



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

Committee for Justice

# OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

Justice (No. 2) Bill — Proposed Amendments  
to Firearms Legislation:  
Department of Justice

26 November 2015



Once we have that, and subject obviously to the Committee's comments, we plan to put them to the various shooting stakeholders and then let the Committee know the outcome of that exchange as soon as we can.

In closing, I stress, however, that what we are seeking to do is to deliver on the commitments that the Minister gave before the summer. I am happy to take questions.

**Mr Frew:** Thank you, gentlemen, for coming before us. I think that we got this yesterday. Why was it tabled before us today?

**Mr Simon Rogers:** We could have waited, but we were trying to fit in with the timetable that the Committee was asking for. As I mentioned, we got amendments on Monday. We met the police on Tuesday and drafted a response on Tuesday. We went back to counsel on Wednesday, but we did not think that we would have a final version, and, rather than giving you no version, we wanted to send these. We believe that these are nearly there. They are not complete. Rather than not turn up, which, obviously, officials would not do, we would rather have an engagement on where we are at today, with an undertaking to come back again with amended provisions. We are not pretending that this is an ideal way to do business, but we thought that it was better for the Committee to have some sight of these today rather than to leave it.

**Mr Frew:** It has been about six months since the debate on the first Justice Bill, and amendments that were put at that time were withdrawn in good faith. I think, having had a brief look at your amendments, that you will agree that we were not far away. Why do you think that counsel has taken so long? They only came to you on Monday and have given you this period of a few days to consult with the police and then to come to this Committee. Why has it taken so long?

**Mr Simon Rogers:** I certainly was not trying to suggest that counsel had failed the Committee; far from it. It has taken time because it is extremely complicated, and I think that the comments that the Minister made on the amendments back in June demonstrated that those needed further work. They were not our amendments, obviously, and we had to strip right back to the start. We checked our file before we came today, and we discovered that we started work on the clauses before that session in the Assembly on 22 June. It has taken longer than we would have liked, but every part of these clauses trips up another part of the Order. To try to make them workable, not just for the police but for dealers and firearms certificate holders, we have had to go through them with a fine-tooth comb.

**Mr Frew:** Do you not think that to try to make them workable, it would have been a great idea to include the people who have done so much work in getting you and the Department to where you are now? Those are the stakeholders involved. They were involved with us in writing up the amendments for the Justice Bill, and you seem to have completely ignored them for the last six months.

**Mr Simon Rogers:** As a matter of fact, it is not six months, but it is not an acceptable period. Six months sounds worse than it is.

**Mr McGlone:** Five.

**Mr Simon Rogers:** We have not been seeking to exclude the stakeholders, and, as I said in the opening remarks, we certainly want to show these to them. We told them at a fairly early stage that as soon as we have clauses we want to come to them. Since then, we have sent them updates saying that we have not got these yet and that, when we get them, we will come to them. It is not a question of ignoring them. We will go to them. We were trying to get clauses that did what we agreed with members of this Committee — in effect, the Minister with the Assembly and, indeed, us with the shooters, who we had been engaging with. Really, there was no purpose in going to them with a moving target. Until we got to the point where we had a set of clauses that stand up to scrutiny, it would have been a waste of their time. It is just unfortunate that we are coming today with a set that is not quite there, but our approach was to come to you and show you what we have got, rather than to leave the impression that we have done nothing.

**Mr Frew:** With that rationale in mind where you have nothing to go to someone on, how often have you met the PSNI?

**Mr Simon Rogers:** We have probably met the PSNI once, but, again, we did not want to go the police before we had anything meaningful. Monday was the first occasion where we had something approaching a final set of clauses.

**Mr Frew:** So you met the PSNI on Tuesday. What was its view?

**Mr Simon Rogers:** I think that it was broadly happy. We have gone back to counsel with about seven comments. Counsel has come back today on a couple of occasions, and I have sitting on my desk a draft response to those — I hope — when I go back. The answer to your question is six or seven. I can go through those if it helps.

