

COMMITTEE ON STANDARDS AND PRIVILEGES

WEDNESDAY 23RD SEPTEMBER 2015

ROOM 21, PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS

Present: Mr Jimmy Spratt (Chairman)
Ms Anna Lo (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr David Hilditch
Mr Fra McCann
Mr Robin Newton
Mrs Sandra Overend

In Attendance: Mr Paul Gill (Assembly Clerk)
Mrs Hilary Cleland Bogle (Assistant Assembly Clerk)
Miss Alison Ferguson (Clerical Officer)

Apologies: Mr Steven Agnew
Mr Cathal Boylan
Mr Thomas Buchanan
Mr Declan McAleer

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the meeting should commence in closed session and move into open session from agenda item 7.

The meeting commenced at 1.30pm in closed session.

The Chairman welcomed Committee members to the meeting.

1. Apologies

As above.

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.

3. Draft minutes

Agreed: The draft minutes of the meeting held on 15th September 2015 were agreed by the Committee.

4. Matters arising

The Clerk informed the Committee that, further to it agreeing to seek clarification on the Commissioner's practice when making, retaining and transferring audio recordings, Mr Spratt had requested under FOI a copy of the records held by the Assembly Commission in relation to the investigations into his conduct by the Commissioner. The Clerk confirmed that he had responded to the request providing the relevant information.

5. Direction to the Commissioner for Standards on General Procedures

Members noted the Clerk's paper; Legal Advice; and the draft new Direction.

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

1.38pm Mrs Overend joined the meeting

The Chairperson welcomed Kiera McDonald, Legal Adviser, to the meeting and invited her to brief the Committee.

2.01pm The Chairman left the meeting.

2.02pm Ms Anna Lo, Deputy Chairperson, took the Chair.

2.05pm The Deputy Chairperson thanked the Legal Adviser for attending the meeting.

Agreed: Following discussion the Committee agreed to seek further clarification from the Commissioner in relation to the proposal to conduct preliminary inquiries.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that in line with its current position, the Commissioner should redact personal and sensitive material from the documents submitted provided it will not adversely impact on the Committee's decision making role and that this should be provided for in the new Direction.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to review paragraph 7.10 of the draft direction (in relation to the recording of interviews) following the response from the Commissioner on his current practice in this area.

Agreed: The Committee agreed Legal Services should be asked to consider a vires issue.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content to seek the Commissioner's comments on the draft direction.

6. Correspondence from the Ombudsman on the Public Service Ombudsperson Bill

Members noted the Clerk's paper; and correspondence from the Ombudsman dated 15 September 2015.

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

Agreed: Following discussion the Committee agreed that the Clerk should write to the OFMdfM Committee seeking its views on this proposal before deciding whether to bring forward an amendment to the Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Clerk should write to the Ad Hoc Committee informing it of the Committee's position.

2.14pm The Committee moved into open session

7. End of Session Report

Agreed: The Committee agreed its 2014-2015 End of Session Report.

8. Transparency International UK Lobbying Report

Members noted the Clerk's Paper; and Transparency International UK's report on lobbying.

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

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the First Minister and deputy First Minister to clarify their position on the relevant recommendations in the Transparency International report and the Committee's report on the review of the Code of Conduct.

9. Any other business

Mr Newton paid tribute to the Chairman stating that he had brought vast experience from other fields to the Committee and had made an invaluable contribution to the work of the Committee.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Clerk should write to the Chairman on behalf of the Committee thanking him for his contribution as Chairman.

10. Time, date and place of next meeting

The Committee noted that Committee staff would contact members in due course to confirm the time, date and place of the next meeting.

The Deputy Chairperson adjourned the meeting at 2.21pm.

Mr Paul Givan MLA
Chairman, Committee on Standards and Privileges
7 October 2015