

# Keeper of the House Directorate Corporate Report 1999-2002

## FUNCTION

The Speaker and the Assembly are served by the Keeper of the House who is available to all Members individually for consultation and assistance.

The Keeper of the House Directorate aims to deliver the best possible services to the Members, the public and all those who work in or visit Parliament Buildings. Key areas of work include events, support services, works, health and safety and security.

The staff of the Directorate have played a key role in receiving VIPs to Parliament Buildings. They were involved in the preparation, planning, organisation and provision of associated services for all the high profile visits to Parliament Buildings. Security is an important consideration when receiving VIPs to Parliament Buildings.

- In 1999 the First Lady, Hilary Rodham Clinton visited Parliament Buildings;
- In April 2000 the President of the Republic of Ireland, Mary McAleese visited Parliament Buildings; and
- In December 2000 the President of the United States of America, Bill Clinton, the Prime Minister, the Rt. Hon. Tony Blair and the Rt. Hon. Mr Mandelson, the then Secretary of State, visited Parliament Buildings to meet Assembly Members and hold discussions with the pro-agreement parties.

## Events Co-ordination Office

### FUNCTION

The Events Co-ordination Office's role is to provide Members with a comprehensive events co-ordination, planning and management service to ensure successful events in compliance with the requirements of the Assembly Commission.

Events fall into four categories: private, official, press and lobby. The Events Co-ordination Office is responsible for the receipt, control and management of events bookings, including the allocation of function facilities. An events planning service is also available to assist Members with the detailed planning of their events, incorporating catering, security, health and safety and entertainment requirements. Events Co-ordination Office personnel attend events to assist their smooth running.

At a Member's request the Office arranges to receive and provide guests with professional presentations covering the building's history, architecture and present usage. The Office is also responsible for managing, maintaining and controlling equipment for use during Assembly events.

### ACTIVITY DURING THE PERIOD TO 31 MARCH 2002

Groups that visited Parliament Buildings between January 1999 and March 2002 can be considered under two headings:

- 1,434 functions were held involving 67,805 guests; and
- 3,837 tours were enjoyed by 82,038 guests

The majority of guests received came from Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland and Great Britain. A significant number of other countries have also been represented. Guests received during the period of this report comprised representatives from some 118 different countries.

The Events Office was also closely involved in the planning and co-ordination of several major outdoor concerts held in the grounds of Parliament Buildings. The first public concert to be held on the Stormont Estate was in May 1998 and was attended by an audience of 13,000. Following this

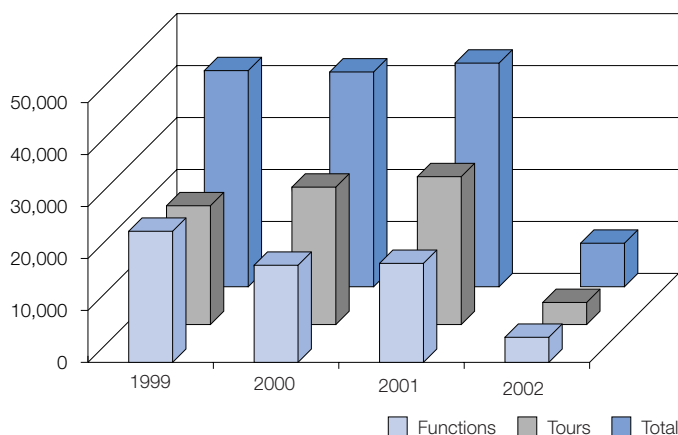
success, other outdoor concerts were as follows:

- Saturday 11 Sept 1999 – Pavarotti, attended by 9,000;
- Saturday 29 July 2000 – Michael Flatley’s ‘Feet Of Flames’, attended by 11,200; and
- Friday 29 June 2001 – The ‘Eagles’, attended by 19,000.

The Office is presently engaged in planning for another major public concert in July 2002 when rock stars Rod Stewart and Gabrielle will perform.

A Members’ satisfaction survey taken at the end of 2001 recorded that 63% of Members considered the quality of service provided by the Events Co-ordination Office as “excellent” with 98% scoring this as “higher than satisfactory”.

Figure 1: Events Guests Numbers January 1999 – 31 March 2002



**THE KEY CHALLENGES FOR 2002/2003**

- To maintain the high quality and efficiency of its services to Members; and
- Closely monitor customer satisfaction levels.

**Facilities Branch**

**FUNCTION**

The Catering and Functions Committee, supported by Facilities Branch, is responsible for the planning and delivery of catering services and the Assembly’s gift shop. Satisfaction with the quality of catering services provided to Members, visitors attending functions and all who work in Parliament Buildings, is paramount. The principal services provided are contracted to a private Support Services contractor.

