

COMMITTEE ON STANDARDS AND PRIVILEGES

WEDNESDAY, 24TH JUNE 2015

ROOM 21, PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS

Present: Mr Jimmy Spratt (Chairman)
Ms Anna Lo (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Thomas Buchanan
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)
Miss Alison Ferguson (Clerical Officer)

Apologies: Mr Colum Eastwood
Mr Cathal Boylan
Mr Robin Newton

Chairman's Introduction

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the meeting should commence in closed session and then move into open session following agenda item 5.

The meeting commenced at 1.30pm in closed session.

The Chairman welcomed Committee members to the meeting.

1. Apologies

As above.

Agreed: Members agreed that the Chairperson should write to Mr Boylan wishing him a speedy recovery.

Agreed: Members agreed that the Chairperson should write to Mr Eastwood congratulating him and his wife on the birth of his daughter.

2. Declaration of Interests

The Chairman reminded Members of their obligation to declare any relevant financial or other interest before or during each Committee meeting.

Mr Hilditch declared an interest in agenda item 6 as a member of the Ad Hoc Committee on the NIPSO Bill.

3. Draft minutes

Agreed: The draft minutes of the meeting held on 10th June 2015 were agreed by the Committee.

4. Matters arising

There were no matters arising.

5. Review of the General Procedures Direction

Members noted the Clerk's Paper, the current General Procedures Direction and correspondence from the Commissioner for Standards.

The Clerk briefed the Committee on the background to this issue and on the various suggestions made by the Commissioner as to how the General Procedures Direction might be improved.

1.36pm Mrs Overend joined the meeting.

1.37pm Mr Buchanan joined the meeting.

1.43pm The meeting adjourned

2.00pm The meeting reconvened

The following Members were present:

Mr Jimmy Spratt (Chairman)
Ms Anna Lo (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Thomas Buchanan
Mr David Hilditch
Mr Fra McCann

Mrs Sandra Overend

The Clerk continued briefing the Committee.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it would like to replace the current direction on general procedures to the Assembly Commissioner for Standards with a new direction that addresses a number of issues identified by the Commissioner.

The Committee noted that it did not have to take a final position on all of the Commissioner's suggestions at today's meeting.

Following discussion, the Chairperson put the question that the Committee agrees with the Commissioner's suggestion that the new direction should require the Commissioner to allow a witness 'not less than 14 days' to submit proposed revisions to the note or recording of an interview.

Ayes	Noes	Abstentions
Mr Thomas Buchanan Mr David Hilditch Ms Anna Lo Mr Fra McCann Mrs Sandra Overend Mr Jimmy Spratt	None	None

The question was carried.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it did not want the new direction to include provision for requiring the Commissioner to publish brief details of admissible complaints received.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to (a) seek legal advice to ensure that the remaining suggested amendments would be lawful and (b) ask Assembly Legal Services to draft the suggested amendments for its consideration. Following its consideration of the legal advice and a draft new direction the Committee will take its final decisions.

2.34pm The Committee moved into Open session

6. Ombudsman Bill – Commissioner for Standards

Members noted the Assembly Research Paper.

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

2.35pm Mr McCann left the meeting.

2.38pm Mr McAleer re-joined the meeting.

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

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek legal advice on its direction to the Commissioner on the Code of Conduct and on the action that could be taken if allegations were made against the Commissioner.

7. All-Party Groups

Members noted that the Chairperson of the All-Party Pro Life Group had confirmed that the group is no longer in existence.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Clerk should remove details of the group from the Assembly's website and the Register of All-Party Groups and should write to those MLAs who were its members, and its secretariat, confirming the position.

8. Any other business

Agreed: The Committee agreed, as is normal practice, to delegate authority during the summer recess to the Chairman and Deputy Chairperson to submit views on the releasing or withholding of information in any non-routine/contentious FoI requests received.

9. Time, date and place of next meeting

The next meeting of the Committee will take place in September and Committee staff will inform members of the date in due course.

The Chairman adjourned the meeting at 2.46pm.

Mr Jimmy Spratt MLA
Chairman, Committee on Standards and Privileges

9 September 2015