

MINUTES OF MEETING

Date: 6th November 2001
Time: 9 a.m.
Venue: Room A3.13

8.2 The Deputy Presiding Officer welcomed David Melding to the meeting. He was grateful that the Business Committee had been given an opportunity to comment on the Standards Committee's proposals before a report was made to the Assembly.

8.3 David Melding introduced paper BC251-01 which proposed changes to Standing Order 4 and the associated guidance in order to clarify the requirements for Members to register and declare indirect interests. He said that the Standards Committee had looked in detail at the issue. It had concluded that the concept of indirect interests was no longer sustainable and that there should be a requirement for Members to register the interests of their spouse and dependent children.

8.4 The Deputy Presiding Officer said that he had a number of reservations about such a major change. It might be difficult for a Member to establish whether a spouse or dependent child had a relevant interest and this inadvertence could lead to Police investigations. David Melding said that it would be incumbent upon a Member to take reasonable action to inform those concerned of the requirements. The Deputy Presiding Officer also asked whether the proposals would create a new anomaly because there would no longer be a requirement to register the interests of dependent children over the age of 16 or other relatives who might have interests in relation to Assembly proceedings. He also commented on the desirability of a de minimis provision and the need for sensible thresholds in relation to pecuniary interests.

8.5 Peter Black said that he was content with the proposal in principle. He noted that local authority rules were different and he asked for clear guidance to be issued to Members on any changes. William Graham said that his group had been advised to keep a record of what they had been offered and refused. He also suggested a possible deminimus procedure based upon notice of a breach. David Melding thanked the Committee for their comments which he would convey to the Committee on Standards of Conduct.