



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Report by the Assembly Commissioner for Standards
on complaints made
against Minister Gordon Lyons MLA

Assembly-Confidential

Summary

This report sets out the findings of my investigation into complaints received between 11 June 2025 and 16 June 2025 from 64 members of the public and one from the Leader of the Opposition Mr Matthew O'Toole MLA. The complaints relate to Minister Lyons' social media post on 11 June 2025 concerning a planned protest at Larne Leisure Centre.

I interviewed Minister Lyons and he stated that the intention of his post was to clarify the situation and calm tensions, acting on a request by the PSNI passed through a DUP Cllr Gregg McKeen. However, on balance I believe that his post may likely have had the opposite effect, heightening tensions and exacerbating an already contentious situation.

Ministers are expected to communicate carefully and responsibly, especially during sensitive and high-tension situations. Although the post was considered and reviewed personally by the Minister, its content and tone were problematic for several reasons:

1. The post lacked any expression of empathy for those affected, falling short of the expected compassion and leadership that should be demonstrated during a crisis.
2. The omission of key known information, such as the presence of over 100 swimmers, including children, from Larne Swimming Club at the time of the protest, gives the impression that public safety was not fully considered or prioritised.
3. It criticised public bodies (Northern Ireland Housing Executive and PSNI) for not consulting DUP representatives despite no requirement to do so, risking undermining public trust in institutions.
4. The message redirected scrutiny or accountability to the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and risked shifting public anger or blame toward them.
5. The post blurred the line between Ministerial, MLA, and party-political roles, raising concerns about politicising a safeguarding issue.

The post should have been more coordinated, careful, and empathetic, prioritising public safety and community cohesion.

I found that Minister Lyons breached Rule iv because he failed to demonstrate the Nolan Principles including accountability and leadership. I found him to be in breach of Rule vi because the manner and content of the post showed a lack of due care, which was not conducive to fostering positive community relations or equal treatment. I did not find that Minister Lyons used information obtained in office for personal gain (Rule vii).

In conclusion, I believe Minister Lyons' actions fell short of the standards expected under the Ministerial Code.

Complaints

1. I received a number of complaints from the public (n=64) and one from the Leader of the Opposition Mr Matthew O'Toole MLA, between the dates of 11th to 16th June in relation to the Minister for Communities, Gordon Lyons MLA Facebook post¹ on 11 June 2025 at 15.50.

Investigation

2. My investigation, commenced on 20 June 2025, focussed on the allegations relating to the Ministerial Code of Conduct Paragraphs 1.4 and 1.5 only. The Pledge of Office is not part of the Code of Conduct. Any allegations relating to the Pledge of Office have not been considered.
3. The Rules of the Ministerial Code of Conduct² ("the Code") that were alleged include:
 - (i) Observe the highest standards of propriety and regularity involving impartiality integrity and objectivity in relationship to the stewardship of public funds
 - (ii) Be accountable to users of services the community and through the Assembly for the activities within their responsibilities their stewardship of public funds and the extent to which key performance targets and objectives have been met
 - (iv) Follow the Seven Principles of Public Life
 - (v) Comply with this code and with rules relating to the use of public funds
 - (vi) Operate in a way conducive to promoting good community relations and equality of treatment
 - (vii) Not use information gained in the course of their service for personal gain
4. I do not believe that Rules (i), (ii), or (v) of the Code were relevant in the context of the complaints I received. As a result, my investigation focused on whether there was a breach of Rules (iv), (vi), and (vii) of the Code.
5. During my investigation, I carried out the following:
 - Reviewed all complaints and evidence received from complainants³
 - Interviewed Minister Lyons⁴
 - Reviewed all evidence supplied by Minister Lyons⁵
 - Spoke with the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) constable who made the call to the DUP Cllr Gregg McKeen⁶

All documents I have relied on in reaching my conclusion are at Annex A or in the text of the report.

¹ Document 1

² [Ministerial Code of Conduct](#)

³ Documents 2, 3 and 4 (sample of 3 complaints)

⁴ Document 5

⁵ Documents 6a, 6b, 7, 8 and 9

⁶ Document 10

Evidence

6. Timeline

9 June 2025	A vigil was held for a teenage girl who was alleged to have been assaulted on 7 June by two 14-year-old Romanian boys who appeared in court on 9 June.
9 June 2025	After the vigil, anti-immigrant violence erupted with mobs targeting foreign residents in Ballymena. As a result, many of the targeted families had to flee their homes.
10 June 2025	Unrest spread to other towns across Northern Ireland.
11 June 2025	At 13:21, the office of Steve Aiken UUP sent an email to Mr Lyons' office asking for advice in relation to a post from "Larne Anti-immigration Protest" which was promoting a protest at Larne Leisure Centre that evening at 7pm. ⁷ In the email, it was stated ' <i>Larne Swimming Club will have over 100+ swimmers from age 3-80 visiting the centre for lessons starting at 6 p.m. – none of whom need/want this hassle</i> '. The email also indicated that ' <i>police resources are limited</i> '.
11 June 2025	At 13:51, a PSNI constable (at the request of a superior) rang Cllr Gregg McKeen DUP, requesting that the DUP "get the word out" that people from the previous evening were no longer in Larne Leisure Centre. ⁸
11 June 2025	At 14:33, Gordon Lyons' office responded to the UUP email confirming that "there was a multi-agency emergency operation last night and around 17 residents were brought to Larne Leisure Centre temporarily until the Housing Executive opened for business. These residents have been moved out of the Leisure Centre and placed in temporary accommodation outside of the Borough. If you are concerned about potential protests I would recommend that you contact the Council on 03001245000 to make them aware of your concerns and ask what measures that they are taking to ensure that the site is secure." ⁹
11 June 2025	At 15:44, Love Ballymena posted on X: "The Council confirmed the activation of the Emergency Rest Centre (ERC) was part of its established emergency response protocols, carried out in collaboration with local partner agencies."
11 June 2025	At 15:50, Mr Lyons posted on Facebook: "It has been brought to my attention that a number of individuals were temporarily moved to Larne Leisure Centre in the early hours of the morning following the disturbances in Ballymena."

⁷ Document 6a and 6b

⁸ Document 10

⁹ Document 6a and 6b

As a local MLA for the area, neither I nor my DUP Council colleagues were made aware or consulted with on this decision until late this afternoon.

It has now been confirmed to us by the PSNI and Council that all these individuals are in the care of the Housing Executive and have been moved out of Larne.

Protesting is of course a legitimate right but violence is not and I would encourage everyone to remain peaceful. ”¹⁰

11 June 2025

At 21:06, Mr Lyons posted again on Facebook with a photo of the Larne Leisure Centre on fire: “East Antrim MLA Gordon Lyons has condemned the damage inflicted on Larne Leisure Centre tonight and said it only serves to hurt residents of the town. He said, “The violence and disorder witnessed on our streets over recent nights serves no purpose. Wanton destruction such as the attack on Larne Leisure Centre is an attack on all residents who use the facility. There is absolutely no excuse for what has taken place in Larne, and it must be condemned.”

7. Responses by other politicians to Minister Lyons 15:50 post are documented in various places including the NI Assembly Chamber¹¹ and in the media¹². Many expressed their disapproval and concern at Mr Lyons’ Facebook message with some calling for his resignation.
8. At interview, Minister Lyons said he posted the statement because there was misinformation that people were still in Larne Leisure Centre (‘LLC’) when they were not, and the aim of his post was to clarify.¹³

“So, to go back to your question, what made me put up that Facebook post, I was concerned that there was going to be a protest taking place that night. I was concerned that that was happening in response to false information, that people were still being held there when they were not.”

“People were getting very agitated about that, and so that’s why I had posted that, to let them know that, yes, individuals had been there, they were no longer there. I’d also mentioned that they had moved out of Larne, because there were rumours circulating that they had been moved to a separate part of the town instead, and I was providing clarity, that if this is your reason for going to protest, then I wanted people to know there was nobody there anymore. That’s why, also, probably concerned about what had happened the nights before in Ballymena, had said that violence is never acceptable and that people should remain peaceful.

“My outcome was, or the outcome I’d hoped for, was to say to people, ‘There is nobody there anymore. If these individuals are a target for you, well, they should not be, but they’re not there anymore’.”

“I have considered this, and I have thought about it, but I do not believe that, in any way, the post that I put up, which was trying, as I’ve said many times, to calm down the situation, I believe that the people that were actually taking part in the violence, I don’t believe that I provided them with any information that they were not already aware of.”

¹⁰ Document 1

¹¹ [Hansard 16.06.2025 NI Assembly Volume 178, Number 2](#)

¹² [BBC Article 12.06.2025](#)

¹³ Document 5

9. Minister Lyons' office had drafted the post which he reviewed and refined.

"Every single thing there that I said was factual, and there was nothing in that that made me think, is there anything significant or controversial in there?"

"Well, I'll tell you one thing that I remember we did change in terms of the post was that originally we were aware there were 17 individuals that were there, and I thought to myself, is it helpful at this stage to talk about numbers? I thought probably not, so that was removed, but the rest, and having to go through this with you line-by-line, maybe you want to do that."

10. When asked about why he stated that the DUP were not consulted, he replied:

"[it] was to let people know that I'm giving you the information as soon as I have it. I wasn't aware until this point."

11. In response to whether in hindsight he might have done anything differently, Minister Lyons stated:

"It is, yes. Look, I obviously regret that such a furore was made out of this. I regret the fact that it had impacts on Executive relations on the united Executive message that we had, because the focus became on me and a few words in a Facebook post. At that time, I read what was there, and I thought that was appropriate for publication. In the weeks after, I've looked at it again, and I still don't believe that there is anything there that is wrong. Look, you can always look back, especially at the events which happened and say maybe you could have been clearer on that, but certainly, I believe, that what is there was correct at the time, and what is correct today. It's how others have chosen to amplify certain sections of it."

Findings of Fact

12. I found the following facts established to the required standards of proof:

1. The office of Steve Aiken UUP sent an email to Mr Lyons' office at 13:21 on 11 June 2025 asking for advice in relation to a post from "Larne Anti-immigration Protest" which was promoting a protest at Larne Leisure Centre that evening at 7pm when there would be over 100 swimmers, including children, using the facilities.
2. The PSNI contacted DUP Counsellor Gregg McKeen at 13:51 on 11 June 2025 to ask them to get the word out that there were no people sheltering in Larne Leisure Centre and that the people had been moved out of Larne.
3. At the time of his first Facebook post at 15:50 on 11 June 2025, Minister Lyons was aware of the unrest over the previous days and was aware of the volatility within communities.
4. Minister Lyons posted on Facebook again at 21:06 on 11 June 2025 condemning the damage inflicted on Larne Leisure Centre.

