



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee on Standards and Privileges

Minutes of Proceedings

21 January 2026

Meeting Location: Room 106, Parliament Buildings

Present:

Cathy Mason MLA (Chairperson)

Connie Egan (Deputy Chairperson)

Stewart Dickson MLA

Brian Kingston MLA

Apologies:

Harry Harvey 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

Maeve Corrigan, Legal Advisor (agenda item 5)

The meeting commenced at 10.01 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.

Connie Egan declared an interest in relation to agenda item 6, in being a member of the Assembly Committee referred to in the complaint under consideration, and advised that she would recuse herself from the relevant agenda item.

Connie Egan declared an interest that she is a member of the proposed All-Party Group (APG) to be considered under agenda item 9.

Brian Kingston declared an interest in relation to agenda item 6, in being a member at the time of the Assembly Committee referred to in the complaint under consideration.

Emma Sheerin declared an interest in relation to agenda item 6, in being a member of the Assembly Committee referred to in the complaint under consideration, and advised that she would recuse herself from the relevant agenda item.

3. Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 3 December 2025.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the publication of the minutes from today's meeting will be deferred until the publication of the Committee's adjudication report on a complaint case in order to ensure that the decisions set out in the embargoed Committee report are not disclosed prior to the plenary debate on the report.

4. Matters Arising

Agreed: The Committee noted the correspondence from a respondent on a complaint case considered by the Committee and in which a letter of apology was requested; and the Committee agreed to note the letter of apology and to append it to the Committee's report on the complaint case.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that a letter of apology template will be prepared for consideration at a future meeting, which would issue to respondents when an apology is agreed as the appropriate approach to resolving a breach of the MLA Code of Conduct.

5. Scope of the MLA Code of Conduct – briefing by Legal Services

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

The Assembly Legal Advisor, Maeve Corrigan, joined the meeting at 10.16 a.m. and briefed the Committee on her legal advice. This was followed by a question and answer session.

The Chairperson thanked the Legal Advisor for her briefing.

The Legal Advisor left the meeting at 10.33 a.m.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that, in its forthcoming report and motion seeking the Assembly approval for various updates to the MLA Code of Conduct, the Committee will include a proposed footnote to paragraph 2.2(c) of the Code to clarify that the exemption does not apply to Assembly committee chairpersons acting as such.

Connie Egan left the meeting at 10.34 a.m.

Emma Sheerin left the meeting at 10.34 a.m.

6. Complaint against a Member – consideration of the 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 3 December 2025.

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 3-4, stands part of the report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the 'Background' section, at paragraphs 5-11, 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 investigation and reasoned decisions' section, at paragraphs 13-18, stands part of the report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the 'Committee's consideration and conclusions' section, at paragraphs 19-31, stands part of the report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the 'Rule of Conduct 15, 13 and 10: Points to Prove' section, at paragraphs 32-36, stands part of the report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that paragraph 37 of the above section does not stand part of the report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the 'Convention and relevant jurisprudence' section, at paragraphs 38-40, stands part of the report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the 'Examination of the allegations' section, at paragraphs 41-63, stands part of the report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the 'Principles of Conduct' section, at paragraphs 64-67, stands part of the report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the 'Sanctions' section, at paragraphs 68-72, stands part of the report.

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

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', at page 30, stand part of the report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the report be the ninth 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 on commencement of the plenary debate on the Committee's recommended sanction 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 embargoed report will be laid in the Assembly Business Office, upon confirmation of the date of the plenary debate on the report and recommended sanction. A link to the report will be emailed to all MLAs at that point, with a covering note to advise of the date of the debate and to highlight the embargo.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the embargoed draft press release for issue, along with a copy of the Committee's embargoed report, to the media outlets as suggested by the Communications Office, following confirmation of the date of the debate, and after the embargoed report has issued to all MLAs.

