



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee on Standards and Privileges

Minutes of Proceedings

23 February 2022

Meeting Location: Virtual Meeting via Microsoft Teams

Present by Video or Teleconference:

Ms Linda Dillon MLA (Chairperson)

Dr Steve Aiken OBE MLA

Ms Sinéad Bradley MLA

Ms Pam Cameron MLA

Mr Stewart Dickson MLA

Ms Áine Murphy MLA

Apologies:

Mr Patsy McGlone MLA

Mr Declan McAleer MLA

In Attendance by Video or Teleconference:

Mr Shane McAteer (Assembly Clerk)

Ms Karen Barry (Assistant Clerk)

Dr Simon Gallaher (Clerical Supervisor)

Ms Alison Ferguson (Clerical Officer)



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Agreed: The Committee agreed to commence the meeting in closed session.

The meeting commenced at 12.43pm in closed session.

The Committee held a minute's silence as a mark of respect for the late Christopher Stalford MLA, Deputy Chairperson.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to Christopher Stalford's family to convey condolences on behalf of the Committee.

Agreed: Members agreed that, in the event of the meeting being adjourned due to loss of quorum, any decisions that were due to be taken at today's meeting are instead taken via correspondence under temporary Standing Order 115(9).

1. Apologies

As noted above.

The Clerk advised the Committee that Patsy McGlone had provided notification that he had delegated authority, under Standing Order 115(6), to Sinéad Bradley to vote on his behalf at today's meeting.

The Clerk advised the Committee that Declan McAleer had provided notification that he had delegated authority, under Standing Order 115(6), to the Chairperson to vote on his behalf at today's meeting and until further notice.

The Clerk advised the Committee that Áine Murphy had provided notification that she had delegated authority, under Standing Order 115(6), to the Chairperson to vote on her behalf, in her absence, until further notice.

2. Declaration of Interests

Members were advised of the ongoing requirement to declare relevant financial or other interests as and when they arise on the Committee.



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Members noted that Steve Aiken wished to recuse himself from Agenda item 5.

3. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 2 February 2022.

4. Matters Arising

Decisions made via correspondence (under temporary Standing Order 115(9))

The Committee noted the following decision that was taken under temporary Standing Order 115(9), since the last Committee meeting on 2 February 2022:

The following Members voted in favour of Option A (that the Committee seeks procedural changes to ensure that it has no role in relation to considering or publishing the Commissioner for Standards investigation reports on complaints against Ministers):

Linda Dillon, Áine Murphy, Declan McAleer, Pam Cameron, Christopher Stalford.

The following Members voted in favour of Option C (that the Committee seeks procedural changes to provide it with a role in adjudicating on complaints against Ministers and in recommending sanctions where applicable):

Steve Aiken, Stewart Dickson, Sinéad Bradley, Patsy McGlone

No Members voted in favour of Option B (that the Committee reports to the Assembly under the existing procedural arrangements (which do not provide for the Committee to adjudicate or to recommend sanctions in relation to Ministerial conduct)).

The majority decision was that the Committee's preferred approach is Option A.



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Agreed: The Committee agreed that a recommendation is included in its Legacy Report that the incoming Committee takes forward this matter in the next Assembly mandate, including consideration of any consequential issues arising from Option A.

Steve Aiken left the meeting at 12.52pm.

5. Complaint against a Member – Briefing by Commissioner for Standards on Investigation Report

Agreed: The Committee agreed to make a video recording of the briefing by the Commissioner for Standards on her investigation report and further agreed that this is forwarded to the respondent for information and comment, as applicable, during their oral hearing/written submission.

The Commissioner for Standards, Dr Melissa McCullough, joined the meeting at 12.55pm.

The Committee received an oral briefing from the Commissioner for Standards, Dr Melissa McCullough, on this agenda item.

Following the briefing and questions from members, the Commissioner for Standards left the meeting at 1.42pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that, because it will be undertaking its deliberation on the complaint case on 2 March 2022 (so that it can subsequently prepare and agree its report before the end of the current Assembly mandate), the respondent will be offered the date of 2 March 2022 as a further opportunity to attend for oral hearing in response to the Commissioner's report; and, if the respondent decides not to take up this opportunity, the Committee will accept a written submission if this is received in advance of the meeting on 2 March 2022.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to commission Assembly Legal Services to provide legal advice on a number of issues in relation to the complaint case, which will be required prior to the Committee undertaking its deliberation on the case.



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6. Review of procedural practices for Committee's adjudication role - Assembly Research and Information Service (RaISe) briefing

Stewart Dickson left the meeting at 1.54pm.

Áine Murphy left the meeting at 1.54pm.

Ray McCaffrey, Assembly Researcher, and Dr Melissa McCullough, the Commissioner for Standards, joined the meeting at 1.54pm.

The Researcher briefed Members on the research paper (NIAR 009-2022), which the Committee had commissioned as part of the review of procedural practices for the Committee's adjudication role.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

The Chairperson thanked the Researcher for the briefing.

7. Review of procedural practices for Committee's adjudication role - Commissioner briefing

The Commissioner for Standards, Dr Melissa McCullough, briefed Members on her views on the review of procedural practices for the Committee's adjudication role.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

The Chairperson thanked the Commissioner for Standards for the briefing.

Ray McCaffrey, Assembly Researcher, and Dr Melissa McCullough, the Commissioner for Standards, left the meeting at 2.14pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that, given the limited time remaining in the current Assembly mandate and the potential need to consider further information in relation to these matters, applicable recommendations on this issue will be included in the Legacy Report for the successor Committee to take forward.



8. All Party Groups Update

Pam Cameron declared an interest as a member of the proposed All Party Group (APG) for Rare Disease.

Members considered an application for a new APG for Rare Disease, which had been submitted to the Committee for approval.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it is content to approve an application for an APG for Rare Disease.

Members noted that the APG on Modern Slavery was unable to hold an AGM, including to elect officers, on 11 February 2022 due to quorum issues and that this is now unlikely to take place prior to the end of the Assembly mandate.

9. Correspondence

The Committee noted the following:

- i. Correspondence from the Chairpersons' Liaison Group regarding its draft report on 'Strengthening Committee Scrutiny'.
- ii. Correspondence from the Speaker regarding the scheduling of plenary business until the end of the mandate.

10. Any Other Business

Sinéad Bradley re-iterated her condolences to the family and colleagues of the late Christopher Stalford MLA, Deputy Chairperson and also to the Chairperson in regards to a recent family bereavement.



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11. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting

Members noted that the next meeting of the Committee will held be on Wednesday, 2 March 2022 at 12:40pm and that the meeting place/format will be confirmed in due course.

The meeting was adjourned at 2.19pm.

Linda Dillon MLA,

Chairperson, Standards and Privileges Committee

2 March 2022