



COMMITTEE FOR JUSTICE

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

THURSDAY 17 DECEMBER 2020

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 Kathy O'Hanlon (Senior Assistant Clerk)
Miss Leanne Johnston (Assistant Clerk)
Mrs Allison Mealey (Clerical Supervisor)

The meeting commenced at 2.00 p.m. in public session.

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

1. Apologies

There were no apologies.

The Clerk informed the Committee that, under Standing Order 115(6), the Deputy Chairperson, Linda Dillon MLA, had delegated authority to Emma Rogan MLA to vote on her behalf in the event she needed to leave before the meeting had finished and Jemma Dolan MLA had also delegated authority to Emma Rogan MLA to vote on her behalf should she encounter connectivity problems with the video conferencing system.

2. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 8 December 2020.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 10 December 2020.

3. Matters Arising

Item 1 – Personal Injury Discount Rate – Press Release from the Association of Personal Injury Lawyers

The Committee considered a copy of a press release provided by the Association of Personal Injury Lawyers regarding a legal challenge it is bringing against the Department of Justice in relation to its decision not to change the Personal Injury Discount Rate.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to ask the Department of Justice whether the Permanent Secretary intended to review the decision not to change the rate at this time in light of the legal challenge and previous discussions with the Committee on this issue.

4. Finance Briefing - January Monitoring Round

The following officials joined the meeting at 2.01 p.m.:

Lisa Rocks, Deputy Director, Financial Services Division, Department of Justice
Andrea Quail, Financial Performance, Financial Planning, Strategy and Support, Department of Justice
Louise Blair, Financial Planning, Strategy and Support, Department of Justice

Ms Rocks outlined the January monitoring position for the Department of Justice and provided an update on the 2021-22 Budget.

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

The officials agreed to provide further information on a range of issues.

The oral evidence session was reported by Hansard.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their attendance.

5. Protection from Stalking Bill

The Committee noted correspondence from the Minister of Justice indicating that she was seeking Executive approval to introduce the Protection from Stalking Bill in January 2021.

Mr Dunne left the meeting at 2.50 p.m.

Mr Frew placed on record his concerns that the approach adopted by the Minister of Justice with the Executive in relation to proposed amendments to the Domestic Abuse and Family Proceedings Bill could result in Members being reluctant to table amendments at Consideration Stage or Further Consideration Stage of a Bill.

6. SL1: PSNI and PSNI Reserve (Injury Benefit) (Amendment) Regulations 2020

The Committee considered a proposal by the Department of Justice to make a Statutory Rule to amend various instruments relating to the Police Service of Northern Ireland and Police Service of Northern Ireland Reserve (Injury Benefit) Regulations 2006 to ensure the Police Injury Duty Scheme continues to work effectively for officers who join the career average police pension scheme established in 2015, resolve the offset issue identified in the March 2020 NI Audit Office report and make several technical amendments.

Agreed:

The Committee agreed to request the attendance of Department of Justice officials to provide clarification on a number of issues and a copy of the full responses to the recent consultation on the proposed amendments to the Regulations.

Mr Dunne rejoined the meeting at 2.55 p.m.

7. The Civil Jurisdiction and Judgements (Lugano Convention 2007) Regulations 2021

The Committee considered information provided by the Department of Justice on Regulations to re-implement the Lugano Convention 2007 which deals with jurisdiction and the recognition and enforcement in civil and commercial matters between the EU, Iceland, Norway and Switzerland.

The Committee noted the position of the Minister of Justice that Westminster regulations to re-implement the Convention should extend to Northern Ireland.

8. Strategy to Support and Challenge Women and Girls in Contact with the Justice System – Proposed Consultation

The Committee considered information provided by the Department of Justice in relation to a proposed public consultation on a new strategy to support and challenge women and girls who come into contact with the justice system.

Agreed:

The Committee agreed that it was content for the consultation to take place and it would consider the proposed strategy when the results of the consultation are available.

9. Publication of Annual Payments to Suppliers of Legal Aid – Proposed Consultation

The Committee considered information provided by the Department of Justice on a proposed public consultation on recommencing the policy of publishing annual payments to suppliers of legal aid.

Agreed:

The Committee agreed that it was content for the consultation to take place and it would consider the matter further when the results of the consultation and proposed way forward are available.

10. Proposals to Reform Rehabilitation Periods in Northern Ireland – Proposed Public Consultation

The Committee considered additional information provided by the Department of Justice on its proposed consultation to reform rehabilitation periods in Northern Ireland.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content for the consultation to take place and it would consider the matter further when the results of the consultation and proposed way forward are available.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write again to the Department for a response to its original request for information on how the Department decides on the length of time it provides for responses to consultations given the variety of timescales being used.

11. Proposals to Amend the Legislation Governing the Retention of DNA and Fingerprints in Northern Ireland – Response from the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission on the Proposed Way Forward

The Committee considered a response from the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission providing its views on the Department of Justice's proposals to amend the legislation governing the retention of DNA and Fingerprints in Northern Ireland.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward a copy of the response from the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission to the Department of Justice and request its comments on the issues raised.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward a copy of the response from the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission to the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People for her comments on the issues raised relating to children and young people.

12. Committee Forward Work Programme – January 2021

The Committee considered information provided by the Department of Justice regarding work items that it wished to schedule during January 2021 and a new date for the meeting with the Minister of Justice.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to schedule the work items requested by the Department for January 2021 and schedule a meeting with the Minister of Justice on Tuesday 19 January 2021.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to schedule an oral evidence session with Department of Justice officials on the SL1: PSNI and PSNI Reserve (Injury Benefit) (Amendment) Regulations 2020 for the meeting on Thursday 14 January 2021.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to reschedule the oral evidence sessions with CJINI Inspectors and justice organisations on the Report on the Care and Treatment of Victims and Witnesses in the Criminal Justice System in Northern Ireland from Thursday 21 January 2021 to a later date given the need to accommodate a briefing on the Protection from Stalking Bill on that date.

13. Correspondence

The Committee noted the following:

- i. A response from the Department of Justice providing a range of additional information in respect of the recent update on the implementation of recommendations contained within the Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland Report on the Review of Policing and Community Safety Partnerships (PCSPs) in Northern Ireland.
- ii. Correspondence from the Department of Justice advising that the Minister of Justice intended to introduce Domestic Homicide Reviews in December 2020 and providing a copy of multi-agency guidance prepared by officials.
- iii. The Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission Annual Statement 2020.
- iv. A Pivotal Public Policy Forum Report entitled ‘Education, Training and Skills for young people aged 14-19’.

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 14 January 2021 at 2.00 p.m. in Room 30, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 3.09 p.m.

**Mr Paul Givan MLA
Chairperson, Committee for Justice**