



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee on Standards and Privileges

Minutes of Proceedings

18 June 2025

Meeting Location: Room 106, Parliament Buildings

Present:

Connie Egan (Deputy Chairperson)

Jemma Dolan MLA

Harry Harvey MLA

Brian Kingston MLA

Present by video or teleconference:

Declan McAleer MLA

Colin McGrath MLA

Apologies:

Cathy Mason MLA (Chairperson)

Stewart Dickson MLA

Paul Frew MLA

In Attendance:

Shane McAteer, Committee Clerk

Ashleigh Mitford, Senior Assistant Clerk

Elaine Farrell, Assistant Clerk

Alison Ferguson, Clerical Supervisor

The meeting commenced at 10.01 a.m. in closed session.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to consider agenda item 6 before agenda item 5 in order to facilitate the attendance of the Commissioner for Standards in briefing the Committee on both items.

1. Apologies

As above.

2. Declaration of interests

The Chairperson advised 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.

Connie Egan declared an interest that she is a member of the proposed All-Party Group (APG) on Online Safety for Children and Young People, to be considered under agenda item 7.

Harry Harvey declared an interest that he is a member of the APG on Construction, that has requested to change its name to the APG on Built Environment and the APG on Aerospace, Defence, Security and Space that has requested to change its name to the APG on Aerospace and Space, to be considered under agenda item 7.

3. Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 4 June 2025.

4. Matters Arising

None.

Colin McGrath joined the meeting online at 10.04 a.m.

5. The Commissioner for Standards Annual Report 2024-25

The Assembly Commissioner for Standards, Dr Melissa McCullough, joined the meeting at 10.15 a.m.

The Commissioner briefed the Committee on her Annual Report 2024-25 and this was followed by a question and answer session.

Noted: The Committee noted the Assembly Commissioner for Standards Annual Report 2024-25.

The Deputy Chairperson thanked the Commissioner for her briefing and paid tribute to her work as the Commissioner during her term of office, which would end in September 2025.

6. Complaint against a member – briefing from the Commissioner for Standards

The Deputy Chairperson advised the Committee that the respondent in the complaint case did not provide a written response to the Commissioner's investigation report nor indicate that they wished to appear before the Committee.

The Commissioner for Standards briefed the Committee on the complaint investigation report. This was followed by a question and answer session.

The Deputy Chairperson thanked the Commissioner for her attendance at the meeting.

The Commissioner left the meeting at 10.45 a.m.

The Committee deliberated on the complaint case as presented in the Commissioner's investigation report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that no further information was required from the Commissioner to enable it to decide on the complaint case.

Agreed: The Committee agreed with the Commissioner's conclusion that the respondent has breached Rule 12 of the Code of Conduct.

Noted: The Committee noted that it has previously highlighted the importance of maintaining confidentiality during the complaints process, including in terms of safeguarding the fairness and integrity of the process and avoiding unnecessary reputational damage to any of the parties involved.

The Committee discussed the specific circumstances of the case and the range of available options in terms of the next steps in light of the finding that the respondent has breached Rule 12 of the Code of Conduct.

Brain Kingston proposed that, in order to seek to resolve a matter, the respondent is asked to provide an apology in writing which would allow the Committee to report that the matter had been resolved.

Colin McGrath expressed his opposition to the proposal, on the basis that it may prove futile.

The Deputy Chairperson put the question on Mr Kingston's proposal to the Committee "that the Committee seeks an apology in writing from the respondent, which would allow the Committee to report to the Assembly that the matter has been resolved".

The Committee divided: Ayes 5; Noes 1; Abstentions 0.

AYES:

Jemma Dolan

Connie Egan

Harry Harvey

Brian Kingston

Declan McAleer

NOES:

Colin McGrath

The proposal was carried.

The Committee noted that the Committee Clerk will therefore contact the respondent to advise them that the Committee agrees with the Commissioner's conclusion that there has been a breach of Rule 12 of the Code of Conduct and to request that the respondent provides an appropriate apology in writing to the Committee to enable it to report to the Assembly that the matter has been resolved.

7. APG issues

The Assistant Clerk briefed the Committee on the proposal for an APG on Online Safety for Children and Young People.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content to approve the establishment of an APG on Online Safety for Children and Young People.

The Committee considered correspondence from the Chairperson of the APG on Construction requesting that the name of the Group be changed to the "APG on Built Environment".

Agreed: the Committee agreed to request clarification from the Chairperson of the APG on Construction on whether the purpose of the APG will remain the same.

The Committee considered correspondence from the Chairperson of the APG on Aerospace, Defence, Security and Space which requested that the name the Group be changed to the "APG on Aerospace and Space" and which explained the reason for the request.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content to approve the change in the name of the Group to the APG on Aerospace and Space.

Colin McGrath left the meeting at 10.56 a.m.

8. Correspondence

Agreed: The Committee noted the correspondence from a member of the public, dated 9 June 2025, regarding a complaint against two MLAs and agreed the draft letter of response.

Agreed: The Committee noted the correspondence from the Chairperson of the Assembly and Executive Review Committee, dated 11 June 2025, on the adjudication of complaints against Ministers of alleged breaches of the Ministerial Code of Conduct and agreed to consider this further at a future meeting of the Committee.

9. Any other business

None.

10. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting

The Deputy Chairperson reminded members that the second part of the adjudication training will take place on Wednesday 2 July 2025 at 9.30 a.m. in room 106, followed by the regular Committee meeting at 11.45 a.m.

The meeting was adjourned at 11.05 a.m.

Cathy Mason MLA

Chairperson, Committee on Standards and Privileges

2 July 2025