

Twenty fourth report to the Sixth Senedd under Standing Order 22.9

November 2025



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About the Committee

The Committee was established on 23 June 2021. Its remit can be found at:
www.senedd.wales/SeneddStandards

Current Committee membership:



**Committee Chair:
Hannah Blythyn MS**
Welsh Labour



Mick Antoniw MS
Welsh Labour



Tom Giffard MS
Welsh Conservatives



Peredur Owen Griffiths MS
Plaid Cymru

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1. Introduction

1. The terms of reference of the Standards of Conduct Committee (“the Committee”) are set out in Standing Order 22¹. In accordance with the functions set out in Standing Order 22.2, the Committee must:

“investigate, report on and, if appropriate, recommend action in respect of any complaint referred to it by the Commissioner for Standards.”²

2. This report is made to the Senedd under Standing Order 22.9 and paragraph 8.23 of the Procedure for Dealing with Complaints against Members of the Senedd (“the Procedure”)³ in relation to a complaint made to the Commissioner for Standards (“the Commissioner”).

3. The Committee has also considered the arrangements for the publication of the Commissioner’s report and related documentation. In order to provide anonymity to those involved in this complaint the Committee has agreed to summarise the Commissioner’s report and findings in its report. This is in line with paragraph 8.26 of the procedure which states:

8.26. *The Committee may redact or withhold all or part of the Commissioner’s report, or publish a summary if considered necessary. A decision to redact, and the general reason for it, must be noted in the Committee report. The reason for doing so must either:*

- a. be consistent with the provisions in the Committee privacy notice; or*
- b. for other reasons where the Committee considers there is a risk of harm or distress to any person.*

4. The Committee has agreed to include relevant extracts from the report to protect the identities of persons named in the Commissioner’s report – given it involves several Member support staff.

¹ Standing Orders

² Standing Order 22.2(i)

³ The Senedd’s Procedure for Dealing with Complaints Against Members of the Senedd

2. Consideration of the Complaint

5. The Commissioner received a complaint in relation to Laura Anne Jones MS in April 2024. The Complaint alleged that the Member had –

- made fraudulent or fabricated fuel claims;
- made a racist comment and had failed to address discriminatory behaviour; and
- failed to act in accordance with the Code of Conduct for Members of the Senedd (“the Code”) when dismissing her from her employment by the Member.

6. Due to the allegation of fraud, the Commissioner suspended consideration of the complaint and referred the matter to South Wales Police along with the complaint, the evidence pack and the Member’s response to it. The police concluded their investigation in December 2024, following which the Commissioner reopened his investigation.

7. The Committee met on 16 September, 7 October, 13 October and 20 October 2025 to consider the Commissioner’s report and reach its conclusion in respect of this complaint. The Committee noted Tom Giffard MS knew a number of people named in the report due to his position as a Conservative MS.

8. This report sets out the details of the complaint and the Committee’s deliberations in arriving at its decision.

9. A copy of this report has been provided to the Member concerned and the Complainant.

3. Committee's Consideration of its Decision

10. The Committee considered whether the Member was in breach of Standing Order 22.2(i).

11. In considering whether a breach took place, the Committee reviewed the findings of the Commissioner as set out in his report.

12. The Member did not avail themselves of the opportunity to make written or oral representations to the Committee. The Committee received and noted representations from the Complainant.

Commissioner's Findings of Fact

13. The Commissioner's findings of fact were as follows. These are as set out in the Commissioner's report, with redactions relation to personal information:

Mileage claims

- I. On 17 July 2023 the Member completed a form authorising the Complainant to complete and submit expenses claims on her behalf.
- II. The Complainant assumed responsibility for completion and submission of such on 28 August 2023 on [...] promotion to Researcher.
- III. From that date all such claims were completed by the Complainant and submitted by [the Complainant] without having been checked by the Member.
- IV. The Member gave the Complainant no guidance on [the Complainant] duties in relation to the completion and submission of such claims nor did she make the Complainant aware of the Rules and Guidance on the Use of Senedd Resources.
- V. The Member did not maintain an accurate record of the journeys undertaken by her for which a claim could properly be made.
- VI. To identify journeys to be claimed for, the Complainant had to search the Member's diary and the Member's social media account.
- VII. The Complainant interpreted messages [] received from the Member and her Senior Adviser, who was [the Complainant's] line manager, as instructions to make claims for journeys that the Member had not made.