Agreed: The Committee agreed additional media outlets, to be added to the suggested list from the Communications Office, to receive the embargoed press release along with the Committee's embargoed report, following confirmation of the date of the debate, and after the embargoed report has issued to all MLAs.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Communications Office will issue a short, factual tweet to signpost the press release once it has been issued on commencement of the debate.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the draft Committee Motion and noted that it will be tabled in the Business Office on the afternoon of Monday 26 January 2026 for consideration by the Business Committee at its meeting on Tuesday 27 January 2026.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that, in order to minimise the time between the embargoed report being circulated and the debate taking place, the Committee would propose a date of Monday 2 February 2026 as the date for scheduling on the Order Paper, with one and a half hours suggested for the debate.

Connie Egan rejoined the meeting at 11.04 a.m.

Emma Sheerin rejoined the meeting at 11.04 a.m.

7. Complaints against a Minister – consideration of the 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 3 December 2025.

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, subject to a minor amendment on the Title Page, 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 6-11, stands part of the report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the 'Commissioner's findings of fact and reasoning' section, at paragraphs 12-24, stands part of the report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the 'Commissioner's findings on allegations' section, at paragraphs 25-37, stands part of the report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the 'Committee's consideration and conclusions' section, at paragraphs 38-43, stands part of the report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the 'Links to Appendices 1-4', stands part of the report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the draft letter for issue to the First Minister and deputy First Minister (FMdFM) to suggest that consideration is given to the need for clarification on when the Ministerial Code of Conduct applies to Ministers; and to consider whether the wider Ministerial Code requires to be updated to reflect legislative amendments to the Ministerial Code of Conduct.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the letter to FMdFM will be appended to the report as Appendix 5 and agreed that the 'Link to Appendix 5' stands part of the report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that any further redactions suggested by Legal Services, which are necessary for the purposes of complying with data protection obligations, will be made to the appended Commissioner's investigation report, the written submissions from the respondent and from the former Commissioner as applicable.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the report be the tenth 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 Friday 23 January 2026 and will remain embargoed until then.

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

Agreed: The Committee agreed that, for practical reasons, the 65 complainants will be provided with a link to the report in advance of publication, which will be accessible once the report is published.

Noted: The Committee noted that a copy of the report will be laid in the Assembly Business Office and 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.

8. Draft amendments to the Guide for Witnesses appearing before Assembly Committees

Brian Kingston declared an interest that he was a member of the Committee for The Executive Office (CTEO) at the time in which the complaint was made by a witness on the conduct of another Member at the CTEO meeting in September 2024, which gave rise to the proposed amendments to the Guide for Witnesses appearing before Assembly Committees.

The Senior Assistant Clerk briefed the Committee on this agenda item.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the draft paper, subject to amendments, for issue to the Chairpersons' Liaison Group (CLG) and for the Clerk to present the paper to CLG at its meeting in February 2026.

Noted: The Committee noted that, subject to CLG approval for the suggested updates to the guidance, a revised Guidance for Witnesses appearing before Assembly Committees will be implemented and published on the Assembly website, with Committee Clerks being advised accordingly.

9. APG issues

The Assistant Clerk briefed the Committee on this agenda item.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content to approve the establishment of the APG on Eating Disorders and Disordered Eating

10. Correspondence

Agreed: The Committee noted the correspondence dated 8 December 2025 from the Commissioner for Standards in respect of the confidentiality of the complaints process, and agreed to write to the Commissioner to advise that the Committee is content with his suggested interim measures for safeguarding the confidentiality of complaints.

Agreed: The Committee noted the correspondence dated 16 December 2025 from the Assembly's Public Engagement Office inviting the Committee to participate in

this year's Balmoral Show, and agreed to decline the invitation as it is not applicable to the remit of the Committee.

Noted: The Committee noted the correspondence dated 23 December 2025 from the Senedd in relation to its Member Accountability and Elections Bill Report.

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 11 February 2026 at 10.00 a.m. in Room 106.

The meeting was adjourned at 11.49 a.m.

Cathy Mason MLA

Chairperson, Committee on Standards and Privileges

11 February 2026