



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Research and Information Service Briefing Note

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Sanctions recommended by standards committees in the UK and Ireland

1 Introduction

This briefing note highlights instances where standards committees in the House of Commons, Scottish Parliament, National Assembly for Wales and Dail Eireann have recommended either the **suspension or censure of a member** as a result of a breach of the relevant rules of the legislature. In most cases where a breach has been found, a standards committee is usually content to ask the Member in question to apologise to the House or repay allowances/expenses.

2 House of Commons

Date of report	Subject of complaint	Context	Sanctions imposed
12 May 2011	David Laws	Breach of rules regarding rented accommodation	Suspension of the House for 7 sitting days and apology to the House when Member returns
25 January 2008	Derek Conway	Serious misuse of parliamentary funds: paying his son from	Suspension from House for 10 sitting days and apology to the House by way of personal statement

		parliamentary funds for work that was probably never undertaken	
16 July 2007	George Galloway	Receiving undisclosed personal financial benefit from Saddam Hussein's regime	Suspension from the House for 18 sitting days
2 February 2005	Jonathan Sayeed	Exploiting the House for personal gain	Suspension from the House for two weeks and apology to the House
16 July 2003	Clive Betts	Employment of a personal friend whose study visa had expired (friend was a Brazilian national) and being party to altering a letter which was then presented to an Immigration Official	Suspension from the House for 7 days
13 February 2003	Michael Trend	Abuse of Additional Cost Allowance in respect of main home	Suspension from the House for two weeks
8 February 2002	Keith Vaz	Allegations relating to the manner in which Mr Vaz conducted himself during the investigation	Suspension from the House for one month
24 October 2001	Geoffrey Robinson	Failure to declare registrable interests and not providing accurate answers to questions asked by the Commissioner and Committee	Suspension of the House for three weeks

A recommendation to suspend a Member must be approved through a specific motion, which is moved formally by the Government¹. The Member concerned may be heard first, after which he or she withdraws. The Chair of the Standards Committee then sets out the Committee's findings, following which there is an opportunity for debate.

¹ Erskine May 2011

3 Scottish Parliament

Date of report	Subject of complaint	Context	Sanctions imposed
1 March 2007	Brian Monteith	Disclosure of confidential information to the media	Five day suspension
1 July 2005	Colin Fox; Frances Curran; Rosie Kane and Carolyn Leckie	Disorderly conduct during First Minister's questions (note this case was referred by the Presiding Officer, not the Commissioner)	One month suspension

During the debate on the Committee's report, Brian Monteith contested the decision to suspend him. Other members also raised concerns about the process, including a belief that Mr. Monteith had not been given an opportunity to appear before the Committee to defend himself and the fact that he was given only three minutes to speak during the debate. Members of the Committee who rose to speak denied the accusation that Mr. Monteith had not been given adequate opportunities to make representations to the Committee². In respect of the three minutes speaking time, the Presiding Officer stated that this was a matter for the Procedures Committee. The motion was passed with 69 votes in favour, four votes against and 20 abstentions.

The July 2005 case centred on the disruption of First Minister's Question Time by the Scottish Socialist MSPs referred to above. In an unusual scenario, the Presiding Officer suspended the members and then asked the Standards Committee to consider the case as a matter of urgency³. That same afternoon, the Convenor of the Committee spoke in the Chamber to recommend that the members in question be suspended from Parliament for one month. An Independent member raised concerns about due process and the fact that the members in question had been unable to make representations to the Committee. These concerns were dismissed by the Presiding Officer who advised that the Committee could deal with the matter as it saw fit⁴.

² <http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/28862.aspx?r=4714>

³ Letter from Presiding Officer to Committee Convenor:

http://archive.scottish.parliament.uk/business/committees/standards/reports-05/str-05-05_Presiding_Officer_Letter.pdf

⁴ <http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/28862.aspx?r=4596>

4 National Assembly for Wales

Date of report	Subject of complaint	Context	Sanctions imposed
May 2012	Keith Davies	Mr. Davies and a female companion were responsible for alcohol-induced shouting and swearing in a hotel room, which the Member had booked for the purposes of Assembly business	Censure of Member

The motion was moved by the Chair of the Standards Committee. A brief debate followed during which the member in question reiterated his full apology and regret at the incident⁵.

5 Oireachtas

It was more difficult to access reports by the Committee on Members' Interests in Dail Eireann. However, the following example was found after a search of Oireachtas debates⁶:

Date of report	Subject of complaint	Context	Sanctions imposed
May 2000	Denis Foley	Failure to make a declaration under section 7 of Ethics Act 1995 (declaration of interest in Dail proceedings)	Suspension from the House for 14 days

⁵ <http://www.assemblywales.org/bus-home/bus-chamber-fourth-assembly-rop/rop20120516qv.pdf?langoption=3&ttl=The%20Record%20%28PDF%2C%20985KB%29>

⁶ <http://debates.oireachtas.ie/dail/2000/05/23/00017.asp>