



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

## Committee for Justice

### Minutes of Proceedings

**Thursday 23 April 2026**

**Room 30, Parliament Buildings, Belfast**

**Present:**

Paul Frew MLA (Chairperson)

Emma Sheerin MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

Doug Beattie MLA

Connie Egan MLA

Aoife Finnegan MLA

Brian Kingston MLA

Patsy McGlone MLA

**Present by Video or Teleconference:**

Maurice Bradley MLA

Ciara Ferguson MLA

**In Attendance:**

Kathy O'Hanlon (Assembly Clerk)

Thomas McKillop (Senior Assistant Assembly Clerk)

Gareth Black (Assistant Assembly Clerk)

Aaron Pakenham (Clerical Officer)

The meeting commenced at 2.03pm in closed session.

**Agreed:** That the meeting to begin in closed session in order to discuss an item of correspondence and a written update on the planned deepfake amendment.

*Maurice Bradley joined the meeting at 2.05pm.*

*The Deputy Chairperson took the chair at 2.07pm.*

The Committee considered further correspondence from an individual regarding Injury on Duty awards. The correspondence requested that the Committee help to progress correspondence the individual has issued to the Chairperson in his capacity as an individual MLA.

**Agreed:** To respond to the individual advising that the Committee is responsible for correspondence it receives, but the responsiveness of an individual MLA to correspondence sent to them is not a matter for the Committee, regardless of whether or not they are a Member of the Committee for Justice; and that Members are content that the Committee's response to correspondence it has received, and the responses of individual Members, have been appropriate.

*The Chairperson resumed the chair at 2.13pm.*

The Committee also discussed the Justice Minister's update on the tabling of Deepfake amendment to the Justice Bill (item 6.1).

*The meeting moved to public session at 2.28pm*

**Agreed:** That the oral evidence session with Women’s Resource & Development Agency on the Role of Firearms in Violence against Women and Girls in Northern Ireland, will be recorded by Hansard.

*The Chairperson noted that a number of Committee Members are members of the All Party Group on Access to Justice.*

## **1. Apologies**

There were no apologies.

## **2. Draft Minutes**

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 16 April 2026.

## **3. Matters Arising**

### **3.1 Correspondence from Pam Cameron MLA**

The Committee noted correspondence from Pam Cameron MLA providing an update on ongoing engagement between the Member, the McCollum family and the Public Prosecution Service in relation to delays in progressing that case due to the withdrawal of services by the Criminal Bar Association (CBA). The Member has thanked the Committee for its interest and support of families affected by the ongoing CBA strike.

## **4. The Role of Firearms in Violence against Women and Girls in Northern Ireland – Women’s Resource & Development Agency oral evidence**

The following witness joined the meeting at 2.32pm:

Elaine Croy, Women's Sector Lobbyist, Women's Resource and Development Agency (WRDA)

The witness provided oral evidence on the WRDA's recently published research on the Role of Firearms in Violence Against Women and Girls.

The briefing was followed by a question-and-answer session.

*Brian Kingston left the meeting at 3.45pm.*

The Chairperson thanked the witness and she left the meeting at 3.50pm.

## **5. Criminal Justice (Sentencing etc) Bill – Written papers**

### **5.1 and 5.2 – Committee for the Economy and Committee for Education – Response to Call for Evidence**

The Committee noted nil responses to the Call for Evidence on the Criminal Justice (Sentencing etc.) Bill from the Committee for the Economy and the Committee for Education.

*Patsy McGlone left the meeting at 3.52pm.*

### **5.3 – Women's Aid Federation NI – Potential amendments and domestic abuse and suicide**

The Committee considered correspondence from the Women's Aid Federation NI requesting that the Committee consider a number of areas in relation to suicide motivated by domestic abuse, and advising that Women's Aid would welcome an opportunity to meet with the Committee to provide evidence on the issue of suicide in domestic abuse cases.

**Agreed:** To consider this further when planning for the oral evidence sessions on the Sentencing Bill.

#### **5.4 – Pauline Duddy (Forwarded by M Durkin MLA’s office) – Criminal Justice (Sentencing etc) Bill submission**

The Committee noted a submission in response to the Sentencing Bill from an individual, forwarded to the Committee by Mark Durkin MLA. The submission asks the Committee to give consideration to the campaign for Jasmin’s Law as part of the ongoing work around the Bill.

