



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee on Standards and Privileges

Minutes of Proceedings

11 February 2026

Meeting Location: Room 106, Parliament Buildings

Present:

Cathy Mason MLA (Chairperson)

Connie Egan (Deputy Chairperson)

Stewart Dickson MLA

Brian Kingston MLA

Apologies:

Harry Harvey MLA

In attendance by video or teleconference:

Mark Durkan MLA

Paul Frew MLA

Declan McAleer MLA

Emma Sheerin MLA

In Attendance:

Shane McAteer, Committee Clerk

Ashleigh Mitford, Senior Assistant Clerk

Elaine Farrell, Assistant Clerk

Laura Gourley, Clerical Supervisor

Alison Ferguson, Clerical Officer

John Hart, Head of Communications (agenda item 4)

The meeting commenced at 10.03 a.m. in closed session

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 in relation to correspondence being considered under agenda item 4 (Matters Arising) and advised that she would recuse herself from the relevant agenda item.

3. Minutes

Noted: The Committee noted that the minutes of the meeting held on 21 January 2026 had previously been agreed by the Chairperson following delegation of authority by the Committee to do so, in order that the minutes could be included in a Committee report published on 2 February 2026.

Connie Egan left the meeting at 10.05 a.m.

4. Matters Arising

The Committee Clerk briefed the Committee on the proposed letter of apology template, which will be used in complaint cases where the Committee agrees that an apology from the respondent is an appropriate means of resolving the complaint.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to adopt the letter of apology template for relevant complaint cases going forward.

Agreed: The Committee noted the correspondence, dated 26 January 2026, from a respondent in a recent complaint case and agreed that the Clerk to issue a response on behalf of the Committee as discussed.

Paul Frew joined the meeting at 10.13 a.m.

Agreed: The Committee noted the correspondence from a Member, dated 27 January 2026, calling on the Committee to make additional redactions to an appendix to a recently published Committee report on a complaint against a Minister. Having noted the legal advice received, the Committee agreed that it will respond to the Member to advise that the Committee has decided against making the requested redactions, including on the basis that there is no legal reason for the data to be withheld.

Agreed: The Committee noted the correspondence from an individual, dated 2 February 2026, raising concerns around the Committee's approach to a recent report on a complaint against a Member and agreed its response for issue to the correspondent.

Noted: The Committee noted the separate correspondence from the Speaker and from Mr John Hart, Head of Communications, on the recent breach, by a media outlet, of the embargo on a Committee report on a complaint case.

Mr John Hart, Head of Communications, joined the meeting at 10.23 a.m. and briefed the Committee on the matter.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

The Chairperson thanked Mr Hart for his briefing.

Mr Hart left the meeting at 10.42 a.m.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to Mr Hart to request that the Committee is kept informed on the outcome of the action being taken as a result of the recent breach, by a media outlet, of the embargo on a Committee report on a complaint case.

Connie Egan rejoined the meeting at 10.48 a.m.

Emma Sheerin joined the meeting at 10.49 a.m.

5. Complaints against a member – consideration of a draft Committee report

The Committee Clerk briefed the Committee on an item of correspondence received from the respondent in the complaint case. The respondent had raised concerns about the conduct of a member of the Committee during a Plenary debate on 10 February 2026.

Mr Kingston recused himself from the consideration of the matter and the business under this agenda item, without prejudice to the outcome of the matter, and left the meeting at 10.53 a.m.

Noted: The Committee noted that the draft report scheduled for consideration at today's meeting reflected the conclusions and decisions which the Committee had made on the case, at its meeting on 3 December 2025, which predated the Plenary debate referred to in the respondent's correspondence.

Noted: The Committee noted that, if the respondent has a complaint of an alleged breach of the MLA Code of Conduct by any Committee member, they should direct that complaint to the independent Commissioner for Standards.

Agreed: The Committee agreed, given the above circumstances, that it would proceed with consideration of the draft report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed for the Committee Clerk to write to the respondent to set out the Committee's decision to proceed with its consideration of the draft 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 1-2, stands part of the report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that 'Role of the Committee' section, at paragraphs 3-4, stands part of the report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the 'Background' section, at paragraphs 5-8, stands part of the report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the 'Relevant rules in the Members' Code of Conduct' section, at paragraph 9, stands part of the report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the 'Commissioner's reasoned decision' section, at paragraphs 10-12, stands part of the report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the 'Committee's consideration and conclusions' section, at paragraphs 13-29, stands part of the report.

Agreed: The Committee considered the documents to be included in appendices as necessary for the purposes of the report and agreed that the 'Links to Appendices', stand part of the report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the report be the eleventh report of the Committee on Standards and Privileges 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.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the further identified redactions are made to the appended Commissioner's investigation report, which were necessary for the purposes of complying with data protection obligations.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to provide the complainant and the respondent with a copy of the embargoed report in advance of publication, in line with normal practice.

Noted: The Committee noted that a copy of the report will be laid in the Assembly Business Office and circulated to all MLAs on publication.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the draft press release for issue following publication of the Committee report on the Assembly website.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Communications Office will issue a short, factual tweet to signpost the press release.

Mr Kingston rejoined the meeting at 11.06 a.m.

6. Further consideration of a complaint against a Member – briefing by the Commissioner for Standards

The Assistant Clerk introduced this agenda item and the next two agenda items.

The Commissioner for Standards, Mr Stephen Wright, joined the meeting at 11.08 a.m.. The Commissioner briefed the Committee on the further consideration of his decision that the complaint was inadmissible. This was followed by a question and answer session.

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

Paul Frew left the meeting at 11.14 a.m.

Emma Sheerin declared an interest and recused herself from the next agenda item and left the meeting at 11.14 a.m.

7. Further consideration of a complaint against a member – briefing by the Commissioner for Standards

The Commissioner briefed the Committee on the further consideration of his decision that the complaint was inadmissible. This was followed by a question and answer session.

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

Emma Sheerin rejoined the meeting at 11.17 a.m.

8. Further consideration of a complaint against a member – briefing by the Commissioner for Standards

The Commissioner briefed the Committee on the further consideration of his decision that the complaint was inadmissible. This was followed by a question and answer session.

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

The Chairperson thanked the Commissioner for his attendance and briefings.

Mark Durkan left the meeting at 11.22 a.m.

9. Correspondence

Agreed: The Committee noted the correspondence, dated 5 February 2026, from a member of the public on an MLA's intervention into a planning application and agreed the draft response for issue.

10. Forward Work Programme

Noted: The Committee noted the Forward Work Programme.

11. AOB

None.

12. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting

The next meeting of the Committee is scheduled to take place on Wednesday 4 March 2026 at 10.00 a.m. in Room 106.

The meeting was adjourned at 11.24 a.m.

Cathy Mason MLA

Chairperson, Committee on Standards and Privileges

4 March 2026