



**Northern Ireland
Assembly**

COMMITTEE FOR JUSTICE

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

THURSDAY 25 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 Paul Frew MLA
Ms Emma Rogan MLA*
Ms Rachel Woods MLA*

* These Members attended the meeting via video conferencing.

Apologies: Mr Gordon Dunne MLA

In Attendance: Mrs Christine Darrah (Assembly Clerk)
Mrs Clairita Frazer (Assistant Clerk)

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.

1. Apologies

As above.

The Clerk informed the Committee that, under Standing Order 115(6), Gordon Dunne MLA had delegated authority to the Chairperson, Paul Givan MLA, to vote on his behalf.

2. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 18 February 2021.

Mrs Bradley MLA joined the meeting at 2.06 p.m.

3. Matters Arising

Item 1 – Intergovernmental Relations and EU Exit Structures

The Committee noted information provided by the Assembly EU Affairs Manager on the various structures of intergovernmental relations and EU exit structures.

Item 2 – Northern Ireland Policing Board response to the Department of Justice on the 2021-22 Draft Budget consultation

The Committee noted the response from the Northern Ireland Policing Board to the Department of Justice on the 2021-22 Draft Budget consultation.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek urgent clarification from the Department of a £40m change in gross provision in respect of Annually Managed Expenditure (AME) for the Legal Services Agency in the 2020/21 Spring Supplementary Estimates.

Item 3 - Pay Settlement for Police Staff

The Committee noted that the Department of Justice had written to the PSNI on 2 February confirming that it had approved the pay award for 2019/20 for the police non-industrial (administrative) staff group and that the payment of the award is an operational matter for the PSNI to take forward.

4. Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland Report on the Care and Treatment of Victims and Witnesses in the Criminal Justice System in Northern Ireland

The following official joined the meeting at 2.09 p.m.:

Jacqui Durkin, Chief Inspector, Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland (CJINI)

Ms Woods MLA joined the meeting at 2.14 p.m.

The Chief Inspector outlined the key findings and recommendations in the CJINI Report on the Care and Treatment of Victims and Witnesses in the Criminal Justice System in Northern Ireland.

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

The oral evidence session was reported by Hansard.

The Chairperson thanked the Chief Inspector for her attendance.

Agenda item 6 was taken next due to technical difficulties with the Starleaf video-conferencing facilities.

5. Protection from Stalking Bill – Further Information from the Department of Justice and Provisional Committee Timetable and Motion to Extend the Committee Stage

The Committee noted further information provided by the Department of Justice following the oral evidence session on the principles of the Protection from Stalking Bill at the meeting on 21 January 2021.

The Committee considered a provisional timetable for the Committee Stage of the Protection from Stalking Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content with the proposed timetable for the Committee Stage of the Bill.

The Committee considered a motion to extend the Committee Stage of the Protection from Stalking Bill until 10 December 2021.

Question put and agreed:

“That, in accordance with Standing Order 33(4), the period referred to in Standing Order 33(2) be extended to 10 December 2021, in relation to the Committee Stage of the Protection from Stalking Bill (NIA 14/17-22).”

6. Action Plan to address the findings and recommendations in the CJINI Report on the Care and Treatment of Victims and Witnesses in the Criminal Justice System in Northern Ireland

The following officials joined the meeting at 3.15 p.m.

Assistant Chief Constable Mark McEwan, Community Safety Department, PSNI
Marianne O’Kane, Senior Assistant Director, Public Prosecution Service
Geraldine Hanna, Chief Executive, Victim Support NI
Julie Wilson, Head of Gillen Implementation Policy and Legislation Team and Victims and Witnesses Branch, Department of Justice
Liz Semple, Policy Officer, Victims and Witnesses Branch, Department of Justice

Ms Wilson outlined the key actions in the multi-agency plan to address the findings and recommendations of the CJINI Report on the Care and Treatment of Victims and Witnesses in the Criminal Justice System in Northern Ireland.

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

The oral evidence session was reported by Hansard.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their attendance.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request a written update on progress with delivery of the Multi-Agency Action Plan to implement the CJINI report recommendations in 6 months’ time.

7. Criminal Justice (Committal Reform) Bill – Report of the Assembly Examiner of Statutory Rules on the Delegated Powers and potential research requests

The Committee noted the advice of the Assembly Examiner of Statutory Rules on the delegated powers in the Criminal Justice (Committal Reform) Bill.

The Committee considered potential areas for research that would assist consideration of the Criminal Justice (Committal Reform) Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to commission research on the position in other jurisdictions that have reformed or removed the committal process and the impact this has had on reducing delays in the criminal justice trial process and on the statutory time limits that are in place in other jurisdictions and any analysis of the impact or effectiveness of the different approaches adopted.

8. NI Audit Office Report on Injury on Duty Schemes for PSNI and NI Prison Service - Update

The Committee considered an update provided by the Department of Justice on progress to implement the action plan to address the recommendations in the NI Audit Office Report on the Injury on Duty Scheme for PSNI officers.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to provide the information to the NI Policing Board for its views/comments on how this matter is being taken forward particularly given the intrinsic link to the ill health retirement schemes.

9. Proposals to Amend the Legislation Governing the Retention of DNA and Fingerprints in Northern Ireland – Response from the Department of Justice to issues raised by the NI Human Rights Commission

The Committee considered a response from the Department of Justice to issues raised by the NI Human Rights Commission and the NI Commissioner for Children and Young People on the proposals to amend the legislation governing the retention of DNA and Fingerprints in Northern Ireland.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request an update from the Department on the timetable for the Justice (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill and the contents of the Bill.

10. Correspondence

- i. The Committee considered information from the Public Accounts Committee regarding NI Audit Office reports that it has agreed to retain primacy over and include in its forward work programme and those it has decided to release and refer on to Statutory Committees to consider further if they wish to do so.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request a response from the Department of Justice to the findings and recommendations in the NI Audit Office Report on “Managing Children who Offend – A Follow-Up Review” following which consideration can be given to what further action may be required.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request a further progress report from the Department to address the findings and recommendations of

The Committee noted the following:

- ii. Correspondence from the Department of Justice providing a copy of a letter from the Minister of Justice to the Minister of Education seeking an update on progress in relation to the Gillen Review recommendations attributed to the Education department and seeking views on how the Education and Justice departments can work collaboratively to implement the recommendations, particularly in relation to Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE) in schools.
- iii. A response from the Department of Justice providing further information requested by the Committee on any role the Department of Justice has in considering and/or advising the Department of Health on the recommendations from the Inquiry into Hyponatraemia-Related Deaths relating to the duty of candour and the associated criminal sanctions and an update on the Coroner’s Service contribution to the Independent Medical Examiner Pilot Scheme.
- iv. The Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service Funds in Court in Northern Ireland - Statement of Accounts 2019-20.

11. Chairperson’s Business

The Chairperson advised Members that he had been invited to attend a private, informal virtual meeting with Chairpersons of other Assembly Committees and the House of Commons Northern Ireland Affairs Committee to discuss the Northern Ireland Protocol.

12. Any Other Business

The Committee noted that the Panel for the Troubles Permanent Disablement Payment Scheme had been appointed.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request an update from the Minister of Justice on the Victims’ Payments Board and the recent meeting with the Secretary of State to discuss financial provision for the payments.

13. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting

The next meeting will be held on Thursday 4 March 2021 at 2.00 p.m. in the Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 4.55 p.m.

Mr Paul Givan MLA
Chairperson, Committee for Justice