



**Northern Ireland  
Assembly**

**COMMITTEE FOR JUSTICE**

**MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS**

THURSDAY 19 MARCH 2020

Room 30, Parliament Buildings, Belfast

- Present: Mr Paul Givan MLA (Chairperson)  
Mr Doug Beattie MLA  
Ms Jemma Dolan MLA  
Mr Gordon Dunne MLA  
Mr Paul Frew MLA  
Mr Patsy McGlone MLA  
Ms Rachel Woods MLA
- Apologies: Ms Linda Dillon MLA (Deputy Chairperson)  
Ms Emma Rogan MLA
- In Attendance: Mrs Christine Darrah (Assembly Clerk)  
Mrs Kathy O'Hanlon (Senior Assistant Assembly Clerk)  
Miss Leanne Johnston (Clerical Supervisor)  
Mr Thomas Manning (Clerical Officer)

*The meeting commenced at 2.06 p.m. in open session.*

The Chairperson welcomed Ms Dolan to the Justice Committee and advised Members that a copy of her entry in the Register of Members' Interests had been provided for information.

The Chairperson read the following statement into the record:

“Members will be aware that from 9pm on Wednesday 18 March 2020, the Speaker/Assembly Commission has restricted access to the building to essential business users only. This means that the general public will not be permitted access to the building and to the public galleries in the Chamber and Committees.

Subject to the usual procedures in relation to closed sessions, any public sessions of the Committee will continue to be broadcast live for the public to view. Whilst this is not ideal, the Speaker/Assembly Commission has taken this decision in the interest of public safety and procedures will continue to be reviewed on a daily basis.”

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed that part of the oral evidence session on the Department of Justice Coronavirus Planning may be taken in closed session.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed that the oral evidence sessions on the Domestic Abuse and Family Proceedings Bill and the Legislative Consent Motions should be reported by Hansard.

### **1. Apologies**

As above.

### **2. Draft Minutes**

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 12 March 2020.

### **3. Matters Arising**

#### Changes to the AccessNI Filtering Scheme

The Committee noted the correspondence from the Department of Justice advising of changes the Minister of Justice had made, initially on an administrative basis, from 16 March 2020 to the AccessNI disclosure process to prevent further challenges following a Supreme Court ruling.

#### The Committee Forward Work Programme and Memo to Committee Chairpersons from the Speaker

The Committee noted a memo from the Speaker to Chairpersons of all Statutory Committees regarding the position in relation to Assembly business, including committee business, and the current public health situation.

The Committee considered its Forward Work Programme for March 2020.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to postpone all items of business on the forward work programme for the rest of March and to only meet to discuss urgent items of business, including further briefings relating to Coronavirus if required, legislative matters including Legislative Consent Motions (LCMs) or other matters that are urgent and time bound.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to schedule an additional meeting on Monday 23 March 2020 to take evidence from Department of Justice officials on the justice-related provisions within the LCM on the emergency Coronavirus Bill, which was scheduled for debate in the Assembly on Tuesday 24 March 2020.

The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Justice advising that the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care had made a statement under section 19(1)(a) of the Human Rights Act 1998 that the provisions in the Coronavirus Bill are compatible with the Convention Rights and the provisions relating to the functions of the Department

of Justice are aligned with the approach taken across all United Kingdom jurisdictions.

#### **4. Department of Justice Coronavirus Planning**

The following officials joined the meeting at 2.14 p.m.:

Deborah Brown, Director, Justice Delivery Directorate, Department of Justice

Ronnie Armour, Director General, Northern Ireland Prison Service and Head of Reducing Offending Directorate

Peter Luney, Chief Executive, NI Courts and Tribunals Service

Alan Todd, Assistant Chief Constable for District Policing and Coronavirus Planning, PSNI

The officials provided the Committee with an overview on planning preparations for the Coronavirus across the justice sector.

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

*The meeting moved into closed session at 4.21 p.m. and the oral evidence session on the Department of Justice Coronavirus Planning continued.*

*Doug Beattie left the meeting at 5.01 p.m.*

The officials agreed to provide further information on several issues.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their attendance.

