

COMMITTEE ON STANDARDS AND PRIVILEGES

WEDNESDAY, 9TH SEPTEMBER 2015

ROOM 21, PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS

Present: Mr Jimmy Spratt (Chairman)
Ms Anna Lo (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Steven Agnew
Mr Colum Eastwood
Mr David Hilditch
Mr Declan McAleer
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 Cathal Boylan
Mr Thomas Buchanan
Mr Fra McCann

Chairman's Introduction

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

The meeting commenced at 1.34pm 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.

Mr Steven Agnew declared an interest in agenda item 7 as a member of the proposed All-Party Group on Multiple Sclerosis.

3. Draft minutes

Agreed: The draft minutes of the meeting held on 24th June 2015 were agreed by the Committee.

4. Matters arising

There were no matters arising.

5. Accountability of the Northern Ireland Assembly Commissioner for Standards

Members noted the Clerk's paper; two complaints which had been received; legal advice; and a research paper.

1.37pm Mrs Overend joined the meeting.

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

The Chairperson invited Ms Tara Caul, Head of Legal Services to brief the Committee on the Legal Advice.

1.39pm Ms Lo joined the meeting.

2.11pm Mr Eastwood left the meeting.

2.12pm Ms Lo left the meeting.

2.38pm Following discussion the Chairperson thanked Ms Caul for attending the meeting.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to respond to each of the complainants setting out its position. The Committee agreed that it would meet to agree its responses.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to review the provisions of the Assembly Members (Independent Financial Review and Standards) Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 (Code of Conduct and Requirement to Register Interests) Direction 2012.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Assembly Commissioner for Standards setting out its position and that this letter should also be agreed at the next meeting.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Clerk should write to seek the views of the current Ombudsman on making the office of the Northern Ireland Assembly Commissioner for Standards a listed authority into which the new Ombudsperson can investigate alleged maladministration.

6. Correspondence from the Northern Ireland Assembly Commissioner for Standards

Members noted the Clerk's Paper and correspondence from the Commissioner on a complaint against a Member.

The Clerk briefed the Committee on this issue.

Agreed: Following discussion, the Committee agreed with the conclusion of the Assembly Commissioner for Standards that the complaint was inadmissible.

2.50pm Ms Lo returned to the meeting.

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.

2.51pm The meeting moved into public session

7. All-Party Groups

The Committee noted an application form for the formation of an All-Party Group on Multiple Sclerosis.

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

8. Publishing the Register of Members' Interests as 'Open Data'

Members noted the Clerk's Paper.

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

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Register of Members' Interests will be published as Open Data.

9. Correspondence

Members noted correspondence from the Electoral Commission on the Review of the Code of Conduct and Guide to the rules relating to the conduct of Members.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Clerk should meet the Electoral Commission and report back to the Committee.

10. Any other business

The Chairperson reminded members that the Committee will be sponsoring an event organised by Transparency International UK on lobbying to be held at lunchtime (12.00 noon – 2.00pm) on Monday 28th September in the Long Gallery.

2.55pm Mr Newton left the meeting.

The Committee moved into closed session

Members noted the tabled Clerk's Paper and a draft Committee response to a press enquiry in relation to the Guidance for Members on Lobbying.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the contents of the draft response.

2.57pm Mr Newton returned to the meeting.

11. Time, date and place of next meeting

The Committee agreed to hold a short meeting the following week and noted that committee staff would confirm a suitable time, date and place.

The Chairman adjourned the meeting at 2.59pm.

Mr Jimmy Spratt MLA
Chairman, Committee on Standards and Privileges

15 September 2015