13. In accordance with paragraph 7.14 of the General Procedures Direction, Mr Lyons was afforded an opportunity to challenge any of the above findings before I finalised my report. He did challenge one of my findings of fact. Having considered it, I decided to remove the finding of fact as, on balance, it was likely more an opinion.¹⁴

¹⁴ Document 11

Analysis and Reasoning

14. Minister Lyons said that the intention of his message on Facebook was to clarify the situation and help calm tensions surrounding the planned protest at LLC. Acting at the request of the PSNI, conveyed through a local DUP councillor, he said his aim was to reassure (presumably his 8,000 Facebook followers) that those who had taken refuge at the centre the night before were no longer there. However, in my view and on the balance of probabilities, the post likely had the opposite effect. Rather than defusing the situation, it may have heightened tensions and contributed to further unrest. The following explains why.
15. Ministers are senior public figures whose words carry significant weight. What they say and how they say it can shape public reaction, especially during sensitive and tense situations. Even small misjudgements can lead to serious consequences. That is why ministers must take extra care when speaking publicly. In this case, I believe there was a clear need for more thoughtful communication, better coordination with authorities, and a stronger sense of responsibility for how the message might be received by the wider public.
16. Minister Lyons told me the post was drafted by his office, but that he took full responsibility for it. He explained that he reviewed it personally and chose to remove a reference to the number of people who had stayed at LLC, believing it was inappropriate to include. This shows that the post was not made in haste, rather it was deliberate and considered, which makes it all the more important to assess.
17. It is clear to most readers of his message that it included no expression of empathy for those who had been harmed or forced to flee their homes. This was an omission that, whether intentional or not, carries real weight. Ministers are expected to lead with compassion, particularly in times of crisis. Demonstrating empathy is not a courtesy; it is a fundamental part of responsible leadership. In moments of distress, the public looks to those in authority for reassurance and humanity. That was missing here, and it matters.
18. As per the timeline, Minister Lyons was aware of several important things prior to posting his message. He was aware or should have been aware:
 1. From the email sent to him by the UUP¹⁵, that at the time of the intended 7pm protest at LLC, *'Larne Swimming Club will have over 100+ swimmers from age 3-80 visiting the centre for lessons starting at 6 p.m. – none of whom need/want this hassle'*.
 2. From the email sent to him by the UUP¹⁶, that *'police resources are limited'*.
 3. From the call to the DUP Office directly from the PSNI 30 minutes after the UUP email, that the PSNI resources were stretched and they had concerns about the protest; they directly requested it be made clear by the DUP that the people affected were no longer in LLC.

¹⁵ Documents 6a and 6b

¹⁶ *ibid*

19. The first sentence of his message confirms “It has been brought to my attention that a number of individuals were temporarily moved to Larne Leisure Centre in the early hours of the morning following the disturbances in Ballymena”. By confirming that vulnerable individuals had stayed at LLC, the post revealed a specific location linked to a group already at risk. In my view, this increased the likelihood of further attention or unrest, regardless of whether that group of people had already moved on. Although Minister Lyons was not the first to share this information and he had been asked to get the word out, he is the Minister for Communities and his messages carry greater weight than those of other individuals not in a similar position of power.
20. In the second sentence “As a local MLA for the area, neither I nor my DUP Council colleagues were made aware or consulted with on this decision until late this afternoon”, Minister Lyons appears to criticise the fact that DUP representatives were not consulted by the PSNI or the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE). There would be no reason for the DUP to be consulted on decisions by the NIHE. As the Minister responsible for the Department for Communities, which funds and has power to direct NIHE, he may be accountable to the Assembly for certain matters pertaining to the NIHE but would not be involved in decisions to implement previously agreed protocols (as occurred in this case).
21. A person reading the second sentence, and aware of the views of many of Minister Lyons’ constituents, could reasonably conclude Minister Lyons and his DUP Council colleagues would have expressed disapproval of the decision had they been consulted. This could inadvertently sow mistrust in public institutions and shift the focus from a humanitarian response to a political grievance. At a time when unity and public confidence were critical, this approach risked deepening division rather than supporting community cohesion.
22. The third sentence of his post “*It has now been confirmed to us by the PSNI and Council that all these individuals are in the care of the Housing Executive and have been moved out of Larne*” affirms that the individuals were in the care of the NIHE. This was unwise of Minister Lyons to include, because it was operationally revealing, politically sensitive, and lacked humanitarian focus. It risked escalating tensions, undermining trust, and sending the wrong message in a moment that required empathy and discretion. Additionally, the PSNI confirmed to me that this was never something they had expected or requested be known or said when they asked the DUP to “get the word out”.
23. The fourth sentence, “*Protesting is of course a legitimate right but violence is not and I would encourage everyone to remain peaceful*”, is problematic. Protest is a legitimate form of political expression, but not at all times and all places. A person reading this, aware that there was a protest scheduled for 7pm at LLC, might reasonably conclude that Minister Lyons did not disapprove of the protest occurring at LLC, provided it did not turn violent. In the circumstances, the reference to non-violent protest was wholly unrealistic because Minister Lyons was aware that there had already been two nights of violent protests. It was entirely foreseeable that violence would occur in the event of more protests, particularly when his office was asked by the PSNI to make clear that the people affected were no longer in LLC,

presumably due to PSNI concern about disorder. He also knew there would be over 100 people, including children, swimming there¹⁷ yet was content to encourage protests he could easily have foreseen would become violent (as they did).

24. In failing to mention or include anything in his post about the over 100 swimmers, including children and elderly people, who were expected at the Larne Swimming Club at the time of the protest, which he knew approximately three hours prior to posting his message, gives the impression that public safety was not fully considered by Minister Lyons. Whether this omission was intentional or not, it could have made an already tense situation more dangerous.
25. By speaking as a Minister, a local MLA, and a party representative all at once, the post blurred the line between public duty and party politics. This can make public statements appear politically motivated rather than focused on community welfare. In situations involving public safety and vulnerable people, it is vital that government communication puts people first, clearly and without ambiguity.
26. Given the serious and sensitive nature of the situation, Minister Lyons would have been wise to seek a second and perhaps third opinion on the wording of the post prior to posting.
27. Finally, I do not agree with Minister Lyons' view that the comments made by his Assembly colleagues constituted a "political pile-on." I believe the post invited criticism as it lacked empathy and failed to prioritise public safety and community cohesion in a time of crisis. I note that the Northern Ireland Secretary of State, the Rt Hon Hilary Benn MP, remarked that "*we all have a responsibility to act in a sensible way in these circumstances*" and suggested that Minister Lyons should "*watch his words*" and "*reflect on what he said.*" I consider this to be a fair and reasonable observation from the Secretary of State.

Findings on allegations

Rule (iv): Follow the Seven Principles of Public Life

28. The Ministerial Code of Conduct is built on the Nolan Principles. By failing to ensure that his message upheld public trust, reflected empathy, and clearly prioritised public safety, I believe Minister Lyons fell short of those standards.
29. Minister Lyons' failed to prioritise public safety. By omitting critical details about the vulnerable swimmers expected at the leisure centre, he did not act solely in the public interest.
30. Minister Lyons' blending of personal, political, and official roles raises questions about the integrity of his actions.

¹⁷ Documents 6a and 6b

31. Minister Lyons' post appears to have been shaped by personal or political considerations, rather than a fully objective assessment of the situation. For instance, the emphasis on not being consulted about the use of LLC to shelter those fleeing violence suggested a distancing from the humanitarian response, rather than support for it. This messaging seems to have been prioritised over expressing empathy for those affected. In a moment that called for leadership, reassurance, and compassion, that emphasis was misplaced.
32. Minister Lyons' actions, even if unintentional, demonstrate a failure of leadership in managing a sensitive and potentially volatile situation.

Rule (vi): Operate in a way conducive to promoting good community relations and equality of treatment

33. The analysis above demonstrates that Minister Lyons did not exercise due care in his communication. He ought to have given greater consideration to both the context and the wording of his message, and he should not have endorsed a protest in circumstances where the risk of violence was, at the very least, reasonably foreseeable. His approach, in my view, fell short of promoting good community relations and of upholding the principle of equal treatment.

Rule (vii): Not use information gained in the course of their service for personal gain

34. On balance, I do not believe Minister Lyons used information he gained in relation to this incident for personal gain.

Conclusions

35. Ministers hold positions of significant influence and responsibility; they play a critical role in maintaining public trust in government. Their words can influence public behaviour, either calming or exacerbating community tensions. In this case, I consider that Minister Lyons breached the Ministerial Code of Conduct by failing to take sufficient care to ensure that his message was appropriate, particularly given the prevailing tensions at the time. As a Minister, he has access to the advice and support of the civil service to assess the risks and potential implications of public communications, and it would have been prudent for him to have made use of that support.
36. Minister Lyons still maintains that there was nothing wrong with his message. That is very disappointing. Mistakes in judgment can happen, even at the highest levels, but leadership also requires the humility to acknowledge them.
37. This matter is not about punishing human error; it concerns accountability, leadership, and the importance of learning. The public rightly expects those in positions of authority to reflect, take responsibility, and uphold the values of leadership in public life. When this does not occur, it is appropriate that it be acknowledged and addressed.

38. I am satisfied based on my analysis of the facts and evidence that on the balance of probabilities, Minister Lyons' conduct was in breach of Rules iv and vi of the Ministerial Code of Conduct.

Dr Melissa McCullough
NI Assembly Commissioner for Standards
11 August 2025

Annex A

Document	Description
1	GL Facebook post 11.06.25 at 15:50
2	Complaint (sample 1)
3	Complaint (sample 2)
4	Complaint (sample 3)
5	G Lyons interview transcript
6a	Email exchange between S Aiken Office and G Lyons Office
6b	Attachment screenshot to email 6a
7	Screenshot, call received from PSNI by DUP Cllr Gregg McKeen
8	GL Facebook post 11.06.25 at 21:06
9	Love Ballymena post 11.06.25
10	Telephone Call Note w PSNI
11	Correspondence on Findings of Fact

11 June

22:24

**Gordon Lyons MLA** · [Follow](#)

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It has been brought to my attention that a number of individuals were temporarily moved to Larne Leisure Centre in the early hours of the morning following the disturbances in Ballymena.