- VIII. The Member did not instruct the Complainant to make false claims and had no knowledge of any other person having done so.
- IX. Although aware that on [the Complainant's] interpretation of the messages [the Complainant] was being required to be party to the submission of false and fraudulent claims, the Complainant did not object until, following the termination of [the Complainant's] employment, [the Complainant] made [their] complaint.
- X. Even after [the Complainant] had decided to submit a complaint, [the Complainant] did not report the allegedly fraudulent claims to the police.
- XI. On becoming aware that incorrect claims may have been made by the Complainant on her behalf, the Member reviewed all claims completed and submitted by the Complainant.
- XII. The Member identified a number of claims for journeys she had not made and has reimbursed the Commission the amount she received in respect of them.
- XIII. South Wales Police carried out a full and thorough investigation of the Complainant's allegation that the Member had made fraudulent expenses.

Inappropriate Comments

- XIV. With the exception of two comments (which cannot properly be regarded as offensive), none of the offensive comments allegedly made by [a member of staff] about the Complainant or [the Complainant's] family were made in the hearing of the Member.
- XV. The Member had no knowledge of any inappropriate comments allegedly made by [a staff Member] about the Complainant or [the Complainant's] family prior to a phone call from MBS on 1 March 2024.
- XVI. In August 2023 in a WhatsApp group of which both she and the Complainant were members, the Member posted "No chinky spies for me."
- XVII. At that time there was public concern about the use of TikTok by the Chinese Government to gather information.
- XVIII. The post was made in response to one by her [member of staff] saying that [they] had raised the TikTok issue at a Conservative Group meeting earlier that day.

- XIX. The Member has accepted that her post was “completely inappropriate and unacceptable” and has apologised for it.
- XX. In August 2023 in a WhatsApp exchange with [a member of staff] the Member referred to a former staff member as “a [swear word]” and “a bitter, twisted, useless person” and posted “I tried to be so understanding. I even asked if [they] had ADHD or something and if [they] needed extra support ... cos something isn't right with [them]!?” In the same exchange [the Staff Member] referred to the same person as a “Grade A [swear word].”
- XXI. The Member regretted that these comments had become public.
- XXII. On 13 November 2023 in a WhatsApp exchange with the Member, [a member of staff] posted “And Suella was correct in what she said too. We have two tier policing. It was clear over the weekend if your white working class you get hammered, if you're an Islamist it's all fine, spew all the hate you want.”
- XXIII. Although the Member has accepted that the post was unacceptable, she did not reprimand [the member of staff].
- XXIV. On 14 November 2023 in a WhatsApp exchange with the Member [member of staff] described the then Prime Minister as “a weasel.”
- XXV. The Member did not regard the comment as “particularly offensive” and took no action.

Dismissal

- XXVI. The Complainant ceased to be employed by the Member on 4 March 2024.
- XXVII. Although the Complainant obtained legal advice following the termination of [the complainant's] employment, [the complainant] has not instituted proceedings for unfair dismissal.
- XXVIII. The Member decided to terminate the Complainant's employment on 29 February 2024 prior to becoming aware, on 1 March 2024, of the allegations of bullying and misconduct [the complainant] was making against [a Staff Member].
- XXIX. That decision was made because of the complainant's unsatisfactory performance in the role of researcher to which [the complainant] had been appointed on 28 August 2023.

XXX. Prior to the dismissal the Member and the Complainant enjoyed a close and friendly working relationship.

XXXI. Prior to [the complaint's] dismissal the complainant did not complain to the Member about any of the misconduct of either [the staff member] or the Member although [the complainant] had on 1 March 2024 spoken to Member's Business Services about alleged bullying by [a staff member].