**CORE SERVICES**

A wide range of dining services (including a full silver service) are available to Members and their guests. Secretariat staff and visitors can also avail of a range of services.

Further services provided include a Post Office, Gift Shop, vending machines, water dispensers and an automatic bank teller machine. The Support Services contractor also provides cleaning services, floral services, portorage services and a Help Desk facility for enquiries and advice.

**ACTIVITY DURING THE PERIOD TO 31 MARCH 2002**

A consultancy report was commissioned at the end of 1999 to make recommendations on the most appropriate ways of providing catering, cleaning, floral and portorage services to the Assembly. Recommendations based on a customer needs assessment included the provision of a Visitors’ Restaurant, which was completed and opened in August 2000. This is a useful facility for group/school tours during plenary sittings when the Basement Restaurant is in high demand.

In December 2001 the Assembly Commission directed Facilities Branch to create a Brasserie area within the Members’ Dining Room to provide quicker lunches for Members.

The contractual arrangement with the Support Services contractor expired in December 2001. Following the preparation of specification and tender documentation for the provision of cater-

ing, cleaning, floral and portage services to the Assembly, tenders were received and evaluated by the panel, which included members of the Catering and Functions Committee. The existing contractor was reappointed by the Assembly Commission in January 2002.

**Catering, Functions and Assembly Gift Shop Annual Sales**

1999	£487,000
2000	£554,000
2001	£688,000

**Fair Trade**

The Assembly Commission and the Catering and Functions Committee have been actively exploring ways to promote fair trade in the Assembly. The current contract commits the contractor to purchase Fairtrade goods where possible. Fairtrade coffee, tea and chocolate are available. On 26 March 2001 there was a successful photocall in the Great Hall of Parliament Buildings to promote the Fairtrade campaign. This included Members of the Assembly Commission and the Catering and Functions Committee as well as representatives from the Support Services contractor, War on Want and the Tear Fund group from Queen’s University.

**Green Policy**

Facilities Branch produced an environmentally friendly policy on waste and energy management, which was approved by the Assembly Commission in July 2001. As a result, with the co-operation of the Support Services contractor, a much greater percentage of paper, bottles, cans and newspapers are recycled, and staff are required to switch off lights and equipment at designated times. The Office of the Keeper of the House is committed to maximising participation in this policy.

In conjunction with Facilities Branch the Support Services contractor has provided extensive catering services for all events and functions in Parliament Buildings and for the annual concerts in the Stormont Estate.

**THE KEY CHALLENGES FOR 2002/2003**

- Develop the Assembly's gift shop with a view to maximising its potential;
- Ensure that this facility is accessible to people with varying degrees of mobility and to those with special needs; and
- Continue to develop and monitor environmentally friendly policies on waste management and energy.

**Works**

**FUNCTION**

Works Branch is responsible for all accommodation and associated services including the allocation of accommodation and the provision and allocation of all furniture requirements and subsequent office layouts. Additionally it is responsible for building management and maintenance, energy management, fire precautions and evacuation procedures and the provision of telephone systems, voice mail, mobile phones, and fax machines.

Works Branch also provides a proactive service to Members and all those who work in the building.

**ACTIVITY DURING THE PERIOD TO 31 MARCH 2002**

Prior to the first plenary sitting of the Assembly, a brief was prepared to fit out the recently refurbished Assembly Chamber with seating, tables incorporating the Greek Key design, equipment rooms for sound and vision, three television and two radio studios. The work was completed within the agreed contract period of six weeks in the summer of 1998. The initial plenary sitting of the Assembly in Parliament Buildings paid tribute to this achievement.

In December 1999, when power was devolved to the Northern Ireland Assembly, there was a need to prepare ministerial suites and offices for Committee Chairpersons and Secretariat staff. Extensive refurbishment and conversion work was carried out within the required timescale.

The decision to use the Senate Chamber for Committee meetings resulted in the upgrading of sound and vision recording facilities.

During the 2000 summer recess the following work was completed:

- Committee rooms 135 and 144 were sound-proofed and air-conditioning was installed;
- Rooms B40 and B46 were refurbished into Press studios;
- Room B4 was refurbished to provide a Press Conference facility for Members, political parties and Committees;
- In the Assembly Chamber additional seats and desks incorporating the Greek Key Design were installed; and
- Room B24 was refurbished to provide a Visitors' Restaurant for group/school tours.

During 2001 the following work was completed:

- Lighting in the lower east car park was upgraded;
- A number of rooms were converted to provide additional office accommodation;
- Annexe C, Dundonald House, was refurbished to provide additional accommodation for finance and personnel Secretariat staff; and
- The air-conditioning and ventilation system in the Basement Restaurant was upgraded.