**Mr Frew:** Yes, if you have them there.

**Mr Simon Rogers:** I have them in my head.

**The Chairperson (Mr Ross):** Just before you start, I will say that the Committee has a lot of work on this afternoon. We have an event at 6.00 pm, and we have another oral evidence session. We will run this session until about 5.15 pm, so we have another 23 minutes. I am not going to curtail any questions. There are other members, so you can share the floor between yourselves.

**Mr Frew:** To speed things up, maybe we could have those in writing, even. We will not worry too much about the actual concerns that the PSNI has at the minute. Getting those in writing would quicken it up, if that would be OK, Simon.

**Mr Robert Kidd (Department of Justice):** Mr Frew, would it be more helpful if we have those amendments sorted with counsel and then forward a refreshed set of clauses?

**Mr Frew:** As soon as you have a settled view, we would like to see the clauses so that we can get to work on them. My disappointment is that I have only had today to work on them. However, I understand and take your point that you only had them on Monday, so that takes away that pressure. To get into the actual amendments, you are proposing that there be two types of club: the existing bullet-firing club and then a shotgun club. What is the rationale for that?

**Mr Simon Rogers:** The shotgun club is created to enable young shooters to shoot clay targets. This has been one of the complicating factors. At the minute, "firearms club" is carefully defined in article 49. We have created a new clause to enable a shotgun club, authorised by the Chief Constable, to set itself up purely for the purpose of young shooters. At the minute, shotgun clubs are not authorised. To satisfy the requirement that there be the appropriate level of supervision etc, we have had to create a new concept of a shotgun club authorised for shooting by minors in clay disciplines.

**Mr Frew:** But there are currently gun clubs that use shotguns.

**Mr Kidd:** Practical shotguns, yes.

**Mr Frew:** Yes. So why can we not just amend article 49?

**Mr Simon Rogers:** Because we would then have created a regime for shotgun clubs that restricts them in an unintended way. Shotgun clubs do not exist formally under the statute at the minute, although there are people who fire at what are known as shotgun clubs. We are trying not to put a whole raft of regulation around those, which are practising perfectly reasonably, but to say, "If you want to have this competitive arrangement with young shooters, you need to comply with certain provisions that are set out here in clause 50(a)."

**Mr Frew:** Are you not creating more burden? There will be a separate fee. I think that I saw in here that there will be a separate fee of £71 for the shotgun club, which is new.

**Mr Simon Rogers:** Only if it wants to have young shooters who are firing at clay targets under supervision. If a shotgun club wants to do that, which is a new provision, the police will need to inspect it etc. The fee for that will be, as you say, £71.

**Mr Frew:** To me, that smacks of your creating more regulation when there is no need. These clubs are perfectly safe.

**Mr Kidd:** Under the current regime, Mr Frew, all bullet-firing clubs go through a mandatory registration system of being authorised and approved by the PSNI. For shotgun clubs, there is currently a voluntary registration scheme. That is why we have kept the shotgun clubs separate. Under our proposals, we are still saying that shotgun clubs do not have to register. The authorisation and registration will only be for those clubs that wish to permit access to young people.

**Mr Frew:** At the minute, the existing bullet-firing clubs are required to introduce gun registers and ammunition registers. Would this mean that they will have to do that again if they are shotgun clubs? You are doubling up. Why?

**Mr Kidd:** No, the regime for a bullet-firing club is not changing.

**Mr Frew:** Let us say that Kells or Ballymoney bullet-firing clubs are already there and want to accommodate young people. They would have to become shotgun clubs also.

**Mr Kidd:** If they have been approved by the PSNI —

**Mr Frew:** But they would still have to become a second thing, with a second fee and a second set of regulations and registrations.

