Committee on Standards and Privileges

Minutes of Proceedings

15 October 2025

Meeting Location: Room 106, Parliament Buildings

Present:

Cathy Mason MLA (Chairperson)

Connie Egan (Deputy Chairperson)

Brian Kingston MLA

Apologies:

Stewart Dickson MLA

Harry Harvey MLA

In attendance by video or teleconference:

Jemma Dolan MLA

Mark Durkan MLA

Paul Frew MLA

Declan McAleer MLA

In Attendance:

Shane McAteer, Committee Clerk

Ashleigh Mitford, Senior Assistant Clerk

Elaine Farrell, Assistant Clerk

Alison Ferguson, Clerical Supervisor

Laura Gourley, Clerical Officer

Maeve Corrigan, Legal Advisor (agenda item 5)

Holly Groves, Legal Trainee (agenda item 5)

The meeting commenced at 10.05 a.m. in closed session

1. Apologies

As above.

Agreed: The Committee noted that Harry Harvey has indicated that he will be leaving the Committee and agreed to record its appreciation to Mr Harvey for his work on the Committee.

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 in relation to agenda item 5, in being a member of the Assembly Committee referred to in the complaint under consideration, and advised that she would recuse herself from that agenda item given the extent of that interest.

Brian Kingston declared an interest in relation to the item 5, in being a member of the Assembly Committee referred to in the complaint under consideration.

Mark Durkan declared an interest regarding agenda item 6, in relation to a cousin referenced in the Commissioner for Standards complaint investigation report.

3. Minutes

Noted: The Committee noted that the minutes of the meeting held on 10 September 2025 had previously been agreed by the Chairperson following the delegation of authority by the Committee to do so, in order that the minutes could be included in a Committee report published on 12 September 2025.

4. Matters Arising

Noted: The Committee noted that the All-Party Group (APG) on Tourette's and the APG on Preventing Loneliness have been removed from the Register due to non-compliance with the Rules in respect of the requirement to hold an AGM.

Noted: The Committee noted that, following the announcement by the Speaker that the newly appointed Commissioner for Standards, Mark McEwan, would be stepping down from his post due to his appointment as the Deputy Chief Constable for the Surrey Constabulary, the recruitment competition had produced a list of appointable candidates and that the Assembly Commission is going through a process of pre-appointment checks and will nominate a new Commissioner for Standards as soon as possible.

Noted: The Committee noted that, following its consideration of the draft Unacceptable Behaviours Policy, the Policy has now been forwarded to the Assembly Commission for its consideration and approval.

Connie Egan left the meeting at 10.10 a.m.

5. Complaint against a Member – briefing by Legal Services

The Committee Clerk introduced this agenda item to the Committee.

The Assembly Legal Advisor, Maeve Corrigan, and Legal Trainee, Holly Groves joined the meeting at 10.12 a.m.

The Legal Advisor briefed the Committee on a range of issues in respect of the complaint case against a member. This was followed by a question and answer session.

The Chairperson thanked the Legal Advisor for her briefing.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to advise the respondent that the Committee has read their written response to the (former) Commissioner's investigation report and that the format of their oral hearing on 12 November 2025 will be a 10 minute opening statement, followed by questions from members.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to share the (former) Commissioner's written response to the respondent's written response to the investigation report, with the respondent prior to the oral hearing for information.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to commission legal advice on whether a third party can attend with a respondent at an oral hearing and, if so, on what role the third party would have.

Connie Egan rejoined the meeting at 10.58 a.m.

6. Complaint against a Member – consideration of the Commissioner's report

In the absence of a current Commissioner for Standards, the Committee Clerk briefed the Committee on the (former) Commissioner's investigation report on the complaint case to be considered under this agenda item.

Mark Durkan left the meeting at 11.00 a.m.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to commission legal advice on whether there is any legal requirement on, or barrier to, the Committee offering the former Commissioner the opportunity to respond the respondent's criticism of her investigation report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request that the respondent provides a copy of the press statement referenced in the complaint for completeness, while it noted that the respondent has not disputed the accuracy of how the press statement was quoted in the complaint.

Declan McAleer left the meeting at 11.15 a.m.

7. Complaints against a Minister – consideration of the Commissioner's report

In the absence of a current Commissioner for Standards, the Committee Clerk briefed the Committee on the (former) Commissioner's investigation report on the complaint case to be considered under this agenda item.

Noted: The Committee noted that, unlike the position with complaints made under the MLA Code of Conduct, it does not have an adjudication function in relation to complaints made under the Ministerial Code of Conduct.

Noted: The Committee considered and noted a written submission from the respondent which was made in response to the (former) Commissioner's investigation report.

Agreed: The Committee, in noting that the respondent had indicated that they would like to avail of an oral hearing to present their response to the investigation report, agreed to advise the respondent that an oral hearing will be scheduled if the respondent still wishes to take up the offer in light of being advised that the Committee does not have an adjudication role in respect of ministerial complaints.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to commission legal advice on whether there is any legal requirement on, or barrier to, the Committee offering the former Commissioner the opportunity to respond to the respondent's criticism of her report.

8. Further consideration of a complaint case

The Committee considered correspondence, dated 21 July 2025, from the then Commissioner which referred a complaint to the Committee for further consideration of a decision that the complaint was inadmissible.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it concurs with the then Commissioner's decision that the complaint is inadmissible.

Paul Frew left the meeting at 11.39 a.m.

9. Further consideration of a complaint case

The Committee considered correspondence, dated 13 August 2025, from the then Commissioner which referred a complaint to the Committee for further consideration of a decision that the complaint was inadmissible.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it concurs with the then Commissioner's decision that the complaint is inadmissible.

10. Draft End of Session Report

The Committee considered the draft End of Session Report for the period 3 February 2024 - 31 August 2025

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content with the Remit, Powers and Membership section of the report, subject to an amendment to a date in the footnote.

The Committee considered the Key Activities, Outputs and Achievements section of the report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content with paragraphs 1 and 2 of the report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content with paragraphs 3 - 5 of the report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content with paragraph 6 of the report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content with paragraphs 7 and 8 of the report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content with paragraphs 9 - 11 of the report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content with paragraph 12 of the report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content with paragraphs 13 and 14 of the report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that is was content with paragraphs 15 and 16 of the report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that is was content with paragraphs 17 - 19 of the report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that is was content with paragraph 20 of the report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content with paragraph 21 of the report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content with paragraph 22 of the report and with the Appendix on Committee Expenditure.

Noted: The Committee noted that the End of Session report will be published on the Committee webpage in due course

11. Correspondence

None.

12. Forward Work Programme

Noted: The Committee noted the Forward Work Programme, which is subject to change.

13. Any other business

None.

14. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting

The next meeting of the Committee is scheduled to take place on Wednesday 12 November 2025 at 10.00 a.m. in Room 106.

The meeting was adjourned at 11.46 a.m.

Cathy Mason MLA

Chairperson, Committee on Standards and Privileges

12 November 2025