



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee on Standards and Privileges

Minutes of Proceedings

20 November 2024

Meeting Location: Room 21, Parliament Buildings

Present:

Connie Egan MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

Harry Harvey MLA

Cathy Mason MLA

Present by video or teleconference:

Jemma Dolan MLA

Brian Kingston MLA

Stewart Dickson MLA

Apologies:

Carál Ní Chuilín MLA (Chairperson)

Paul Frew MLA

Colin McGrath MLA

In Attendance:

Shane McAteer, Committee Clerk

Elaine Farrell, Assistant Clerk

Laura Gourley, Clerical Supervisor

Alison Ferguson, Clerical Officer

Jonathan McMillen, Head of Legal Services (Agenda item 5)

The meeting commenced at 10.06 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.

No interests were declared.

3. Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 23 October 2024.

4. Matters Arising

None.

5. Review of standing order 70 – briefing from Legal Services

The Head of Legal Services, Jonathan McMillen, joined the meeting at 10.09 a.m.

Mr McMillen briefed the Committee on follow-up legal advice relating to the review of standing order 70.

Ms Dolan joined the meeting at 10.17 a.m.

Agreed: The Committee confirmed its decision to seek the repeal of standing order 70 and to change the Committee's name to the "Committee on Standards" and agreed the proposed consequential amendments to standing orders, in line with the legal advice received.

The Deputy Chairperson thanked Mr McMillen for his briefing.

Mr McMillan left the meeting at 10.30 a.m.

Mr Kingston left the meeting at 10.30 a.m.

6. Protocol on remote participation in Committee meetings

The Clerk briefed the Committee on the draft protocol on remote participation in Committee meetings.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the draft protocol on remote participation in Committee meetings, which will be implemented forthwith, as well as minor consequential amendments to the Committee's protocol for handling protectively marked meeting papers.

7. Consideration of draft Committee report on the investigation of the referral to the Commissioner for Standards

The Committee undertook formal consideration of the draft report on its self-referral to the Commissioner for Standards for an investigation into an alleged leak of confidential information to the media, as follows:

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Title Page, Table of Contents, Powers and Membership and List of Abbreviations stand part of the report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Introduction section, at paragraphs 1-3, stand part of the report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Background section, at paragraphs 4-11, stand part of the report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Commissioner's key findings section, at paragraph 12, stands part of the report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Committee's follow-up action section, at paragraphs 13-15, stand part of the report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Links to Appendices section, at page 14, stands part of the report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that this report be the fifth report of the Committee on Standards and Privileges in the 2022-27 mandate.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Deputy Chairperson will agree the minutes from the meeting today so that they may be included in the Minutes of Proceedings appendix in the report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the report will be published on the Assembly website at noon on Friday 22 November 2024 and will remain embargoed until then.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to provide the complainant with a copy of the embargoed report in advance of publication in line with normal practice.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that, in line with agreed protocols, a copy of the report will be laid in the Business Office within 48 hours (the Committee noted that the report will be made available for viewing by members once the embargo has expired and that a link to the report will be emailed to all MLAs following publication).

Agreed: The Committee agreed the draft press release, subject to minor editorial amendments, and that it should issue from the Communications Office following publication of the report on the Assembly website.

Agreed: The Committee agreed for the Communications Office to issue a tweet on its behalf, which will signpost the press release.

8. All-Party Group issues

The Deputy Chairperson advised the Committee that the All-Party Group (APG) on Universal Basic Income has failed to comply with the Rules on APGs in relation to holding an AGM and electing a new Chairperson.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the draft letter to issue to the Vice-Chairperson and the membership of the APG on Universal Basic Income to highlight the issue of non-compliance with the Rules and to provide a deadline in that regard.

9. AOB.

None.

10. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting

The Deputy Chairperson reminded members that the agreed adjudication training for the Committee will take place on Wednesday 11 December 2024 at 10.00 a.m. in Room 106 in place of the regular meeting scheduled for that date.

The next meeting of the Committee on Standards and Privileges will take place on Wednesday 15 January 2025 at 10.00 a.m. in Room 106.

The meeting was adjourned at 10.46 a.m.

Connie Egan MLA

Deputy Chairperson, Committee on Standards and Privileges

15 January 2025