Committee's Consideration

Mileage Claims

14. In relation to the mileage claims, the Commissioner set out:

"The Member has neither been convicted of, nor admitted any offence. The allegation was fully investigated by the South Wales Police Economic Crime Unit over a period of more than seven months and 'no evidence of fraud was found'."

15. The Commissioner found that there were different accounts of how the inaccurate mileage claims were made, but that on balance he was satisfied that the Member's version of events was 'more likely than not to be the correct one.' As such he did not find it established that the Member made fraudulent claims for mileage.

16. In forming that opinion, the Commissioner noted that the Member did not provide training on the Code of Conduct⁴ or the Rules and Guidance on the Use of Senedd Resources⁵, which is a failure to comply with Rule 24 that:

"Members must take reasonable measures to ensure that their staff, when acting on their behalf, also uphold and act in accordance with these Rules and the Overarching Principles."

Having considered the information available, in particular the Police stating that they had found no evidence of fraud, the Committee agreed with the conclusion of the Commissioner that there was no breach of the Code of Conduct in relation to the making of fraudulent mileage claims.

⁴ Code of Conduct on the Standards of Conduct of Members of the Senedd

⁵ Rules and Guidance on the Use of Senedd Resources

Inappropriate Comments

17. The Commissioner's findings (Finding XX and XVI) set out that the Member made offensive comments and had not taken action when a member of staff had made offensive comments (Findings XXII and XXIV). The Commissioner considered whether the conduct of the Member in Findings XVI and XX amounted to a breach of Rule 3 (duty not to bring the Senedd into disrepute), Rule 4 (duty not to engage in discrimination etc) or Rule 6 (Personal attack). He found that:

"The comment in Finding XVI ('no chinky spies') was not a personal attack and so did not breach Rule 6. I agree with the Member that the comment was 'completely inappropriate and unacceptable'. But even having regard to the context in which it was made (Findings XVII and XVIII) and the enhanced protection of the right to freedom of expression enjoyed by the Member, it is my opinion that it amounted to a breach of the Respect Principle and so of Rule 1, Rule 3 and Rule 4. And even allowing for that enhanced protection, I am satisfied that the comments made by the Member about her former staff Member (Finding XX) amounted to a clear breach of Rule 6."

18. The Commissioner also found that by failing to challenge the Member of staff about the offensive and unacceptable comments in Findings XX and XXII, the Member failed to uphold the Leadership Principle and so broke Rule 1.

Having considered the information available and all the representations, the Committee agreed with the conclusion of the Commissioner that the Member breached the following provisions in the Code of Conduct:

- Rule 1 (failure to uphold the Leadership Principle)
- Rule 3 (duty not to bring the Senedd into disrepute)
- Rule 4 (duty not to engage in ... discrimination)
- Rule 6 (duty not to subject anyone to excessive or abusive personal attack) and
- Rule 24 (duty to take reasonable measures to ensure that their staff, when acting on their behalf, also uphold and act in accordance with these Rules and the Overarching Principles)

Dismissal

19. The Commissioner stated that it was not for him:

“... to investigate whether the Complainant’s dismissal by the Member was fair. [and]...that matter was for another forum.”

20. The Commissioner did consider if the Member broke any provisions of the Code in the build up to the dismissal. The Commissioner stated that although there were no formal performance review meetings, regular performance feedback was provided, and this informal process can be described as a performance review system.

Committee’s recommendations

21. The Committee considers a breach of the Code of Conduct by any Member of the Senedd a serious matter. The reputation of the Senedd as an institution, and the public’s trust and confidence in it, rely upon Members demonstrating integrity and leadership by their actions.

22. The Committee is clear that inappropriate and offensive comments have no place in our Senedd, or society more widely. These messages were contained within an office group WhatsApp chat, rather than a public forum; however the Code is clear that it applies to Members at all times. This provision is intended to ensure that as Members we conduct ourselves according to the required standard in all aspects of our lives.

23. The conduct found in this report fell far below the standards expected. It points to an office culture where there was little respect towards others or any consideration of what may be found offensive.

