



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee on Standards and Privileges

Minutes of Proceedings

10 September 2025

Meeting Location: The Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings

Present:

Cathy Mason MLA (Chairperson)

Connie Egan (Deputy Chairperson)

Stewart Dickson MLA

Paul Frew MLA

Brian Kingston MLA

Apologies:

Jemma Dolan MLA

Harry Harvey MLA

In attendance by video or teleconference:

Mark Durkan MLA

Declan McAleer MLA

In Attendance:

Shane McAteer, Committee Clerk

Ashleigh Mitford, Senior Assistant Clerk

Alison Ferguson, Clerical Supervisor

Laura Gourley, Clerical Officer

Rebecca Ellis, Legal Advisor (agenda item 5)

In attendance by video or teleconference:

Elaine Farrell, Assistant Clerk

The meeting commenced at 10.04 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.

No interests were declared.

3. Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 2 July 2025 subject to a minor amendment.

4. Matters Arising

The Committee acknowledged the work and contribution of the outgoing Commissioner for Standards, Dr Melissa McCullough, and welcomed the appointment of the new Commissioner, Mr Mark McEwan.

The Committee noted that a response had not been received to its request that the Commissioner considers measures to highlight the confidentiality of the complaints process when acknowledging receipt of complaints.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to reissue the correspondence to the new Commissioner, Mr Mark McEwan, for his consideration and response.

5. Unacceptable Behaviours Policy – briefing by Legal Services

The Assembly Legal Advisor, Rebecca Ellis joined the meeting at 10.10 a.m.

The Legal Advisor briefed the Committee on a range of issues in respect of the draft Unacceptable Behaviours Policy that legal advice had been requested on. This was followed by a question and answer session.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the suggested amendments to the Confidentiality Agreement.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the suggested amendments to the General Procedures Direction.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that, when seeking Assembly approval to the previously agreed proposed amendments to the Code of Conduct, it will also propose an amendment to the accompanying Guide to the Rules to highlight the confidentiality requirements during the complaint process.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to make provision in the General Procedures Direction for a discretionary, rather than a mandatory, power for the Commissioner to administer a confidentiality agreement to complaints which do not fall under the Unacceptable Behaviours Policy.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that any future review of the Rules of Conduct should be timed to take place following a period of implementation of the draft Policy, in order to assess how it is operating and whether there are any further situations arising that have not been accounted for, and also to consider at that point whether such a review could be completed within the current mandate or should instead be presented as a legacy recommendation for the next Committee.

Noted: The Committee noted the steps to be taken towards the implementation of the Policy.

The Chairperson thanked the Legal Advisor for her briefing.

6. 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 19 June 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 to the Committee Membership list to reflect a recent change in its membership – stand part of the report.

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

Agreed: The Committee agreed that 'Role of the Committee' section, at paragraphs 3-4 of the report, stands part of the report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the 'Background' section, at paragraphs 5-8 of the report, stands part of the report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the 'Relevant rule in the Members' Code of Conduct' section, at paragraph 9, stands part of the report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the 'Commissioner's reasoned decision' section, at paragraphs 10-11 of the report, stands part of the report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the 'Committee's consideration and conclusions' section, at paragraphs 12-18 of the report, stands part of the report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Annex stands part of the report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the 'Links to Appendices', at page 14 of the report, stand 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 agreed that the report be the eighth 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 12 September 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.

7. Review of the Rules on All-Party Groups (APGs)

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

Agreed: The Committee agreed, in principle, to undertake a review on the Rules for APGs and noted that a more detailed paper to further inform the Committee's considerations, including draft terms of reference for a review, will be considered at a future meeting.

8. APG issues

Agreed: The Committee agreed the draft letters for issue to the Chairperson and membership of the APG on Tourettes and the APG on Preventing Loneliness to highlight issues of non-compliance with the Rules.

9. Correspondence

Noted: The Committee noted the correspondence dated 28 July 2025 from the Senedd Commissioner, Mr Douglas Bain, in respect of the Senedd Commissioner for Standards Annual Report 2024-25.

Noted: The Committee noted the correspondence dated 24 July 2025 from the House of Lords Commissioner, Margaret Obi, in respect of the House of Lords Commissioner for Standards Annual Report 2024-25.

10. Forward Work Programme

Agreed: The Committee noted and agreed the introduction of a Forward Work Programme in order to provide members an indication of key upcoming Committee business, and noted that the details are subject to change.

11. The Any other business

None.

12. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting

The next meeting of the Committee is scheduled to take place on Wednesday 15 October 2025 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

10 September 2025