



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee on Standards and Privileges

Minutes of Proceedings

4 March 2026

Meeting Location: Room 106, Parliament Buildings

Present:

Cathy Mason MLA (Chairperson)

Connie Egan (Deputy Chairperson)

Stewart Dickson MLA

Apologies:

Keith Buchanan MLA

In attendance by video or teleconference:

Mark Durkan MLA

Paul Frew MLA

Declan McAleer MLA

Emma Sheerin MLA

In Attendance:

Shane McAteer, Committee Clerk

Ashleigh Mitford, Senior Assistant Clerk

Elaine Farrell, Assistant Clerk

Laura Gourley, Clerical Supervisor

Alison Ferguson, Clerical Officer

Rebecca Ellis, Legal Advisor (agenda item 5)

Adam Leitch, Legal Advisor (agenda item 5)

The meeting commenced at 10.06 a.m. in closed session, in accordance with agreed procedure.

Agreed: The Committee noted that Trevor Clarke and Keith Buchanan had joined the Committee to replace Harry Harvey and Brian Kingston, and agreed to write to Harry Harvey and Brian Kingston to express gratitude for their service to the Committee.

1. Apologies

As above.

Mark Durkan and Declan McAleer joined the meeting at 10.07 a.m.

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.

No interests were declared at this point in the meeting.

3. Minutes

Noted: The Committee noted that the minutes of the meeting held on 11 February 2026 had previously been agreed by the Chairperson following delegation of authority by the Committee to do so, in order that the minutes could be included in a Committee report published on 13 February 2026.

4. Matters Arising

Noted: The Committee noted the item of emailed correspondence, dated 11 February 2026, from a Member who was the respondent in a complaint case on which the Committee had recently reported.

Noted: The Committee noted the emailed correspondence, dated 18 February 2026, from John Hart, Head of Assembly Communications, which provided an update on the recent breach, by a media outlet, of the embargo on a Committee report on a complaint case.

5. Review of the General Procedures Direction

The Committee Clerk introduced this agenda item.

Rebecca Eliis and Adam Leitch, Assembly Legal Advisors, joined the meeting at 10.12 a.m. and briefed the Committee on the proposed revisions to the General Procedures Direction. This was followed by a question and answer session.

Stewart Dickson left the meeting at 10.27 a.m.

The Chairperson thanked the Legal Advisors for their briefing.

The Legal Advisors left the meeting at 10.28 a.m.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to send the proposed revisions to the General Procedures Direction to the Commissioner for Standards for information and comment ahead of final agreement and the issuing of the amended Direction.

Agreed: The Committee agreed not to pursue the recommendation from the previous Committee's Legacy Report 2017-2022 to consider providing the

Commissioner for Standards with the discretion to decide on the admissibility of a complaint notwithstanding a failure to meet the procedural criteria set out in the Direction.

6. Adjudication of complaints against Ministers of alleged breaches of the Ministerial Code of Conduct – next steps

The Committee Clerk briefed members on this agenda item, which included the considerations to inform a final Committee decision on whether or not to seek procedural changes to provide it with a role in adjudicating on complaints against Ministers and in recommending sanctions where applicable.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that members would take the issue back to their parties for further consideration before the Committee makes a final decision on the matter.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek the view of the Commissioner for Standards on the matter in the meantime.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that, to inform its deliberations, legal advice will be commissioned on the feasibility of seeking the devolution of responsibility for the Ministerial Code of Conduct to the Assembly.

7. Draft guidance on respondents attending oral hearings.

The Committee Clerk briefed members on this agenda item.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to apply the draft guidance, as applicable, to those respondents attending oral hearings with the Committee in respect of complaint cases against them.

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

The Assistant Clerk introduced this agenda item.

The Commissioner joined the meeting at 10.47 a.m. and briefed the Committee on the further consideration of his decision that the complaint was inadmissible. This was followed by a question and answer session.

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

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

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

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

The Chairperson thanked the Commissioner for his attendance and briefings.

The Commissioner left the meeting at 10.55 a.m.

10. All-Party Group issues

Agreed: The Committee agreed the draft letter for issue to the Chairperson and members of the APG on Further and Higher Education, which highlights the requirement to hold an Annual General Meeting as per the rules for APGs.

11. Correspondence

The Committee Clerk spoke to the item of correspondence, dated 26 February 2026, from the Chairpersons' Liaison Group (CLG), suggesting a minor amendment to the Guide for Witnesses appearing before Assembly Committees.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to the minor amendment to the Guide for Witnesses appearing before Assembly Committees as suggested by the CLG.

The Committee Clerk spoke to the item of correspondence from an individual, dated 11 February 2026, in response to the Committee's letter of response to previous correspondence, dated 2 February 2026, in which the individual had raised concerns regarding the publication of a Committee report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the draft letter for response for issue to the correspondent.

12. Forward Work Programme

Noted: The Committee noted the Forward Work Programme.

13. AOB

None.

14. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting

The next meeting of the Committee is scheduled to take place on Wednesday 18 March 2026 at 10.00 a.m. in Room 106.

The meeting was adjourned at 11.01 a.m.

Cathy Mason MLA

Chairperson, Committee on Standards and Privileges

18 March 2026