As a local MLA for the area, neither I nor my DUP Council colleagues were made aware or consulted on this decision until late this afternoon.

It has now been confirmed to us by the PSNI and Council that all these individuals are in the care of the Housing Executive and have been moved out of Larne.

Protesting is of course a legitimate right but violence is not and I would encourage everyone to remain



From: +StandardsCommissioner
Sent: Fri, 13 Jun 2025 08:43:00 +0000
To: StandardsCommissioner@[REDACTED]
Subject: 202500017 FW: Formal Complaint Regarding MP Gordon Lyons' Conduct and Breach of Public Standards

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: 12 June 2025 09:02
To: +StandardsCommissioner <standardscommissioner@niassembly.gov.uk>
Subject: Formal Complaint Regarding MP Gordon Lyons' Conduct and Breach of Public Standards

FAO Assembly Commissioner for Standards,

I am writing to formally express my deep concern and disappointment regarding the recent actions of MP Gordon Lyons, whose conduct has, in my view, demonstrated a serious disregard for the Seven Principles of Public Life and the Additional Assembly Principles and Rules of Conduct.

There can be no doubt that his recent Facebook post – which I am confident you have received numerous complaints about by now, or certainly should have – played a direct role in inciting the unrest and wanton destruction witnessed in our local area, particularly the damage to our community's leisure facilities. At the very least, his words irresponsibly stoked the flames of division and tension, and for someone in elected office, that is utterly unacceptable.

Public representatives are bound to uphold standards of selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty, and leadership. In this case, it is painfully clear that these principles were not only ignored, but actively undermined. Elected officials are also expected to demonstrate respect, to act in the public interest, and to be mindful of the real-world impact of their words and actions. Mr Lyons' inflammatory post showed none of these qualities. Instead, it served only to inflame public sentiment, jeopardise community safety, and erode trust in public office.

Our community deserves better than this. We expect our representatives to lead with responsibility and to be held to account when they fail to do so. I urge you to take this matter seriously and investigate the conduct of Mr Lyons with the full weight of the standards expected of Assembly Members.

The damage done to local leisure resources may be visible, but the deeper harm is to public trust – a far more difficult thing to repair. I look forward to seeing a meaningful response to this complaint and trust that appropriate steps will be taken to uphold the integrity of public office.

Kind regards

From: +StandardsCommissioner
Sent: Fri, 13 Jun 2025 08:44:02 +0000
To: StandardsCommissioner@[REDACTED]
Subject: 202500019 FW: Formal Complaint Regarding Breach of Ministerial Code by Gordon Lyons MLA, Minister for Communities

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: 12 June 2025 09:25
To: +StandardsCommissioner <standardscommissioner@niassembly.gov.uk>
Subject: Formal Complaint Regarding Breach of Ministerial Code by Gordon Lyons MLA, Minister for Communities

Dear Commissioner,

I write to formally submit a complaint regarding what I believe to be a serious breach of the **Ministerial Code of Conduct** and the **Seven Principles of Public Life** by Gordon Lyons MLA, the current **Minister for Communities** in the Northern Ireland Executive.

On **Wednesday 11 June at approximately 3:50pm**, the Minister used his **public social media account** to post that **vulnerable and minority members of the community** had been temporarily housed in a local leisure centre for their safety.

By **8:00pm the same evening**, the leisure centre in question was **attacked by masked youths**, endangering the vulnerable individuals inside as well as other members of the public using the facility.

It is my firm belief that the Minister's actions **directly contributed** to the incitement of this violence, and as such, **he must be held accountable**.

The Minister's actions are in clear breach of multiple principles expected of public servants:

- **Selflessness:** By publicly sharing sensitive information that compromised the safety of at-risk individuals, the Minister failed to act solely in the public interest.
- **Integrity:** He failed to uphold the trust placed in him to protect vulnerable communities and may have knowingly risked fuelling division for political gain.
- **Objectivity:** He failed to consider or weigh the potential consequences of publicising this information on a volatile issue.
- **Accountability:** The Minister has not issued a meaningful response or taken responsibility for the consequences of his disclosure.
- **Openness:** The selective nature of what was shared suggests an intent to provoke public sentiment rather than provide transparent governance.
- **Honesty:** There is serious concern as to whether the Minister was fully truthful about his intentions behind the post.
- **Leadership:** Rather than promoting unity or safeguarding the vulnerable, his actions contributed to increased community tension, violence, and public disorder.

I refer also to his failure in role-specific responsibilities as Minister for Communities

The **Minister for Communities** is responsible for:

- **Supporting vulnerable individuals** and promoting **social cohesion**;
- **Tackling disadvantage** and encouraging **inclusive communities**;
- **Protecting community infrastructure**, including shared public facilities.

His disclosure endangered vulnerable people, incited community division, and resulted in an attack on a public facility—all diametrically opposed to the core purpose of his ministerial brief. These failures are not peripheral; they are fundamental breaches of the expectations and obligations of this role.

As a citizen, a voter and taxpayer in Northern Ireland, I believe the Minister's actions:

- Represent a **dangerous misuse of his public platform**;
- Have **seriously undermined public confidence** in the Executive;
- Render his position **untenable** in a post requiring impartiality, integrity, and a genuine commitment to community safety and wellbeing.

I request that your office:

- **Formally investigate** this matter as a breach of the Ministerial Code;
- **Assess the Minister's fitness to hold office** in light of his conduct;
- **Publish your findings** and recommend appropriate action, up to and including his removal from office if a breach is confirmed.

This incident has caused real harm. It is part of a wider pattern of divisive conduct that threatens the delicate social fabric in Northern Ireland. The bar for ministerial conduct must remain high, especially in roles with such direct community impact.

I trust that you will give this complaint the serious consideration it warrants.

Yours sincerely,

[Redacted Signature]

Sent from my iPhone



Matthew O'Toole MLA
 Leader of the Opposition
 Room 124
 Parliament Buildings
 Ballymiscaw
 Stormont
 Belfast
 BT4 3XX

matthew.otoole@mla.niassembly.gov.uk

12 June 2025

Melissa McCullagh
 Standards Commissioner
 Room 222
 Parliament Buildings
 Ballymiscaw
 Stormont
 Belfast
 BT4 3XX

An official complaint to the Commissioner for Standards in the Northern Ireland Assembly, Ms Melissa McCullough, regarding breaches of the Ministerial Code of Conduct and Pledge of Office by the Minister for Communities, Mr Gordon Lyons MLA

Dear Melissa,

I am writing to you to register a complaint against the Minister for Communities, Mr Gordon Lyons MLA.

I believe Minister Lyons' online activity, on 11th June 2025, is a clear breach of Article VI and Article VII of the Ministerial Code of Conduct (See below).

(vi) operate in a way conducive to promoting good community relations and equality of treatment;

(vii) not use information gained in the course of their service for personal gain;

We also believe that Minister Lyons violated clause C and subsection Ca of the Ministerial pledge of office.

(c) to serve all the people of Northern Ireland equally, and to act in accordance with the general obligations on government to promote equality and prevent discrimination;

(ca) to promote the interests of the whole community represented in the Northern Ireland Assembly towards the goal of a shared future;

Background to incident

On Monday 9th and Tuesday 10th June, rioting broke out in the Ballymena area of Northern Ireland. The rioters targeted a number of immigrants and members of ethnic minority communities living in the area. Victims of the rioters have been targeted by racial, derogatory and offensive remarks; verbal and physical abuse; threats of violence; destruction of property; assault; intimidation and potentially attempted murder.

On the evening of 10th June, a number of victims, who were forced to evacuate their homes, were temporarily accommodated in the Larne Leisure Centre. The next day (11th June) they were moved to alternative facilities.

Disclosure of Larne Leisure Centre as a temporary site of shelter for victims of rioting

On 11th June at approximately 2pm, the Minister for Communities posted the following message on Facebook (annex one).

It has been brought to my attention that a number of individuals were temporarily moved to Larne Leisure Centre in the early hours of the morning following the disturbances in Ballymena.

As a local MLA for the area, neither I nor my DUP Council colleagues were made aware or consulted on this decision until late this afternoon.

It has now been confirmed to us by the PSNI and Council that all these individuals are in the care of the Housing Executive and have been moved out of Larne.

Protesting is of course a legitimate right but violence is not and I would encourage everyone to remain peaceful.

From the first paragraph, it could be very easy to deduce that he was referring to the victims of the Ballymena riots from the previous two nights.

We regard the decision to publicly confirm and highlight that the centre was being used to provide shelter for victims of rioting as highly irregular. The victims were clients of the Housing Executive (after being made homeless), for which Minister Lyons is the responsible Minister. He should be familiar with the Housing Executive's policy to protect the privacy of its customers, especially those who have been targeted by intimidation; harassment; and criminal behaviour and may still be at risk.

The Minister claims that he made these comments after the PSNI asked him to help defuse tensions. Our understanding is that Minister Lyons was asked to defuse tensions due to a false rumour that the Larne Leisure Centre was being turned into a permanent accommodation for migrants. Minister Lyons could have simply stated that the rumour was false, without highlighting the centre's role in sheltering the victims the night before.

Immigrants were not the only groups that had been targeted by the riots, several police officers have also been injured. This demonstrates that the rioters were not just targeting migrants, but also those that protected them. There have also been similar incidences in which the Welcome Centre in Belfast was targeted by arson attacks for housing refugees; asylum seekers; and migrants. As such we believe highlighting the Leisure Centre's role in sheltering displaced migrants placed the centre and those who work there at risk of being targeted. Equally as the relevant minister, Minister Lyons should have been very familiar with such risks.

As such we believe the Minister both disclosed information gained in the course of his service in an indiscreet and irresponsible manner (Article VII) and in a manner that was likely to damage community relations (Article VI)

Minister Lyons implied criticism of the decision to shelter victims of rioting in Larne Community Centre

In the second paragraph, the Minister made clear neither he nor his party colleagues on Mid and East Antrim Council, were informed the victims had been staying in the centre:

As a local MLA for the area, neither I nor my DUP Council colleagues were made aware or consulted on this decision until late this afternoon.

