



**Northern Ireland
Assembly**

COMMITTEE FOR JUSTICE

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

THURSDAY 11 FEBRUARY 2021

Room 30, Parliament Buildings, Belfast

Present: Mr Paul Givan MLA (Chairperson)
Ms Linda Dillon MLA (Deputy Chairperson)*
Mr Doug Beattie MLA*
Ms Sinéad Bradley MLA*
Ms Jemma Dolan MLA*
Mr Gordon Dunne MLA*
Mr Paul Frew MLA
Ms Emma Rogan MLA*
Ms Rachel Woods MLA*

* These Members attended the meeting via video conferencing.

Apologies: None

In Attendance: Mrs Christine Darrah (Assembly Clerk)
Mrs Clairita Frazer (Assistant Clerk)
Mrs Allison Mealey (Clerical Supervisor)

The meeting commenced at 2.03 p.m. in public session.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the oral evidence sessions should be reported by Hansard.

The Chairperson placed on record the Justice Committee's appreciation to Leanne Johnston, who is leaving the Assembly, for the support and assistance she has provided during her time with the Committee team.

The Chairman welcomed Clairita Frazer to the Justice Committee team.

1. Apologies

There were no apologies.

2. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 4 February 2021.

3. Matters Arising

Item 1 – A Response from the Minister of Justice on the Damages (Return on Investment) Bill and Accelerated Passage

The Committee noted a response from the Minister of Justice to the letter from the Committee following the oral evidence session on 28 January on the Damages (Return on Investment) Bill and accelerated passage.

The Chairperson advised the Committee that the issue would be placed on the agenda for consideration at the meeting on 18 February 2021.

4. Criminal Justice (Committal Reform) Bill

The following representatives of the Law Society of Northern Ireland joined the meeting at 2.06 p.m.:

Pearse MacDermott, Representative of the Law Society of Northern Ireland
Eoghan McKenna, Representative of the Law Society of Northern Ireland

Mr Frew MLA joined the meeting at 2.07 p.m.

The representatives provided an outline of key issues in relation to the Criminal Justice (Committal Reform) Bill.

The oral evidence was followed by a question and answer session.

The oral evidence session was reported by Hansard.

The Chairperson thanked the representatives for their attendance.

5. Criminal Justice (Committal Reform) Bill

The following representatives of the Public Prosecution Service joined the meeting at 3.18 p.m.:

Michael Agnew, Deputy Director, Public Prosecution Service
Francesca Keaney, Head of Strategic Improvement Team, Public Prosecution Service

The representatives provided an outline of key issues in relation to the Criminal Justice (Committal Reform) Bill.

The oral evidence was followed by a question and answer session.

The oral evidence session was reported by Hansard.

The Chairperson left the meeting at 4.20 p.m.

The Deputy Chairperson took the Chair at 4.20 p.m.

The Chairperson returned to the meeting and took the Chair at 4.22 p.m.

The Chairperson thanked the representatives for their attendance.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request further information from the Public Prosecution Service in relation to statutory custody and case management time limits.

The Chairperson advised the Committee that, as previously agreed, any further issues raised during the oral evidence sessions on the Committal Reform Bill would be added to the summary of evidence and referred to the Department of Justice for a written response on each of the issues.

6. Protection from Stalking Bill – Proposals for Committee Stage

The Committee considered proposals to seek written evidence on the Protection from Stalking Bill including a draft media sign-posting notice, a draft letter seeking evidence on the Bill and a list of key stakeholders.

Agreed: The Committee agreed a closing date of Friday 16 April 2021 for receipt of written evidence.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content with the media sign-posting notice, the list of key stakeholders and the letter to issue seeking written evidence on the Bill.

The Chairperson advised the Committee that proposals to encourage individuals who have experienced stalking behaviour to share their experiences and their views on the legislation with the Committee would be provided for consideration.

