



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee on Standards and Privileges

Minutes of Proceedings

7 May 2025

Meeting Location: Room 106, Parliament Buildings

Present:

Cathy Mason MLA (Chairperson)

Paul Frew MLA

Harry Harvey MLA

Brian Kingston MLA

Present by video or teleconference:

Connie Egan (Deputy Chairperson)

Stewart Dickson MLA

Declan McAleer MLA

Apologies:

Jemma Dolan MLA

Colin McGrath MLA

In Attendance:

Shane McAteer, Committee Clerk

Ashleigh Mitford, Senior Assistant Clerk

Elaine Farrell, Assistant Clerk

Alison Ferguson, Clerical Supervisor

Laura Gourley, Clerical Officer

Adam Leitch, Legal Advisor (agenda item 6)

The meeting commenced at 10.02 a.m. in closed session

1. Apologies

As above.

2. Declaration of interests

The Chairperson advised Members of the ongoing requirement to declare relevant financial or other interests as and when they arise and before taking part in any Assembly proceedings, including Committee proceedings, relating to that matter.

Ms Egan declared an interest in relation to the complaint case report to be considered under agenda item 5, in being a member of the Assembly Committee referred to in the complaint, and advised that she would recuse herself from the relevant agenda item.

Mr Kingston declared an interest in relation to the complaint case report to be considered under agenda item 5, in being a member of the Assembly Committee referred to in the complaint, and advised that he would recuse himself from the relevant agenda item.

Mr Harvey declared an interest that he is a member of the proposed All-Party Group on Funerals and Bereavement to be considered under agenda item 7.

3. Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 2 April 2025.

4. Matters Arising

None.

Ms Egan and Mr Kingston left the meeting at 10.04 a.m.

5. Complaint against a Member – consideration of draft Committee report

The Chairperson reminded the Committee that the draft report was developed in line with the Committee's decisions on the complaint case, which were taken at the meeting on 26 March 2025.

Mr Frew joined the meeting at 10.13 a.m.

The Committee undertook formal consideration of the draft report as follows:

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Title Page, Table of Contents, Powers and Membership and List of Abbreviations, as drafted, stand part of the report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the 'Introduction' section, at paragraphs 1 and 2 of the report, stands part of the report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that 'Role of the Committee' section, at paragraphs 3-5 of the report, stands part of the report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the 'Background' section, at paragraphs 6-11 of the report, stands part of the report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the 'Relevant rules in the Members' Code of Conduct' section, at paragraph 12, stands part of the report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the 'Commissioner's findings and reasoned decisions' section, at paragraphs 13-24 of the report, stands part of the report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the 'Committee's consideration and conclusions' section, at paragraphs 25-26 of the report, stands part of the report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the 'Rule of conduct: points to prove' section, at paragraphs 27-29 of the report, stands part of the report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the 'Convention and relevant jurisprudence' section, at paragraph 30-32 of the report, stands part of the report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the 'Examination of the allegations' section, at paragraphs 33-43 of the report, stands part of the report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the 'Principles of Conduct' section, at paragraphs 44-45 of the report, stands part of the report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the 'Recommendations' section, at paragraphs 46-47 of the report, stands part of the report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the 'Links to Appendices', at page 20 of the report, stand part of the report.

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

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the report be the seventh report of the Committee on Standards and Privileges in the 2022-2027 Mandate.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Chairperson will agree the minutes of today's meeting so that they may be included in the Minutes of Proceedings appendix to the report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the report will be published online on the Assembly website at noon on 9 May 2025 and will remain embargoed until then.

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

Noted: The Committee noted that a copy of the report will be laid in the Assembly Business Office, which will be available for viewing by all MLAs once the embargo has expired.

Noted: The Committee noted that a link to the report will be emailed to all MLAs following publication on the Assembly website.

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

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

Ms Egan and Mr Kingston rejoined the meeting at 10.24 a.m.

6. Further consideration of decisions on inadmissible complaints – briefing by Legal Services

The Committee Clerk briefed the Committee on the background to this agenda item.

The Assembly Legal Advisor, Adam Leitch, joined the meeting at 10.27 a.m.

The Legal Advisor briefed the Committee and this was followed by a question and answer session.

The Chairperson thanked the Legal Advisor for his briefing.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to the proposed amendments to the General Procedures Direction (GPD), as outlined by the Legal Advisor, subject to some additional clarificatory amendments in relation to the time limits for complaints and to consulting the Commissioner for Standards on the proposed amendments prior to the introduction of a revised GPD.

Noted: The Committee noted that the agreed amendments to the GPD will be taken forward as part of a wider review of the GPD, including any amendments arising from other ongoing Committee considerations, such as the implementation of the Unacceptable Behaviours Policy.

7. APG issues – proposed APGs

The Assistant Clerk briefed the Committee on the proposals for an All-Party Group (APG) on Funerals and Bereavement and an APG on Rare Disease.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content to approve the establishment of an APG on Funerals and Bereavement and an APG on Rare Disease.

8. Correspondence

None.

9. Any other business

None.

10. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting

The next meeting of the Committee is scheduled to take place on Wednesday 4 June 2025 at 10.00 a.m. in room 106.

The meeting was adjourned at 11.08 a.m.

Cathy Mason MLA

Chairperson, Committee on Standards and Privileges

7 May 2025