at the issues. Would you be able to give us an update on that, where this might fit into that or whether it does or not?

MR. SPEAKER: The Clerk.

CLERK: We do not have that all compiled yet. We have had pretty good response. Some of the capital region members have not bothered to reply, most of the others have, but the budget has sort of taken us away from compiling it. What we asked for there was simply the adequacy within the existing categories of the maximums and so on. I do not think we have gotten to the point of, are twenty trips enough or do you need more trips or do we need to exclude the very notion of a maximum number of trips. We sort of tried to stay within the rules and the categories and just looked at the dollar allocations. So, it would not quite address this particular issue.

MS E. MARSHALL: This wouldn't fit into that review.

MR. SPEAKER: The other issue that has been raised with relationship to almost exactly the same situation is where some members are allowed to come into the capital region and stay in suitable accommodations, whether it be a hotel room or to reflect on what the cost is of keeping an apartment on a prorated basis. We do have some members, I think the Member for Bellevue who drives back and forth to his district every day. This has been an item of contention for him as well. There is no simple solution to it that I see, that we can probably make by the Commission other than to maybe follow what Ms Michael has suggested. We are open to other suggestions from the floor.

Ms Burke.

MS BURKE: I just want to concur with what Ms Michael just said and some other comments that are here. It is fairly complicated to change, because we certainly have the rules that we are working under and we are going to have a committee to look at those rules and provide some advice. I guess, what further complicates this is the fact that we budgeted the money in recognition that this is a legitimate expense that is there that we anticipate that somebody would use, and we see the MHA for Placentia & St. Mary's in this situation. When you look at his particular expenditure report, his percentage of expenditure is actually very low compared to what is in his budget. The money is allotted in recognition that he has this work to do, but the rules are so prescriptive it provides a situation where he cannot work within them.

I would not want to suggest that we start changing the rules in any type of way until we have that committee that can look at it and provide that information back to us. I would think that as soon as we start looking at one individual situation, there is going to

be another one and another one and another one, and we are going to be setting rule after rule after rule, and eventually one rule is going to start contradicting the first one, and we will never be able to get a handle on all these different situations.

I think that we need to acknowledge that this situation that we hear from Mr. Collins is a real issue for him, and we cannot get at it, although we recognize the budget is there. I think we do not have much of a choice other than refer it to the committee.

MR. SPEAKER: Is that the general agreement of the Commission members, that we refer it to the Members' Compensation and Review Committee? It certainly needs some adjustment, I think, of members' resources and allowance rules.

Thank you.

The next item on the agenda would come under tab 4, and it is Signage Policy.

In an earlier meeting - and I am going to ask the Clerk to continue with explaining this particular topic again - there were some issues raised as to what was acceptable for proper signage and what was not acceptable.

The commission asked Ms Keefe to do some research and to come back with some recommendations. What we did, or what the staff did, was to approach Transportation and Works and ask for their policy when it comes to providing signage for government buildings. Their policy, I think, is reflected on what the recommendations are here, with the description, the sign, what costs should be involved and where it should be placed, et cetera.

If there is anything further to be added here by the Clerk for clarification before members take part in debate, I would welcome it.

CLERK: Just one point. Beyond the specifications, because the specifications,

see, for the signs, are what Transportation and Works has developed for the government offices – but the minute back from the April 30 meeting also wanted us to refer to the maximum costs, but that only makes sense if we are doing the stand-alone signs.

What we decided, rather, was build it into the lease costs, so the landlord would be putting up this sign, and he would amortize those costs over the forty-eight months or whatever the duration of the lease is. In that sense, the cost of the sign will somehow be tempered through the bid prices on the overall lease cost, so the landlord will cover the costs. To the extent he feels he has to, he will incorporate those costs into his bid price and we will not be dealing with the individual, isolated cost. It will be the landlord's issue to deal with. We thought that was a better way to approach it.

