



**Northern Ireland
Assembly**

COMMITTEE ON STANDARDS AND PRIVILEGES

**WEDNESDAY, 29TH JANUARY 2014
ROOM 21, PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS**

Present: Mr Alastair Ross (Chairperson)
Mr Steven Agnew
Mr Cathal Boylan
Ms Paula Bradley
Mr Fra McCann
Mr Ian McCrea
Mrs Sandra Overend

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

Apologies: Ms Anna Lo (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Declan McAleer

The meeting commenced at 1.32pm in closed session.

Chairperson's Introduction

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the meeting should be held in closed 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 of the meeting held on 20th January 2014

Agreed: The draft minutes of the meeting held on 20th January 2014 were agreed by the Committee.

4. Matters arising

There were no matters arising.

5. Correspondence from the Northern Ireland Assembly Commissioner for Standards on complaints against a Member

Members noted the Clerk's Paper and correspondence dated 21st January 2014 from the Assembly Commissioner for Standards.

The Chairperson welcomed Mr Douglas Bain, Northern Ireland Assembly Commissioner for Standards and invited him to brief the Committee on this correspondence.

Following discussion the Chairperson thanked Mr Bain.

Agreed: The Committee agreed with the conclusion of the Assembly Commissioner for Standards that the complaints against the Member are inadmissible.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Clerk write to the Member complained of and the complainants enclosing a copy of the Commissioner's correspondence and informing them of the Committee's decision.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Clerk write to the Commissioner informing him of the Committee's decision.

6. Review of the Code of Conduct

Mr Douglas Bain, Assembly Commissioner for Standards and Mr Ray McCaffrey, Assembly Researcher joined the meeting for this agenda item.

Members noted the Clerk's paper on principles and codes of conduct.

The Clerk briefed the Committee on this issue.

Agreed: The Committee agreed, subject to the outcome of its review, that the new Code of Conduct should provide for both aspirational principles and enforceable rules. The principles could be taken into consideration when any allegation of breaches of the rules was under investigation. However, the principles would not by themselves found a complaint.

1.56pm Mr Agnew left the meeting

2.00pm Mr McCrea left the meeting

Agreed: The Committee agreed, subject to the outcome of its review, that the revised seven principles of public life should be included amongst the aspirational principles in the Code. The Committee agreed it would consider amending the descriptors of each to reflect specifically the role of an Assembly Member.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to defer considering the remaining existing principles in the Code until after it had received legal advice.

Agreed: Members agreed that the consultation document should invite respondees to consider whether further additional principles should also be included in the Code.

Members noted the Clerk's Paper on Lobbying; the Assembly Research Paper on Developments relating to Lobbying in the UK and Ireland; and correspondence from the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee of the Scottish Parliament.

The Clerk briefed the Committee on this issue.

The Chairperson invited Mr Ray McCaffrey, Assembly Research to brief the Committee on the Research Paper.

Agreed: Following discussion the Committee agreed that no Member should offer or accord preferential access or treatment to professional lobbyists or their employers. However, members expressed concerns about how such a rule, if provided for in the Code of Conduct, might be enforced.

The Committee also noted the Committee on Standards in Public Life's recommendations in relation to elected representatives and lobbying and expressed concern that these may be impractical to implement.

The Committee agreed to address these issues in its consultation document.

The Chairperson thanked Mr Bain and Mr McCaffrey for attending the meeting.

The Committee noted correspondence from the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee who are carrying out an inquiry into lobbying.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Chairperson should respond to the correspondence setting out the Committee's current position.

Members noted the Clerk's Paper on Visits to other Legislatures as part of its Review of the Code of Conduct.

The Clerk briefed the Committee on this issue.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it would like to meet the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee at the Scottish Parliament and that it would also like to meet the House Ethics Committee, the Senate Ethics Committee, and the Joint Committee on Legislative Ethics at the General Assembly of Maryland.

The Committee agreed that the Clerk should seek to make the necessary arrangements and prepare a business case. The Clerk should then return to the Committee with the business case and draft programme before numbers and dates are confirmed and any bookings are made.

7. Any other business

The Clerk updated the Committee on issues which shall arise as a result the impending building works relating to the times of committee meetings and use of committee rooms.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it should continue to meet on Wednesday afternoons whenever possible and noted that it would need an appropriate meeting room when meeting in public session and when taking evidence.

8. Time, date and place of next meeting

The next meeting of the Committee will be held on Wednesday, 5th February 2014 at 1.30pm in Room 21 (**lunch will be available from 1.15pm**).

The Chairperson adjourned the meeting at 2.56pm.

Mr Alastair Ross MLA
Chairperson, Committee on Standards and Privileges
5th February 2014