



**Northern Ireland  
Assembly**

## **COMMITTEE FOR JUSTICE**

### **MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS**

THURSDAY 4 JUNE 2015  
Room 29, Parliament Buildings

Present: Mr Alastair Ross MLA (Chairman)  
Mr Raymond McCartney MLA (Deputy Chairman)  
Mr Stewart Dickson MLA  
Mr Sammy Douglas MLA  
Mr Tom Elliott MLA  
Mr Paul Frew MLA  
Mr Chris Hazzard MLA  
Mr Alban Maginness MLA  
Mr Patsy McGlone MLA  
Mr Edwin Poots MLA

In Attendance: Mrs Christine Darrah (Assembly Clerk)  
Mr Keith McBride (Senior Assistant Assembly Clerk)  
Mrs Roisin Donnelly (Assistant Assembly Clerk)  
Ms Leanne Johnston (Clerical Supervisor)  
Ms Marianne Doherty (Clerical Officer)

Apologies: Mr Seán Lynch MLA

*The meeting commenced at 2.10 p.m. in public session.*

#### **1. Apologies**

As above.

#### **2. Draft Minutes of the meetings held on 26 May 2015 and 28 May 2015**

The Committee approved the draft minutes of the meeting held on 26 May 2015 subject to one amendment to reflect apologies from Mr Alban Maginness MLA.

The Committee approved the draft minutes of the meeting held on 28 May 2015.

*2.12 p.m. Mr Raymond McCartney joined the meeting.*

### **3. Matters Arising**

- i. The Chairman informed Members that he and the Deputy Chairman had met earlier with the Minister of Justice, at his request, to discuss a possible amendment he was considering bringing forward at Further Consideration Stage in light of the removal of Clause 86 and an amendment to provide some further protection for vulnerable victims and witnesses following the retention of Preliminary Investigations. If the Minister provided further information on the proposed amendments a Committee meeting would be scheduled to consider the issues and this would also provide an opportunity for officials to brief Members on the proposals for Child Protection Disclosures and Domestic Violence Disclosures prior to Further Consideration Stage of the Bill.
- ii. The Chairman informed the Committee that the Report by the Attorney General in relation to the handling of the Adams case by the Public Prosecution Service (PPS) had not yet been received. The PPS had indicated that this was due to sick absence and it should be available by 9 June 2015.

The Committee expressed concern about the delay by the PPS in providing the Report and the need for Members to have enough time to consider the Report prior to the attendance of the Director of Public Prosecutions at the meeting on 11 June 2015 was raised.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to ask the PPS to provide the Report no later than Friday 5 June 2015.

### **4. Draft Desistance Strategy and Action Plan**

Ms Sue McAllister, Director of Reducing Offending and Director General of the Northern Ireland Prison Service, Mr Brian McCaughey, Director of Rehabilitation, Northern Ireland Prison Service, Mr Declan McGeown, Chief Executive, Youth Justice Agency and Ms Cheryl Lamont, Acting Director, Probation Board for Northern Ireland joined the meeting at 2.18 p.m.

Ms McAllister and Mr McCaughey outlined the key issues relating to the draft Desistance Strategy and Action Plan.

*2.27 p.m. Mr Paul Frew joined the meeting.*

A detailed question and answer session followed covering issues including: whether there are measurable targets relating to the Desistance Strategy action plan; the importance of training and employment programmes for offenders; measures to support ex-offenders entering employment and cross departmental responsibility for this; the importance of mentoring for young offenders and whether this should become mandatory or continue to be on a voluntary basis; whether there is a ring-fenced budget to deliver the desistance strategy; what has shaped the approach to desistance; what are the challenges facing ex-offenders and how these are reflected in the strategy and action plan; the interface and working relationship between the Department of Justice and the Department of Education and Department for Employment and Learning; the difficult challenges in dealing with custodial and non-custodial offenders; good practice examples from other jurisdictions; issues and challenges that have arisen in other jurisdictions; addressing patterns of reoffending; the importance of early intervention to address offending behaviours; the need to re-examine the rehabilitation of offenders; the impact of the disclosure of criminal records on employment opportunities for ex-offenders; the relationship and cooperation between those in the criminal justice system delivering

desistence activities and external organisations delivery similar services; the external organisations involved in the desistence strategy; the use of restorative approaches within the criminal justice system; whether potential savings have been built into the strategy; progress on an adult restorative justice strategy for Northern Ireland; what will be different in prisons as a result of the implementation of the strategy; assurance of the practical delivery of measurable outcomes in relation to this strategy; and work with the private sector to develop employment opportunities for ex-offenders.

The officials agreed to provide the Committee with further information on a number of the issues discussed during the briefing session.

*2.55 Mr Patsy McGlone joined the meeting.*

Mr Edwin Poots MLA raised an issue with Ms McAllister regarding her oral evidence to the Committee in her capacity as Director General of the Northern Ireland Prison Service, at the meeting on 4 March 2015, regarding the ending of the issuing of security notices to non-prison grade staff and the engagement that had taken place with NIPSA on the matter.

Ms McAllister clarified her position in relation to the matter.

The Chairman thanked the officials for their attendance and they left the meeting.