**Mr Simon Rogers:** If they wish to become a shotgun club, which is a new thing in terms only of young shooters, yes, they will have to go through a regime, and that is because police need to satisfy themselves that the arrangements are suitable to allow this type of shooting as a matter of public safety. That is the reason behind that.

**Mr Frew:** Is the Department aware of the latest EU firearms directive, which was adopted by the European Commission a matter of days after the atrocities in Paris?

**Mr Simon Rogers:** Yes.

**Mr Frew:** It is very clear with regard to people under 18. It is very clear-cut. What is the Department going to do about this directive, and the burden of regulation that you are placing on young shots?

**Mr Simon Rogers:** At the minute, the directive is a proposal. Even as we speak, our colleagues in the Home Office are in Brussels discussing it. We are conscious that a number of things in it may have implications for our firearms regime, were they to go through, including medical certificates, deactivation and all sorts of other things. However, it is not actually settled yet. At this stage, it is a proposal. It only came out earlier this month, and we are in close contact with the Home Office. We do not know what impact it will have at this stage.

**Mr Frew:** It is very clear. If this goes through in its present guise:

*"at least 18 years of age, except in relation to the ... possession of firearms for hunting and target shooting, provided that in that case persons of less than 18 years of age have parental permission, or are under parental guidance or the guidance of an adult with a valid firearms or hunting licence, or are within a licenced or otherwise approved training centre".*

That is nowhere near what we have in Northern Ireland, and this is an EU directive.

**Mr Simon Rogers:** The explanatory memorandum also says that:

*"the Directive lays down the minimum requirements that MS should impose".*

It is a minimum requirement. The Minister —

**Mr Frew:** Yes, and the UK also has regulations and legislation around proportionality and about not gold-plating EU directives. We should not be going stronger, stricter and with more regulation than

European directives; we should be going the opposite way. To me, that is a sound directive, but what the Minister is trying to do is impose further regulations on the people of Northern Ireland.

**Mr Simon Rogers:** In fact, the Minister is liberalising our current regime through these changes.

**Mr Frew:** And that makes it even worse, because we have been in a bad place and we are trying to move forward. The EU is giving us guidance here and showing the way, yet you are being too restrictive and, in that, you are hurting not only the rural community but the sporting fraternity too.

**Mr Simon Rogers:** The Minister's position on this has been set out on a number of occasions, and we are here to bring forward legislation that meets what he is asking us to do in the clubs. The EU directive sets a minimum standard and in fact the proposals that we have today are liberalising the regime as in the Firearms (Northern Ireland) Order 2004.

**Mr Frew:** This has been out for about a month — sorry, it came out after the Paris atrocity, of course. Have you had any discussion with the PSNI or the Minister about it?

**Mr Simon Rogers:** We have sent it to the PSNI. We have been in contact with the Home Office, and we hope that the meeting that it is having today will give us a better sense of what exactly is the response of member states to this. It is hot off the press, so to speak. We expect, when we have a better idea about it, to be consulting shooting groups and others to get a view, including the police, before we are able to take it forward. However, as an EU directive, obviously it has the potential to be binding on —

**Mr Frew:** Yes, it is an EU directive which has been born out of a terrorist atrocity in Paris, and it is far more liberating than our current legislation and what the Minister is proposing. Does that not say and show that our Minister of Justice is well out of step?

**Mr Simon Rogers:** I do not think that. Also the directive, in many respects, is not liberating. There are elements of it that will restrict in terms of —

**Mr Frew:** Yes, but with regard to young shooters.

**Mr Simon Rogers:** As I say, it is a minimum standard.

**Mr Kidd:** There are, of course, different regimes, different minimum ages etc in different European countries.

**Mr Frew:** And, of course, it is without prejudice to article 3. However, at the same time, we have laws in the UK that talk about having proportionality with regard to EU directives and not gold-plating things, yet we are not following them. I will leave it at that; I know that you are stuck for time.