24. In reaching its decision, the Committee considered the mitigation set out by the Commissioner in his report. The Commissioner set out the following mitigation:

- the time that has elapsed since the breaches [...] occurred
- the mental and physical health of the [Member] at the time that the false mileage claims were submitted and the inappropriate comments were made
- the adverse publicity she has already received as a result of the anonymous leaking to the media of information about the complaint, the police investigation and [the] investigation

- the repayment by the Member to the Commission of the sums improperly claimed on her behalf by the Complainant
- the apologies [the Member] has given for her misconduct
- the lack of any causal connection between the breach of Rule 24 and the false claims submitted by the Complainant.

25. The Committee noted that the Member paid back the sums related to the false claims and further noted the lack of causal connection between the breach of Rule 24 and the false claims submitted by the Complainant, but did not consider these with regards to reaching a decision on sanction given the finding of no breach for these parts of the complaint.

26. The Committee noted that the Member had apologised and expressed regret for the messages getting into the public domain. The Committee welcomes the fact the Member and her staff have undertaken diversity training since the making of these comments.

27. The Committee did not consider the time elapsed to be a mitigation in this matter, with much of the delay caused by the police investigation.

28. The Committee noted the unauthorised release of information to the media throughout this complaint. However, we do not consider this to be mitigation in relation to the breaches found, given that it has no impact on the actions of the Member. In fact, the Member herself even commented on the Commissioner's report before it was provided to Members of this Committee.

29. The Committee noted that the Member was suffering with poor physical and mental health at the time of the false mileage claims, and some of the reported comments. However, the Committee considers that the findings point to a pattern of poor culture within the office of the Member rather than an isolated incident.

30. Having considered the breaches and the mitigations set out by the Commissioner, the Committee has decided that a sanction of exclusion from Senedd proceedings is warranted on this occasion.

31. In reaching its decision on the length of exclusion the Committee considered a number of factors, including the decisions of this and the Fifth Senedd Standards of Conduct Committee where sanctions of exclusion have been applied, to ensure that the length of the exclusion in this instance is a fair and proportionate sanction in light of the seriousness of this matter.

Recommendation 1. The Standards of Conduct Committee, in accordance with paragraph 8.22(a) of the Procedure for Dealing with Complaints Against Members of the Senedd and Standing Order 22.10, recommends Laura Anne Jones MS is excluded from proceedings of the Senedd for a period of 14 calendar days.

4. Matters of General Principle

32. The Committee noted that this complaint took a significant period of time, this in part was due to the referral to South Wales Police and the time taken to carry out such an investigation. The Committee is aware that this will have had an impact on the Complainant and the Member. The Committee would like to remind those going through the complaints process that there is support available to them throughout.

33. It is a matter of significant regret to the Committee that information about this complaint has been released to the press periodically during the course of the investigation. In addition to information being released into the public domain, the Committee noted that the Member talked about the outcome of the Commissioner's report at the Royal Welsh Show, and her party leader responded to questions in relation to the report.⁶

34. Press reports indicate that media outlets received the full Commissioner's report in summer 2025, which was before the report was provided to this Committee.

35. Such unauthorised releases of information undermine the complaints process. It is incumbent on all parties involved in the process to maintain confidentiality throughout, as this is the only way that confidence can be maintained in the system.

36. The Committee noted representations from the Complainant regarding the Commissioner's approach to neurodiversity. The Committee raised these concerns with the Commissioner and noted the adaptations made by the Commissioner in this instance. The Committee takes these concerns seriously and is clear that everybody should feel comfortable and supported in engaging with the complaints process. Accordingly, the Committee recommends that at the outset of an investigation the Commissioner takes steps to consider whether the Complainant's circumstances require any reasonable adjustments and should ensure that appropriate support mechanisms are in place and readily available as a matter of course.

37. The Committee noted that there were a number of media reports relating to this complaint which referred to the use of non-disclosure agreements (NDAs) in the Members office. The Committee confirmed with the Commissioner that NDAs had not been raised by anybody during the course of his investigation. The use of

⁶ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c2le45rjldno>

NDA's by Members of the Senedd is something the Committee may give some further consideration to.