



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee on Standards and Privileges

Minutes of Proceedings

9 June 2021

Meeting Location: StarLeaf

Present by Video or Teleconference:

Ms Sinead Ennis MLA (Chairperson)
Ms Pam Cameron MLA
Mr William Irwin MLA, (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Sean Lynch MLA
Mr Patsy McGlone MLA
Mr George Robinson MBE MLA

Apologies: Dr Steve Aiken OBE MLA
Mr Stewart Dickson MLA

In Attendance by Video or Teleconference:

Mr Shane McAteer (Assembly Clerk)
Ms Marie Austin (Senior Assistant Clerk)
Mr David McClure (Assistant Clerk)
Mr Jim Nulty (Clerical Supervisor)
Ms Alison Ferguson (Clerical Officer)



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Agreed: The Committee agreed to commence the meeting in closed session.

The meeting commenced at 14.36pm in closed session.

1. Apologies

As noted above.

2. Declaration of Interest

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

No interests were declared.

3. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 26 May 2021.

4. Matters Arising

- **Correspondence from CAMS Office – Social Media Training**

Noted: The Committee noted the correspondence from the Clerking and Member Support (CAMS) Office in relation to a Member Development programme on 'Protecting Your Social Media Reputation'. This was offered to all MLAs at the request of the Committee.



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- **Committee member development programme**

Members were reminded that the remaining development sessions on the Committee's adjudication role will run from 12:15 to 2:15pm on 16 June and 30 June 2021.

5. Complaint against a Member – Commissioner Investigation Report

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the briefing from the Commissioner for Standards would be recorded by Hansard.

Members received a briefing from the Clerk on the Committee's adjudication role in relation to complaints of alleged breaches of the Members' Code of Conduct.

Members received a briefing from the Commissioner for Standards, Dr Melissa McCullough, on this agenda item. Following the Commissioner's briefing, the Committee deliberated on the complaint case.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to defer its decisions on this complaint case to another date in order to receive a follow up briefing from the Commissioner for the purpose of obtaining clarification on issues discussed.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Hansard of the briefing from the Commissioner is forwarded to the Member who is the subject of the complaint for information and comment as applicable.

6. Procedures for investigating complaints against Ministers – Legal advice and policy options

The Committee further discussed the need to put in place procedures for the Commissioner for Standards to consider and investigate complaints of alleged breaches of the Ministerial Code of Conduct. This requirement arose from section 5 of the Functioning of Government (Miscellaneous Provision) Act (Northern Ireland) 2021, which commenced on 22 March 2021 and extended the powers of the Commissioner to investigate and report on complaints against Ministers.



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Members noted the legal advice on this matter which had been considered at the Committee meeting on 26 May 2021.

Members received a briefing from the Clerk on the policy options in relation to this agenda item.

Agreed: Having regard to the legal advice received, the Committee agreed that the procedures should enable the Commissioner to consider and investigate alleged misconduct by Ministers which occurred from 22 March 2021, the date that the Commissioner's new functions came into effect.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the necessary amendments to the Assembly Members (Independent Financial Review and Standards) Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 (General Procedures) Direction 2016 ('the General Procedures Direction'), which will ensure that the procedures for the Commissioner's consideration and investigation of complaints against Ministers for alleged breaches of the Ministerial Code of Conduct align, as applicable, to the existing procedures for complaints against Assembly Members in relation to alleged breaches of the Assembly Code of Conduct.

Noted: The Committee noted that the new General Procedures Direction, which will take effect from 14 June 2021, will be issued to the Commissioner, laid in the Assembly Business Office, published on the Committee's webpage and copied to The Executive Office for information.

7. Any other business

Members noted that William Irwin MLA will be leaving the Committee and thanked him for his contribution to the work of the Committee during his term as Deputy Chairperson.



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8. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting

The Committee was informed that the date for the next meeting will be Wednesday 16 June 2021 and this will start in Room 30 (and on StarLeaf) at 16:30pm.

Members were reminded that the next Member development session on the Committee's adjudication role will also be on Wednesday 16 June 2021 and that will take place on Microsoft Teams from 12:15 – 2:15pm.

The meeting was adjourned at 15.44pm.

**Sinead Ennis MLA,
Chairperson, Standards and Privileges Committee**

Wednesday 16 June 2021