**Mr McGlone:** Thank you. I really think that a wee bit more joined-up work with some of the stakeholders would have helped, because, as you will know, some of them can draw on very specialist legal advice that would have been helpful to you. I find it a bit difficult to understand why it took five months, although that was not a fault with you. I would like to know when counsel was first instructed on the matter and told to get on with it. It took five months — they were not writing a thesis.

**Mr Simon Rogers:** I do not want to come here and criticise counsel. I have already said that once. Producing instructions is a team effort, and this is a complicated bit of legislation. In fact, the last time we met counsel, he said that this was the most complicated bit of legislation that he had worked on, and that is the starting point for the changes. In addition, we are not looking in one area alone. In my introductory remarks, I —

**Mr McGlone:** I appreciate that, Simon, but I am just going to repeat this: five months is an awful length of time to work up a few amendments. I have to say that. Maybe the clock was ticking for him for those whole five months, and good luck to him, but five months is a considerable amount of time.

I will move on to some of the substance. I will come back to the issue of target clubs in a wee minute or two, following something that you said earlier. In paragraph 2 on the second page of the departmental Assembly liaison officer's (DALO) submission, he states:

*"to broaden access to shotguns for 16 and 17 year olds".*

Why are air rifles not included in there?

**Mr Kidd:** Because 16- and 17-year-olds can already access air rifles in target clubs.

**Mr McGlone:** You say:

*"broaden access ... for 16 and 17 year olds with a firearm certificate for sporting and pest control uses."*

Those are your words. I do not know whether any of you are practitioners, but you will know that an air rifle is very conducive to the control of pests and vermin, particularly rats and the like — more so than a shotgun. So I just do not understand why air rifles are not in there. I first started out with an air rifle, as most young lads would do. From personal experience, I know that, once you have been taught safe practice, you get to use it and learn a wee bit of accuracy. It does not have an awful lot of power, given, as you will know, the 12 ft/lb rule and all that sort of stuff, although that does not apply here. That is the reason why, over in GB, they do not have firearm certificates for air rifles. They have shotgun certificates, as you know, but they do not have any certificates for air rifles in England at the minute. Looking at it, it puzzles me more than anything else why an air rifle or air arm, for want of a better word, has not been included. Maybe you could reflect on that, please.

Coming back to what you were saying there about air rifles — you were probably pointing out something that had been read out, too — puzzled me a bit, but we will come to that in a wee minute.

Simon, you talked about a club having to get dual registration for shotgun use — and it could be a club where young shooters currently practise with rifles and the like — and said that it would have to be assessed for safety. You will appreciate that, in terms of ballistics, the charge of a shot or whatever, a rifle club is likely to already be determined as safe, depending on what rifles are being used there. In comparison with a shotgun range, a rifle club, if it has already been investigated and looked at, will be a much safer place, because, obviously, a rifle bullet carries much further and is much more accurate in terms of the distance that it travels and all those things. Why, therefore, would they, as you said and if I picked you up correctly, have to come out and inspect it a second time for shotgun use? I am not getting the rationale. If a club has been determined to be a safe place for the use of firearms, as it has to be and rightly so, why do you have to come back to it for shotguns?

**Mr Kidd:** You certainly make a very valid point, Mr McGlone. Part of our consideration was that, if a club is registering and opening for clay target shooting, it may have a separate facility and may not be on the same range facility that is used for the rifle range.

**Mr McGlone:** If it was a different range facility, that would be a different place and location, so I understand why that would need to be assessed. I presume that you know that, if they were using a certain range for, let us say, rifle or target shooting, that is the one that would be assessed. If you move half a mile or 2 miles down the road, it is a different ball game. Of course that would have to be assessed and looked at as a separate venue.

I understand that if a club — say an NI Assembly club — already has a rifle range but decides to have a shotgun range down the road, that it is a different facility and should have different licensing and inspection. It would have to be inspected. But, when the two are within one shooting holding that is in the same geographical location that has already been inspected by the police and determined to be a safe facility for that use, I cannot understand why it would have to be looked at again for shotgun use. It is an anomaly in my mind why that should be the case. What are your views on that?

