



COMMITTEE ON STANDARDS AND PRIVILEGES

WEDNESDAY, 26TH NOVEMBER 2014
ROOM 106, PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS

Present: Mr Alastair Ross (Chairperson)
Ms Anna Lo (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Steven Agnew
Mr Cathal Boylan
Mr Colum Eastwood
Mr David Hilditch
Mr Fra McCann
Mr Ian McCrea
Mr Robin Newton
Mrs Sandra Overend

In Attendance: Mr Paul Gill (Assembly Clerk)
Mrs Hilary Cleland Bogle (Assistant Assembly Clerk)
Mr Jonathan Kerr (Clerical Officer)

Apologies: Mr Declan McAleer

Chairperson's Introduction

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the meeting should be held in closed session.

The meeting commenced at 1.30pm in closed session.

The Chairperson welcomed Committee members to the meeting.

1. Apologies

As above.

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.

Mr Agnew and Mr Eastwood declared an interest as members of the proposed All-Party Group on Housing.

3. Draft minutes

Agreed: The draft minutes of the meeting held on 5th November 2014 were agreed by the Committee.

4. Matters arising

There were no matters arising.

1.34pm Mr Hilditch joined the meeting.

5. Committee Report

Members noted the Clerk's Paper; the draft Committee Report; and various related papers.

1.47pm Mr Hilditch left the meeting.

Agreed: Members discussed and agreed the draft Committee Report paragraph by paragraph and ordered that the report (as amended) be printed today.

Agreed: Members agreed that the Committee Report should be embargoed until 12.00 noon on Friday, 28th November 2014.

Agreed: Members agreed the draft press release and the media handling arrangements.

Agreed: Members agreed that the two individuals who are the subjects of the Report should receive an advanced copy of the embargoed Report.

1.54pm Mr Hilditch returned to the meeting.

1.55pm Mr Eastwood left the meeting.

6. Correspondence

Members noted correspondence from the Assembly Commissioner for Standards on a complaint against a Member.

The Chairperson welcomed Mr Bain, Assembly Commissioner for Standards to the meeting and invited him to brief the Committee on his correspondence.

The Chairperson thanked Mr Bain and asked him to remain in the meeting for the next agenda item.

Agreed: The Committee agreed with the Assembly Commissioner for Standards' conclusion that the complaint was inadmissible.

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

7. Review of the Code of Conduct

Members noted the Clerk's Paper; the draft new Code of Conduct; and other relevant papers.

The Clerk briefed the Committee on the background to this issue.

2.06pm Mr Newton left the meeting.

2.08pm Mr McCann left the meeting.

Agreed: Following discussion the Committee agreed it was broadly content–

- (a) with the structure of the Code (i.e. with separate aspirational principles and enforceable rules);
- (b) with the purpose of the Code;
- (c) with the scope of the Code;
- (d) that versions of each of the eleven principles should be included; and
- (e) that versions of each of the twenty rules should be included.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that its preference was for the Code to be supplemented by a Guide which would explain the application of, and how to comply with, the Code of Conduct and that the Committee should have the role of agreeing such a Guide.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the draft Code of Conduct should be taken back to parties for consideration; and that any final comments from the parties should be forwarded within two weeks. Following this, Legal Services should be consulted on the drafting and other legal issues.

The Committee noted that that it could amend the draft Code of Conduct at a later date as it has not been formally agreed.

2.21pm Mr McCann returned to the meeting.

8. Petition

Members noted that in response to the Spotlight programme broadcast on Tuesday, 18th November 2014 a Petition has been established by Change.org. and that the Petition has received 88 signatures to date.

The Clerk briefed the Committee on this issue.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it should write to the Independent Financial Review Panel and the Assembly Commission in relation to the relevant matters raised in the programme.

9. Application for an All-Party Group

The Committee considered an application for an All-Party Group on Housing.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to the formation of an All-Party Group on Housing.

10. Any other business

The Chairperson informed members that this would be his last meeting as Chairperson of the Committee. The Chairperson thanked the members for the manner in which they conducted themselves and the support that was given to him as Chairperson. The Chairperson also thanked the committee staff.

Members expressed their thanks to the Chairperson for his commitment, hard work and leadership.

11. Date, time and place of next meeting

Members agreed that the Committee staff would inform members of the date of the next meeting.

The Chairperson adjourned the meeting at 2.35pm.

Mr Jimmy Spratt MLA
Chairperson, Committee on Standards and Privileges
21 January 2014