



**Northern Ireland
Assembly**

COMMITTEE ON STANDARDS AND PRIVILEGES

WEDNESDAY, 21ST JANUARY 2015
PRIVATE DINING ROOM, PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS

Present: Mr Jimmy Spratt (Chairperson)
Ms Anna Lo (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Steven Agnew
Mr Cathal Boylan
Mr Sammy Douglas
Mr Colum Eastwood
Mr David Hilditch
Mr Declan McAleer
Mr Fra McCann
Mrs Sandra Overend

In Attendance: Mr Paul Gill (Assembly Clerk)
Mrs Hilary Cleland Bogle (Assistant Assembly Clerk)
Mr Jonathan Kerr (Clerical Officer)

Apologies: None

Chairperson's Introduction

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the meeting should be held in closed session.

The meeting commenced at 1.30pm in closed session.

The Chairperson welcomed Committee members to the meeting and informed members that he had replaced Alastair Ross MLA as Chairperson of the Committee.

The Chairperson also welcomed Mr Sammy Douglas to the meeting and informed the Committee that Mr Douglas had replaced Mr McCrea as a member of the Committee.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Chairperson should write to Mr Ross and Mr McCrea thanking them for the contribution they had made to the work of the Committee.

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.

The Committee noted the tabled interests of Mr Spratt and Mr Douglas.

1.33pm Mr Boylan left the meeting

3. Draft minutes

Agreed: The draft minutes of the meeting held on 26th November 2014 were agreed by the Committee.

4. Matters arising

There were no matters arising.

1.34pm Mr Eastwood joined the meeting.

5. Correspondence from the Assembly Commissioner for Standards

1.35pm Mr Boylan returned to the meeting.

Members noted three pieces of correspondence from the Assembly Commissioner for Standards on complaints against three Members.

The Chairperson welcomed Mr Bain, Assembly Commissioner for Standards to the meeting and invited him to brief the Committee on his correspondence dated 4th December 2014 on a complaint against a Member.

Following discussion the Chairperson invited Mr Bain to brief the Committee on his second piece of correspondence dated 4th December 2014 on a complaint against a Member.

Following discussion the Chairperson invited Mr Bain to brief the Committee on his third piece of correspondence dated 8th January 2015 on a complaint against a Member.

Following discussion the Chairperson thanked Mr Bain for attending the meeting.

Agreed: Following discussion, the Committee agreed with the Assembly Commissioner for Standards' conclusion that the complaint at agenda item 5.2 was inadmissible.

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

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

Agreed: Following discussion, the Committee agreed with the Assembly Commissioner for Standards' conclusion that the complaint at agenda item 5.3 was inadmissible.

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

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

Agreed: Following discussion, the Committee agreed with the Assembly Commissioner for Standards' conclusion that the complaint at agenda item 5.4 was inadmissible.

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

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

6. Review of the Code of Conduct

Members noted the Clerk's Paper; the draft new Code of Conduct; and other relevant papers.

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

The Chairperson welcomed Ms Angela Kelly, Legal Adviser and invited her to brief the Committee on the Legal Advice.

Following discussion the Chairperson thanked Ms Kelly for attending the meeting.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Clerk should seek further legal advice in relation to the Guide to the Rules.

The Committee noted tabled papers in relation to the Northern Ireland Ombudsman's consultation on the Northern Ireland Local Government Code of Conduct for Councillors and correspondence dated 16th January 2015 from the Equality Commission.

The Clerk briefed the Committee on the background to these issues.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the draft new Code of Conduct be updated to reflect the suggested wording on the Principle of Good Relations as suggested by the Equality Commission.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Clerk should consult with the Commissioner for Standards on making further changes to the draft Code, based on the points raised in the legal advice.

2.01pm Mr McAleer left the meeting.

2.02pm The Chairperson, Mr Spratt left the meeting and the Deputy Chairperson, Ms Lo took the Chair.

7. Correspondence from the Independent Financial Review Panel

Members noted the Clerk's Paper; and related correspondence and documents.

The Clerk briefed the Committee on this issue.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Chairperson should meet with the Chairperson of the Independent Financial Review Panel.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Independent Financial Review Panel be invited to give evidence to the Committee.

2.10pm Mr Spratt, Chairperson returned to the meeting and took the Chair.

8. Correspondence from the Assembly Commission

The Committee noted the Clerk's Paper and the correspondence from the Assembly Commission dated 10th December 2014.

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

Agreed: Following discussion the Committee agreed to note the response from the Assembly Commission.

9. Correspondence from the Assembly and Executive Review Committee

Members noted the Clerk's Paper; and correspondence from the Assembly and Executive Review Committee.

The Clerk briefed the Committee on this correspondence.

Agreed: The Committee agreed a response to this correspondence.

10. Correspondence from the First Minister and deputy First Minister

The Chairperson declared an interest as a member of the Committee on the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister.

The Committee noted the Clerk's Paper; and the correspondence from the First Minister and deputy First Minister.

The Clerk briefed the Committee on this correspondence.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Clerk should seek further legal advice.

11. Application for an All-Party Group

Mr Boylan, Mr Eastwood and Ms Lo declared an interest as members of the proposed group.

The Committee considered an application for an All-Party Group on China.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to the formation of an All-Party Group on China.

12. Any other business

The Committee agreed that it should seek to arrange a visit to meet its counterparts on the Select Committee on Members' Interests of Dáil Éireann.

13. Date, time and place of next meeting

The next meeting of the Committee shall take place at 1.30pm on Wednesday 18th February 2015. Members will be informed of the room number in due course.

The Chairperson adjourned the meeting at 2.22pm.

**Mr Jimmy Spratt MLA
Chairperson, Committee on Standards and Privileges
18th February 2015**