MR. SPEAKER: Comments?

Ms Burke.

MS BURKE: Is that the typical way government would tender or go for office space? If a government department was looking for space, whether it was the Department of Education or Transportation and Works, is this a typical expectation, that landlords provide the signage?

MR. SPEAKER: The Clerk.

CLERK: I do not know if I can say what would be typical for the department. It may well be that because they have the sign shop that they sometimes create some of these on their own and do not have it as part of the lease specifications. I am not sure what their standard package is. Minister Taylor may well know.

For our purposes, it was the specifications on the physical layout of the sign that we took and we sort of adopted the responsibility of the landlord to provide it.

MR. SPEAKER: Mr. Taylor.

MR. TAYLOR: Just from a department perspective, my understanding when it comes to signage on government buildings, leased properties and what have you, is it varies, depending on – sometimes we will get it done internally but that is primarily, I believe, for our own buildings. Then in other cases it is built into the lease arrangement with the private building provider, I guess you would call them.

MR. SPEAKER: Ms Michael.

MS MICHAEL: Just to be clear on that: let us say that somebody saw a space, they wanted it, and then the lessor said, well, no, I do not see that that should be part of the contract - that is possible.

CLERK: If I understand, you are suggesting that once we put the specs out, make a tender call, someone might decline to bid because of the sign?

MS MICHAEL: Because of the sign.

CLERK: I guess it is possible, yes. There could be other matters in the specs.

MS MICHAEL: They can always do it, I suppose, and then say, okay, well, the sign is going in, I will charge this much more a month.

CLERK: We understand, if you are (inaudible) a cost for the sign that has to be built in just like all the other costs. It would have to be built into the bid price.

MS MICHAEL: Okay.

CLERK: There is a matter of clarification in the policy I should point out, Mr. Speaker. In fact, it was the Speaker who pointed it out to us.

If I could direct you to page 2 of 2, that is under the section of the policy called 4.1. Restrictions and then down under the

subheading Signs. There is an ambiguity there which we need to correct, which the Speaker pointed out to us. The sentence beginning, “The Lessor is to supply and install an illuminated plastic sign for the constituency office of the Member, which is to be mounted in an aluminium frame and erected...” those next words should be “on the front of the building.”

We will need to reflect that, if you agree with this policy, “on the front of the building”, because that is what was intended - it is attached to the building - or on a structure out in front of the building near the road.

The way it was phrased, it could be interpreted that in front of the building and the pylon structure out front are the same. We did not mean that. We meant attached to the building.

MR. SPEAKER: This is just a proposal that is put forward. If members want to adopt another policy, or if they want to change this particular policy that we are suggesting, by all means, it is wide open for input and consideration.

Ms Marshall.

MS E. MARSHALL: Mr. Chair, I don't have any problem with the policy, but on that page 2 of 2 that we were just referencing there were two references there to an illuminated plastic sign. Then, when you get down to the body, it is a requirement that it be heavy duty acrylic. So, I don't know if you want to –

CLERK: Oh, yes.

It should be consistent.

MS E. MARSHALL: It should be consistent.

CLERK: If acrylic is what it is, we will call it acrylic in both spots.

MR. SPEAKER: Just for clarification myself, because Mr. Taylor talked about The Sign Shop, would it be permissible or is that something that members could use? There is not everywhere in rural Newfoundland you can get a sign made. Would it be an option for members, if they choose, to have their sign made at The Sign Shop? Would that be an option, or is that wholly and solely for other purposes?

Mr. Taylor.

MR. TAYLOR: I am not sure, but I suspect that we would not have the capacity to do that type of sign. Our sign shop primarily, I believe, are dealing with plywood, paint and what have you, as opposed to this type of thing.

Further to that, I would suggest, do we have to have this heavy duty acrylic or whatever? In some cases, I just think of some place, we might be better off giving people the option to do that or a plywood sign of the same standard that we use in other parts of government.

