



COMMITTEE ON STANDARDS AND PRIVILEGES

WEDNESDAY, 11TH JUNE 2014
ROOM 106, PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS

Present: Mr Alastair Ross (Chairperson)
Mr Cathal Boylan
Ms Paula Bradley
Mr Colum Eastwood
Ms Anna Lo
Mr Declan McAleer
Mr Fra McCann
Mr Ian McCrea
Mrs Sandra Overend

In Attendance: Mr Paul Gill (Assembly Clerk)
Mrs Ashleigh Mitford (Assistant Assembly Clerk)
Mr Jonathan Watson (Clerical Supervisor)

Apologies: Mr Steven Agnew
Mr Mervyn Storey

The meeting commenced at 1.30pm in open session.

Chairperson's Introduction

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the meeting should commence in open session and then move into closed session from agenda item 6.

1.31pm: Mrs Overend joined the meeting

The Chairperson welcomed Committee members to the meeting.

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Mr Agnew

2. Declaration of Interests

The Chairperson reminded Members of their obligation to declare any relevant financial or other interests before and during each Committee meeting.

No interests were declared.

3. Draft minutes of the meeting held on 4th June 2014

Agreed: The draft minutes of the meeting held on 4th June 2014 were agreed by the Committee.

There were no matters arising from the previous meeting.

4. Review of the Code of Conduct: Briefing from the Assembly Research and Library Service - 'Rules on the receipt of gifts and hospitality'

The Clerk reminded the Committee of the background to its request for the research paper 'Rules on the receipt of gifts and hospitality'.

Mr Ray McCaffrey, Assembly Researcher, joined the meeting and was invited to brief the Committee. This was followed by Committee discussion and a question and answer session.

1.42pm: Mr Eastwood joined the meeting

1.59pm: Mr McCann left the meeting

Agreed: Members agreed that they should be provided with further information on what effect the introduction in other legislatures of tighter rules in relation to the receipt of benefits from lobbyists had had on Members being able to undertake overseas visits in relation to matters of public interest.

Agreed: Members agreed that they would discuss with their parties the various issues raised during the session.

The meeting moved into closed session at 2.02pm

5. Review of the Code of Conduct: Consideration of Legal Advice

The Chairperson reminded the Committee of the background to its request for legal advice in relation to members' staff and in relation to the Bribery Act 2010.

Mrs Alice McKelvey, Assembly Legal Advisor, briefed the Committee and answered questions from members.

2.04pm: Mr McCann joined the meeting

2.24pm: Mr Eastwood left the meeting
2.35pm: Mr McCann left the meeting
2.44pm: Mr McAleer joined the meeting
2.49pm: Ms Bradley left the meeting

Agreed: The Committee agreed that there could be merit in including within the Code of Conduct a duty on Members to ensure their staff uphold high standards of conduct.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Clerk would bring further detail to the Committee around possible approaches to this issue.

The Clerk updated the Committee in relation to updating the Ministry of Justice on the implementation of the GRECO recommendations.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Clerk should respond to the Ministry of Justice on the implementation of these recommendations.

6. Correspondence from the Northern Ireland Assembly Commissioner for Standards on complaints against Members

Members noted the Clerk's Papers and related items of correspondence, dated 27th May 2014, 6th June 2014 and 3rd June 2014, from the Assembly Commissioner for Standards on complaints against three Members.

The Chairperson welcomed Mr Douglas Bain, Northern Ireland Assembly Commissioner for Standards, and invited him to brief the Committee on these items of correspondence. The Commissioner answered members' questions.

2.52pm: Ms Bradley joined the meeting
3.00pm: Ms Lo left the meeting

The Chairperson thanked Mr Bain who left the meeting.

Agreed: The Committee agreed with the conclusion of the Assembly Commissioner for Standards that all three complaints against the three Members are inadmissible.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Clerk write to the Members complained of and the complainants enclosing a copy of the Commissioner's correspondence and informing them of the Committee's decision.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Clerk write to the Commissioner informing him of the Committee's decisions.

7. Any other business

The Committee noted correspondence from the OFMdfM Committee in relation to the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission's annual budget.

The Committee noted the revised guides to the powers and operation of statutory and standing committees for chairpersons and members.

8. Time, date and place of next meeting

The Chairperson advised Members that the next meeting will take place on 25th June 2014 at 1.30pm in room 106.

The Chairperson adjourned the meeting at 3.03 pm

Mr Alastair Ross MLA

Chairperson, Committee on Standards and Privileges

25th June 2014