

Civil Service (Special Advisers) Bill

[AS AMENDED AT CONSIDERATION STAGE]

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Amend the law on special advisers in the Northern Ireland Civil Service.

BE IT ENACTED by being passed by the Northern Ireland Assembly and assented to by Her Majesty as follows:

Meaning of “special adviser”

1.—(1) A person (P) is a special adviser if subsections (2) to (4) apply.

(2) P is appointed to a position in the Northern Ireland Civil Service by a Minister.

5 (3) P is appointed only in order to advise the Minister.

(4) The terms and conditions of the appointment provide that P will cease to hold that position on or before the date the Minister ceases to hold office.

Special advisers: serious criminal convictions

10 2.—(1) Subject to subsection (2) and section 3, a person is not eligible for appointment as a special adviser if the person has a serious criminal conviction.

(2) Where a Minister proposes to appoint as a special adviser a person who has a serious criminal conviction, that person may refer the proposed appointment to the Commissioners.

15 (3) Where a person who holds an appointment as a special adviser incurs a serious criminal conviction, that person’s appointment terminates immediately by virtue of this Act.

(4) Where on the date of coming into operation of this subsection a person—

(a) holds an appointment as a special adviser, and

(b) has before that date incurred a serious criminal conviction,

20 that person’s appointment terminates immediately by virtue of this Act.

(5) But a person to whom subsection (4) will apply may refer the appointment to the Commissioners, within 21 days of this subsection coming into operation.

(6) A Minister must inform the Department in writing whether any special adviser appointed by the Minister has a serious criminal conviction.

Determination of eligibility of special advisers by Commissioners

3.—(1) Where—

(a) a proposed appointment is referred to the Commissioners under section 2(2), or 5

(b) an appointment is referred to the Commissioners under section 2(5), the Commissioners shall determine whether the person is eligible for appointment as, or to continue to hold appointment as, a special adviser.

(2) The Commissioners shall only determine that a person is eligible for appointment as, or to continue to hold appointment as, a special adviser, if satisfied that there are exceptional circumstances justifying it— 10

(a) after having regard to the matters set out in subsection (3), and

(b) in the case of a proposed appointment, after taking account of the outcome of the vetting procedures mentioned in subsection (4). 15

(3) Those matters are—

(a) whether the person has shown contrition for the offence to which the serious criminal conviction relates,

(b) whether the person has taken all reasonable steps to assist in the investigation and prosecution of all other persons connected with the commission of the offence, 20

(c) the views of any victim of the offence, or where a victim has died, the views of any close family member of the victim.

(4) The Commissioners must arrange for the proposed appointee to be the subject of the same vetting procedures as apply to the appointment of persons as Senior Civil Servants to the Northern Ireland Civil Service. 25

Appeals against Commissioners' determinations

4.—(1) Where a person who is the subject of a determination of the Commissioners is aggrieved by that determination, that person may appeal to the High Court. 30

(2) The appeal can only be brought on the ground that it was not reasonable for the Commissioners to make that determination.

(3) The appeal must be brought within 21 days from the day on which the Commissioners made the determination.

(4) On hearing the appeal, the High Court may make such order as it thinks fit in respect of a person's eligibility for appointment as, or to continue to hold appointment as, a special adviser. 35

Meaning of "serious criminal conviction"

5.—(1) In this Act "serious criminal conviction" means a conviction for an offence for which— 40

(a) a sentence of immediate imprisonment of 5 years or more was imposed,

- (b) a sentence of imprisonment for life was imposed,
- (c) an indeterminate custodial sentence under Article 13 of the Criminal Justice (Northern Ireland) Order 2008 was imposed,
- 5 (d) a sentence of detention during the pleasure of the Secretary of State or the Minister of Justice, or for life, or for 5 years or more, was imposed under Article 45 of the Criminal Justice (Children) (Northern Ireland) Order 1998 (children convicted of grave crimes), or
- (e) a sentence of detention during the pleasure of the Governor or the Secretary of State, or for life, or for 5 years or more, was imposed under
10 section 73 of the Children and Young Persons Act (Northern Ireland) 1968 (children convicted of grave crimes).
- (2) This section applies whether the person—
- (a) was convicted in Northern Ireland or elsewhere,
- (b) was convicted before or after the coming into operation of this section.
- 15 (3) Where the person was convicted in a country or territory outside Northern Ireland, the references in subsection (1)(c), (d) and (e) to sentences are to be read as references to equivalent sentences in the country or territory in which the person was convicted.

