

**The Speaker**

Room 39
Parliament Buildings
Ballymiscaw
Stormont
Belfast, BT4 3XX

Tel: +44 (0) 28 9052 1130
email: speaker@niassembly.gov.uk

To: All Assembly Members

24 September 2026

Dear Member

Tone and Conduct Within Recent Assembly Debates

It is three weeks since the Assembly returned in September and there is much work to do before the end of the mandate.

At this point, it appears that the changes regarding Members' Bills, recommended by the Committee on Procedures, are being effective in seeking to reduce potential bottlenecks later and the detrimental impact they could have on scrutiny.

The Second Stages of all Members Bills will have been completed by the end of September. In the last mandate, it was not until the end of November 2021 that most Members' Bills completed their Second Stages. Much depends on the time taken for the essential detail of committee scrutiny, and whether any further legislation comes from the Executive. Nonetheless, those additional two months should be valuable in reducing pressure on the time for scrutiny.

However, the more significant risk to business at this point is the state of relationships and conduct across the Assembly Chamber. There is no issue with expressing opposing political views on the floor of the Assembly. The Assembly exists so that our differences are expressed through the democratic process, and not on our streets.

Members will also know that it is a priority for me to protect freedom of expression and challenge to enable the robust scrutiny of legislation. While I have a high threshold for passionate debate, I am concerned about the aggressive tone and language of some exchanges of late. On too many occasions over the last few weeks, behaviour across the House has risked becoming disruptive and disorderly, with all parties being involved to different levels.

It is of course natural that if there are high political tensions, these will affect every aspect of the Assembly, its committees and the Executive. In the context of having served 28 years at the Assembly, including through many crises, I have to observe how difficult it is proving at the moment to conduct the Assembly's routine functions and day to day business.

There is a balance to be struck. On the one hand, there has to be proper time given for thorough scrutiny to be conducted and for Members to raise concerns on behalf of constituents. On the other, all Members, Ministers and parties have to have confidence that their own business will have a fair opportunity to be decided by the Assembly within the appropriate procedures.

As Speaker, it is my role to uphold the Assembly's scrutiny function, to ensure that order is maintained in the Chamber and to enable the Assembly to decide on the business in front of it. I will do what I have to in order to achieve that.

However, this should be done with the cooperation of all Members. I encourage all Members to recognise that strongly held and opposing views can be expressed passionately within our standards of debate of good temper, moderation, courtesy and respect. I am therefore recirculating the principles of debate which I issued to all Members in June 2025. I particularly draw the attention of Members to paragraphs 9 to 16 in relation to tone and temper, and language and content.

I also encourage Members that if someone draws their attention to the fact that they have found something said by another offensive or distasteful, they should be prepared to reflect upon, and respond to, that perspective. None of us in the Assembly are infallible.

That includes those of us in the Chair. In this environment, it is challenging for myself and the Deputy Speakers to deal with every issue in a way that satisfies everyone. Frankly, there are more issues being raised in some debates at the moment than are reasonable for my office to deal with. No matter how any matter is dealt with, it is out of order for any Member to challenge the Chair. The Deputy Speakers and I routinely review and reflect on the management of debates ourselves and the last few weeks are no different.

I have written to a number of Members directly on some of the most serious incidents of conduct over the past few weeks and will continue to do so.

However, it would be in the interests of everyone if some greater dignity and decorum was to return to the handling of our business in the time ahead. I ask all Members to play their role in that.

Yours Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ed Poots', written in a cursive style.

**EDWIN POOTS MLA
SPEAKER**