



**Northern Ireland
Assembly**

COMMITTEE ON STANDARDS AND PRIVILEGES

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

**WEDNESDAY, 29 JANUARY 2020
ROOM 21, PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS**

Present: Ms Sinéad Ennis MLA (Chairperson)
Mr William Irwin MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Mrs Pam Cameron MLA
Mr Colm Gildernew MLA
Mr George Robinson MLA

Apologies Mr Doug Beattie MC MLA
Mr Stewart Dickson MLA
Mr Declan McAleer MLA
Mr Patsy McGlone MLA

In Attendance: Mr Shane McAteer (Assembly Clerk)
Mrs Clairita Frazer (Senior Assistant Clerk)
Ms Aoibheann Baker (Assistant Clerk)
Mr Jim Nulty (Clerical Supervisor)
Mr Gareth Cross (Clerical Officer)

*Members agreed that today's meeting will be held in closed session.
The meeting commenced at 10.34am in closed session.*

Members noted that, given the nature of the Committee's work, including the adjudication of complaints alleging breaches of the Assembly Members' Code of Conduct, confidentiality and impartiality are critical to the Committee's reputation and to the manner in which it exercises its functions.

1. Apologies

As above.

2. Declaration of Members' Interests

The Chairperson advised members of the requirement to register relevant financial and other interests in the Register of Members' Interests.

Members were further advised of the ongoing requirement to declare relevant financial or other interests as and when they arise on the Committee. In that regard, members were advised that any financial or other interests which relate to the remit of the Committee, or which are likely to be relevant to a substantial part of its work, should be drawn to the attention of the Committee at this stage.

No interests were declared.

3. Committee Procedures

Members noted the following guidance documents:

- 3.1 Committee Membership;
- 3.2 Staff contact details;
- 3.3 Arrangements for Committee meetings;

Agreed: The Committee agreed that modest refreshments will be provided for Committee meetings.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that, while it will often need to meet in closed session given the confidential nature of much of its business, individual agenda items which are of a nature that do not require to be held in private, may be considered in open session. It was *further agreed* that closed sessions will normally take place after any items being considered in open session have been dealt with.

- 3.4 Guide to the Powers and Operation of Standing Committees and Ad Hoc Committees for Chairpersons and Members;

The Chairperson drew members' specific attention to the guidance on privilege and matters of sub-judice contained within the "Guide to the Powers and Operation of Standing Committees and Ad Hoc Committees for Chairpersons and Members".

- 3.5 Guide to the Role of the Committee Chairperson;
- 3.6 Guide to the Role and Functions of the Committee Office;
- 3.7 Committee Protocol on conduct and courtesy in Committee meetings;

Agreed: The Committee agreed to adopt a protocol on conduct and courtesy in Committee meetings.

- 3.8 Committee Procedures for handling protectively marked documents;

Agreed: The Committee agreed to adopt procedures for handling protectively marked documents, which were tailored to meet the needs and work of the Committee.

- 3.9 Committee approach to meeting preparation and questioning; and

Agreed: The Committee agreed to re-visit options for meeting preparation and questioning at a later date as part of the Committee's strategic planning work.

3.10 Committee approach to dealing with correspondence.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to adopt a Committee approach to dealing with correspondence, which was tailored to meet the needs and work of the Committee, with provision for it to be reviewed at a later date.

4. Ethical standards system in the Northern Ireland Assembly

Members received a briefing from the Committee Secretariat on the ethical standards system in the Northern Ireland Assembly.

5. Role of Standards and Privileges Committee

11.20am Mr Gildernew left the meeting.

Members received a briefing from the Committee Secretariat on the role of the Standards and Privileges Committee.

11.23am Mr Gildernew returned to the meeting.

6. Recruitment and Appointment of the Commissioner for Standards

Members received a briefing from the Committee Secretariat on the process for the recruitment and appointment of a Commissioner for Standards.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission seeking a briefing on the updated position and timetable for the appointment of a Commissioner for Standards.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Committee Secretariat will circulate a link to the Commissioner for Standards website to Committee members for information.

7. Draft Committee Induction Plan

Members received a briefing from the Committee Secretariat on the draft Committee Induction Plan, which included arrangements for a strategic planning meeting.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the proposed Induction Plan.

8. Potential Topics for Committee Work Programme

Members received a briefing from the Committee Secretariat on potential topics for the Committee's forward work programme. The briefing included issues considered by previous Committees in the 2016-17 and 2011-16 mandates, which may still be topical; as well as potentially applicable issues which have arisen in other jurisdictions; and additional issues which the secretariat had identified.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to commission a research paper on "Topical issues in other legislatures" and to schedule a briefing on the paper for the Committee's next meeting on 19 February 2020.

9. All-Party Groups

Members received an update from the Committee Secretariat on All-Party Groups (APGs).

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the research being commissioned into "Topical Issues in other legislatures" will include a comparative examination of membership requirements for APGs in other applicable jurisdictions.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Committee Secretariat will circulate a link to the current list of APGs to Committee members for information.

10. Correspondence

None.

11. Any Other Business

None.

12. Time, date and place of next meeting

The next meeting will be held on Wednesday 19 February 2020 at 10:30am in Room 21, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 11.51am.

Ms Sinéad Ennis MLA
Chairperson, Committee on Standards and Privileges
19 February 2020