



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

# Committee on Standards and Privileges

## Minutes of Proceedings

**29 April 2026**

Meeting Location: Room 106, Parliament Buildings

**Present:**

Cathy Mason MLA (Chairperson)

Connie Egan (Deputy Chairperson)

Keith Buchanan MLA

Declan McAleer MLA

Emma Sheerin MLA

**Apologies:**

Trevor Clarke MLA

Stewart Dickson MLA

**In attendance by video or teleconference:**

Mark Durkan MLA

Paul Frew MLA

**In Attendance:**

Shane McAteer, Committee Clerk

Ashleigh Mitford, Senior Assistant Clerk

Elaine Farrell, Assistant Clerk

Laura Gourley, Clerical Supervisor

Alison Ferguson, Clerical Officer

Htaik Win, Legal Advisor (agenda item 6)

The meeting commenced at 10.03 a.m. in closed session, in accordance with agreed procedure.

**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.

The Chairperson declared an interest in relation to the investigation case to be considered under agenda item 5 and advised that she would recuse herself from that agenda item.

The Deputy Chairperson declared an interest that she is a member of the All-Party Group (APG) referred to in an item of correspondence to be considered under agenda item 9.

Paul Frew declared an interest that he is a member of the APG referred to in an item of correspondence to be considered under agenda item 9 and that he has had previous communication with the organisation concerned and indicated that he would recuse himself from that agenda item.

### **3. Minutes**

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 18 March 2026.

### **4. Matters Arising**

None.

The Chairperson recused herself from the next agenda item and left the meeting at 10.06 a.m. The Deputy Chairperson took the Chair.

### **5. Complaints against a Minister – briefing by Commissioner for Standards on an investigation report**

The Commissioner for Standards, Mr Stephen Wright, joined the meeting at 10.07 a.m.

Emma Sheerin joined the meeting at 10.08 a.m.

Mark Durkin joined the meeting at 10.23 a.m.

The Commissioner briefed the Committee on his complaints investigation report and this was followed by a question and answer session.

The Chairperson thanked the Commissioner for his briefing.

The Commissioner left the meeting at 11.15 a.m.

The Chairperson reminded members that the procedural arrangements for determining complaints against Ministers differ from those for complaints against MLAs, given that the Committee does not currently have an adjudication role in relation to complaints of alleged breaches of the Ministerial Code of Conduct.

The Committee considered the complaints investigation report from the Commissioner.

Following discussion, there was no consensus on the Committee on next steps. As such, the Deputy Chairperson put the question that the Committee follows the approach taken with previous ministerial complaint cases by publishing the

Commissioner's investigation report, without requesting further investigation by the Commissioner.

The Committee divided: Ayes 2; Noes 4; Abstain 0.

**AYES**

Keith Buchanan

Paul Frew

**NOES**

Connie Egan

Mark Durkan

Declan McAleer

Emma Sheerin

The proposal fell.

Declan McAleer proposed that the Committee requests the Commissioner to carry out further investigation of issues identified during the Committee's considerations, and that a draft letter to the Commissioner specifying the issues to be investigated will be prepared, in consultation with Legal Services, for consideration at the next meeting.

The Deputy Chairperson put the question on Mr McAleer's proposal.

The Committee divided: Ayes 4; Noes 2, Abstain 0.

**AYES**

Connie Egan

Mark Durkan

Declan McAleer

Emma Sheerin

## **NOES**

Keith Buchanan

Paul Frew

The proposal was carried.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to commission legal advice on what, if any, further redactions are required to the Commissioner's investigation report in order to ensure the Committee meets its legal obligations in line with normal practice.

**Noted:** The Committee noted that the case will be considered further at the next meeting in light of the above decisions

The meeting suspended at 11.33 a.m.

The meeting resumed at 11.39 a.m.

The following members were in attendance:

Cathy Mason, Connie Egan, Keith Buchanan, Mark Durkan, Paul Frew, Emma Sheerin.

## **6. The Ministerial Code of Conduct – briefing by Legal Services**

The Assembly Legal Advisor, Htaik Win, joined the meeting at 11.41 a.m. and briefed the Committee on its commissioned legal advice on the devolution of powers in relation to the Ministerial Code of Conduct. This was followed by a question and answer session.