**Mr Simon Rogers:** We think it is justified, because if you are firing clays out of a trap, for example, it is not the same as shooting at a fixed target. Therefore, even if it is already a club, the police may have to attend to look at the circumstances in which it has been set up and at backdrops, etc, which may be different. There may be circumstances in which they have to inspect.

I agree with you that, if it is dual club, if we can call it that, a lot of the inspection will be easier, because the police will already know that it complies —

**Mr McGlone:** A lot of the inspection should already have been done.

**Mr Simon Rogers:** Yes; exactly.

**Mr Frew:** Can I interject? Why not just widen the club environment. If you need a suitable greenfield site for clays, why not just widen the club environment in the initial inspection under the original certificate and registration?

**Mr Simon Rogers:** If it is an existing club, there is logic while it is applying to become a club in it saying that it would also like to do clay target shooting with young people only; this is only about young people. There may be others. Indeed, the group that we are thinking of more are those who are doing clay target shooting solely. If that group is on a site and wants to extend its arrangements to young people, we feel that we would want the police to authorise that.

**Mr Frew:** How many groups in Northern Ireland are like that? Sorry, Patsy. How many groups are like that?

**Mr Kidd:** For clay only?

**Mr Frew:** For clay only.

**Mr Kidd:** We do not know, because there is no mandatory registration scheme.

**Mr Simon Rogers:** We do know that the association wants the changes and supports them. We need to bring them in so that it can get the authorisation to enable young shooters —

**Mr McGlone:** I think we are moving slightly off target, if you will forgive the analogy. We started with clubs that are already officially approved to use guns that carry or have the potential to carry much further distances. As you know, they will be centre-fire weapons and the like. The sites have already been ascertained to be a safe, approved location, and that would have to be done for insurance purposes and all that. Why would you want to come back into that situation?

I know that it is not applied in this way, but we will just draw the analogy, even though it is not like for like. You were coming in to say, "This is a distinction, because we are a club that is going to call for re-registration, but we are introducing the use of airguns in an airgun practice. People would already have been shooting .223s or .308s on the site, but we are going to introduce airguns, so we will have to look at that and go for re-registration". To my mind, that is the logic of it. It does not make sense at all. You have a site that has already been examined for much more powerful weapons, and you are saying that you have to go in and look at it again for less powerful weapons. I do not understand it. Anyway, you hear my point on that.

What are your views on the original point that I raised about the accommodation of an air rifle for sporting and pest control? What are you going to do about that? Are you going to reflect on it?

**Mr Simon Rogers:** Yes. I am not sure that we have not provided for it, but —

**Mr McGlone:** I read that bit too, and I was not too sure about it. It seemed a wee bit confusing to me. Are these the actual amendments?

**Mr Simon Rogers:** Yes.

**Mr McGlone:** Those are your amendments on —

**Mr Simon Rogers:** The provision that I am looking at is the amendment at —

**Mr McGlone:** Clause 2(2)(a), is that the one?

**Mr Simon Rogers:** I was looking at the bottom of page 2, which is roughly what you are looking at. At the bottom of page 2, under:

*"amendments relating to persons under 18",*

it states:



*"Article 7 ... insert "or for the purpose of pest control"."*

**Mr McGlone:** Yes.

**Mr Simon Rogers:** So, the Chief Constable may grant a firearms certificate, etc, to a young person, such for as an airgun or shotgun, and there may be conditions for sporting or pest or vermin control.

**Mr McGlone:** It also says that the:

*"(person under 18 may not purchase air gun without a certificate unless the person has attained the age of 17), the words "unless he has attained the age of 17" are repealed".*

What does that mean? That he has to be aged 18?

