



**Northern Ireland
Assembly**

COMMITTEE FOR JUSTICE

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

THURSDAY 2 APRIL 2020

Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings, Belfast

Present: Mr Paul Givan MLA (Chairperson)
Ms Linda Dillon MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Doug Beattie MLA
Mr Paul Frew MLA
Mr Patsy McGlone MLA
Ms Rachel Woods MLA

Apologies: Ms Jemma Dolan MLA
Mr Gordon Dunne MLA
Ms Emma Rogan MLA

In Attendance: Mrs Christine Darragh (Assembly Clerk)
Mrs Kathy O'Hanlon (Senior Assistant Assembly Clerk)
Mr Peter Madine (Assistant Assembly Clerk)
Miss Leanne Johnston (Clerical Supervisor)

The meeting commenced at 2.10 p.m. in open 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), Mr Dunne had delegated authority to the Chairperson, Mr Givan, to vote on his behalf and Ms Dolan had delegated authority to the Deputy Chairperson, Ms Dillon, to vote on her behalf.

2. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 19 March 2020.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on Monday 23 March 2020.

3. Matters Arising

Letter from the Minister of Justice – Commencement of Provisions of the Coronavirus Act 2020

The Committee noted correspondence from the Minister of Justice regarding the commencement of provisions of the Coronavirus Act 2020.

Memo from Committee for Finance on the 2020-21 Budget Process

The Committee considered correspondence from the Committee for Finance advising that, given the current circumstances, it would not be appropriate to proceed with the oral evidence session on the Budget that had been scheduled for 23 April and the Committee should instead consider the written information to be provided by the Department of Justice and submit questions for the Department to respond to within 24 hours to enable the Committee to consider and agree its position on the Budget by 30 April.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to adopt the revised approach and to notify the Department of Justice of the change.

*Mr McGlone joined the meeting via tele conferencing at 2.09 p.m.
Mr McGlone left the meeting at 2.14 p.m.*

4. Domestic Abuse and Family Proceedings Bill

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

Dr Veronica Holland, Head of Violence Against the Person Branch, Department of Justice

Jane Maguire, Head of Family Courts and Tribunals Branch, Department of Justice

Anthony McNally, Detective Superintendent, Police Service of Northern Ireland

The officials provided an overview of the Domestic Abuse and Family Proceedings Bill.

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.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content with the principles of the Bill.

The Chairperson advised the Committee of the Minister of Justice's intention to schedule second stage of the Bill on Tuesday 28 April and indicated that he would reflect the views of the Committee during the debate.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister of Justice and ask her to raise the issue of victims intimidated as a result of domestic violence not currently being awarded housing points with the Minister for Communities and discuss how the Housing Allocation Scheme can be amended to address this gap.

5. Covid-19 Response – Northern Ireland Prison Service

The following official joined the meeting at 3.01 p.m.:

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

The Director General provided an update on the Covid-19 response and current situation in relation to the Northern Ireland Prison Service.

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

The oral evidence session was reported by Hansard.

The Chairperson thanked Mr Armour for his attendance and placed on record the appreciation of the Committee for the work being carried out by Prison Service staff in the current very difficult circumstances.

6. Covid-19 Response – Police Service of Northern Ireland

The following witness joined the meeting at 3.32 p.m.:

Alan Todd, Assistant Chief Constable, District Policing and Coronavirus Planning, Police Service of Northern Ireland

The Assistant Chief Constable provided an update on the Covid-19 response and current situation in relation to the Police Service of Northern Ireland.

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

The oral evidence session was reported by Hansard.

The Chairperson thanked the Assistant Chief Constable for his attendance and placed on record the appreciation of the Committee for the work being carried out by PSNI staff in the current very difficult circumstances.

7. Covid-19 Response – Department of Justice and SR 2020/55: The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020

The Chairperson informed the Committee that Statutory Rule 2020/55 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020 was laid by the Department of Health on 28 March 2020 under urgent procedure, came into operation on the same date and would cease to have effect within 28 days unless approved by resolution of the Assembly. The relevant provisions in the Regulations for the justice sector included enforcement of requirements to close premises and businesses and

restrictions on gatherings; and offences and penalties, including the processes for registration and challenging penalties.

The following officials joined the meeting at 4.03 p.m.:

Deborah Brown, Director of Justice Delivery, Department of Justice

Andrew Laverty, Acting Head of Criminal Law Branch, Department of Justice

The officials provided an update on the Department of Justice's Covid-19 response and outlined the relevant justice related provisions in SR 2020/55.

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 and placed on record the appreciation of the Committee for the work being carried out by Department of Justice officials in the current very difficult circumstances.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister of Health to request details of the mechanisms to be used and the criteria and information that would be taken into account to determine either the continuation or relaxation of the restrictions provided for by the Regulations and the exit strategy from the restrictions and to send a copy of the letter to the First Minister and deputy First Minister, the Minister of Justice, the Committee for Health and the Committee for the Executive Office.

8. Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered proposals to handle a number of items of business on the Forward Work Plan, including those which were deferred from meetings on 19 March and 26 March and a number that had been scheduled for April taking account of the decision to meet only when necessary to consider matters relating to the Covid-19 response or other essential, urgent items of business.

Agreed: The Committee agreed it was content with the approach outlined for handling the items of business.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister of Justice to request that, given the current exceptional circumstances and the decision to only meet when necessary to focus on Covid-19 related work and other essential urgent business such as legislation, the Department avoids bringing non-essential items of business to the Committee until regular committee business resumes.

Agreed: The Committee agreed a standard letter to issue in response to any items of general correspondence or requests for meetings received during this period.

9. Correspondence

- i. The Committee considered a response from the Minister of State for Northern Ireland to its letter requesting that the cost of providing the separated regime in HM Prison, Maghaberry should be funded by the Northern Ireland Office rather than the Department of Justice.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the letter to the Department of Justice and request its comments on the response and an update on the current position regarding the recommendation of the Independent Panel that the Department should revisit the framework relating to the separated regime and arrange for an independent review to be undertaken.

- ii. The Committee considered correspondence from BLM Law raising issues in relation to the targeted consultation by the Department of Justice on a proposal to change the Personal Injury Discount Rate (PIDR) to -1.75%.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to BLM Law indicating that it will consider this matter further when the results of the consultation are available and advising BLM that if it wishes to draw any issues regarding the proposed change to the Committee's attention it should write setting them out in detail.

The Committee noted the following:

- iii. A response from the Department of Justice to work related issues in HM Prison Maghaberry which had been raised by the Prison Officers' Association.
- iv. The Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunal Service Trust Statement for year ended 31 March 2019.
- v. The Investment Strategy Northern Ireland – Department of Justice's Procurement Activity Report for March 2020.
- vi. The Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland Report on a Review into the methods the Police Service of Northern Ireland use to disclose information in respect of historic cases to the Office of the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland.

10. Any Other Business

The potential for an earlier date for the second stage of the Domestic Abuse and Family Proceedings Bill was raised and Members noted that Committee staff would advise of any change.

11. Date, time and place of next meeting

The next meeting of the Committee will be scheduled when required to consider urgent items of business.

The meeting was adjourned at 5.00 p.m.

Paul Givan MLA
Chairperson, Committee for Justice