Declan McAleer rejoined the meeting at 11.45 a.m.

Keith Buchanan left the meeting at 11.50 a.m.

Emma Sheerin left the meeting at 11.54 a.m.

The Chairperson thanked the Legal Advisor for her briefing.

The Legal Advisor left the meeting at 11.55 a.m.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that it is content to note the legal advice and to further consider the issue in the context of the Committee's wider considerations on whether it should seek adjudicatory functions in relation to ministerial complaints.

## 7. Discontinuation of complaints

The Committee Clerk declared an interest in having been the Clerk to the Assembly Committee whose proceedings are referenced in the two complaint cases being considered.

Emma Sheerin rejoined the meeting at 12.02 p.m.

The Committee Clerk briefed the Committee on the background to two complaint cases, one of which was made in 2015 and the other made in 2016, in which both investigations were suspended pending the outcome of a police investigation and subsequent court proceedings.

**Noted:** The Committee noted that the Acting Commissioner for Standards, Mr Gerard Elias CBE KC, who was appointed by the Assembly on 15 February 2016 to deal with the 2015 case, had written recently to the Committee to report that consideration of the 2015 complaint should be discontinued, to explain the reasons and to seek the Committee's approval in that regard.

**Noted:** The Committee noted that the previous Commissioner for Standards, Dr Melissa McCullough, had similarly written to the Committee, prior to her term of office ending, to explain why she believed that consideration of the 2016 complaint should be discontinued and to seek the Committee's approval in that regard.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to the Acting Commissioner's request for approval to discontinue consideration of the 2015 complaint, in light of the procedures for discontinuation of complaints and the specific circumstances of the case in question.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to the previous Commissioner's request for approval to discontinue consideration of the 2016 complaint, in light of the procedures for discontinuation of complaints and the specific circumstances of the case in question.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to inform the current Commissioner of its decisions on both cases, in order for him to advise the respondents and the complainants accordingly.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to record in the minutes of proceedings that the appointment of the Acting Commissioner has now ceased, following his having reported to the Committee, and to advise him accordingly.

Mark Durkan declared an interest in relation to the complaint case to be considered under the next agenda item and recused himself from the proceedings.

Mark Durkan left the meeting at 12.05 p.m.

## **8. Complaint against Members – 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 18 March 2026.

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

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

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

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

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that the 'Background' section, at paragraphs 6-9, stands part of the report.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that the 'Relevant rules in the Members' Code of Conduct' section, at paragraph 10, stands part of the report.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that the 'Commissioner's reasoned decision' section, at paragraphs 11-12, stands part of the report.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that the ‘Committee’s consideration and conclusions’ section, at paragraphs 13-18, stands part of the report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the ‘Recommendations’ section, at paragraphs 19-20, stands part of the report.

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

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

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

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

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that, in line with normal practice, the complainant and the respondents will be provided with a copy of the embargoed report in advance of publication (at noon on Friday 1 May 2026).

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

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

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

## **9. Correspondence**

The Committee Clerk briefed the Committee on the items of correspondence received.

**Agreed:** The Committee noted the correspondence from the Commissioner, dated 8 April 2026, on proposed amendments to the General Procedures Direction and agreed for the Clerk to liaise with Legal Services on the issue.

Paul Frew left the meeting at 12.12 p.m.

Mark Durkan rejoined the meeting at 12.14 p.m.

**Agreed:** The Committee noted the correspondence from an external organisation, dated 25 March 2026, in relation to the APG on Domestic Violence and agreed the draft letter to issue in response, subject to adding information in relation to the procedures for the formation of an APG.

**Noted:** The Committee noted the correspondence from the Chairpersons' Liaison Group, dated 15 April 2026, on a proposed revision to the Guidance on the Role of Chairpersons.

## **10. Forward Work Programme**

**Noted:** The Committee noted the Forward Work Programme.

## **11. AOB**

None.

## **12. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting**

The next meeting of the Committee is scheduled to take place on Wednesday 27 May 2026 at 10.00 a.m. in Room 106.

The meeting was adjourned at 12.18 p.m.

**Cathy Mason MLA**

**Chairperson, Committee on Standards and Privileges**

**27 May 2026**