**Mr Simon Rogers:** Yes. That was an anomaly that we consulted on. That is a separate provision. The anomaly in the current legislation, which would enable —

**Mr McGlone:** So, what you are saying is that you can broaden access to target clubs or shotguns for 16- and 17-year-olds with a firearms certificate for sporting and pest-control uses while under appropriate supervision but that you cannot do that with an air rifle.

**Mr Simon Rogers:** No.

**Mr McGlone:** That is what I am reading from it.

**Mr Simon Rogers:** That is not what I think.

**Mr McGlone:** It is just that it is very confusing reading that. You might get an odd, good barrister who would take it apart.

**Mr Kidd:** We believe that we have added, as well as sporting purposes, the words "for the purpose of pest control" to article 7(3)(b).

**Mr Simon Rogers:** Which would apply to airguns, but with supervision.

**Mr McGlone:** What age are you dealing with there?

**Mr Simon Rogers:** That is 16- and 17-year-olds.

**Mr McGlone:** So, are you telling me that this can read with accuracy:

*"broaden access to shotguns and air rifles for 16- and 17-year olds with a firearms certificate for sporting and pest control uses while under supervision."*

Is that what you are telling me is correct?

**Mr Simon Rogers:** Yes. We did not cover every last element in that letter — for example, the repeal point — but, yes, we are saying that that is the effect of the amendment.

**Mr McGlone:** So, it applies to shotguns and airguns?

**Mr Simon Rogers:** Airguns at 16 and 17 for sporting and pest control.

**Mr McGlone:** OK, thanks for that. I will just go on to one or two things that I need a wee bit of clarity on.

**The Chairperson (Mr Ross):** I will give you just a gentle reminder that we are approaching 5.15 pm.

**Mr McGlone:** I appreciate that, Chair, and you have been very patient, but these are very material issues that I want to get clarity on. Where the departmental amendments are concerned, there is an

explanatory document that goes with the key issues and the responses to those issues from the Department.

On the any lawful quarry condition, I see a response from the Department. I will explain a circumstance to you. You are out with a rifle, which is approved for deer stalking, and you spot a fox. Because that firearm is not conditioned for that vermin control of a fox, albeit that it could be beside a pheasant pen or whatever it might be, by law you are not allowed to take that shot, even though you could be doing the most eminently sensible thing to protect stock or whatever it might be. Maybe you could clarify this for me, because I read this and I could read it read it two or three different ways. It says:

*"The Home Office Guidance, revised in 2014 explains that the initial grant of a firearm still requires the good reason to be met".*

We all know about that. It goes on:

*"In the case of a quarry firearm they may condition the firearm for any other lawful quarry meaning that firearm may be used in other circumstances."*

Can you clarify for me when a person who is out deer stalking with a firearm that is conditioned for that may take a shot to protect stock or to protect against other controls on that fox? How does that mechanism work? Am I reading in this that the Home Office guidance makes provision for that to happen within the firearms licensing law?

**Mr Kidd:** Yes. The Home Office guidance does make that provision. My understanding is that not all GB forces have thus far adopted the any lawful quarry conditioning. Hence the use of the word "may".

**Mr McGlone:** Yes, I got that bit — the word "may".

We will take it to the next step, then. Are you adopting the approach that the person who finds themselves in that circumstance can apply for the any lawful quarry use? There is perfect logic in this. There are people out there who prefer not to have two or three different rifles, but they are conditioned for deer or fox or whatever, so they will have — I will pluck a rifle out of the air — a .243. If it were for any lawful quarry, the person could use it for deer. I will not be too long, Chair, but I want to tease this out: it is very important. The person could use that rifle for deer and for the control of foxes — I read about it, and that is the case over in GB — instead of having a .243 and a .223 or .204 or whatever it might be. It makes logical sense for the person to be able to use it on the ground for vermin control, as well as for deer stalking, and it makes eminent sense that the person would not have to have two different firearms for varying purposes. Can you see a situation or situations where that will happen here where the term "any lawful quarry" will be introduced as a condition or as an interpretation of a condition on a firearm certificate?