From my own perspective, I look at certain places. We have a lot of wind. I would just as soon have a plywood sign, if I was going to have one, rather than the illuminated acrylic; because, if you get a nice windstorm in January month on the Northern Peninsula, that nice acrylic could be halfway across the Strait of Bell Isle.

MR. SPEAKER: Ms Burke.

MS BURKE: I have a question as well, because this obviously deals with constituency offices that are in private accommodations, that are leased. What about in constituency offices that are located in government buildings? The office I have is in what is known as the Harmon Corporation building, or the Newfoundland and Labrador Housing building in Stephenville. Who would put that sign out, or would get that made and mounted on the outside of the building?

MR. SPEAKER: The Clerk.

CLERK: Is there a sign there now? Do you have a sign?

MS BURKE: No. When someone comes into the building, just in little letters put up on some kind of a letter board it would say: MHA office upstairs - or something.

I have been there five years without a sign, so I don't know if I actually need a sign, or if I should have a sign, or what the rules are on having signs, but I wouldn't want someone to come out and do an audit and say that I do not have a sign up and I should have one up, because I know the rules are very prescriptive right now.

MR. SPEAKER: The Clerk.

CLERK: We are not prescriptive in the sense that you must have a sign. All we were doing here was trying to establish standards and build it in as part of the lease, so it was not this extra expense the Speaker had to continually approve.

For instance, those who already have a constituency office with a sign, however they received it, they would just chug along until the lease was rewritten and this might then kick in at that point and it would be the landlord's obligation, but you do raise a good point.

On small government buildings I assume the other offices there have this sort of sign with this spec and you would just be the same, but if you are in a larger government building like the Richard Squires Building, or any of these, you would not put one of these signs, I would not think, attached to the wall, the brickwork of the building. So we would have to allow some sort of options, yes. If you simply have a little sign in the lobby, and that is all you want, you would be free to do it.

Maybe this needs to be thought of more as the sort of the maximum, or this is the best sort of sign for rented premises. For government premises we would probably have to defer to the owner of the building, Transportation and Works, and what they would allow for signage in that building, but it is a complexity yes.

MS BURKE: So we would come back and order it through here? Like we would order it individually and put it in through our expenses here and then ask, say, in my case, Newfoundland and Labrador Housing, to erect it on the outside of their building?

CLERK: Well, again, I am not sure if they would permit you to do that. They might want the final say on all the signs attached to their own buildings, so there might be a complexity with the government-owned buildings.

MS BURKE: But, the payment for the sign, the individual member would have the sign made to any particular specifications in that case, or –

CLERK: I do not know if even Transportation and Works would allow the individual member to have the sign made, no matter what the specs. They may say no, if you are in our building, we will just add you to our list, whether that is in the lobby, outside, or whatever. It is probably something we would have to negotiate with Transportation and Works.

If they, for instance, were using the sort of plywood signs that Minister Taylor mentioned for all of the other offices in the building they probably would not want an illuminated sign for the MHA to overshadow all of the government offices.

For government-owned buildings, yes, this might not be the final word. We might have to talk to the Department of Transportation and Works on each and every case.

MS BURKE: Again, it would be an expense that the individual member would put in a claim?

CLERK: If ultimately you were to put a sign up, yes, because I assume you are getting it rent-free from Minister Taylor. We have no lease on which to build the cost, so it would have to be a stand-alone item in that case, yes, for government-owned buildings.

MR. SPEAKER: Am I correct in saying that when we looked at this it was also our understanding that we might do this on a go-forward basis, because the rent is already negotiated now for a four-year period. Is it a four-year period?

CLERK: Four, yes.

MR. SPEAKER: If we are going to go back now and bring in this signage policy, and start opening up leases again where people will go out and tender signs, then who knows where it will go. It is my understanding that we are also going to suggest that this would be when the leases are renewed. If members have already gotten their signs, then their signs will stay where they are. When the lease is renewed then they are entitled to this sign.