The Chairman advised Members that a progress report on the strategy would be provided to the Committee towards the end of 2015.

**5. Department of Justice June 2015 Monitoring Round Return, 2014-15 Provisional Outturn and Final Update on 2014-15 Savings Delivery Plans**

Mr Glyn Capper, Deputy Director, Finance, Mr Billy Irvine and Mr Patrick Barr, Financial Services Division, Department of Justice, joined the meeting at 3.04 p.m.

Mr Capper outlined the Department's June 2015 Monitoring Round position, the 2014-15 provisional outturn and the final position in relation to the 2014-15 Savings Delivery Plans.

*3.13 p.m. Mr Tom Elliott joined the meeting.*

A detailed question and answer session followed covering issues including: the consequences and impact of a successful legal case against the Minister of Justice in relation to criminal legal aid remuneration rates; oversight of the police budget; the PSNI bid for funding for cybercrime and what it would be used for; whether communication and information sharing between the Department and PSNI on the budget was satisfactory; the present position in relation to the £30 million funding provided for the Desertcreat Community Safety Training College capital project; the bid for funds from the Building a United Community Strategy; an explanation of the underspend by the Compensation Agency and the PSNI; the position regarding underspend and flexibility to reallocate underspend between the different business areas in the Department; the processes to identify underspends in budgets earlier; whether any underspends identified during the January Monitoring Round should be better managed and reallocated; whether underspent funds could be used more creatively to support Community and Voluntary organisations such as the Search and Rescue organisations and Addiction Services such as Railway Street in Ballymena; the pressures on the legal aid budget and whether bills could be paid in instalments; the impact of cuts to the Police Ombudsman's budget in relation to the investigation of historical cases; the role of the Executive in relation to reallocation of funds; whether there will be a higher level of assets recovery funding as a

result of the operation of the NCA; progress in relation to the voluntary exit scheme; financial planning in relation to the voluntary exit scheme and whether there are sufficient resources to support it; and the potential financial pressure that may arise from the fine default test cases.

The briefing was recorded by Hansard.

The officials agreed to provide the Committee with further information on a number of the issues discussed during the briefing session.

*3.33 p.m. Mr Chris Hazzard left the meeting.*

The Chairman thanked the officials for their attendance and they left the meeting.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to request an update on the position in relation to the Desertcreat Community Safety Training College Capital project from the Department of Justice.

## **6. Psychoactive Substances Bill**

The Committee noted information provided by the Department of Justice on the Westminster Government's plans to bring forward a Psychoactive Substances Bill, the intention of which is to prohibit and disrupt the manufacture, distribution, sale and supply of psychoactive substances, particularly those not covered under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971. The Bill is a reserved matter and a Legislative Consent Motion is not required by the Assembly for the proposals.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to request regular updates on the progress of the proposed legislation from the Department of Justice.

## **7. EU Justice and Home Affairs Bi-Annual Report**

The Committee noted information provided by the Department of Justice which summarised the current position in relation to relevant EU measures, the known impact for Northern Ireland and proposed actions.

## **8. Criminal Records Disclosure: Guidance for a Filtering Review Mechanism – Proposed Consultation**

The Committee considered information provided by the Department of Justice on a proposed public consultation on draft Guidance for the Operation of the Criminal Records Filtering Review Mechanism which will provide information to a range of audiences on the context, purpose and scope of the review mechanism, the processes involved and the role of the independent reviewer.

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

## **9. Correspondence**

- i. The Committee noted a further response from the Department of Justice regarding the name change of Hydebank Wood Young Offenders Centre.

- ii. The Committee considered an update from the Department of Justice in relation to outstanding AccessNI checks for taxi licence applications and overall performance which indicated delays in the provision of enhanced checks.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to schedule an oral briefing by AccessNI and the PSNI on the checking system and the current delays.

- iii. The Committee noted the publication of Northern Ireland Data Lab Bulletin 1/2015: Reoffending Analysis for a sample of Offenders who completed the NIACRO Jobtrack Programme during 2010/11 and Bulletin 2/2015: Provision of a Northern Ireland Data Lab Facility.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Justice and the Department of Employment and Learning to ascertain the position regarding securing funding for the Jobtrack programme to continue with current provision and to expand capacity.

- iv. The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Justice in relation to the authorisation for the closure of an alleyway at Edgar Street, Belfast.
- v. The Committee noted an invitation from the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission to its inaugural social justice lecture on 9 June 2015 at the Bar Council, Royal Courts of Justice.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed that Members should advise the Clerk if they wished to attend this event.

- vi. The Committee noted the Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland report on “*An Announced Inspection of Woodlands Juvenile Justice Centre*”.
- vii. The Committee noted the Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland – Department of Justice’s Procurement Activity Report for May 2015.

## **10. Chairman’s Business**

None.

## **11. Any Other Business**

An invitation from the Belfast Law Centre to hold a meeting at its premises was raised and the Committee noted that this had been included in the Forward Work Programme and a suitable date would be identified.

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

The next Committee meeting will take place on Thursday 11 June 2015 in Room 30, Parliament Buildings at 2.00 p.m.

*The meeting was adjourned at 3.51 p.m.*

**Mr Alastair Ross MLA**  
**Chairman, Committee for Justice**