Annual report

- 20 **6.**—(1) The Department must, as soon as possible after the end of each financial year, issue a report about special advisers employed at any time during that year.
- (2) The Minister of Finance and Personnel must lay the report before the Assembly as soon as possible after it has been issued.
- 25 (3) Without prejudice to the generality of subsection (1), a report under this section must include information about the number and cost of the special advisers.

Code of conduct

- 30 **7.**—(1) The Department must issue a code of conduct for special advisers within 2 months of this section coming into operation.
- (2) Without prejudice to the generality of subsection (1), the code must provide that special advisers must not—
- (a) authorise the expenditure of public funds,
- (b) exercise any power in relation to the management of any part of the
35 Northern Ireland Civil Service, or
- (c) otherwise exercise any power conferred by or under any statutory provision, or any power under the prerogative.
- (3) The code may permit a special adviser to exercise any power within subsection (2)(b) in relation to another special adviser.
- 40 (4) The Minister of Finance and Personnel must lay the code before the Assembly as soon as possible after it has been issued.

(5) The code forms part of the terms and conditions of appointment of special advisers.

Code for appointments

8.—(1) The Department must issue a code governing the appointment of special advisers within 2 months of this section coming into operation. 5

(2) Where a Minister proposes to appoint a special adviser, such an appointment shall be subject to the terms of the code.

(3) Without prejudice to the generality of subsection (1), the code must provide that persons proposed for appointment as special advisers—

(a) must be subject to the same vetting procedures as persons to be appointed as Senior Civil Servants to the Northern Ireland Civil Service, 10

(b) must not be subject to further vetting procedures if they have been subject to vetting procedures in accordance with section 3.

(4) The Minister of Finance and Personnel must lay the code before the Assembly as soon as possible after it has been issued. 15

(5) All persons exercising functions in respect of the appointment of special advisers must have regard to the code.

Advisers to the Presiding Officer

9.—(1) In Article 3 of the Civil Service Commissioners (Northern Ireland) Order 1999, paragraph (2)(b) (which excludes certain appointments by relevant members from the requirement that persons are to be selected for appointment to the Northern Ireland Civil Service on merit) shall cease to apply in relation to the Presiding Officer of the Assembly. 20

(2) Accordingly, in paragraph (3) of that Article, sub-paragraph (a) shall cease to have effect. 25

Interpretation

10. In this Act—

“the Commissioners” means the Civil Service Commissioners for Northern Ireland,

“the Department” means the Department of Finance and Personnel 30

“the Minister” means

(a) the First Minister or deputy First Minister,

(b) a Northern Ireland Minister,

(c) a junior Minister,

and the words in paragraphs (a), (b) and (c) have the same meaning as in the Northern Ireland Act 1998, 35

“statutory provision” has the meaning given by section 1(f) of the Interpretation Act (Northern Ireland) 1954.

Transitional provisions

11. The Schedule (transitional provisions: termination payments) has effect. 40

Commencement

12.—(1) Sections 2(5), 3, 7, 8, 10, 12 and 13 come into operation on the day on which the Act receives Royal Assent.

5 (2) Section 2(6) comes into operation at the end of the period of 1 month after the day on which the Act receives Royal Assent.

(3) The other provisions of this Act come into operation at the end of the period of 2 months after the day on which the Act receives Royal Assent.

Short title

10 **13.** This Act may be cited as the Civil Service (Special Advisers) Act (Northern Ireland) 2013.

Section 11.

SCHEDULE

TRANSITIONAL PROVISIONS: TERMINATION PAYMENTS

1. A special adviser whose appointment is terminated by virtue of section 2(4) is entitled to a termination payment from the Department.
2. The termination payment is an amount equivalent to the greater of— 5
 - (a) 3 months' salary, or
 - (b) where the special adviser is entitled to a contractual severance payment, that payment.
3. A contractual severance payment means a payment, to which the special adviser would be entitled under the terms and conditions of the appointment, if the appointment were terminated because the Minister who appointed the special adviser ceased to be a Minister. 10
4. No termination payment under paragraph 2(b) shall exceed an amount equivalent to 6 months' salary.