



**Northern Ireland  
Assembly**

## **COMMITTEE FOR JUSTICE**

### **MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS**

TUESDAY 21 OCTOBER 2014  
Room 29, Parliament Buildings

Present: Mr Paul Givan MLA (Chairman)  
Mr Raymond McCartney MLA (Deputy Chairman)  
Mr Stuart Dickson MLA  
Mr Sammy Douglas MLA  
Mr Tom Elliott MLA  
Mr Paul Frew MLA  
Mr Seán Lynch MLA  
Mr Alban Maginness MLA  
Mr Patsy McGlone MLA  
Mr Edwin Poots MLA

In Attendance: Mrs Christine Darragh (Assembly Clerk)  
Mr Keith McBride (Senior Assistant Assembly Clerk)  
Mrs Sinead Kelly (Assistant Assembly Clerk)  
Miss Marianne Doherty (Clerical Officer)  
Miss Anna McDaid (Assembly Bursary Student)

Apologies: Mr Chris Hazzard MLA

*The meeting commenced at 11.33 a.m. in public session.*

#### **1. Apologies**

As above.

#### **2. Evidence Session with the Minister of Justice on the allegations broadcast in the BBC Spotlight programme on 14 October 2014 regarding potential interference in the justice process**

Mr David Ford MLA, Minister of Justice and Karen Pearson, Deputy Director, Criminal Justice Policy and Legislation Division, Department of Justice joined the meeting at 11.35 a.m.

The Minister of Justice made some opening remarks regarding the BBC Spotlight Programme broadcast on 14 October 2014.

A detailed question and answer session followed covering issues including: the allegations regarding the PSNI and the Public Prosecution Service handling of the Mairia Cahill case; what action the Minister intended to take regarding the allegations made in the Spotlight programme; whether there is a need for an independent inquiry into the allegations; whether an inquiry is the most appropriate means of uncovering the facts and ensuring openness and transparency; the recently announced Review by the Public Prosecution Service and the acceptable timescale for completion and publication of the outcome; the likely timescale for completion of the Police Ombudsman's investigation into a complaint he has received regarding the Mairia Cahill case; the length of time the Police Ombudsman has taken to publish his report into a complaint relating to the A Adams case and whether this has damaged confidence in the process; why the Public Prosecution Service has not published the report of an independent investigation by the Attorney General into the handling of the A Adams case and what action has been taken to implement any recommendations made; whether the Police Ombudsman investigation and the Review initiated by the Public Prosecution Service are the most appropriate means of dealing with the allegations and are sufficient; what consideration the Minister has given to any issues arising from the case that fall within the responsibility of his Department; the views of the Minister regarding alleged political interference; whether there is a need for an inquiry into the role played by social services; the need to support and encourage victims to come forward; how issues that are outside the scope of the Police Ombudsman investigation and the Review initiated by the Public Prosecution Service will be considered; the impact of the allegations on public confidence in the criminal justice process; the role of the Department of Justice and the independence of the various agencies; the need for full disclosure as part of the process; the timeframe for the Minister to review with his officials the allegations made in the programme and the implications for the Department of Justice; how the Committee and Department can co-operate on this matter; the Minister's responsibility for overall confidence in the justice system; and whether the Minister has full confidence that the Police Ombudsman, the Public Prosecution Service and the PSNI can offer victims the appropriate support.

The Minister of Justice undertook to write to the Police Ombudsman and the Director of Public Prosecutions regarding the timescale for completion and publication of the investigations and reports discussed during the session and agreed to advise the Committee of his review of the Spotlight Programme and the implications for his Department as soon as possible.

The briefing was recorded by Hansard.

The Chairman thanked the Minister of Justice and Ms Pearson for their attendance and they left the meeting.

### **3. Consideration of advice on the options available to the Committee to conduct an Inquiry on the matter**

*12.39 p.m. Mr Stuart Dickson left the meeting.*

The Committee considered an advice paper on the options available to the Committee to conduct an inquiry into the matter.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to the Police Ombudsman to request a timescale for the publication of the outcome of his investigation into the complaint relating to the A Adams case and for a timeline for completion of the investigation into the complaint relating to the M Cahill case.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to the Director of Public Prosecutions to request the terms of reference and the timescale for completion and publication of the independent review, the timescale for the publication of the Attorney General's investigation into the handling of the A Adams case and what action has been taken to implement any recommendations made by the Attorney General.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to request legal advice on a range of issues relating to a possible inquiry into allegations of potential interference in the criminal justice process.

#### **4. Date and Time of next meeting**

The next meeting will take place on Wednesday 22 October 2014 at 2.00 p.m. in Room 21, Parliament Buildings.

*The meeting was adjourned at 12.46 p.m.*

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