The tone of the message was interpreted by many as expressing his disapproval that the individuals had been briefly sheltered in his community, or suggesting he would have prevented the centre being used as emergency shelter.

Later in the post he goes on to speak about constituents right to protest the decision. His words can be interpreted tacit support for the protest.

Minister Lyons has the right to express his opinion about the use of community services in his constituency. However we would highlight that the Larne Leisure Centre has previously been used as a shelter for those who have had to leave their home, most recently during Storm Eowyn (please click [here](#) to access a link showing the Larne Leisure Centre listed as a Community Assistance Hub by Mid and East Antrim Borough Council during Storm Eowyn). The Minister made no objection to the centre being used this way previously.

As such we believe Minister Lyons was not promoting good community relations or treating all communities equally. He implied a desire to discriminate against the victims of violence by denying them access to community facilities that had been provided to other constituents in similar scenarios. We believe this is a clear violation of Article VI of the Ministerial code of Conduct and section C of the Ministerial Oath of Office.

The Impact

Hours after the Minister's post protestors and rioters arrived at Larne Leisure Centre. A large number attacked the centre, causing significant damage and partially burning the centre. While we don't know the full cost of the damage, the Larne Leisure Centre cost £14.5 million to build.

The centre was unable to open this morning and it is unclear when it will be able to resume normal services. This will naturally lead to be a massive economic and emotional impact on those who work in the centre; those who use the centre; and the wider community of Larne.

It is unclear if these protestors identified the Larne Leisure Centre as a result of Minister Lyons post. However, as a senior figure within the Larne Community, is likely that Minister Lyons simultaneously made people aware of the decision to shelter the victims at the centre; and as a person in a position of authority confirmed what may have only been a rumour at this point.

Lack of contrition

While a poor choice of words might be understood, the Minister kept the post up by (at the time of writing this) 17 hours, long after the centre was attacked and his comments were widely



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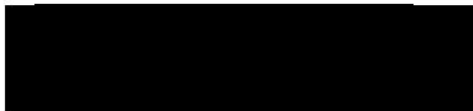
condemned. At no point did he retract or edit his post, or issue a follow up post to clarify his remarks.

The Minister also expressed no remorse for the impact of his words on BBC Radio Ulster the next morning, despite bi-partisan condemnation. Indeed he called for an apology from the Secretary of State for NI for their criticism of him.

We believe this constitutes behaviour unacceptable from a Minister of the Northern Ireland Executive. We would like you to investigate the issues raised in this letter carefully to determine whether Minister Lyons did breach the Ministerial code.


Thank you very much in advance for your consideration.

Yours sincerely,



Matthew O'Toole MLA
Leader of the Opposition

Annex one



Gordon Lyons MLA
17h · 🌐



...



It has been brought to my attention that a number of individuals were temporarily moved to Larne Leisure Centre in the early hours of the morning following the disturbances in Ballymena.


As a local MLA for the area, neither I nor my DUP Council colleagues were made aware or consulted on this decision until late this afternoon.


It has now been confirmed to us by the PSNI and Council that all these individuals are in the care of the Housing Executive and have been moved out of Larne.


Protesting is of course a legitimate right but violence is not and I would encourage everyone to remain peaceful.

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161  69 

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Commissioner Interview with Gordon Lyons

GL 07.07.25

JULY 2025

CRI - DEPTH - 57 MINS

Okay, this interview is being tape recorded. I'm Melissa McCullough, Commissioner for Standards. The day is the 7th of July 2025, and the time is 12:50 pm. I'm interviewing Mr. Gordon Lyons MLA, Minister for Communities. Accompanying him is [REDACTED] and also present is John Devitt, a second interviewer. Are you happy to be referred to as Minister Lyons or do you prefer Gordon?

Gordon is fine.

Okay, Gordon. I want to just remind you that [REDACTED] isn't permitted to answer any questions on your behalf; he's here as an observer. However, if you need to consult with him at all, I can turn this off. You can either stay in here or go outside if you want privacy, whatever you want, and then I'll resume once you come back.

That's fine.

So, I just want to ask you to now formally take the oath. Do you prefer the copy affirmation or on the Bible?

I'll take an oath on the Bible.

Okay. If I could ask you to read out that one.

Yes, I swear by Almighty God that the evidence I shall give shall be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.

Okay.

Thank you.

Right, this is just to also remind you this is a confidential interview, and nothing spoken in this interview should be discussed with anyone. Additionally, the transcript of this interview will be appended to my investigation, for if I rely on it to return recommendations, which likely I will, so this complaint about, just to open up for the record, there are a number of complaints against you, and my questions and the complaints relate to three main things as I see it in the Ministerial Code. That is 1.54, which is follow the seven principles of public life as set out by the Committee on Standards in public life, item six, which was cited by Matthew O'Toole in a way which is operate in a way conducive to promoting good community relations, and equality of treatment. This is also mentioned by others as well, the complaint. He mentions seven, 1.57, which is not to use information gained in the course of their service for personal gain, or to use the opportunity of public service to promote their private interest.

We can talk about all this, but I just want it on the record the main things that are being alleged, because it's all in relation to, of course, in relation to this Facebook post you made, which I believe was made on Wednesday, the 11th of June at around 3:50 pm. Matthew O'Toole says 2:00 pm. Do you remember the time?

It was after 4:00 pm.

So, they say 2:50 pm, somewhere around 3:50/4:00.

Yes.

Okay, right, so before I begin on the record to start questions, do you have any questions for me before I begin?

No.

All right, so we're going to open this up with what prompted you to make the Facebook post at the time you did.

I suppose you'd need to go back to the start of the day. Clearly, the night before, there had been some families and individuals that had been moved to Larne Leisure Centre in response to the emergency protocol around the events that had taken place in Ballymena, I think over the two nights previous. In and around 10:30 to 11:00, I had started to receive phone calls and representations saying that something is going on at the leisure centre. 'What is it that's happening? What do you know about it?' At 12:38 pm, the Larne Anti-Immigrant Facebook page had highlighted the fact that there was going to be a protest at the leisure centre that night at 7:00 pm, and that was as a result of people being held there and being provided emergency accommodation the night before.

I received an email at 1:21 pm from [REDACTED] of Larne Swimming Club. She then had screenshotted below that the Larne Anti-Immigrant Facebook page, and she had asked me, 'Gordon, what should we do here? This is going on. We don't know what's happening. Can you give some advice?' At 1:51, there was a call from the PSNI, a constable, to Councillor Gregg McKeen in my office, and in and around that time, he had also received confirmation from the council and the police that there were 17 individuals that had been held there overnight, but that they had subsequently moved on. Love Ballymena, in response to a statement that council had put out, carried their statement, which said that it had been used the night before, but it wasn't currently being used. So, to go back to your question, what made me put up that Facebook post, I was concerned that there was going to be a protest taking place that night.

I was concerned that that was happening in response to false information, that people were still being held there when they were not. Unfortunately, the Facebook post has now been deleted from the Larne Anti-Immigrant Facebook page, but there are a number of comments beneath that saying, 'This is going to be used as a longer-term shelter.' People were getting very agitated about that, and so that's why I had posted that, to let them know that, yes, individuals had been there, they were no longer there. I'd also mentioned that they had moved out of Larne, because there were rumours circulating that they had been moved to a separate part of the town instead, and I was providing clarity, that if this is your reason for going to protest, then I wanted people to know there was nobody there anymore. That's why, also, probably concerned about what had happened the nights before in Ballymena, had said that violence is never acceptable and that people should remain peaceful.

Okay, so your primary objective in sharing the information publicly in the Facebook post was to let people know they were no longer being housed in - well...

Yes.

They were no longer within the Larne Leisure Centre.

Yes.

What specific outcome did you hope to achieve by posting about the temporary relocation to the Larne Leisure Centre, or was that just to say...? You said they had been.

Yes.

Yes, so you wanted them to know. Maybe people didn't know this. I know that you're saying that this was available on the Larne - what was the evidence you said you had?

It's called the Larne Anti-Immigrant Facebook page.

Anti-Immigrant.

Yes.

Okay, so on that you have sort of taken all this into account, and the outcome you hoped was to what, factually update, reassure constituents? What outcome did you want?

I wanted people to know that with the protest being organised for the leisure centre, my understanding that the protest was being organised because there were currently people being held there. My outcome was, or the outcome I'd hoped for, was to say to people, 'There is nobody there anymore. If these individuals are a target for you, well, they should not be, but they're not there anymore.'

Right, okay.

And I think that's what most people saw and recognised that for. I think anybody looking at that in a fair way was able to say, 'Okay, that's understand [sic].'

Yes, and yet we have, believe it or not - well, you do believe it - loads of complaints.

Yes.

I guess people read this differently.

Well, in response to that, I suspect a lot of your complaints came from, there was a post put up by the Green Party, which was encouraging people to put in complaints about me, and in that it stated that I had revealed the location of the people that were there, that it made it seem as if I was saying, 'Look everybody, here's where people are currently being housed,' homed, whatever phrase you want to use. I think that would have been an abdication of leadership on my part. I think, if I had publicly highlighted where people were currently being held in that really difficult environment that was going on over that period of days, I'd have said that would have been irresponsible, but that's not what I was doing.

Okay, and again, I'm investigating this, so I'm asking you questions that don't...

I understand.

Did you consider alternative ways to communicate your concerns on this, so in other words, maybe internal correspondence rather than this public social media post, or did you feel this was the best

way for you to communicate? You said the PSNI called, was it? I've read a lot around the media, but I don't bring that in here necessarily as evidence, but I have read that you have said the PSNI contacted a councillor.

Yes, Councillor Gregg McKeen.

Gregg McKeen.

Yes, that was the call that took place at 1:51 pm.

So, he gets a call from the PSNI. What are they asking exactly?

So, essentially, they are saying, 'Can you use whatever methods that you can to get the message out to people that they're not being housed?' I think the police - and I haven't spoken to the constable involved since.

Do you know his name?

Yes, Constable [REDACTED].

[REDACTED]

Yes.

Okay.

Of course, I hope that names can be redacted in terms of the sensitive...

I am going to redact, yes. I will redact.

In terms of sensitivities.

Anything I need to redact, I will.

Yes, because there are obviously sensitivities with naming police officers.

Of course, so he calls.

