



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee on Standards

Minutes of Proceedings

23 September 2026

Meeting Location: Room 106, Parliament Buildings

Present:

Connie Egan (Deputy Chairperson)

Stewart Dickson MLA

In attendance by video or teleconference:

Cathy Mason MLA (Chairperson)

Mark Durkan MLA

Paul Frew MLA

Declan McAleer MLA

Emma Sheerin MLA

Apologies:

Keith Buchanan MLA

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 Deputy Chairperson took the chair due to the Chairperson attending the meeting remotely.

The meeting commenced at 10.02 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.

The Chairperson declared an interest in relation to the further investigation case to be considered under agenda item 5 and advised that she would recuse herself from that item.

3. Minutes

Noted: The Committee noted that the minutes of the meeting held on 1 July 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 due to be published.

4. Matters Arising

Noted: The Committee noted the item of correspondence which was a letter of apology from a Member who was the respondent in a complaint case and noted that it will be included in the Committee's report on the case, which will be considered in due course.

The Chairperson left the meeting at 10.06 a.m.

Mark Durkan joined the meeting at 10.08 a.m.

5. Complaints against a Minister – briefing by the Commissioner for Standards on Further Investigation Report

The Committee Clerk briefed the Committee on the background to the further investigation report.

The Commissioner for Standards, Mr Stephen Wright, joined the meeting at 10.11 a.m.

The Commissioner briefed the Committee on his further investigation report and this was followed by a question and answer session.

Mark Durkan left the meeting at 10.33 a.m.

The Deputy Chairperson thanked the Commissioner for his briefing.

The Commissioner left the meeting at 10.41 a.m.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that, in reporting on its consideration of the case, the Committee will follow the approach taken with previous ministerial complaint cases; whereby it will agree and publish a short covering report which explains the

current procedural arrangements for such cases and attaches the Commissioner's investigation and further investigation reports, together with the respondent's written submission and the letter from the Committee requesting the Commissioner to undertake further investigation.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to send the Commissioner's further investigation report to the respondent for comment prior to the Committee publishing its report.

Emma Sheerin left the meeting at 10.47 a.m.

6. Further consideration of inadmissibility decision

The Clerical Supervisor introduced this agenda item.

The Commissioner rejoined the meeting at 10.51 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.

The Chairperson rejoined the meeting at 10.53 a.m.

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

7. Further consideration of inadmissibility decision

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.

Emma Sheerin rejoined the meeting at 10.58 a.m.

8. Further consideration of inadmissibility decision

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.

Declan McAleer declared an interest that he is the Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, which is scrutinising the Bill referred to in the further consideration case.

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

9. Further consideration of inadmissibility decision

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.

10. Further consideration of inadmissibility decision

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.

Paul Frew left the meeting at 11.12 a.m.

11. Commissioner for Standards Annual Report 2025-26

The Commissioner briefed the Committee on his annual report 2025-26 and this was followed by a question and answer session.

Mark Durkan left the meeting at 11.15 a.m.

Noted: The Committee noted the Commissioner for Standards Annual Report 2025-26.

The Deputy Chairperson thanked the Commissioner for his briefings.

The Commissioner left the meeting at 11.19 a.m.

Mark Durkan rejoined the meeting at 11.19 a.m.

Paul Frew rejoined the meeting at 11.19 a.m.

12. Update on the implementation of the Unacceptable Behaviours Policy and approval of revisions to the General Procedures Direction

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

Noted: The Committee noted that the plenary debate on its *Report on proposed updates to the Assembly Members' Code of Conduct and the Guide to the Rules relating to the Conduct of Members* is scheduled for Monday 28 September 2026.

Noted: The Committee noted the next steps in implementing the Unacceptable Behaviours Policy.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to approve the issue of the revised General Procedures Direction to the Commissioner.

Noted: The Committee noted that the Committee Clerk and Assembly Legal Services will brief the Committee on Procedures on 30 September 2026 in relation to the proposed amendment to Standing Order 69C to extend the scope of the rectification procedure to include the Unacceptable Behaviours Policy.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek legal advice regarding the Commissioner's involvement in the mediation provisions of the Unacceptable Behaviours Policy.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek the views of the Assembly Commission on the creation of a cross-functional working group to review the implementation of the Unacceptable Behaviours Policy; and to ask the Commissioner for his formal view in the first instance and to inform the consideration of this proposal.

13. Draft End of Session Report

The Committee considered the draft End of Session Report for the period 1 September 2025 -31 August 2026.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content with the Remit, Powers and Membership section of the report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content with the Key Activities, Outputs and Achievements section of the report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content with paragraph 1 of the report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content with paragraph 2 of the report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content with paragraph 3 of the report as amended.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content with paragraphs 4 and 5 of the report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content with paragraphs 6 and 7 of the report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content with paragraphs 8 and 9 of the report, subject to adding a footnote to provide a link to the plenary debate on the Repeal of Standing Order 70.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content with paragraphs 10 and 11 of the report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content with paragraphs 12 to 14 of the report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content with paragraphs 15 to 17 of the report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content with paragraphs 18 and 19 of the report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content with paragraph 20 of the report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content with paragraph 21 and the Appendix on Committee Expenditure.

Noted: The Committee noted that the End of Session report will be published on the Committee webpage in due course.

14. All-Party Group issues

The Clerical Supervisor introduced this agenda item.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the draft letter for issue to the All-Party Group on Housing in respect of its overdue Annual General Meeting.

15. Correspondence

Noted: The Committee noted the correspondence, dated 29 July 2026, from the Standards of Conduct Committee in the Senedd on its call for evidence on its Inquiry on Recall Guidance.

16. Forward Work Programme

Noted: The Committee noted the Forward Work Programme.

17. AOB

Agreed: The Committee agreed for the Committee secretariate to explore options to improve the online sound quality for briefings to the Committee.

18. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting

The next meeting of the Committee is scheduled to take place on Wednesday 14 October 2026 at 10.00 a.m. in Room 106.

The meeting was adjourned at 11.33 a.m.

Cathy Mason MLA

Chairperson, Committee on Standards

14 October 2026