7. SR 2021/16: The Crown Court (Amendment) Rules (Northern Ireland) 2021

The Committee noted SR 2021/16: The Crown Court (Amendment) Rules (Northern Ireland) 2021 which will make amendments to the Crown Court Rules to take account of provisions in the Crime (Overseas Productions Order) Act 2019 and the Crime (International Co-operation) Act 2003 and which were not subject to any Assembly procedure.

8. SL1: Rule Change to Allow Online Applications in Non-Contentious Probate Cases

The Committee considered further information from the Department of Justice on the proposal to make a Statutory Rule to amend Order 97 of the Rules of the Court of Judicature to enable applications in non-contentious probate cases to be made online, replace the sworn affidavit with a statement of truth and make changes to the marking of exhibits.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content with the proposal for the Statutory Rule.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request clarification from the Department regarding the timeline for the Rule to be laid and when it would come into operation.

9. Draft Budget 2021-22 – Committee Draft Response

The Committee considered a draft Committee response on the Department of Justice 2021-22 Draft Budget settlement which covered the key areas and issues discussed during the evidence session with Department of Justice officials on 4 February 2021.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the response as drafted.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to send the response to the Committee for Finance and the Minister of Justice and to the Assembly Research and Library Service for information.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request further information from the Department of Justice on a range of issues relating to budget pressures.

10. Implementation Plan for the Gillen Review Recommendations in relation to Serious Sexual Offences Cases - Update

The Committee considered an update provided by the Department of Justice on progress to deliver the Implementation Plan covering the strategic priority areas to address the Gillen Review Recommendations in relation to serious sexual offences cases.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request additional information on one area and a further update on progress to deliver the implementation plan in early September 2021.

11. Modern Slavery – Transparency in Supply Chains – Proposed Consultation

The Committee considered further information provided by the Department of Justice in relation to the differences between ‘engagement’ and ‘consultation’ and why a full public consultation was not being undertaken with both public sector organisations and commercial sector companies in Northern Ireland on intended amendments to the Modern Slavery Act 2015 to strengthen transparency in supply chain arrangements.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content to note the clarification provided and to consider the matter further when the results of the consultation and the proposed way forward are available.

12. Committee Forward Programme – March 2021

The Committee considered information provided by the Department of Justice regarding work items that it wished to schedule during March 2021.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to schedule the work items requested by the Department for March 2021 including the deferral of two work items from the meeting on 25 February 2021 to 25 March 2021.

The Committee considered a request from the Department of Justice to hold an oral evidence session on a proposal for a Statutory Rule in closed session.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the oral evidence session should be held in closed session.

13. Correspondence

- i. The Committee considered correspondence from the Gillen Review Implementation Team regarding a scoping exercise to ascertain the policy position of a variety of stakeholders, including the Committee, on Relationship and Sexuality Education in schools and the relevant Gillen Report Serious Sexual Offences recommendations.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request further information from the Gillen Review Implementation Team on what political parties and All-Party Groups had been contacted regarding the scoping exercise.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to send a copy of correspondence between the Committee and the Minister of Education on the role of the Department of Education and other education bodies in advising and educating young people on the criminal law in relation to sexual offences to the Gillen Review Implementation Team for information and to advise that the Committee would be content to engage further on any justice strands of work or issues.

The Committee noted the following:

- ii. A response from the Department of Justice providing an update on the work of the Adherence work stream of the Executive Covid Taskforce including behavioural analysis following the oral evidence session on 19 January 2021.
- iii. A response from Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland (CJINI) providing further information requested by the Committee on the Terms of Reference for the Review into the Operation of Care and Supervision Units in the Northern Ireland Prison Service.
- iv. An invitation from the WAVE Trust to a virtual seminar on trauma-informed practice and programmes within the prisons sector on 26 March 2021.
- v. The Attorney General for Northern Ireland Annual Reports for the years 2016-17, 2017-18, 2018-19 and 2019-20 which had been laid in the Assembly by the First Minister and deputy First Minister.

14. Chairperson's Business

None.

15. Any Other Business

None.

16. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting

The next meeting will be held on Thursday 18 February 2021 at 2.00 p.m. in the Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 5.12 p.m.

Mr Paul Givan MLA
Chairperson, Committee for Justice