Northern Ireland Assembly

# Committee on Standards

## Minutes of Proceedings

## 14 October 2026

Meeting Location**:** Room 106, Parliament Buildings

**Present:**

Cathy Mason MLA (Chairperson)

Connie Egan (Deputy Chairperson)

Stewart Dickson MLA

**In attendance by video or teleconference**:

Keith Buchanan MLA

Mark Durkan MLA

Paul Frew MLA

Declan McAleer MLA

Emma Sheerin MLA

**Apologies:**

Trevor Clarke MLA

**In Attendance:**

Shane McAteer, Committee Clerk

Ashleigh Mitford, Senior Assistant Clerk

Laura Gourley, Clerical Supervisor

Alison Ferguson, Clerical Officer

**In attendance by video or teleconference:**

Elaine Farrell, Assistant Clerk

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 Deputy Chairperson advised Committee 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 9, in being a member of the Assembly Committee referred to in the complaint case under consideration at the time when the complaint incident occurred.

Emma Sheerin declared an interest in relation to agenda item 9, in being a member of the Assembly Committee referred to in the complaint case under consideration at the time when the complaint incident occurred.

## 3. Minutes

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 23 September 2026.

## 4. Matters Arising

None.

Declan McAleer joined the meeting at 10.06 a.m.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to reorder the agenda.

## 5. Correspondence

**Noted**: The Committee noted the correspondence from the Committee for Finance, dated 24 September 2026, in respect of a Ribbon Ceremony for Baby Loss Week on 12 October 2026.

**Agreed:** The Committee noted the correspondence, dated 8 October 2026, from a member of the public raising concerns regarding unequal standards applied to elected representatives and agreed the draft response for issue.

## 6. Forward Work Programme

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

Mark Durkan joined the meeting at 10.10 a.m.

## 7. Complaints against members – briefing by the Commissioner for Standards on investigation report

Stewart Dickson declared an interest as a member of the Assembly Committee referred to in the complaint case to be considered under this agenda item, though he was not present at that Committee at the time the complaint incident occurred.

The Commissioner for Standards, Mr Stephen Wright, joined the meeting at 10.10 a.m. and briefed the Committee on his investigation report on complaints against three Members.

The Chairperson thanked the Commissioner for his briefing.

The Commissioner left the meeting at 10.20 a.m.

The Committee deliberated on the complaint case following the briefing by the Commissioner, which included alleged breaches of Rules 15, 1 and 13 by two named members and the alleged failure to observe the Principles of Conduct on Integrity, Honesty and Respect by three named members.

The Committee considered the allegations 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 15 of the Assembly Members' Code of Conduct, the Committee agreed that there was no breach of Rule 15 in respect of either named Member.

**Agreed:** In relation to the allegation which pertained to Rule 1 of the Assembly Members' Code of Conduct, the Committee agreed that there was no breach of Rule 1 in respect of either named Member.

**Agreed:** In relation to the allegation which pertained to Rule 13 of the Assembly Members' Code of Conduct, the Committee agreed that there was no breach of Rule 13 in respect of either named Member.

**Agreed:** In relation to the allegation which pertained to the Principle of Integrity, the Committee agreed that the named Members have not failed to observe this Principle.

**Agreed:** In relation to the allegation which pertained to the Principle of Honesty, the Committee agreed that the named Members have not failed to observe this Principle.

**Agreed:** In relation to the allegation which pertained to the Principle of Respect, the Committee agreed that the named Members have not failed to observe this Principle.

**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.

## 8. Further consideration of inadmissibility decision

The Clerical Supervisor introduced this agenda item.

The Commissioner rejoined the meeting at 10.24 a.m. and briefed the Committee on the further consideration of his decision that the complaint was inadmissible.

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

The Chairperson thanked the Commissioner for his briefing.

The Commissioner left the meeting at 10.28 a.m.

## 9. Complaints 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 1 July 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 the 'Role of the Committee' section, at paragraphs 3-4, stands part of the report.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that the 'Background' section, at paragraphs 5-14, stands part of the report.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that the 'Relevant rules in the Members' Code of Conduct' section, at paragraph 15, stands part of the report.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that the 'Relevant Principles of Conduct' section at paragraphs 16-17, stands part of the report.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that the 'Commissioner's reasoned decision' section, at paragraphs 18-26, stands part of the report.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that the 'Committee's deliberations' section, at paragraphs 27-38, stands part of the report.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that the 'Committee's conclusions and recommendation's section, as paragraphs 39-52, stands part of the report.

**Agreed:** The Committee considered the appendices to the report and agreed that they stand part of the report.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that the report be the fourteenth report of the Committee on Standards 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 secretariat will make any necessary redactions to the Commissioner's investigation report before publication, in line with normal practice and to comply 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 16 October 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's report on the Assembly website.

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

## 10. AOB

None.

## 11. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting

The next meeting of the Committee is scheduled to take place on Wednesday 11 November 2026 at 10.00 a.m. in Room 106.

The meeting was adjourned at 10.35 a.m.

**Connie Egan MLA**
**Deputy Chairperson, Committee on Standards**

**11 November 2026**