



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee on Standards and Privileges

Minutes of Proceedings

12 February 2025

Meeting Location: Room 106, Parliament Buildings

Present:

Cathy Mason MLA (Chairperson)

Stewart Dickson MLA

Jemma Dolan MLA

Paul Frew MLA

Harry Harvey MLA

Brian Kingston MLA

Declan McAleer MLA

Colin McGrath MLA

Present by video or teleconference:

Connie Egan 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 10.03 a.m. in closed session

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the former Chairperson, Carál Ní Chuilín MLA to thank her for her contribution to the work of the Committee.

1. Apologies

None.

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.

The Deputy Chairperson declared an interest in relation to the complaint case to be considered under agenda item 5, including in being a member of the Assembly Committee referred to in the complaint, and advised that she would recuse herself from consideration of the complaint case and associated business.

Mr Kingston declared an interest in relation to the complaint case to be considered under agenda item 5, including in being a member of the Assembly Committee referred to in the complaint, and advised that he would recuse himself from consideration of the complaint case and associated business.

Mr Harvey declared an interest in relation to the complaint case to be considered under agenda item 5, in being a member of the Assembly Committee referred to in the complaint, but confirmed that he did not take part in any related discussion during the proceedings of that Committee.

Mr Dickson advised that he became a member of the Assembly Committee referred to in the complaint to be considered under agenda item 5 after the incident in question had occurred.

Mr Frew declared an interest that he is a member of the All-Party Group (APG) on Ethnic Minority Community to be considered under agenda item 7.

Mr Kingston declared an interest that he is a member of the APG on Ethnic Minority Community to be considered under agenda item 7.

3. Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 15 January 2025.

4. Matters Arising

Noted: The Committee noted that comparative research has now been commissioned following the decision at the meeting on 15 January 2025 to review the procedures for complainants to request reconsideration of inadmissible complaints and, in particular, complaints about service or performance standards.

Ms Egan left the meeting at 10.08 a.m.

Mr Kingston left the meeting at 10.08 a.m.

5. Complaint against a Member – briefing by the Commissioner for Standards on investigation report

The Commissioner for Standards, Dr Melissa McCullough, joined the meeting at 10.08 a.m.

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

The Chairperson thanked the Commissioner for her attendance at the meeting.

The Commissioner left the meeting at 11.04 a.m.

The Committee deliberated on the complaint case, as presented by the Commissioner.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the correspondence from the respondent and to include it in the Committee's report on the complaint case.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the MLA referred to in the correspondence from the respondent, to seek their comments on points raised within the correspondence and to provide them with an opportunity to respond.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to commission legal advice on a number of issues arising from the complaint case.

Mr Frew left the meeting at 11.20 a.m.

Mr Harvey left the meeting at 11.20 a.m.

Mr McGrath left the meeting at 11.20 a.m.

Ms Egan rejoined the meeting at 11.20 a.m. (online)

Mr Frew rejoined the meeting at 11.22 a.m.

Mr Kingston rejoined the meeting at 11.25 a.m.

6. Adjudication of complaints on alleged breaches of the Ministerial Code of Conduct – next steps

The Clerk briefed the Committee on the next steps in considering potential procedural changes to provide the Committee with a role in adjudicating on complaints of alleged breaches of the Ministerial Code of Conduct.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to defer consideration of the agenda item until its scheduled meeting on 26 March 2025, when it is anticipated a response will have

been received from one of the political parties that had not yet responded to the Committee's consultation on the matter.

7. All-Party Group issues

Agreed: The Committee agreed the draft letters for issue to the Chairperson and the membership of the APG on Ethnic Minority Community, and the Chairperson and the membership of the APG on Press Freedom and Media Sustainability to highlight the issues of compliance with the Rules.

8. Correspondence

Agreed: The Committee noted the correspondence dated 4 February 2025 from the Assembly Legal Services in respect of the repeal of Standing Order 70 and agreed that the Clerk will liaise with the Clerk to the Procedures Committee to request that it brings the proposed amendments to Standing Orders to the Assembly for approval.

9. AOB.

None.

10. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting

The next meeting of the Committee on Standards and Privileges is scheduled to take place on Wednesday 26 February 2025 at 10.00 a.m. in Room 106.

The meeting was adjourned at 11.35 a.m.

Cathy Mason MLA

Chairperson, Committee on Standards and Privileges

26 February 2025