So, he called, and I think - and, again, I'm summarising here - but my understanding is they had concerns about what might happen at 7:00 pm at the protest, realising what had happened the couple of nights before in Ballymena, and I think they were trying to say, 'Can you use your influence to let people know that they aren't there anymore,' because I think that's what the focus was, and I wish that we would have had screenshots from that time, but certainly, on the Anti-Immigrant page, that seemed to be where the concern was coming from.

Just a side to this, is there any of those, any evidence you do have, can you provide to me after this, just any evidence of screenshots? If they don't, if there are none, if they have taken them down, that's one thing, but if you've anything that you wish to provide me as evidence, please do.

Yes, I can provide those for you. The Anti-Immigrant Facebook page post was attached to the email that [REDACTED] had sent to me at Larne Swimming Club, and I've got a screenshot of the call from the PSNI to Gregg McKeen, and I've got the reply that I sent to [REDACTED] and the Love Ballymena post to show that it was very public.

Please, as soon as you can, that would be great.

Okay.

Okay, so when you made this post, did you check the post with anyone? Did you say to anybody, 'Read that,' or did you write it and just post it? I just want to know how it came about.

Yes, I was busy. At the time, I had a busy ministerial day, and it was the office that I'd put it up, and they checked with me and I confirmed. I want to make this clear: I take full responsibility for it. Even though it wasn't drafted by me, I cleared it and I sent it out.

Yes, that's okay, but at no point did you say, 'Let me send this to the Housing Executive.' At least, was there anyone in your family you checked it with? No. Somebody wrote it, though.

Yes.

I'm saying it was in your name.

Yes, and I stand by it.

And you stand by it, that's a given.

Okay.

But my question was going to be, did you say, 'Well, let me just check this with somebody'? Would you normally check these sorts of things with anybody?

So, I did not see this as being a departmental issue, so that's why I did not check with the Housing Executive, or with the department, because this, for me, it's something that I've done many, many, many times, putting out a clarification about the current situation, so to me there was nothing in any way that is controversial about what I had said. Every single thing there that I said was factual, and there was nothing in that that made me think, is there anything significant or controversial in there?

Yes, okay, and we can go through it, just a few things that I think people are finding controversial about it, and get your...

And I get that, and especially after the events, people will find that, and because it became a political issue, all of a sudden, people started looking through this through a political lens.

Yes, but you at the time - and this is why I'm going through it very slowly, just to get the idea of the motivation behind putting it out there, now.

Yes. Well, I'll tell you one thing that I remember we did change in terms of the post was that originally we were aware there were 17 individuals that were there, and I thought to myself, is it helpful at this stage to talk about

numbers? I thought probably not, so that was removed, but the rest, and having to go through this with you line-by-line, maybe you want to do that.

Let me go through this because it might tick little lines by the time we go through it.

That's fine.

Let me see, because I put some effort into figuring out how to get through this so that you're not here too long.

That's okay, I'll try and keep answering.

But we'll cover it all, definitely. Were you aware of the community tensions - and this is a question, I think, I already know the answer to, but for the record - were you aware of community tensions, or potential for violence at the time you posted this?

I certainly was aware of community tensions. I don't think, at any stage, that I imagined that what happened to the leisure centre would have happened, but I think the fact that I said that violence is not acceptable, and encouraged people to remain peaceful, I think that was overall part of why I put the post out, was to try and temper down the atmosphere that was out there. What I think is very difficult in these situations is maybe all these additional rumours and misinformation that's out there, and that's what creates an atmosphere, and that was the entire point of the post. It was to show, if you're heading there, and if you are annoyed because you think this is going to turn into a permanent shelter, or if you're annoyed because you think your children are going to be affected by classes being cancelled, or swimming lessons not taking place, it was an attempt to say, 'Nobody is there anymore, service is normal, don't go there.'

Okay. I mean, again, were you aware that the individuals that were moved to the Larne Leisure Centre were classified as vulnerable and potentially at-risk individuals?

I didn't know exactly who was there. I was aware that it was being used as accommodation. My understanding, I believe, at that time, was that they were people who had to be moved as a result of what was going on in Ballymena, but I did not know who the individuals were. Those were some of the issues that were swirling around as well, but I didn't have any understanding of who.

So, you weren't briefed on the security or safeguarding implications before you posted that, in terms of those people/individuals?

Well, I didn't think there would be any safeguarding issues because, again, all of this happened after they had moved. That's something, I have said that so many times over the last number of weeks, but I think that was what some of the complaints are about. That wasn't an issue for me because those people had been moved on. As I said, quite clearly, they're now in the care of the Housing Executive, and they have been moved out of Larne, so that's why that was not an issue with those. They had been taken care of. They were being looked after. The focus was on trying to stop inappropriate behaviour, whatever else taking place.

I guess I might have the answer to this, but you say your decision to include the detailed information about the location of the individuals and their movement out of Larne, the decision you made to include that, you've explained to me, am I correct in saying, was that you wanted to make sure anybody who was going there to protest knew that there was nobody there?

Yes.

So, that was the intention.

And, just to be clear on why I said that they had moved out of Larne as well, was because there were other rumours circulating. In fact, I spoke to the police later on, later after the events of that evening, and I think there was due to be a protest that was taking place. They were going to move from the Housing Executive round to Larne Market Yard because rumours were circulating about people having then been moved to the Market Yard in Larne. What I thought, by including that sentence about having moved out of Larne, was we wouldn't be playing this game of, oh, they've moved people here instead, or this centre is going to be, or whatever it might be.

Now, this is made much of, and I understand why, but can you tell me why you mentioned it, that neither you nor your DUP colleagues had been consulted? What message did you intend to convey by highlighting this?

The message what I intended to convey was that I didn't know about it, and I think this was one of the struggles. Over the course of the afternoon, I didn't have that full - or the morning - I didn't have that full information. Maybe if I had of been aware of it earlier on, I would have been in a position to have told people earlier on, 'This isn't happening,' or, 'Here's what the truth is,' or, 'Here's what's actually going on,' and that part of it, which yes, it has come in for some criticism, was to let people know that I'm giving you the information as soon as I have it. I wasn't aware until this point.

I understand the criticism because it appears from the post - and I'm not sure if you would agree - that there is some sort of link. Your priority looked as if you were saying, 'Well, the lack of notification to elected representatives,' rather than the well-being of those people, I mean, the empathy part.

And I get that, but the empathy and the well-being part had sort of passed on by that stage because there wasn't anybody there. If there had still been people, of course the post wouldn't have been posted, if people were still there, but that was an issue that had been dealt with and they were now in the care of the Housing Executive and they were elsewhere, so that wasn't the focus, that had moved on.

So, almost situationally, the Facebook post is situationally in a place where that empathy, that thing, it wasn't so much that you were ignoring that bit of it, it was that you were in the moment that, well, people are already safe.

Yes, and that's been twisted and taken out of context, I believe, as well.

This is why I asked you about did anybody read this, and maybe it was a rush because, I think, would you agree with me, that there was just not intentionally, but on reading that out, you were situationally where you knew was correct in your head?

Yes.

But, actually, when it was put out there, people who had said why was this not focused on individuals, they weren't in the same situational space as you, and that's why I asked you, should somebody have read that maybe, and considered is there anything we're missing in tone here?

Yes, but this was not an issue at all at that time. When that was put out, I think most people understood that and recognised that. When did the focus come on? Everyone was all of a sudden offended by this after what had happened, the events that night, and there was a desire for people to link the two as if to say it is this post that created the circumstances that happened later on, which was wrong.

Let me jump to this. Do you think that your post had anything to do with escalating the violence?

Absolutely not.

Nothing to do with it.

No.

I mean, I'm not saying you intended that to happen.

No, I get that, but do I believe that in any way that post contributed to what happened later on that night? No. Yes, there were many people who were down there. There was a small number of people that were involved in the violence, and, as I said before, I believe the die was probably cast at that stage. I do not think that this changed one thing, and yes, I have thought long and hard about that, and you question it, and you think, would it have made any difference? No, the people that I've spoken to, and everything else, I think that the die was cast at that stage. I do not believe that anybody that was down there intended to go, with hours, this is being on before my post was online, the other post had been online for hours, and I think the die had already been cast at that stage. I had hoped that this would have stopped people from going there, but I think that was largely a futile action, looking back on it.

I'm moving to the fact that you're a Minister for Communities, much has been made of just your duties as a minister, and let me just read those out, because the majority of the complaints say that you have a duty: seven principles of public life under Section 4, and they list out selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and leadership. I want to go through those because they say that by publicly sharing sensitive information that compromised the safety of at-risk individuals, the minister failed to act solely in the public interest. Do you want to speak to that?

What sensitive information?

The sensitive information, I believe, is the fact that they were moved to Larne Leisure Centre. I think the location is the sensitive information, the location.

So, I would ask...

I know you were saying they'd left.

Yes, so my question to that would be, has the council also failed in that regard, then?

I don't know, but I mean, I'm asking you.

Sorry, that's not your job, I suppose, but when a public body, like the council, publicly identifies the fact that something was being used before I did, I don't see how that can be considered sensitive information. I'm sorry, could you read that out again for me, please, sensitive information?

Yes, so it's important that I address this because, as you know, I mean public trust, this is all about public trust, so I'm going to go through this.

And I'm happy to do that.

And I'll just ask you to answer them, so that I know what your answer to that is, but selflessness, they say by publicly sharing sensitive information, it compromised the safety of at-risk individuals, the minister failed to act solely in the public interest.

And the second question then that I was asked was, how did it compromise the safety of anybody if they were not there?

Well, I suppose there are people who work there in that building. I mean, I suppose, it's the whole picture.

But they're talking about the vulnerable individuals. They're not specifically referring to staff there.

At-risk. They did say at-risk, you're right, okay.

And this goes back to the idea, which is completely false, which I, in some way, highlighted where people currently were at, and that's where that complaint completely falls apart. I did not disclose sensitive information that was not already in the public domain.

Okay, and you're sending me those links.

Yes.

Those things that were there.

Yes, I'm more than happy to do that.

Integrity, they say, you failed to uphold the trust placed in you to protect vulnerable communities, and you may have knowingly risked fuelling division for political gain. Can you speak to that?

I have no idea what they mean. I have no idea.

Was any of this done for your constituents, or anybody in the Anti-Immigrant group? I think what they're trying to say is you have somehow aligned yourself to that group. Have you at all, under that?