**Mr Simon Rogers:** Throughout the consultation on these measures, we did not look at the proposal on any lawful quarry. I think our position, as stated before, was that we are happy to look at this, but we did not do it as part of the consultation. Therefore, we are trying to deliver on what we said we would do without introducing a new element.

Secondly, we agree with you that, if this led to fewer firearms out there, that would be extremely positive, but our system is founded on good reason and quarry type. Indeed, the whole banded system that we are hopefully about to bring forward to the Assembly and to introduce is based on quarry type as well. We have a system that limits use on the basis of quarry type, and before we would make a change to extend to any lawful quarry, we would want to talk to the police in detail and, indeed, to consult. We know that some firearms groups are keen on this, but we would want to consult the whole range of groups to get their view. We have not done that, because the exchanges that we have had with the Committee and others up till now have been on a specific set of proposals, not including that one.

**Mr McGlone:** I hear what you are saying. Does this involve a change of policy or a change of practice?

**Mr Simon Rogers:** That is a good question.

**Mr McGlone:** I do not think that other UK forces in GB have changed legislation. From what I am hearing, there has been a change in practice. Therefore, any change of policy and a consultation — all that is grand. It is a change of practice, and I think that it would be a change of good practice.

**Mr Simon Rogers:** In which case, it is the Chief Constable who sets the conditions, etc, and it would be an issue principally for him.

**Mr McGlone:** Is it an issue that you are prepared to raise with the Chief Constable?

**Mr Simon Rogers:** Of course, yes.

**Mr McGlone:** Can you get back to us on that? We will probably have the details, however.

**Mr Kidd:** My understanding at the moment, Mr McGlone, is that if you were applying at the moment for a fox-calibre rifle, such as a .223 or whatever, you could say on the form, "My primary use is going to be fox, but I also wish to use the rifle for x, y and z." I think that, at that point, you can have the certificate conditioned for more than simply fox.

**Mr McGlone:** I appreciate that, but you could have a list as long as your arm, which could be encapsulated by the words "or any other lawful quarry", if you get where I am going.

Just coming back to the banded system, there will be people who do not want to go up a calibre. Point taken, and thank you for your forbearance, Chair.

**The Chairperson (Mr Ross):** Edwin has negotiated a very quick question.

**Mr Poots:** There is a series of things that I would like to ask. I will stick to one and give you your due, Chairman.

There was a whole series of things that it was agreed to move forward five or six months ago, including the fees. It seems that you are ready to move forward on the fees but that you are not ready to move forward on the other series of things. I am making it clear that, unless you are ready to move forward on the other things, a number of us on this Committee will not be ready to move forward on the fees. That may be a question, or it may not be a question. That is a course of work that needs to be completed, and it needs to be completed before February, otherwise we cannot agree the fees.

**Mr Simon Rogers:** It is a statement of fact that the fees have already been approved by this Committee. We came to you and put them to you in September, and we were planning to introduce them in about February to give everybody a reasonable opportunity on the basis that we and the Minister are committed to introducing these new changes. On the other side of that is that none of us are blind to the fact that the Police Service of Northern Ireland needs all the resources it can secure, and we need to move forward with those changes as well. I will take that message back to the Minister.

**Mr Poots:** An agreement is an agreement, and we expect that to be —

**Mr Frew:** They were agreed in good faith.

**The Chairperson (Mr Ross):** I suggest that it might be useful if you were to meet the members of this Committee who are particularly interested as soon as you possibly can, even if you could do it on Monday or Tuesday. That would be useful. There is a level of expertise on this Committee that I think is fairly unmatched anywhere else in the Assembly on the issue, and it may be useful to hammer out some of these details in a meeting.

**Mr Poots:** It may well be that that is a good suggestion, Chair, and I am happy to do that.

**The Chairperson (Mr Ross):** It would be a better use of time as well, and I am sure that members would make themselves available to do that if you could afford us that opportunity.