



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

# Committee on Standards and Privileges

## Minutes of Proceedings

**10 April 2024**

**Meeting Location:** Room 21, Parliament Buildings

**Present:**

Carál Ní Chuilín MLA (Chairperson)

Stewart Dickson MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

Connie Egan MLA

Harry Harvey MLA

Brian Kingston MLA

Cathy Mason MLA

**Present by Video or Teleconference:**

Colin McGrath MLA

**Apologies:**

Jemma Dolan MLA

Paul Frew MLA

**In Attendance:**

Shane McAteer, Committee Clerk

Nick Mitford, Senior Assistant Clerk

Elaine Farrell, Assistant Clerk

Alison Ferguson, Clerical Supervisor

Ciara Dorrian, Clerical Officer

Jonathan McMillen, Head of Legal Services (for agenda item 6)

Helen Smyth, Legal Advisor (for agenda item 6)

The meeting commenced at 10.00 a.m. in closed session

Brian Kingston joined the meeting at 10.01 a.m.

**1. Apologies**

Jemma Dolan MLA

Paul Frew MLA

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to send a letter of congratulations to Jemma Dolan MLA on the birth of her baby daughter.

**2. Declaration of interests**

There were no interests declared.

**3. Draft Minutes**

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 13 March 2024.

#### **4. Matters Arising**

There were no matters arising.

Colin McGrath joined the meeting via Video Conference (Zoom) at 10.05 a.m.

#### **5. Recommendation of a sanction against a Member**

The Committee considered a proposal by the previous Committee that it identifies and recommends an appropriate sanction to be imposed on a Member by the Assembly in plenary, for what the previous Committee considered to be an egregious breach of the Code of Conduct.

The Committee deliberated on the circumstances of the case and noted that any sanction that might be recommended by the Committee must be appropriate and proportionate, bearing in mind all of the circumstances of the case. The Committee noted that, as highlighted by the previous Committee, a recommendation of a sanction by way of an apology may not be suitable in this case.

The Committee considered the range of possible sanctions, as provided for in Standing Order 69B.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that an appropriate and proportionate sanction would be the exclusion of the Member from the proceedings of the Assembly for two sitting days, as provided for in Standing Order 69B(c), and that, subject to receiving legal advice in this regard, a motion recommending this sanction to the Assembly will be considered at the next Committee meeting.

#### **6. Complaints against Ministers of alleged breaches of the Ministerial Code of Conduct – briefing by Assembly Legal Services**

The following Assembly officials joined the meeting at 10.53 a.m.

Helen Smyth, Legal Advisor

Jonathan McMillen, Head of Legal Services

Ms Smyth briefed the Committee on the legal advice provided in respect of the procedures for handling investigation reports by the Commissioner for Standards on complaints against Ministers of alleged breaches of the Ministerial Code of Conduct.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

The Chairperson thanked Ms Smyth for her briefing.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to defer consideration of the issue until further legal advice has been received.

## **7. Proposals for new All-Party Group**

Members considered an application for a proposed All-Party Group on LGBTQIA+ Equality.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to approve the establishment of an All-Party Group on LGBTQIA+ Equality.

## **8. Correspondence**

**Noted:** The Committee noted the correspondence from the Committee on Procedures seeking suggestions for its priority areas of work for a forthcoming strategic planning session and the interim response which issued from the Committee Clerk.

## **9. Any Other Business**

None.

## **10. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting**

The next meeting of the Committee on Standards and Privileges will take place on Wednesday 24 April 2024 at 10.00 a.m. in Room 21.

The meeting was adjourned at 11.23 a.m.

**Carál Ní Chuilín MLA**

**Chairperson, Committee on Standards and Privileges**

**24 April 2024**