No, not at all. I do not understand how anybody can believe that there has been some sort of personal gain for me in this. In fact, I'd go the opposite way. I would say that it would show a lack of leadership, trust, honesty, openness, transparency and integrity if I were not to do my job, and to highlight what I think is the right thing to do. Can you imagine? I'll paint this scenario for you. If I had known all of this information, if I had known that the individuals that we're talking about were no longer there and I kept that information to myself, if I wasn't open and honest, and transparent with the public, I would be open to just as much criticism, 'So, Gordon Lyons, the police were in contact with you, and asked you to get the information out that they weren't there anymore. The council had already shared that information, but you weren't prepared to do that. Why were you withholding that information?' That's...

Yes. Now, speaking of integrity - oh no, objectivity we're at now - 'He failed to consider a way that potential...' - now, this is interesting - so objectivity is interesting because it's about evidence.

Yes.

If there is one of these seven principles that might actually apply, you could apply that objectivity... When I asked you, 'Did anybody check that? Was it done in haste? Is there anything you reading it might not see it, but others might have?' so they're saying that you failed to consider the potential consequences of publicising this information on a volatile issue. How would you answer that allegation?

Well, first of all, I don't even ignore volatile issues. I don't run away from them, and that's, as I've explained already, was exactly what I was trying to do, and the fact I have considered it because I was informed that there had been 17 people there, and I thought that naming, or providing a number maybe would not have been conducive to the situation, so I thought we'll keep this as close as we can to fact.

So, there was evidence that you kind of weighed this up, and you made a decision. In other words, they're saying that you failed to consider or were aware of the consequences, but you're saying you did.

Yes.

You did?

Yes.

You weighed it up. Accountability: 'You have not issued a meaningful response or taken responsibility for the consequences of his disclosure.' This is a lot. I think there has been a lot of commentary in these complaints on this, and that is, as it is, you do not believe that your Facebook - there is no evidence to know one way or another.

No, and you want me to be honest, and clearly, I need to have integrity in these matters as well. I have considered this, and I have thought about it, but I do not believe that, in any way, the post that I put up, which was trying, as I've said many times, to calm down the situation, I believe that the people that were actually taking part in the violence, I don't believe that I provided them with any information that they were not already aware of.

They were in tune with what was going on.

Yes.

Before you put that post down.

Oh, yes, and that's clear. Again, you can see that on that post.

The people who would have looked at your post are possibly those same people, or...?

I don't know. How can you say that?

I thought maybe you could analyse it or something.

No, I know from the comments underneath that there were people saying, 'Thank you for the information, that's good to know. That's useful,' etc., etc.

Did any of them say, 'Right, let's go! Let's go!'? Was there any indication of any of that?

No. What, as in?

As in, I don't know, as in that it fuelled anybody thinking, let's get over to Larne Leisure Centre.

No, I haven't read every single comment underneath. I don't know if you're going to have a look at that.

Yes.

But I did not see any pattern that was suggesting that this was some sort of a call.

I think somebody mentioned it elevated it in people's minds, then, Larne Leisure Centre.

Well, I don't know who those mind-readers are, but maybe you can find that out in your investigation.

It says under openness in their complaint that, 'The selective nature of what was shared suggests an intent to provoke public sentiment rather than provide transparent governance.' Would you disagree with that?

Can you read that out again?

Yes, 'The selective nature...'

Oh, perfect, yes.

I2: I can give you one.

Thank you. Sorry, that's...

Is that a comparison one?

I2: Yes.

Yes, so, 'The selective nature of what was shared,' this is under openness.

Openness.

'Suggest an intent to provoke public sentiment...' selective nature, '...rather than provide transparent governance.'

I'm not sure, again, what he means by that, but was I trying to provoke public sentiment? No, and, again, that's what some people are, I think, trying to... They are trying to say that I was almost trying to gee people up to do something.

Yes.

That was not my intention. I think any reasonable person that looks at that recognises that.

I mean, we're on to the honesty bit where they are saying that they're concerned that you weren't fully truthful about your intentions behind the post. Again, we're going back to this idea, I feel, that they're saying you were somehow promoting this. Well, I mean, is that what you're reading out of that?

No, and I never saw it as promoting this because it was doing the rounds on social media. It seemed like everybody knew that something was happening, and that people were here in the leisure centre, so I certainly don't accept that at all, that I was trying to divulge information.

To elevate it.

To elevate it. The information that I was trying to get across was actually information that I believe would have been helpful.

Okay, so under the last bit, the leadership principle, which says basically you should follow these in all your dealings, always act within the six principles above, but they say, 'Rather than promoting unity, or safeguarding the vulnerable, your actions contributed to increased community tension, violence and public disorder.' Do you refute that?

I do, and, again, I don't believe that they, in any of these, have actually provided evidence for this. Look, we don't know exactly what people were thinking, but certainly I do not believe that that had increased community tension, violence and public disorder because, ultimately, unfortunately, I don't believe that my post, when it had been posted, actually changed much in terms of the violence.

That was always going to happen.

That happened. You don't know for sure, but certainly, I believe, that the protest, having been planned from before 1:00 pm, I don't think anything I would have said by 4:00 pm would have made a difference to that.

They basically go on to say your disclosure endangered vulnerable people, incited community division, and resulted in an attack on a public facility, which are all opposed to the four principles of your ministerial brief. They say that your actions, as Minister for Communities, you're responsible for supporting vulnerable individuals and supporting social cohesion. This is on the back of that page I gave you, tackling disadvantage and encouraging inclusive communities, and protecting community infrastructure, including shared public facilities. They believe that this disclosure really went against that. Now, I mean you are very free to speak to why you believe that is not the case, and refute that if you like. They believe that.

I believe that I have already in how I have answered these questions. I'm happy to say it again, but I believe that this is clutching at straws. Again, I think this would have been very different... 'His disclosure endangered vulnerable people,' he said. Again, I think this comes from a misunderstanding. Yes, so this was sent on the Friday, so this was sent very soon after to you.

Yes. I must say...

Sorry, on the 12th.

Yes, and I must say, as you know this, some trickled in days.

Yes.

But they are pretty much an exact copy of this.

Yes, so it's a pro-forma that people have done.

Yes, people have decided...

So, the 12th of June, within a few hours of what had happened that night before, and they were putting this in, before, I think, that people had an understanding because I think where this fundamentally falls down is where it talks about me endangering vulnerable people, and I believe that these...

Yes, because there was nobody in there.

Yes, I think their understanding, and I think they would have been justified in being annoyed at this, if I'd publicly revealed a location where people were still being housed, albeit temporarily. I think that is where their anger comes from.

Interestingly, your post says they've been moved, so there is still anger, even though people had been moved, isn't it? Your post says were temporarily moved, in the early hours of the morning following disturbances, and you say, 'It has now been confirmed that all these individuals are in the care of the Housing Executive and have moved out of Larne.'

I wouldn't be surprised if some of the complainants hadn't even read the whole thing. It was very, very clear, and I can see if I can - if you bear with me just a few seconds...

Sure.

...because I think it's important. The Green Party of Northern Ireland, in a Facebook post, says, 'Our Minister for Communities chose to reveal the location of vulnerable families forced from their homes. This reckless move put lives at risk, fanned division, and exposed the failures at the heart of his leadership,' and that was then calling for me to resign, and I think that that was at the base of this. Many people tried to suggest that I had, in live time, told people, and some of the media coverage of this as well made it seem as if I was telling people where they were, and that they had been moved on after the fact. That's where my frustration comes from.

Because they had already been moved.

Yes.

And your Facebook post said that.

Yes.

No, and I understand that, and I think we're just going to move on to one of the complaints. What we're talking about covers all of those complaints.

Yes.

I don't want to say on record how many complaints, I'm not supposed to, but there's a lot. The one from Matthew O'Toole is one I want to focus on, because he is the one who actually brings in a few other bits of the code, aside from 1.54. He brings in 1.56 and 1.57. In relation to six, operating in a way that's conducive to promoting good community relations and equality of treatment, and seven, not to use information being in the course of your service for personal gain. Can we talk about seven, first? Did you use any information for personal gain?

No, I think that's ridiculous that the Leader of the Opposition, and what is meant to be a senior politician, could suggest in any way that I had any personal gain from putting this post up. I think that's ridiculous.

Okay, and in terms of operating in a way that's conducive to promoting good community relations and equality of treatment, I think it's best to maybe go through some of the questions I have relating to his complaint, and that you answer that. He is saying it's highly irregular that you would publicly confirm and highlight that the centre was being used to shelter victims, but he said that they were clients of the Housing Executive, and you should be familiar with the Housing Executive's policy to protect the privacy of its customers, especially those who have been targeted by intimidation, harassment and criminal behaviour, and may still be at risk. You don't believe that you, in any way, undermined the privacy of any of these people.

No, and with the greatest respect, this was not about the individuals concerned because in my mind, in the drafting of this post, these individuals had been looked after, and, as I said in my statement there now, in the care of the Housing Executive and moved out of Larne, so anything to do with undermining their safety, there is no basis in reality in that because, as far as I was concerned, they had been moved on. They were getting other forms of temporary accommodation. This was about a protest that had been planned for hours on the basis that people were still there, and they wanted to protest at that fact, and it was me saying they aren't there.

Okay, so his point, though, his point - and I understand your point - then he goes on to say that you could have just stated that the rumour was false, that rumour that perhaps Larne Leisure Centre was being turned into permanent accommodation, and you mentioned you were trying to avoid misinformation, which is very, very important to do as a minister, I get that, but in saying that, he's saying you should have done that, or could have done that, without highlighting the centre's vulnerable victims the night before. Do you see any validity to that argument, that actually naming Larne Leisure Centre is part of the issue here? I'm not saying you intended. I'm simply saying that if you were to have said, 'I understand that everybody who was involved, any individuals have been moved out of the area,' without mentioning, what do you say to that? Do you want a copy, or do you have a copy of that?

I have a copy of that. I brought that with me.

Thank you.

Sorry, your question is, could I have said instead that a number of individuals were temporarily moved to Larne following the disturbances in Ballymena? Sure.

You see this bit, it's about three down from the first or second page, sorry. The second page, underneath, it starts...

Yes, 'Minister Lyons could have stated that the rumour was false without highlighting the centre's role in sheltering the victims the night before,' could I have omitted it? Yes, I could, but everybody knew exactly where we were talking about.

