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This Infosheet is the third in a series produced by the OCLA to explain the work of the Legislative Assembly of Samoa

Infosheets in this series include

1 Legislative Assembly of Samoa

2 Legislation

3 Committees

4 Parliamentary words and expressions

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Infosheets on a range of topics will be added to this series in the future

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3 PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEES

WHAT IS A PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE?

A Parliamentary Committee is a small group of Members of the Legislative Assembly who are appointed by the Assembly to assist with its work. By their nature and by the powers the Assembly confers on them, these Committees are better equipped than



Select Committee Members at work.

the Assembly as a whole to carry out certain kinds of work, such as detailed examination of the provisions of bills (proposed laws) and specific issues. Unlike the Assembly as a whole, Committees are well-equipped to receive written submissions and to question people who can inform them about the issues the Assembly wants them to consider. This Infosheet discusses in general terms the work of Legislative Assembly Committees.

ROLES AND POWERS

Committees are important to the parliamentary system: each is responsible for completing the investigation and oversight role allocated by the Assembly. They are also important for the way they bring 'parliament to the people': they enable the public to be involved in the work of their parliament.

The Assembly may appoint two types of Committees and each type has a specific **role**:

- Select Committees are usually standing committees—lasting for the life of the Parliament—and overseeing particular areas of Government administration. Between them, they can scrutinise all areas of Government activity. Some Select Committees have a 'domestic' purpose, focusing on the Assembly's rules and arrangements and matters of parliamentary privilege and ethics.

- Ad Hoc Committees are appointed for a specific purpose and for a limited time. Once they have reported

on the issue that they were appointed to investigate they are dissolved.

Powers

When they are performing their duties, Committees have the same powers and privileges as the Assembly. The Assembly's standing orders (rules) also provide them with particular powers—typical of the powers of parliamentary committees around the world. They give Committees power and flexibility by enabling them to:



Finance Select Committee Members discussing 2013-2014 budget. #1

- send for—summons—persons, papers and records relevant to their proceedings and
- meet in places away from the Assembly, if the Speaker agrees.

These powers enable Committees to obtain all the information they need to fulfill their responsibilities. The Assembly can ensure that requests for persons, papers and records are complied with and that the evidence given to its Committees is truthful. Equally it can ensure that the people who comply with requests of Committees are given reasonable protection. The Assembly's standing orders also regulate the way that its Committees may meet and make decisions. This whole framework enables Committee members and those who interact with them to understand and comply with their responsibilities.

These powers enable Committees to obtain all the information they need

Most interaction by Committees is with Ministry staff but that is not always the case. When Committee are considering bills they may ask the Attorney General's Office for assistance, as well as staff from the responsible ministry or corporation. Committees may also request or, if necessary, direct individuals and organisations to attend and assist with evidence relevant to their inquiries.

When Committees consider bills, they may also invite members of the public to provide written submissions (and these need not be in any particular format). This is a good opportunity for members of the public to contribute to parliamentary work and inform Committees about the views of different people and groups.



Government Ministry Representatives during Finance Committee Enquiry.

COMMITTEES, THEIR WORK, AND THE RESPONSE TO THAT WORK

Committees

Currently there are 11 Standing Select Committees, each with seven members appointed for the duration of a Parliament. A list of Committees is posted 'in such a place as directed by the Speaker' and can be found on the Assembly's Order Paper on sitting days.

Nature of Committee work and follow-up

Select Committees consider matters referred by the Assembly. In effect, this requires them to report on bills that are referred after the second reading stage in the Assembly (when the Speaker identifies the relevant Committee to inquire and report), and on the annual reports of Government ministries and organisations that are presented to the Assembly and become Parliamentary Papers. Such Papers are distributed to the most appropriate Select Committee for inquiry and report within three months from the date of referral. (*See the Infosheet on Legislation for more detail on inquiries into bills.*)

Ad Hoc Committees are established usually when there is no relevant Select Committee to investigate an issue. They operate in similar ways to Select Committees but the scope of their work, and their life, is strictly confined.

Just as Committees are established by the Assembly, and carry out the work it requests, they also report back to the Assembly when their work is complete. Reports take the form of written documents agreed to by the Committee, outlining the Committee's findings and its recommendations. The Assembly's standing orders provide for the Government to present to the Assembly a response to recommendations in a Select Committee report within 90 days of the report being adopted (accepted) by the Assembly. In this way Committees facilitate the examination and passage of information between the Assembly and the Government.



Finance Select Committee Members discussing 2013-2014 #2

MORE INFORMATION:

Parliamentary Practice and Procedure Manual, 2012, Legislative Assembly of Samoa

Legislative Assembly of Samoa: www.parliament.gov.ws

Standing Orders of the Legislative Assembly of Samoa, 2010

The Legislative Assembly Powers and Privileges Ordinance 1960