This particular sign, as well, is going to be the maximum that we will provide. If some member wants to put up their plywood sign and not have it lit, we are not going to insist, are we, that they go with this type of sign when it meets their requirements?

CLERK: I suppose we could look at that. I guess it will depend. We want to have something consistent in the lease specs that we put out, but if, I guess, a member had cause for something less than this, as long as the tender documents reflected that, I think we have always viewed this as sort of the maximum, because one of the issues that came up in April was the cost. I think, Ms Marshall, you mentioned it.

The sign we were looking at, at that time - I think it was the Member for Holyrood, I am not sure, but anyway - it was about \$1,600 and you thought that was rich. This is really the same type of sign, so these specs are that identical sign at that general price range.

MR. SPEAKER: Ms Marshall.

MS E. MARSHALL: Mr. Chair, that was my question: Do we have an estimate as to how much a sign like this would cost on its own? I know it is going to be built into the lease but this is the \$1,700 sign.

CLERK: Yes, this is essentially the same sort of sign.

MS E. MARSHALL: This is the best, yes.

CLERK: It is not Minister Taylor's sign, it is the other sign.

MS E. MARSHALL: No, it is the other sign.

MR. SPEAKER: Mr. Taylor.

MR. TAYLOR: Yes, just picking up on that. I tend to agree with the chairman, that we should provide for options for smaller. However, I think that the outline of this - the design, so to speak, should be consistent to the extent that it can be made to be consistent. If you only want to put up a two by four sign for the sake of argument as opposed to a three by six sign, then you should still have the same look, so to speak.

MR. SPEAKER: Yes, the Clerk.

CLERK: Because we have not really covered that in here in some of these eventualities, such as a government building and so on, maybe we should take another stab at this, where it is not as sort of prescriptive on this one sign. We can use this as a basis for how we will deal with signs on leased premises but then we will have to adapt government buildings to a certain extent and probably allow, as

Minister Taylor says, some other options. If the member has good reason not to want this, something less than this, then that is obviously to be permitted and the tender documents for the lease would reference that. So we could rework this a bit if you like. There seem to be a lot of questions.

MR. SPEAKER: So maybe we can bring this directive back to another meeting with some more clarification to reflect what the Commission has heard from members present.

The next item on the agenda is Tab 5, Ratification of Budget Transfers. I am going to refer this to the Clerk as well, since it is a – his name is signed to most of those and he would have the information on the transfers and why they were transferred.

The Clerk.

CLERK: This is one, again, that the Speaker had a question on. The transfer of funds policy we use does not require us to bring every transfer back to the Commission. The first bullet in the briefing notes sort of suggests that. Ms Lambe and I discussed it and said: Well, now, maybe we should bring all the matters, however small, back to the Commission so that there is complete transparency.

The Speaker asked the question – you will notice in the action required – but what would ratification mean? As always, with the term ratification, it is very unclear what it means.

I have approved the transfers. The money was transferred; the money was subsequently spent. So the ratification after the fact is unclear if it has a great deal of meaning. Mr. Speaker, you wondered if we should just be bringing these smaller ones that can be done by the Clerk, if we should just bring those to the Commission for reporting purposes.

The transfer funds policy identifies those transfers which must be approved by the Commission in advance, but whichever the Commission decides, it does not require a lot to bring them forward. The only issue, I guess, is whether we would talk about it as requiring ratification or bringing them forward for reporting purposes.

MR. SPEAKER: Comments?

Ms Marshall.

MS E. MARSHALL: I had questions on three of them, so I will just mention the three of them.

MR. SPEAKER: Sure.

CLERK: Sure, yes.

MS E. MARSHALL: Number 74, number 77 and 78. In all three cases, I wanted someone just to explain, is this the reason the funds are available? For the first two, it talks about costs related to management certification process were less than anticipated at budget time.

