

I wish to add my support to the Functioning of Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill as proposed and sponsored by Mr Jim Allister MLA. All fourteen objectives are necessary to gain the respect and confidence of the general public. The office of the Northern Ireland government badly needs to show the highest standards and integrity in conducting business.

Public confidence in Stormont is extremely low and passing this bill would be a start to regaining it. Government practices should be of the highest standard and an example to all.

I followed the RHI scandal and the subsequent inquiry with great interest and concluded there were system-wide problems, lack of good governance and general bad behaviour and careless conduct within Stormont which contributed to the cash for ash scandal. I was involved in industry for many years and was astounded by the number of bad practices which came to light.

Using personal email accounts, also private phones is wrong and should never be deployed for government business, and it is proper to make this practice a criminal offence. All government correspondence should be open to scrutiny.

Giving confidential government information to a third party, something which happened on many occasions during the RHI scandal is immoral and should become a criminal offence.

Learning that proper & accurate minutes, with action points, were not recorded by the civil service, of every meeting attended by a minister shocked me. A factual and precise record of every meeting must be made and kept. This method of thwarting Freedom of Information requests by not keeping a record is completely dishonest. It means that the public will never know the full truth about the RHI scandal. Ministers and their advisors have to be held to account for mistakes made and lessons learnt.

The RHI Inquiry showed that Ministers didn't comply with the code regarding SPADs and their selection. Ministers should be held accountable and also responsible for those they appointment.

I think this Bill will lead to more transparency in how government business is conducted, and should be supported by all MLAs.