



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee on Standards and Privileges

Minutes of Proceedings

18 March 2026

Meeting Location: Room 106, Parliament Buildings

Present:

Cathy Mason MLA (Chairperson)

Trevor Clarke MLA

Stewart Dickson MLA

Apologies:

Connie Egan (Deputy Chairperson)

Paul Frew MLA

Declan McAleer MLA

In attendance by video or teleconference:

Keith Buchanan MLA

Mark Durkan 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

The meeting commenced at 10.05 a.m. in closed session, in accordance with agreed procedure.

The Chairperson welcomed Keith Buchanan and Trevor Clarke as new members to the Committee.

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.

Mark Durkan declared an interest in relation to the complaint case to be considered under agenda items 5 and 6 and advised that he would recuse himself from those agenda items.

The Chairperson declared an interest that she is a member of the proposed All-Party Group (APG) to be considered under agenda item 8.

Mark Durkan declared an interest that he is a member of the proposed APG to be considered under agenda item 8.

3. Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 4 March 2026.

4. Matters Arising

The Committee Clerk updated the Committee on a Freedom of Information request that had been received by the Assembly Commission that had required input from the Committee secretariat.

Trevor Clarke declared an interest that he is a member of the Assembly Commission.

Mark Durkin left the meeting at 10.09 a.m.

5. Complaint against Members – briefing by Commissioner for Standards on an investigation report

The Commissioner for Standards, Mr Stephen Wright, joined the meeting at 10.09 a.m.

The Commissioner briefed the Committee on his investigation complaint case 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 10.35 a.m.

6. Committee deliberation on a complaint case against Members.

The Committee deliberated on a complaint case against two Members ('the respondents'), which included an allegation of a breach of Rule 12 of the Assembly Members' Code of Conduct.

The Committee considered the allegation which had been made against the respondents, together with the evidence, findings of fact and reasoned decisions of the Commissioner for Standards, as set out in his investigation report.

Agreed: In relation to the allegation which pertained to Rule 12 of the Assembly Members' Code of Conduct, the Committee agreed with the Commissioner's reasoned decision that there was no breach of Rule 12.

The complaint was therefore not upheld and the Committee concluded that the Members in question had not breached the Assembly Members' Code of Conduct.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the draft Committee report will comment on how the complaint case highlights: the need for clarity around the definition, purpose and application of the 'embargo' marking when used on Assembly committee reports; and the importance of Rule 12 (and Rule 19) of the Assembly Members' Code of Conduct, in preventing the unauthorised disclosure of confidential or protectively marked information.

Noted: The Committee noted that the secretariat will prepare a draft Committee report on the complaint case, which will be considered at a future meeting.

Mark Durkin rejoined the meeting at 10.42 a.m.

7. Discontinuation of a complaint

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

The Committee considered correspondence, dated 4 September 2025, from the (former) Commissioner for Standards seeking approval to discontinue consideration of a complaint against a former Member, that had been received in 2016 and consideration of which had been suspended pending the outcome of a related PSNI investigation and subsequent court proceedings.

Noted: The Committee noted the procedures for discontinuation of complaints and the specific circumstances of the case in question, as well as the fact that, even if a former Member was found to have breached the Assembly Members' Code of Conduct, no sanction could be imposed on them by the Assembly.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to further consider the matter at its next meeting.

Noted: The Committee noted that consideration of a related complaint, made in 2015, will be considered at a subsequent meeting and upon receipt of the report/recommendation from the person appointed as Acting Commissioner for Standards for the case.

8. APG issues

The Assistant Clerk briefed the Committee on this agenda item.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to approve the establishment of the APG on Children and Young People.

9. Correspondence

Noted: The Committee noted a follow-up item of correspondence, dated 4 March 2026, from an individual in respect of the publication of a Committee report on a complaint case.

10. Forward Work Programme

Noted: The Committee noted the Forward Work Programme.

11. AOB

The Committee discussed the importance of adjudication training from new Committee members, both at the beginning of a mandate and as new members join the Committee during the course of a mandate.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Committee secretariat will examine the feasibility of providing adjudication training material on the Members' Portal for this purpose, potentially drawing on the applicable resources available from the adjudication training provided to Committee members previously.

12. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting

The next meeting of the Committee is scheduled to take place on Wednesday 29 April 2026 at 10.00 a.m. in Room 106.

The meeting was adjourned at 10.56 a.m.

Cathy Mason MLA

Chairperson, Committee on Standards and Privileges

29 April 2026