So I was wondering, how much was budgeted for management certification?

CLERK: This was the one, you remember, we discussed some time ago.

MS E. MARSHALL: Yes.

CLERK: It was over \$200,000, perhaps \$230,000?

MS LAMBE: Yes, \$230,000.

CLERK: \$230,000. We had no idea what it would cost, but that is what we put in the budget.

MS E. MARSHALL: If you are transferring some out now, I mean the management certification process is going to cost around \$220,000, isn't it?

CLERK: No, if you remember the –

MS E. MARSHALL: It is \$130,000.

CLERK: It was \$124,000.

MS E. MARSHALL: Yes, you are right.

CLERK: We may incur some costs in the last few weeks of March, because we have to do more testing, but there was certainly more budgeted than was required.

MS E. MARSHALL: Okay.

CLERK: And the other number was?

MS E. MARSHALL: Number 78, and I was just – the reference to the block funding, just explain that to me, how that works in the House of Assembly. I know we are transferring the money from salaries into professional services.

CLERK: Yes. The IEC minute which established the core staff for the Leader of the Opposition, identified four core positions and a PS level – political staff level. So there was a PS-9, two PS-7s and a PS-5, I think, and the IEC minute took the cost of those at that time – that was I think, perhaps 2004, and that block of funds was provided to the Leader of the Opposition to pay for her core staff; \$250,000, as a ballpark. We, because those are classified positions, those PS levels now have had the raises.

MS E. MARSHALL: Oh, yes.

CLERK: So while the core back then might have been this \$250,000, we built in the steps and the raises and so on.

MS E. MARSHALL: Okay. So the money was initially budgeted in salaries?

CLERK: Yes.

MS E. MARSHALL: Okay.

CLERK: Oh, no, I am sorry. I am misreading this one.

MR. SPEAKER: Yes, that was where we had given the Loyal Opposition the top scale for block funding for the positions that were assigned to the Leader of the Opposition.

CLERK: Yes, and my mistake here.

Ms Lambe, could you explain this one? This is the one where they have used some of those salary funds to pay the legal bill.

MS LAMBE: At one of the House of Assembly Management Commission meetings, when discussions were around the whole caucus resources, it was decided to allow the Leader of the Opposition the equivalent, if you like, to the core staff in funding to use, if she wished I guess, and she chose to hire an outside legal consultant for a matter that was on the go. So, while the funding was in salaries, this was professional services, to ensure it was charged to the right place. It did not change the funding, just where it is.

MS E. MARSHALL: That is why it was transferred. Yes.

Okay, thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Ms. Michael.

MS MICHAEL: Yes, I just think the wording of it was a bit confusing for me. Cost of legal services provided to the Official Opposition, made it sound like the House services had provided it. I think if it had been cost of legal services contracted by the Official Opposition, it would have made it clearer because I could not understand what it meant either and I was going to ask about it. I think it is the way it is worded, the fact that it was a contracted service for the Opposition that they contracted.

MR. SPEAKER: Further comments on the ratification of budget transfers? If not, then

I will revert to the suggestion that was made by the Clerk.

Do we need - should we be bringing those topics and those headings forward for a vote and ratification, because what we are doing is approving something that has already been done, or should we use it exclusively for reporting purposes and the questions can be asked at the time when we are into a Commission meeting?

Ms Marshall.

MS E. MARSHALL: Perhaps the Clerk can refresh my memory, but this authority was delegated to you, was it not? So really there would be, if it comes back to us - and I do find them of interest, I do like to see them but I think it would come back for information purposes. That would be my opinion, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Agreed? Members agree?

Okay. Well that concludes the business agenda for the meeting except for one small item, and that is to schedule some technical briefings. There was a -

MS MICHAEL: (Inaudible).

MR. SPEAKER: Yes, sure, Ms Michael.

MS MICHAEL: This is more to lift up our spirits as people who sit here and wonder: do people pay attention to what we are doing?

