



## COMMITTEE ON STANDARDS AND PRIVILEGES

### MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

WEDNESDAY, 19 FEBRUARY 2020  
ROOM 21, PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS

Present: Ms Sinéad Ennis MLA (Chairperson)  
Mr Doug Beattie MC MLA  
Mrs Pam Cameron MLA  
Mr Colm Gildernew MLA  
Mr Declan McAleer MLA  
Mr George Robinson MLA

Apologies Mr Stewart Dickson MLA  
Mr Patsy McGlone MLA  
Mr William Irwin MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

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)

*The meeting commenced at 10.58am in open session.*

#### **1. Apologies**

As above.

#### **2. Declaration of Members' Interests**

Members were advised of the ongoing requirement to declare relevant financial or other interests as and when they arise on the Committee.

Mrs Cameron and Mr Beattie both declared an interest as founding members of the proposed All-Party Group (APG) on Preventing Loneliness, which would be considered by the Committee at agenda item 8.

### **3. Draft Minutes**

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 29 January 2020.

### **4. Matters Arising**

There were no matters arising

### **5. Introductory Briefing on Assembly Research and Information Service (RaISe)**

The Committee received a briefing from RaISe on the services which it offers to Members to support their work across a range of business areas, including: constituency matters; preparing for plenary debate; scrutinising the work of departments; and bringing forward legislation in the form of a Private Members' Bill.

### **6. Research Briefing on Topical Issues in other Legislatures**

*Mr Gildernew joined the meeting at 11.12am*

Members received a briefing from RaISe on *Topical Issues in other Legislatures*. The briefing covered a range of topics including: procedures for dealing with complaints of inappropriate behaviour; lay members on standards committees; ending dual registration; and the rules on APGs.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to the Assembly Commission seeking information on work it may have planned or undertaken on an Inappropriate Behaviours Policy and associated processes; and on how this might be taken forward, having regard for the respective remits of the Assembly Commission and the Standards and Privileges Committee.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to hold an informal strategic planning meeting on Wednesday 11 March in Room 278, which would help identify the priorities for the Committee forward work programme for the remainder of the Mandate.

### **7. Potential Improvements to the Rules to All-Party Groups**

Members received a briefing from the Committee Secretariat on potential improvements to the rules on APGs.

Members discussed a range of issues for consideration in any review of the rules on APGs, including: the requirement for all three designations in the Assembly to be represented in the membership; clarity regarding a proposed APG's purpose; potential for overlap between groups; the scope for APGs to appoint co-chairpersons; the accessibility of APGs; in addition to a range of other issues covered in the briefing.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to consider the range of issues further; and, subject to agreeing this as a priority at the strategic planning meeting on 11 March, to follow a similar approach to that taken by the Committee review of the rules in 2010.

## **8. All -Party Group Update**

Members considered applications for three new APGs which had been submitted to the Committee for approval, namely;

- APG on Climate Action;
- APG on Football; and
- APG on Preventing Loneliness.

Members discussed the purpose of APGs and the extent to which there may be duplication between the proposed APG on Football and the APG on Sports and Physical Recreation. Members also discussed the membership requirements for establishing a new APG, including how the 'Other' designation should be described on the registration form.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed that, as part of any review of APG rules, it will also consider how the designation requirements are to be set out on the registration form.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed that it is content to approve the application for an APG on Climate Action

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed that it is content to approve the application for an APG on Football; but that it will seek clarification from the Chairperson of the APG on Football on whether the purpose of the group is in relation to soccer only.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed that it is content to approve the application for an APG on Preventing Loneliness.

## **9. Functioning of Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill – Clauses 5 and 10**

Members received a briefing from the Committee Secretariat on clauses 5 and 10 of the Functioning of Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill, which are relevant to the functions of the Committee. Members noted that, if the Bill reaches Committee Stage, the lead committee will seek the views of the other committees which may have a concern/interest in relation to individual clauses of the Bill.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed that, if the Bill passes Second Stage, in order to inform the Committee's position on the relevant clauses, it will:

- (a) commission a research paper providing a comparative examination of: how complaints alleging breaches of Ministerial Codes of Conduct are investigated in other applicable jurisdictions; and the

approaches taken in other applicable legislatures to dealing with areas of overlap between codes of conduct for Ministers and codes of conduct for Members of the legislature; and

- (b) schedule oral evidence sessions with the applicable departmental officials, other applicable stakeholders, and the Bill Sponsor as necessary.

*Mr McAleer left the meeting at 11.57am*

Arising from their discussion, the Committee members also noted several commitments in ‘New Decade, New Approach’ (NDNA) which are relevant to the functions and work of the Committee.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to The Executive Office to request information on the processes and timetable envisaged for taking forward the commitments in NDNA which are relevant to the functions and work of the Committee.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to move into closed session for the remainder of the meeting.

*The meeting moved in to closed session at 12.03pm*

## **10. Procedural Fairness in Standards and Privileges Committee context**

Members received a briefing from Assembly Legal Services on procedural fairness in the context of the work of the Standards and Privileges Committee.

Members noted the advice received and retained the aide-memoire, which was provided by Assembly Legal Services for future reference.

## **11. Correspondence**

- 11.1 Members considered a request from a member of the public both that their previous correspondence with the Commissioner for Standards be raised with the Committee and that they meet with the Committee.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed that the Clerk will write to the correspondent advising that the Commissioner for Standards is the correct point of contact for any complaint about MLAs; and additionally explain that, while the Commissioner’s position is currently vacant, any correspondence received by the Commissioner’s office will be retained and considered when a new Commissioner is in place.

- 11.2 The Committee noted correspondence from the Speaker’s Office in relation to the recruitment of a Commissioner for Standards.

11.4 Members noted circular correspondence from the Director of Pivotal regarding its future work.

**11. Any Other Business**

None.

**12. Time, date and place of next meeting**

The Committee will hold an informal strategic planning meeting on Wednesday 11 March 2020 in Room 278, Parliament Buildings (start time to be confirmed).

*The meeting was adjourned at 12.21pm.*

**Ms Sinéad Ennis MLA**  
**Chairperson, Committee on Standards and Privileges**  
**6 May 2020**