



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee on Standards and Privileges

Minutes of Proceedings

23 October 2024

Meeting Location: Room 106, Parliament Buildings

Present:

Carál Ní Chuilín MLA (Chairperson)

Connie Egan MLA

Paul Frew MLA

Harry Harvey MLA

Brian Kingston MLA

Cathy Mason MLA

Present by video or teleconference:

Jemma Dolan MLA

Colin McGrath MLA

Apologies:

Stewart Dickson MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

In Attendance:

Shane McAteer, Committee Clerk

Nick Mitford, Senior Assistant Clerk

Elaine Farrell, Assistant Clerk

Laura Gourley, Clerical Supervisor

Alison Ferguson, Clerical Officer

The meeting commenced at 10.04 a.m. in closed session

1. Apologies

As noted above.

2. Declaration of interests

The Chairperson advised Members of the ongoing requirement to declare relevant financial or other interests as and when they arise and before taking part in any Assembly proceedings, including Committee proceedings, relating to that matter.

Mr Harvey declared an interest that he is a member of the proposed All-Party Group (APG) on Aerospace, Defence, Security and Space and the APG on Road Safety, which would be discussed under agenda item 7.

3. Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 25 September 2024.

4. Matters Arising

The Chairperson advised the Committee that the consultation paper on the adjudication of complaints against Ministers of alleged breaches of the Ministerial Code of Conduct issued to the Assembly parties and independent MLAs with a response deadline of 1 November 2024.

The Chairperson advised the Committee that the consultation on the draft Unacceptable Behaviours Policy issued to all MLAs via email, and to members of the public via Citizen Space with a response deadline of 29 November 2024.

Members noted that the responses to both consultations will be brought to a future Committee meeting for consideration.

5. Investigation report on referral to the Commissioner for Standards – briefing from the Commissioner for Standards

The Commissioner for Standards, Dr Melissa McCullough, joined the meeting at 10.07 a.m.

The Commissioner briefed the Committee on her investigation report and this was followed by a question and answer session.

The Chairperson thanked the Commissioner for her briefing and her report.

The Commissioner left the meeting at 10.33 a.m.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to develop a protocol for remote attendance at Committee meetings which, for example, will include a rule that remote attendees must have their camera on for the duration of the meeting and which will set out the extent to which restricted documents are shared on-screen for remote attendees.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the reading-room facility, for viewing the restricted meeting papers in advance of Committee meetings, will be limited to in-person attendance only and that a hard-copy of the restricted pack will be available during the reading room viewing.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that, when the restricted meeting packs are substantial, time could be taken immediately before the Committee meeting

commences in order to provide members with a further opportunity to read the hard-copy papers.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the Commissioner's report to Legal Services in order to seek advice on any further redactions that may be required in advance of publication.

6. Update on proposed Committee Member Development Programme

The Senior Assistant Clerk briefed the Committee on the proposed Committee Member Development Programme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to procure an in-person, two-hour training session on Adjudicatory Panel Training, which will be held on 11 December 2024 in place of the regular Committee meeting scheduled on that date.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to consider if it wishes to procure a second training session after the conclusion of the first training session.

7. All-Party Group issues

The Assistant Clerk briefed the Committee on a proposal for an APG on Aerospace, Defence, Security and Space, and a proposal for an APG on Road Safety.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to approve the establishment of an APG on Aerospace, Defence, Security and Space and an APG on Road Safety.

The Chairperson advised the Committee that the APG on Further and Higher Education and the APG on Rare Disease have failed to comply with the Rules on APGs in relation to holding an Annual General Meeting.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the draft letters for issuing to the Chairperson and the membership of the APG on Further and Higher Education, and the Chairperson and the membership of the APG on Rare Disease to highlight the issues of compliance with the Rules.

8. Correspondence

Noted: The Committee noted the correspondence dated 27 September 2024 from the AERA Committee in respect of a complaint against a Minister from a member of the public.

Agreed: The Committee noted the correspondence dated 21 September 2024 from the Committee on the Administration of Justice in respect of the adjudication of ministerial complaints. The Committee agreed a draft letter of response for issuing.

Noted: The Committee noted the correspondence dated 18 October 2024 from the Chairpersons' Liaison Group providing an update on the business brought to the group at its meeting on 18 June 2024.

Mr McGrath left the meeting at 10.45 a.m.

9. AOB.

None.

10. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting

The next meeting of the Committee on Standards and Privileges was scheduled to take place on Wednesday 20 November 2024 at 10.00 a.m. in Room 21.

The meeting was adjourned at 10.48 a.m.

Connie Egan MLA

Deputy Chairperson, Committee on Standards and Privileges

20 November 2024