The Committee noted information received during the oral evidence session advising that, for operational health and safety reasons, Parliament Buildings would close at 6:00 p.m. and all witnesses would be required to leave the building by that time. The Chairperson advised the Committee that, in the circumstances, it would not be possible to complete the remaining oral evidence sessions on the agenda for the meeting and acknowledged the inconvenience this caused to the officials who were waiting.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed that, in the circumstances, it would defer the following agenda items to future meetings:

Agenda item 5: Domestic Abuse and Family Proceedings Bill

Agenda item 6: Proposed Legislative Consent Motion for the Birmingham Commonwealth Games Bill.

Agenda item 7: Proposed Legislative Consent Motion for the Air Traffic Management and Unmanned Aircraft Bill

Agenda item 8: Proposed Legislative Consent Motion for the Private International Law (Implementation of Agreements) Bill

Agenda item 9: Proposed Legislative Consent Motion for the Sentencing (Pre-consolidation Amendments) Bill

*The meeting moved into public session at 5.28 p.m.*

#### **10. 2020-21 Budget – Key Issues**

The Committee considered a paper setting out key issues and themes in preparation for its consideration of the Department of Justice budget for 2020-21.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to forward the list of issues to the Department of Justice and request that they are addressed in forthcoming written briefing papers on the 2020-21 Budget.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to include a request for information on the Department's budget planning in light of the Coronavirus, including details of any activities or services that may need to cease in order to redirect resources, to the list of issues to be covered.

The Committee considered correspondence from the Committee for Finance on the indicative timetable for the Executive Budget 2020-21 and a standardised budget scrutiny process.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to forward the budget template when available to the Department of Justice for completion by 16 April 2020 and to provide a copy of the completed template to the Committee for Finance and the Assembly Research and Information Service (RaISe).

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to schedule an oral evidence session with Department of Justice finance officials for the meeting on Thursday 23 April 2020, with a view to agreeing the Committee's position on the Department's budget at the meeting on 30 April but noted these actions may change in light of the current extraordinary circumstances.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to provide a copy of its views and agreed position on the budget to the Department of Justice, the Committee for Finance and RaISe.

## **11. Correspondence**

- i. The Committee considered a response from the Department of Justice providing an update on the work being taken forward to implement the recommendations in the Report of the Gillen Review of Serious Sexual Offences in Northern Ireland.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to schedule a briefing on the Gillen Review Implementation plan when it is signed off by the Criminal Justice Board.

- ii. The Committee considered a memo from the Committee on Procedures seeking the views of Statutory Committees on current procedures for Legislative Consent Motions.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to place the correspondence on the agenda of a future meeting for discussion.

The Committee noted the following:

- iii. Correspondence from the Department of Justice advising that the Minister of Justice inadvertently gave an incorrect date for completion of the secure children's campus at Woodlands and Lakewood when she attended the Committee for Justice meeting on 27 February 2020 and this has been reported in the Hansard of the session. The correct date is 2022.
- iv. A response from the Department of Justice providing an update on the position regarding the outstanding pay award for police staff.
- v. A response from the Department of Justice providing further information on delivery of the action plan to address the recommendations in the Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland Report: A Thematic Inspection of Public Protection Arrangements in Northern Ireland.
- vi. A Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland Report on 'Base 2: Working to Support Individuals Under Threat – An Inspection of the Role of Base 2 in Threat Verification'.
- vii. A copy of a response from the Department of Justice to the Committee for infrastructure on issues raised regarding driving licences and penalty points.
- viii. A response from the Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice providing further information on the Counter-Terrorism (Sentencing and Release) Bill and how its provisions could be extended to Northern Ireland.
- ix. A Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland Report on a Follow-Up Review of the '2016 Enforcement of Road Traffic Legislation in Northern Ireland Inspection'.

## **12. Chairperson's Business**

### Invitation from the Law Society of Northern Ireland

The Chairperson informed Members that he and the Deputy Chairperson had received an invitation from the Law Society of Northern Ireland to meet with the President and Chief Executive of the Society and arrangements would be made for this to take place.

### Correspondence from the Community Rescue Service

The Chairperson advised Members that he received a letter from Community Rescue Service highlighting the three-part documentary called 'The Search' on the work carried out by the organisation.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to add the organisation to the list of possible visits given the vital community service it provides.

## **13. Any Other Business**

None.

#### **14. Date, time and place of next meeting**

The next meeting will be held on Monday 23 March at 9:30 a.m. in Room 30, Parliament Buildings.

*The meeting was adjourned at 5.35 p.m.*

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