



Our Ref: TG00608

26 November 2025

Mr Shane McAteer  
Clerk to the Committee on Standards and Privileges  
Room 276  
Parliament Buildings  
Ballymiscaw  
Stormont  
Belfast  
BT4 3XX

Dear Mr McAteer

**Re: Additional Procedural Information Relevant to Committee Deliberations**

In light of the Committee's continuing consideration of the Commissioner's report, I wish to draw Members' attention to a matter of fact which may assist their understanding of the wider procedural context surrounding the events of 23 October 2024.

On 7 November 2024, I wrote to the Committee on Procedures raising concerns regarding the practice of private meetings between Committee Chairpersons and political witnesses immediately prior to scrutiny sessions.

Those concerns were not personal in nature, nor directed at any individual Member. They related solely to the integrity of committee procedure and the need to ensure that scrutiny is conducted in a way that both is, and is seen to be, impartial and transparent.

I believe it may be helpful for the Committee to be aware that these concerns were formally considered by the Committee on Procedures at its meeting of 13 November 2024. The minutes of that meeting are publicly available on the Assembly website:

<https://www.niassembly.gov.uk/assembly-business/committees/2022-2027/procedures/minutes-of-proceedings/session-2024—2025/13-november-2024/>

As recorded in those minutes, the Committee on Procedures—without any dissent from any member and comprising MLAs from Alliance, Sinn Féin, the SDLP, the UUP and the DUP, and chaired by an Alliance MLA—agreed to add this issue to its longer-term priority work areas. This was subsequently confirmed in later correspondence from both the Chair and Deputy Chair of that Committee during the 2024–25 session.

Timothy Gaston MLA, 38 Henry Street, Harryville, Ballymena, Co Antrim BT42 3AH

Tel: 028 25 640250

The meeting was recorded, and the discussion on my letter can be viewed at 9 minutes and 30 seconds into the broadcast, available here:

<https://niassembly.tv/committee-on-procedures-meeting-wednesday-13-november-2024/>

The recording shows that this matter was agreed without controversy, objection, or debate by any member from any party.

The Committee on Procedures subsequently advised that it would not be able to complete work on this issue within the current mandate not because the concern lacked merit, but because of time constraints.

I highlight this information solely to assist Members in understanding that the concerns I raised on 23 October were:

- not personal,
- not retrospective, and
- not manufactured in response to later events,

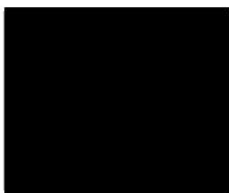
but were recognised at the time as legitimate procedural issues by another Assembly committee—chaired by a member of Ms Bradshaw’s party—and agreed without objection by members of all parties represented on the Committee on Standards and Privileges.

I hope this factual information is of assistance to the Committee in the course of its deliberations.

Please let me know if any further clarification would be of help.

In any case, I make it clear that I would expect this letter to be included in any report published by the Committee.

Yours sincerely



TIMOTHY GASTON MLA



**NORTHERN IRELAND  
ASSEMBLY**

**COMMITTEE ON PROCEDURES**

Timothy Gaston MLA  
Room 252  
Parliament Buildings  
Ballymiscaw  
Belfast  
BT4 3XX

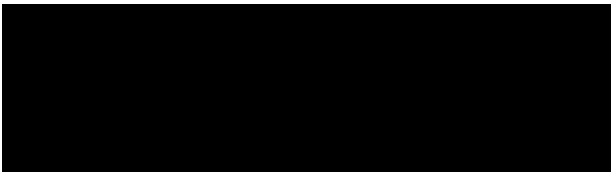
14 November 2024

Dear Timothy,

Thank you very much for your recent correspondence, dated 7 November 2024, reference TG/SM/Assembly/12496. This letter was considered by the Committee on Procedures at its meeting Wednesday 13 November 2024.

I am pleased to tell you that the Committee agreed at its meeting to add your suggestion regarding meetings between Committee Chairpersons and witnesses, to the Committee's list of longer-term priority work areas.

Yours sincerely



**Kellie Armstrong MLA**  
**Chairperson, Committee on Procedures**



Our Ref: 12506-9

18 December 2025

Shane McAteer  
Clerk to the Committee on Standards and Privileges

Dear Mr McAteer,

I write to draw the Committee's attention to a further factual development which may be relevant to its consideration of the Commissioner's report.

As you are aware, I have pursued a complaint with the Information Commissioner's Office relating to the withholding of information concerning the meeting of 23rd October 2024 between the First Minister and the Chair of the Executive Office Committee. I have recently been advised by the ICO that a Decision Notice is now being prepared and is expected to issue shortly. For completeness, I have enclosed a copy of the relevant email from the ICO for your information.

The information under consideration by the ICO may be capable of being material to the issues addressed in the report. While its disclosure status remains unresolved at present, this will become clearer in the near future.

Yours sincerely



Timothy Gaston MLA

Enc



**From:** icocasework <[icocasework@ico.org.uk](mailto:icocasework@ico.org.uk)>

**Sent:** 12 December 2025 14:57

**To:** [REDACTED]

**Subject:** ICO Case Reference: IC-403947-Z8P4

FAO Mr Timothy Gaston MLA

12 December 2025

Case Reference: IC-403947-Z8P4

Dear Mr Gaston

I hope you are well. I am writing in response to your letter of 9 December 2025 regarding your complaint under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA). I thought I had written to you previously to advise that I was investigating but it appears that the email was not sent. I must therefore apologise sincerely for the lack of communication, although I would assure you that your case was being progressed during this time.

I have received copies of the withheld information in this case, along with further submissions from the Executive Office. I am therefore now drafting a decision notice which will set out the Commissioner's findings, and I would hope to issue it in early January. The decision notice will take account of all arguments put forward by both parties, although they may not be reproduced in full within the notice.

I hope this information is helpful to you. If you have any further queries please do not hesitate to contact me.

Kind regards

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Senior Case Officer  
Information Commissioner's Office

Information Commissioner's Office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire SK9 5AF

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