It was out there.

It wasn't going to make any difference. It goes back to the previous point that I made, someone could easily have commented beneath it very quickly and said, 'We'd heard it was Larne,' I would have confirmed then, or said whatever. Look, materially - materially would it have made any difference? No.

No, okay.

No, and not even just my opinion on that. It was so well-known by those, it was part of the post that had gone up. The locations were all there. It was online. People understood. People knew.

People who were interested knew, isn't that right? I mean, in other words, I didn't know.

Yes.

I'm not a social media user.

But you don't live in Larne.

Right, so the people that were interested would read it for whatever reason, good and bad.

Yes, they were aware that it was Larne. Look, it was providing clarification. I was being transparent of what was happening, and that ultimately wouldn't have made any difference.

Now, he says something interesting. He says in the next paragraph, 'Immigrants were not the only groups that had been targeted, several police officers,' so rioters were not just targeting migrants, but also those that protected them he says, and so he believes that highlighting the leisure centre's role placed the centre, and those who worked there, and that's where I was picking up at earlier. It was not that in that first load of formatted frames, but in his. I wondered, had you thought of that at all, because he's right in that there are other people that work at that leisure centre, so I just want to get your take on that?

Yes, so go back to what I was trying to do here, which was to say, 'Yes, it had been used, but it's not being used for that purpose anymore.' That wasn't something, by the way, that I was revealing, okay, it was on the Larne Anti-Immigrant Facebook page. This is something that the council had released a statement on as well. The council had put that out, so I don't think this was something that I, myself, had just put out.

If you were responsible, so were they.

No, I'm saying I wasn't the only one that thought it's good to be open and transparent, to tell people what was actually happening.

Yes, okay, so that's how he came up with article seven, so in relation to article seven was, 'We believe he disclosed information in an indiscreet and irresponsible manner,' that's their position, and, 'In a manner that was likely to damage community relations,' which is six. Anyway, yes, you've probably said everything you wanted to say about that, but please jump in if you don't.

Okay.

Now, this is going back to what I asked you about already, but he claims that, 'The tone of your message was interpreted by many as expressing his disapproval that the individuals had been briefly sheltered in this community, or suggesting that he would have prevented the centre from being used as an emergency shelter.' I think this is really important, Gordon, because that is about that statement of, 'We weren't even consulted.' Some people read it just as the tone I used there, 'But wait, we weren't consulted. We wouldn't have given our approval.' Please explain whether you meant that or not.

So, first of all, I think it shows how the complaint is that we're getting into the territory of talking about a tone.

Well, I used the word 'tone'. Oh, he did.

He did, yes.

Okay.

Further on down this page, he implied a desire, and in the previous page it could be very easy to deduce, I think that shows how weak this complaint actually is, but in terms of that message and myself, from where I was coming from, certainly when I looked at that and thought, yes, that's a sentence worth including in there, it was because I was getting calls from constituents. I was being asked what's going on, or what information are you hiding, or you're not telling us of what's going on? That came from a position of wanting to clarify, 'I wasn't aware that this had happened. I'm telling you now, because this is as soon as I know all of the facts, and I've got all of the information.'

Okay, so my next question is really, you're sitting here and you're making a lot of sense to me.

Well, you don't have to sound so surprised about that.

No! Sorry, I don't mean to sound surprised, but you are making sense to me, and I feel like I want to know why you did not then, why did you not go on to clarify? You went on to say, 'I do not have to apologise,' I heard that in the Chamber, right? You did nothing to apologise about, but at no point did you ever go back on to the statement and say, 'Just for clarity,' what you've just told me.

Do you mean editing the post?

Well, no, but clarifying afterwards because there were so many people, you were on *Nolan*, there was a lot going on after, and you did clarify, I know.

Yes, and on *Good Morning Ulster*. I was asked that question on *Good Morning Ulster* and on *Nolan*. I believe I was asked about it in the Chamber as well, and I gave those answers.

Yes, you were.

So, I did.

So, you clarify that way.

Very publicly.

But you didn't take it down, right?

No.

Any reason why? Just curious.

Because I didn't think anything else needed adding on to it. I'd provided that additional context.

In the media.

Yes.

Okay, so you thought that was enough.

Yes.

And you would never have retracted it, or edited it because you didn't believe it had anything wrong with it, is that correct?

Again, it was factual information.

Can I just ask you?

Yes.

This is not to get into the politics, but the Secretary of State situation, he says - and I remember this - you called for an apology, you believed that he...

Yes.

Can you just tell me a little bit about that, so I understand it better?

Because my understanding is that, at that time, I was asked about his comments, but that was very early on. He had recorded that before I was on *BBC Nolan* where I was able to set that out, and I think that he was taking the approach that many others had taken in the late hours of that night, and the early hours of the next morning, which was he highlighted where individuals were currently being held at that time that I had indicated, and I think that was his understanding of it. I think that he thought that I had said, 'These are where people are being held,' and I think that we've had a lot of politicians over that 24 hours after the events of that evening were really quick to say what they thought had happened rather than actually stopping to think about it.

You have had me in here now for 50 minutes. We've had a good chat through these issues, and I've answered your questions. The next day, the Communities Committee, without any discussion, decided to pass a motion of no confidence in me. They weren't looking for the facts. They weren't looking for information. In my opinion, they were driven by politics. I think that's what some others were driven by as well.

Okay, thank you for that answer. You'll be happy to know I have a few questions left, and John might pick up on something I've missed, but would, in hindsight, it's very important for me to understand, would you change how or whether you communicated this information? Would you do anything different?

But hindsight is a wonderful thing.

I know, it's important.

It is, yes. Look, I obviously regret that such a furore was made out of this. I regret the fact that it had impacts on Executive relations on the United Executive message that we had, because the focus became on me and a few words in a Facebook post. At that time, I read what was there, and I thought that was appropriate for publication. In the weeks after, I've looked at it again, and I still don't believe that there is anything there that is wrong. Look, you can always look back, especially at the events which happened and say maybe you could have been clearer on that, but certainly, I believe, that what is there was correct at the time, and what is correct today. It's how others have chosen to amplify certain sections of it.

I tend to ask at the end, is there anything additional that we haven't touched upon, or information that you believe should be considered to understand the situation around these complaints? Anything I have missed?

I don't think so.

We have been pretty thorough.

I'm happy to come back to you again.

Just to recall, about the bits of evidence you say you have, that you'll send.

Yes.

John, is there anything that I've...?

I2: No, I just want to recap on a couple of issues, Gordon, if I may. You have confirmed, I think, that the post was issued on your behalf by the office.

Yes.

I2: And you have confirmed that you proofread the post, because in the original post, it'll not get mentioned 17 individuals who you thought wasn't appropriate to name.

Yes.

I2: So, when you reconsidered the content, did you not consider that the second paragraph, 'As a local MLA for the area, neither I nor my DUP council colleagues were made aware or consulted in this decision until late in the afternoon,' did you not consider that could be seen as a criticism of the Housing Executive or the relevant authorities?

That wasn't what was in my mind at that time. I think people were asking me, 'Do you have this information? Are you withholding this information?' or, 'What do you know?' That was more to let people know, 'I'm letting you know when I do.'

I2: But you wouldn't ordinarily be expected to be consulted on decisions made by the Housing Executive, because they have their own management structure.

As an MLA, no.

I2: So, you've no operational role in that.

No, I don't. No, I was clear about that, but I think it is useful to speak to political representatives to get their views, and I never at any time claim to be a decision-maker on that. I never said that I have the power of veto in any of these things, but it's good for us to have the information on other people.

I2: But, on reflection and reading it back, do you see that there could be a presumed criticism?

I can see how it could be considered as a presumed criticism, but I don't believe that that, in itself, was a breach of the Ministerial Code.

I2: In relation to the point that Matthew O'Toole has raised, 'At no point did he retract or edit his post, or issue a follow-up post to clarify his remarks.'

So, what's your question?

I2: The complaint contained within Matthew O'Toole's issue, 'At no point did he retract or edit his post, or issue a follow-up post to clarify his remarks.'

Yes, I'm sorry, what's the question?

I2: The question is, you could have rectified the situation for the benefit of the community and the constituency to say that they are no longer there, which is contained within your original post, and that the leisure centre is open for business as normal to the public, which it was.

Yes, maybe I could have added that in that the leisure centre had now been opened, or that it was continuing to open, but did I consider issuing a follow-up to that? I believe that the information that had been provided at that time was accurate and complete.

I2: And you didn't think it necessary to put out a further post to defuse any potential unrest that may, or may not have taken place, and in fact did take place.

That's exactly why the last line was included, 'Protesting is a legitimate right, but violence is not. I would encourage everyone to remain peaceful.'

I2: But that was at 4:00?

Yes.

I2: You didn't put anything out further after that when the disturbances took place.

I did.

I2: Pardon.

I did.

Yes.

I2: You did?

Yes.

I2: Okay.

Can you send me that?

Yes, it's still up there, yes.

If you can just grab it.

Yes.

Yes. Oh, sorry, John.

I2: No, I just wanted to clarify those issues.

That's fine, no problem.

Are you done?

I2: Yes.

Yes, so okay, so thanks. Yes, and I understand, just to pull up on that, that there is, in my head, this idea about... Can I just ask? Was there any, at all, were you politicising this issue at all? Had you intention of politicising it in any way?

Absolutely not.

I want that on record.

Others did, in my opinion, by their actions afterwards, but I think if you read the post, there is no politics in there at all.

Yes, I know.

Yes.

Well, I think there is criticism that could be levelled that says that publicising a safety and welfare matter by actually saying the local DUP reps weren't informed, do you follow? That's where I'm coming from.

I can see the argument, but, again, as I...

No, and that's where these nuances of every sentence of that comes, because people read it differently, and I would say sometimes it can be dangerous even to okay a thing. I don't know. I just always say to people, 'Let legal read it.' I mean, let somebody read it because the interpretation you may not see.

Yes, but to be fair, you would never be out of this office in reviewing MLAs and ministers if you took such a wide-ranging approach to everybody. Seriously, the language that is used in this complaint from Matthew O'Toole it could be easy to deduce a tone of a message was interpreted by many. You're getting into really subjective and viewed...

Yes, this is the problem, so your Ministerial Code, Gordon, is ethics-based...

Yes.

...which is a good thing. It's a good thing for trust in the public and all that.