I had an e-mail last weekend from somebody who was reading the July minutes, and it was about transfers. The person could not understand some of it and wanted to know, could I please explain? It took me about an hour to put my e-mail together. This was an ordinary person out there who was reading our minutes and wanted a full explanation of something that had been transferred. I had to refer to two or three documents to get all of the information. Just in case we think nobody is

paying attention, at least that one person was paying attention.

MR. TAYLOR: Say hello to him.

MS MICHAEL: I will do. It was a him, by the way.

CLERK: It was probably one of our auditors.

MS MICHAEL: No, it wasn't.

MR. SPEAKER: I do not know if anybody ever realized how popular the House of Assembly broadcasting would be when it happened, and, I guess, as an extension of that, the House of Assembly Management Commission meetings. They are tweaking the interest of a lot of people out there. People do tune in. T

The next item on the agenda would be scheduling of technical briefings as a result of our budgetary process with the statutory offices. The Clerk has already met with the statutory officers. I have had a briefing from the Clerk and the staff. Now, we need to continue with that process and have members of the Commission receive their briefings from the statutory offices. We need to strike a schedule for that.

Maybe I can ask the Clerk to tell us what he has in mind for scheduling.

CLERK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I you remember we established a budget process with definite timelines. One of the things we did, wisely or not, was in the month of December the Commission receives technical briefings from the statutory officers on their upcoming budget requests. We are calling them technical briefings. It is back and forth discussion. It is not the formal budget presentation or the formal budget votes. It is just information purposes, dialogue and so on.

We said we would do those in December. I guess, within the overall scheme of the budget process duration, trying to conclude by February, we needed to. But, we are also faced with the House being open, we are faced with the challenges of meeting at nights, the Opposition challenges of meeting in the mornings, the challenges of some members who are not resident in the Capital of meeting Fridays, and we are challenged because we do not know when the House will rise. I am sort of looking for some advice.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible).

CLERK: How will we schedule these?

While I understand, and I might even sympathize if members wanted to delay it for January. We would be rather condensed with all of these meetings in January, but if we do decide that, because we established the policy and said December, as Ms Marshall, I am sure, will attest, we will probably invite comment from an auditor that we did not adhere to our policy of meeting in December.

I sort of throw it out. I do not know what is possible with the House sitting but we should either try to do something or make a decision in the record that we would do it in January.

MR. SPEAKER: Ms Marshall.

MS E. MARSHALL: Mr. Chair, these would be technical briefings by the statutory offices, and how many statutory offices do we have? Five. How long do you think the technical briefings would be?

CLERK: Some would be very short, ten or fifteen minutes, Mr. Speaker, I would say. There are some that could be an hour or more, depending on questions and so on.

MS E. MARSHALL: I mean, based on the briefings that we had last year from the statutory offices, they were not long

briefings. I realize other people here have other schedules but I would be available during the month of December if you wanted to schedule some.

MR. SPEAKER: The Clerk.

CLERK: I should have said, as well, one of the issues with technical briefings is, it is not a meeting of the Commission that requires a quorum. It is a briefing and to-and-fro, so it is not an official meeting. We did not want to sort of schedule on that basis and leave out some members who could not attend. It is not obligatory because it is not a meeting and we are not trying to hit a quorum. We just want to leave the option available for all members.

MR. SPEAKER: With that procedure, at the end when we do the technical briefings from the statutory offices, all the statutory office proposals come back to the Commission?

CLERK: A second time in the formal meeting.

MR. SPEAKER: A second time. So, it is not like something is going to happen and then decisions are going to be made without the full support of the Commission. It is to seek information, question on what their proposals are, and gain information that way. It will be a technical briefing and then the Commission will meet to discuss the combined five offices after.

Members comments?

Ms Michael.

