



**Northern Ireland
Assembly**

COMMITTEE ON STANDARDS AND PRIVILEGES

**WEDNESDAY, 20TH NOVEMBER 2013
ROOM 21, PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS**

Present: Mr Alastair Ross (Chairperson)
Ms Anna Lo (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Steven Agnew
Mr Cathal Boylan
Ms Paula Bradley
Mr Declan McAleer
Mr Fra McCann
Mr Ian McCrea
Mr Mervyn Storey

In Attendance: Mr Paul Gill (Assembly Clerk)
Mr Ray McCaffrey (Assembly Research and Information Service)
Ms Hilary Bogle (Assistant Assembly Clerk)
Mr Jonathan Watson (Clerical Supervisor)

Apologies: Mr Colum Eastwood
Mrs Sandra Overend

Chairperson's Introduction

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the meeting should begin in open session and move into closed session for the Committee's consideration of item 5.

The meeting commenced at 1.30pm in open session.

The Chairperson welcomed Committee members to the meeting.

1. Apologies

As above.

2. Declaration of Interests

The Chairperson reminded Members of their obligation to declare any relevant financial or other interests before and during each Committee meeting.

3. Draft minutes

Agreed: The draft minutes of the meeting held on 2nd October 2013 were agreed by the Committee.

4. Matters arising

There were no matters arising.

1.34pm Mr Mervyn Storey joined the meeting

5. Review of Directions

Members noted the Clerk's Paper; the Submission from the Assembly Commissioner for Standards on the Disclosure of Information on Complaints; correspondence dated 10th October 2013 from the Assembly Commissioner for Standards; the Clerk's Paper dated 27th September 2013; the Assembly Research Paper; and the General Procedures Direction.

1.38pm Mr Fra McCann joined the meeting

The Clerk briefed the Committee on the background to this issue.

Mr Ray McCaffrey, Assembly Research and Information Service, briefed the Committee on his Research Paper.

The Chairperson thanked Mr McCaffrey for attending the meeting.

1.43pm The Committee moved into closed session

The Committee considered the Commissioner's Submission on the Disclosure of Information.

Agreed: The Committee agreed not to accept the Commissioner's proposal in relation to the disclosure of information. However, the Committee said it would review this position following the review of the Code of Conduct.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to amend the Direction as per the proposed amendments to Directions 3.8, 6.9(3), 6.13, 7.1(c), 7.1, 10.2 and 2.1 in the Commissioner's correspondence of 10 October 2013. The Committee did not agree to amend the Direction 3.4 as per the other proposed amendment in the Commissioner's correspondence.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Direction should be amended to provide that a complaint must be from an individual. Complaints from organisations, or complaints made on behalf of someone else, should be inadmissible

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Direction should be amended to provide that when a complaint is received by the Commissioner he must write to the Member (or former Member) complained of, enclosing a copy of the complaint

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Clerk should seek legal advice. The new Direction shall be put to the Committee for formal approval after it has considered this advice.

6. Committee Review Group – All-Party Groups

The Committee noted the Clerk's Paper; correspondence dated 9th November 2013 from the Committee Review Group; and the Rules on All-Party Groups.

The Clerk briefed the Committee on the background to this issue.

2.15pm Mr McCann left the meeting.

Agreed: Following discussion the Committee agreed that the Chairperson should respond to the Committee Review Group setting out the measures that are currently in place in relation to the governance of All-Party Groups.

2.22pm Mr McAleer left the meeting

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Clerk should write to the Chairperson of each All-Party Group to draw attention to certain matters in relation to the governance of All-Party Groups.

7. Application for an All-Party Group on Trade Unions

The Committee noted an application for an All-Party Group on Trade Unions.

Paula Bradley and Steven Agnew declared an interest as members of the proposed All-Party Group.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the formation of an All-Party Group on Trade Unions.

8. Conduct of Members in Committees

2.30pm Mr McAleer returned to the meeting

The Committee noted the Clerk's Paper; correspondence from the Deputy Chairperson, Chairpersons' Liaison Group; and an extract from the Committee's report of 5th June 2013 on a complaint against a Member.

The Clerk briefed the Committee on the background to this issue.

Agreed: Following discussion the Committee agreed that the Chairperson should respond to the Chairpersons' Liaison Group setting out the Committee's position as detailed in the Clerk's Paper.

9. Correspondence

9.1 The Committee noted correspondence from the Assembly Commissioner on a previous complaint against a Member. The Committee noted the Commissioner's response and gave the matters raised the consideration that they merited.

9.2 The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Justice on a complaint by NIACRO on behalf of a complainant.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the complainant setting out how to make a complaint and pointing out that the Ministerial Code does not fall within the remit of the Committee.

Agreed: The Committee also agreed to write to the Committee for Justice.

10. Any other business

The Committee noted that a strategic planning session on the Review of the Code of Conduct has been organised for the afternoon of Wednesday 4 December 2013 and that the session would be facilitated by Dr Tom Walker, Director of the Centre for Ethics at Queen's University Belfast.

11. Date, time and place of next meeting

Members will be advised of the date of the next meeting by Committee office staff.

The Chairperson adjourned the meeting at 2.44pm.

Mr Alastair Ross MLA
Chairperson, Committee on Standards and Privileges

15th January 2014