In January 2002 Works Branch launched a dedicated on-line Building Management Help Desk for Members, their support staff and Secretariat staff.

#### Purchase of Ormiston House

Ormiston House is a listed building, in Scottish baronial style on a 13-acre site. The site was purchased in September 2001 to provide additional accommodation for the Assembly Secretariat.

#### THE KEY CHALLENGES FOR 2002/2003

- A review of the procurement of building maintenance, planned preventative maintenance and associated contract work carried out in Parliament Buildings will be undertaken in 2002;
- The external lighting and CCTV surveillance system at Parliament Buildings will be upgraded over the next year. The refurbishment of the Press Bar will be completed in March 2002;

- Parenting room for members of the public and a similar facility for Members and staff will be provided;
- An Audit on accessibility has been reviewed, and the report makes recommendations for improving accessibility to and within Parliament Buildings for people with varying degrees of mobility and for providing facilities for people with special needs. The design and planning of this work is at an advanced stage, and it will allow for the building to be as accessible as possible considering its listed building status. This work will be completed before 2004;
- Following the purchase of Ormiston House a major task in the next nine months will be to provide temporary office accommodation on the site for up to 150 Secretariat staff; and
- The most challenging task ahead will be the development of the Ormiston House site to provide permanent accommodation for the Assembly Secretariat. The building's listed status will be a major consideration in the overall development of the 13-acre site.

## Health and Safety

### FUNCTION

The Assembly Commission is committed to a positive health and safety culture throughout the organisation. The Commission has issued the Northern Ireland Assembly – Health and Safety Policy Statement for the information and guidance of the Assembly Secretariat, Members and their support staff.

The Health and Safety Branch is available to provide information and advice to the Assembly Commission, Members, their support staff and Secretariat staff on all matters relating to health and safety.

### ACTIVITY DURING THE PERIOD TO 31 MARCH 2002

In embracing this policy the Office of the Keeper Directorate has:

- Established a Health and Safety Branch in 2001;

- Put in place a comprehensive health and safety training programme for all Secretariat staff; and
- Established a Health and Safety Whitley Sub-committee.

#### THE KEY CHALLENGES FOR 2002/2003

- To ensure that all Members, their support staff and Secretariat staff have taken part in a health and safety training course;
- To ensure that each Directorate has an appropriate number of staff trained in general, DSE and manual handling risk assessments;
- To provide refresher first aid and fire warden training for nominated staff;
- To produce a comprehensive health and safety manual which will be available on the Assembly's website; and
- To establish a health and safety auditing system to monitor the health and safety performance of the Assembly.

## Security

The purpose of the Security Branch is to provide security and doorkeeping services for Parliament Buildings, Members, their support staff, Assembly Secretariat and visitors.

The Security Branch provides two key services to the Assembly.

The first is a security service which involves:

- Controlling access to the Building and any additional locations occupied by the Assembly in the future;
- Screening deliveries to the Assembly;
- Detecting intruders through electronic and physical means;
- Vetting potential employees;
- Controlling passes;
- Advising on physical, electronic and procedural security;
- Investigating and recording incidents; and
- Co-ordinating and controlling emergency responses.

The second is a doorkeeping service which involves:

- Controlling access to designated areas in the Northern Ireland Assembly;
- Escorting and reception duties;
- Light portering duties;
- Mail collection, sorting and delivery;
- Chamber services; and
- Events support.

#### ACTIVITY DURING THE PERIOD TO 31 MARCH 2002

The key challenges for the Security Branch over the last two years have been to build on the skills acquired since the Assembly first convened. This has been possible because of the calibre of staff in the branch and the use of their individual experiences. They have once again shown a great degree of flexibility and willingness to work long hours to ensure that the highest standards are achieved. The doorkeepers demonstrated their professional approach to difficult situations throughout the year and received many letters of praise from Members, staff and visitors.

Training has been an important factor in developing the unique skills required by the staff of the branch. Recruited doorkeeping staff undergo a five-week basic doorkeeping course which includes training in electronic security systems, Assembly procedures, Chamber duties, customer-focused communications skills, first aid, threat awareness, fire and evacuation procedures. All Security Branch staff will undergo annual refresher training in all these areas.

#### THE KEY CHALLENGES FOR 2002/2003

- To complete the recruitment process for additional Doorkeepers;
- To have the Deputy Head of Security in place before the Summer Recess; and
- To assume responsibility for the security of the immediate area around Parliament Buildings as soon as the required number of suitable guards are recruited and trained.