MS MICHAEL: It is difficult to have it in December but I am just trying to see what the possibilities are. You can all appreciate that mornings on days that we are sitting in the House are just absolutely impossible for me, because from the time we walk in until I come to the House it is just filled.

We have two more Wednesday afternoons, a couple of Wednesday afternoons. Quarter after five on the 10th of December, I think I am available. I am here trying to find out now if I am available for you. That would be one way, a couple of Wednesdays. We do have two before we leave. Where we do not know when we are rising, there are – I do not know, will people be coming in on the 22nd of December from outside of St. John's? Probably not, unless the House is sitting. A couple of late afternoons on Wednesdays and even one or two, especially ones that we know are really short, on a Wednesday morning, because Wednesday morning is an easier morning for me anyway. It is an easier morning because of it being Private Members' Day; there is not as much to prepare for. So if we had a really short one on a Wednesday morning at 9:00 o'clock, I could do that. It is a difficult month to try to do it but we do have to do it, I think.

MR. SPEAKER: Ms Burke.

MS BURKE: I agree with what Ms Michael is saying. If there is some Wednesdays we may be able to fit some in, but the other point I want to make is that I do district work on Fridays. However, if it is not a meeting of the Commission and televised and need to be here, I certainly have no problem joining in by teleconference, if we have a PowerPoint presentation that I can have, or have on my computer as we are going through it, and I can ask questions then. So there may be some of us who may not physically be here in St. John's but it might free up a bit more time that we could be available for that type of briefing.

MS MICHAEL: On Friday.

MS BURKE: Absolutely, on a Friday.

MR. SPEAKER: That would probably fit into most people's schedules. We try to accommodate as many members as we can, and realizing what the month of December is we have held open the seventeenth for

probably a meeting of the Commission. We are not sure that we will need one or not. That is not the next Wednesday but the following Wednesday. If Fridays are doable, then it is something that we might be able to do in a way that all members can be included if they want.

Ms Burke.

MS BURKE: It is different from a Management Commission meeting, because we are not going to be televised, which means we have to be here in the House, so it gives us more flexibility that we can have the briefing without having to sit in the same room.

MR. SPEAKER: Yes, absolutely.

Would the members agree that maybe we will try to do it on Fridays, Friday mornings?

MS BURKE: Well, there is another issue then. If we are here all week I cannot get out Thursday evening on a flight and I have to get out Friday morning; I have to go from Deer Lake to Stephenville on Friday morning. So the mornings are taken up usually in travel, but at some point after the flight gets in you get to your destination. I cannot speak for the other members, but Mr. Taylor here, and some of the other members, may also be doing a commute on Friday morning that we cannot get in on Thursday afternoon.

MR. SPEAKER: Am I hearing that we will attempt to do it on Friday mornings and if flight schedules and weather interfere then we will just have to do other things and move forward in that kind of a way?

MS BURKE: We can try on Fridays, either morning or we could try early afternoon, which might be the easiest time to look at. It gives people time to commute in the morning.

MR. SPEAKER: Yes, okay.

MS MICHAEL: One o'clock (inaudible).

MS BURKE: Yes, 1:00 o'clock should be fine.

MR. SPEAKER: All right, that is fine. I do not have any problem with that. I do not know about other members. If there is a time that we can do it in the morning, maybe you would have a little bit of sympathy for the Chair and we might be able to fit a couple in on Friday mornings, but if not then that is fine.

Any other further comments? If not -

MR. TAYLOR: (Inaudible) on Friday afternoons?

MR. SPEAKER: Mr. Taylor.

MR. TAYLOR: I said: What do you have on, on Friday afternoons, that you are so keen to do it on Friday mornings?

MR. SPEAKER: I try to go home, I say to the hon. member.

That is the agenda, and I thank members. When we can have our meetings on a regular basis, this is the kind of thing that we can do and have short meetings, and not tie up members.

I thank all members present, and staff, for their co-operation and for their input and attendance.

Thank you.

This Commission meeting is now adjourned.