Which may also be a subjective view.

Yes, but also if it was done as an MLA complaint, it would be very different because this whole idea of tone and all that, and the seven principles of public life are enforceable with the Ministerial Code, you know, rather than an MLA code, they're not enforceable in their own right. There is a different code here.

[REDACTED], but what I'm saying is, we are used to using this Ministerial Code, and it is a thing about the Ministerial Code, that the principles are enforceable, so there's that. It's a little bit harder with the MLA code, a lot more inadmissibility in this respect for the seven principles because you can't just have a complaint based on the seven principles, and if you understand the majority of these complaints that come in on a scripted situation, which by the way I have to say, again, on the record, does not make them any less amount of complaint.

Yes.

But they are about the seven principles, that's what they're about, so Mr. O'Toole's adds a bit more to it, and I can see where you're saying subjectivity in some of that. I take your point. Yes, I mean I don't believe I have anything else to ask. I did need to get to the bottom of exactly what your intention was behind it, because it's very important to know that. By the end of summer, I should have this done and dusted anyway, but if there is anything else you think that is important in that evidence that we've already mentioned that you want to send along, any sort of screenshots, it just adds to the whole thing...

I'll do that. That's fine, I'll do that.

...and I think adds clarity to the situation.

Okay, thank you very much.

Thank you. The time is - oh, that's nice - it's absolutely 1:3, an hour. Thank you for coming.

Thank you.

[END OF TRANSCRIPT]

From: "Lyons, Gordon" <gordon.lyons@mla.niassembly.gov.uk>
Date: 11 June 2025 at 14:33:52 BST
To: Gordon Lyons [REDACTED] >
Subject: Re: REQUEST FOR ADVICE Larne LC protest planned tonight 11/6/25

Dear [REDACTED]

Thanks for your email, there was a multi-agency emergency operation last night and around 17 residents were brought to Larne Leisure Centre temporarily until the Housing Executive opened for business. These residents have been moved out of the Leisure Centre and placed in temporary accommodation outside of the Borough.

Unfortunately we do not have any further information but are aware that there are many rumours circulating on Social Media.

If you are concerned about potential protests I would recommend that you contact the Council on 03001245000 to make them aware of your concerns and ask what measures that they are taking to ensure that the site is secure.

I hope this is helpful.

Kind regards

[REDACTED]

From: [REDACTED] <party.niassembly.gov.uk>
Sent: 11 June 2025 13:21
To: Lyons, Gordon CO <gordon.lyons@co.niassembly.gov.uk>; Lyons, Gordon <gordon.lyons@mla.niassembly.gov.uk>
Subject: REQUEST FOR ADVICE Larne LC protest planned tonight 11/6/25

Dear Gordon's office and Team:

This posting is circulating today – what's your recommendation?

Larne Swimming Club will have over 100+ swimmers from age 3-80 visiting the centre for lessons starting at 6 p.m. – none of whom need/want this hassle.

We all know that police resources are limited.

Please advise asap, many thanks.

Kind regards,

[REDACTED]

<image002.png> [REDACTED]

Office of Dr Steve Aiken OBE MLA

Deputy Speaker
Ulster Unionist Party
South Antrim Constituency

Constituency Office: 028 9334 4966
X: @SteveAikenUUP
Inst: steve.aikenuk
FB: SteveAikenOBE

3 The Square
Ballyclare
BT39 9BB

20:22

30

Document 7



R

Edit



PSNI



message



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video



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11 June 2025

13:51 **Incoming Call**

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Gordon Lyons MLA



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**Gordon Lyons MLA**

11 Jun •

East Antrim MLA Gordon Lyons has condemned the damage inflicted on Larne Leisure Centre tonight and said it only serves to hurt residents of the town.

He said, "The violence and disorder witnessed on our streets over recent nights serves no purpose. Wanton destruction such as the attack on Larne Leisure Centre is an attack on all residents who use the facility.

There is absolutely no excuse for what has taken place in Larne, and it must be condemned."



Home



Video



Friends



Marketplace



Notifications



Menu



11 June
22:25



Love Ballymena

6h ·



The Council confirmed the activation of the Emergency Rest Centre (ERC) was part of its established emergency response protocols, carried out in collaboration with local partner agencies.



LOVEBALLYMENA.ONLINE

Emergency Rest Centre activated in Larne to support families displaced by disorder in Ballymena



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178

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Note of telephone conversation with Constable [REDACTED] PSNI
30 July 2025

The following are salient points of the call:

1. [REDACTED] explained the background of the day, 11 June 2025.
2. Due to online activity etc, [REDACTED] was made aware that there would be a protest.
3. [REDACTED] was asked by his superior to 'get the word out' that individuals who were relocated to the Larne Leisure Centre the evening before had moved on and were no longer at the Centre or in Larne.
4. As part of getting the word out, [REDACTED] contacted politicians including the DUP Councillor Cllr Gregg McKeen asking them to get the word out that "people were no longer in Larne or the Leisure Centre".
5. [REDACTED] confirmed that at no point did he ask anyone to mention the Housing Executive or the fact that the PSNI did not consult the DUP in relation to moving individuals who were affected to the Larne Leisure Centre the night before.

From: +StandardsCommissioner
Sent: Fri, 8 Aug 2025 05:55:58 +0000
To: StandardsCommissioner@[REDACTED]
Subject: FW: Findings from Commissioner for Standards: Case ID - 202500040

From: 2024 DfC Minister <[REDACTED]>
Sent: 07 August 2025 14:34
To: +StandardsCommissioner <standardscommissioner@niassembly.gov.uk>
Subject: RE: Findings from Commissioner for Standards: Case ID - 202500040

You don't often get email from [REDACTED] [Learn why this is important](#)

Dear Melissa

Thank you for your email and for the copy of your Findings of Fact. I acknowledge points 1,2,3,5 and I agree with your assertion that these are facts and that I have provided you with evidence to ascertain their veracity.

However, on point 4, I do not agree with your view that “Minister Lyons...failed to understand and/or sufficiently consider the impact of the wording of his post or its repercussions.”

Firstly, it is important to reiterate the reason behind the post.

I was aware of the community tension (as you have stated in point 3), I was aware of the planned protest (as you have stated in point 1) and the police had requested that the word got out that no one was still seeking refuge (as you have confirmed in point 2).

These were all factors that were taken into consideration in the drafting and publication of the post.

The reasoning for the post was to help diffuse the tensions and therefore ensure a better outcome. It was clear, it was factual and it ended with an appeal for non-violence. This demonstrates there was a clear purpose for the post that due consideration was given to its contents, as I outlined during my interview with you.

You also state that I did not understand or sufficiently consider the ‘repercussions’ of the post. This is incorrect and cannot be stated as fact.

If there is an implication that the violence was a repercussion of the post, I reject that.

I did not provide any information regarding who had been in the leisure centre that was not already in the public domain (released to the media by the council), or had not already been on social media for hours. You have already established that my post was not the reason for the protest, as it had been planned for hours beforehand, and therefore the post was not the reason for the violence.

It had been my intention that the information that I posted would have helped to calm tensions and dispel rumours. That is what I had hoped the effect would be.

It is now the case that some in their ignorance of the facts, have tried to claim that what took place was a direct repercussion of the post. I reject that. I gave proper consideration to the post and I considered the impacts of it.

In terms of repercussions, its worth noting that at no stage before the leisure center was attacked did anyone say that the post was provocative, nor was I accused of inciting anyone to take any action. It was only after the attack that political opponents and others attributed blame to me, albeit it that after the facts became known most rowed back on the initial accusations that were made.

The idea that my post contributed to the violence was manufactured and I do not believe that it can be credibly argued that the two were linked when you consider all the facts.

The logical outworking of this thinking is that the council and the media are also responsible by the publicising the same information, in advance of me, but I note that their actions have not been subject to the same faux outrage.

I did sufficiently consider the reasonable repercussions of the post but the violence that ensued was not a repercussion.

I hope this is helpful.

Gordon

From: StandardsCommissioner@niassembly.gov.uk <StandardsCommissioner@niassembly.gov.uk>
Sent: 31 July 2025 16:51
To: DFC Private Office <private.office@communities-ni.gov.uk>
Subject: Case ID - 202500040

Dear Minister Lyons

Please find attached communication from the Commissioner for Standards, Dr Melissa McCullough.

Kind regards

Office of the Commissioner for Standards



Commissioner for Standards
222 Parliament Buildings
Ballymiscaw
Stormont
Belfast
BT4 3XX

Tel: 028 9052 1220
Email: standardscommissioner
@niassembly.gov.uk

Minister Gordon Lyons MLA
Stormont Castle
Stormont Estate
Belfast
BT4 3TT

8 August 2025

Dear Minister Lyons

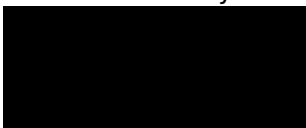
Thank you for your response to my findings of fact which I have carefully considered.

On reviewing the finding itself, I acknowledge it may be more appropriately expressed as an opinion rather than a finding of fact. I have therefore decided to remove it from the list of facts.

For the record, in relation to your questioning of the meaning of the finding, there was no intention to suggest that the violence at the leisure centre was a consequence of your post; there is no evidence to substantiate such a connection. The repercussions to which I referred related to the overall reaction to the content and tone of your message.

I trust this has answered your concerns. For transparency, both this letter and your letter of 7th August will be appended to my report.

Yours sincerely



Dr Melissa McCullough
Northern Ireland Assembly Commissioner for Standards

Encs

PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL

Findings of Fact

I found the following facts established to the required standards of proof:

1. The office of Steve Aiken UUP sent an email to Mr Lyons' office at 13:21 on 11 June 2025 asking for advice in relation to a post from "Larne Anti-immigration Protest" which was promoting a protest at Larne Leisure Centre that evening at 7pm when there would be over 100 swimmers, including children, using the facilities.
2. The PSNI contacted DUP Counsellor Gregg McKeen at 13:51 on 11 June 2025 to ask them to get the word out that there were no people sheltering in Larne Leisure Centre and that the people had been moved out of Larne.
3. At the time of his first Facebook post at 15:50 on 11 June 2025, Minister Lyons was aware of the unrest over the previous days and was aware of the volatility within communities.
4. Minister Lyons posted on Facebook again at 21:06 on 11 June 2025 condemning the damage inflicted on Larne Leisure Centre.