



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee on Standards

Minutes of Proceedings

1 July 2026

Meeting Location: Room 106, Parliament Buildings

Present:

Cathy Mason MLA (Chairperson)

In attendance by video or teleconference:

Connie Egan (Deputy Chairperson)

Keith Buchanan MLA

Stewart Dickson MLA

Paul Frew MLA

Declan McAleer MLA

Emma Sheerin MLA

Apologies:

Trevor Clarke MLA

Mark Durkan MLA

In Attendance:

Shane McAteer, Committee Clerk

Ashleigh Mitford, Senior Assistant Clerk

Elaine Farrell, Assistant Clerk

Laura Gourley, Clerical Supervisor

Alison Ferguson, Clerical Officer

The meeting commenced at 10.03 a.m. in closed session, in accordance with agreed procedure.

1. Apologies

As above.

2. Declaration of interests

The Chairperson advised Committee 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.

The Chairperson advised the Committee that Trevor Clarke has indicated to the Committee Clerk that he will recuse himself from all consideration of the complaint case under agenda item 5.

Stewart Dickson declared an interest in relation to the complaint case to be considered under agenda item 5 in that he is a member of the Committee referred to in the Commissioner for Standards' complaint investigation report.

3. Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 10 June 2026.

4. Matters Arising

The Committee considered correspondence from the Committee for the Executive Office, dated 5 June 2026, in respect of guidance on witnesses using abusive language and making overly political statements or comments.

Agreed: The Committee agreed a draft response for issue to the Committee for the Executive Office to advise that the Committee on Standards has no role in relation to the conduct and contribution of witnesses at committee meetings.

5. Complaints against a Member – Committee deliberation

Connie Egan declared an interest in relation to the complaint case to be considered under this agenda item, in that she was a member of the Committee referred to in the Commissioner's complaint investigation report.

Emma Sheerin declared an interest in relation to the complaint case to be considered under this agenda item, in that she was a member of the Committee referred to in the Commissioner's complaint investigation report.

Agreed: In order to assist members attending remotely in deliberating on the case, the Committee agreed to display the applicable restricted papers on screen during this agenda item.

The Committee Clerk introduced this agenda item. The Committee deliberated on the complaint case taking into consideration: the briefing by the Commissioner at the meeting on 10 June 2026; the written and oral response from the respondent; and the response from the Commissioner to the correspondence from the respondent.

Paul Frew left the meeting at 10.40 a.m.

Paul Frew rejoined the meeting at 10.43 a.m.

Following discussion, there was no consensus reached on the outcome of the case. As such, the Chairperson put the question that the Committee accepts the Commissioner's conclusion that the Member has breached Rule 5 of the Assembly Code of Conduct and failed to uphold the Principles of Openness and Leadership.

The Committee divided: Ayes 4; Noes 3; Abstain 0.

AYES

Keith Buchanan

Stewart Dickson

Connie Egan

Paul Frew

NOES

Cathy Mason

Declan McAleer

Emma Sheerin

The proposal was carried.

Agreed: In light of its decision that the respondent has breached Rule 5 of the Assembly Code of Conduct and failed to uphold the Principles of Openness and Leadership, the Committee agreed to request that the respondent provides an apology in writing to allow it to report to the Assembly that the matter has been resolved.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to highlight in its report on the complaint case that more detailed guidance is needed on the interpretation and application of Rule 5, in particular what is considered to be a 'matter under consideration', and to propose suitable amendments to the Guide to the Rules as appropriate.

6. Draft report on proposed updates to the Assembly Code of Conduct and the Guide to the Rules Relating to the Conduct of Members

The Senior Assistant Clerk introduced this agenda item and explained the tracked changes that have been made to the existing Code and Guide, which is appended to the draft report at Appendix 1.

Agreed: The Committee agreed Appendix 1 as drafted and that it stands part of the report.

The Committee undertook formal consideration of the draft report 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 1-4, stands part of the report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that 'Background' section on the Unacceptable Behaviours Policy, at paragraphs 5-22, stands part of the report, subject to a minor amendment at paragraph 12.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the 'Members' legal requirements under PPERA', section at paragraph 23, stands part of the report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the 'Change to the name of the Committee' section at paragraph 24, stands part of the report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the 'Clarificatory amendments to the Code' section, at paragraphs 25-33, stands part of the report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the 'Other minor amendments proposed' section, at paragraph 34, stands part of the report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the 'Summary of proposed updates' section, at paragraphs 35-45, stands part of the report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the 'Next steps' section, at paragraphs 46-47, subject to minor amendments at sub-paragraphs 47 (c) and (d), stands part of the report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the 'Links to Appendices' stand part of the report, noting that Appendix 1 has already been agreed, and that Appendix 5 will be removed from the report as it is not required.

Noted: The Committee noted that Committee staff will make any necessary redactions to the Electoral Commission correspondence, which was noted at the meeting on 12 November 2025, to ensure data protection obligations are met.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the report be the thirteenth report of the Committee on Standards in the 2022-2027 Mandate.

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

Noted: The Committee noted that an embargoed copy of the report will be laid in the Business Office as soon as practicable and circulated to all MLAs once the date of the debate is known.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that, in the meantime, embargoed copies of the report will be issued to the Assembly Commission, the Electoral Commission and senior Assembly staff for information.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the draft Committee Motion, which will be laid in the Business Office for scheduling for plenary debate at a later date.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the draft Press Release for issue at the appropriate time.

Noted: The Committee noted that, in line with normal practice, the Communications Office will issue a short, factual tweet to signpost the Press Release, at the appropriate time.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the letter to the Committee on Procedures requesting it to take forward the amendments to Standing Orders to widen the scope of the rectification procedures to cover the Unacceptable Behaviours Policy.

7. All-Party Group issues

The Assistant Clerk spoke to this agenda item.

Keith Buchanan declared an interest in that he is a member of the All-Party Group (APG) referred to under this agenda item.

Stewart Dickson declared an interest in that he is a member of the APG referred to under this agenda item.

Connie Egan declared an interest in that she is a member of the APG referred to under this agenda item.

Paul Frew declared an interest in that he is a member of the APG referred to under this agenda item.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the draft letter to the APG on Further and Higher Education in respect of its AGM scheduled for September 2026.

8. Correspondence

Noted: The Committee noted the correspondence from the Commissioner, dated 24 June 2026, advising that his Annual Report 2025-26 has been laid in the Business Office, and that the Commissioner will brief the Committee on the report at the meeting in September 2026.

9. AOB

Agreed: The Committee agreed to delegate authority to the Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson to submit views on releasing or withholding information in any non-routine or contentious Freedom of Information requests received by the Committee during the summer recess period.

Noted: The Committee noted the meeting dates for the period September-December 2026 which were previously agreed at the meeting on 10 June 2026.

10. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting

The next meeting of the Committee is scheduled to take place on Wednesday 23 September 2026 at 10.00 a.m. in Room 106.

The meeting was adjourned at 11.39 a.m.

Cathy Mason MLA

Chairperson, Committee on Standards and Privileges

2 July 2026