**Agreed:** To include the correspondence as written evidence on the Sentencing Bill and to consider further when the call for evidence has closed and the Committee is considering its next steps.

#### **5.5 and 5.6 – Support for Jade’s Law being included in the Criminal Justice (Sentencing etc) Bill**

The Committee considered two items of correspondence from separate individuals requesting that Jade’s Law be included as part of the Sentencing Bill.

**Agreed:** To advise the individuals that the Committee has written to the Department of Justice and the Department of Finance seeking an update on any policy development work in relation to this matter, and that the Committee will forward those responses to them in due course.

### **6. Justice Bill – Written papers**

*Patsy McGlone returned to the meeting at 3.57pm.*

#### **6.1 Department of Justice – Justice Bill: Deepfake amendment update**

The Committee considered a recent update from Minister of Justice in relation to the planned Deepfake amendment to the Justice Bill. The update advises that, due to the complexity of the proposed amendment, the Minister proposes that it is tabled at Further Consideration Stage in order to avoid delaying the Consideration Stage. The Minister has also advised that she would be happy to

meet with the Committee Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson to discuss this in further detail.

Members noted that the Committee has not been advised of the outcome of the consultation on the proposals to criminalise sexually explicit deepfake images, which closed on 13 October 2025.

**Agreed:** To ask the Department to provide the Committee with the outcome of the Department’s consultation on proposals to criminalise sexually explicit deepfake images, and the final policy position, at the earliest opportunity.

**Agreed:** The Committee was content that the Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson meet with the Minister to discuss the tabling of the planned deepfake amendment.

**Agreed:** That the Committee seek procedural advice on the Minister’s proposed approach to tabling the deepfake amendment.

#### **7. SR 2026/55 The Coronavirus Act 2020 (Extension of Provisions Relating to Live Links for Courts and Tribunals) Order (Northern Ireland) 2026**

The Committee considered Statutory Rule SR2026/55 The Coronavirus Act 2020 (Extension of Provisions Relating to Live Links for Courts and Tribunals) Order (Northern Ireland) 2026, made under powers conferred by section 90 of the Coronavirus Act 2020. The Rule will enable the live links provisions for courts and tribunals to remain in force until 24 September 2026. The Rule is subject to the confirmatory resolution procedure.

The Committee noted that the Examiner of Statutory Rules had raised no concerns with regard to the technical aspects of the Rule.

**Agreed:** The Committee for Justice considered SR 2026/55 The Coronavirus Act 2020 (Extension of Provisions Relating to Live Links for Courts and

Tribunals) Order (Northern Ireland) 2026 and recommends that it be approved by the Assembly.

## **8. Legal Aid for Direct Committal – Consultation – Department of Justice written paper**

The Committee noted a written paper from the Department of Justice advising of the launch of a 12-week public consultation on criminal legal aid remuneration for Direct Committal. The Department advised that the proposals within the consultation are in respect of criminal legal aid remuneration for Direct Committal only, and that, in order to meet the proposed launch of Direct Committal provisions in November 2026, necessary fees will be initially given effect by way of a Direction which will be followed by legislative amendment at a later stage.

## **9. Correspondence**

The Committee considered the following items of correspondence:

- A response from the Department of Justice to the Committee's request for further information an independent expert panel to review the current pre-release testing framework for the prison service, which included the Terms of Reference for the review.

**Agreed:** To forward the Department's response to the individual who had originally raised the matter with the Committee.

**Agreed:** To consider further once the outcome of the review is available.

- Responses from the Department of Justice and from the Health Minister to correspondence from Extern around funding for their Prisoner Support Project, that the Committee has considered on 19 March.

**Agreed:** To request information on the work and outcomes of the project to date; and what impact assessment the Department has conducted in relation to the services that may be lost if the project closes due to lack of funding.

**Agreed:** To forward both responses to Extern for information.

- Correspondence from an individual raising concerns about the Victims Payment Board and decisions being on claims to the Troubles Permanent Disablement Payment Scheme.

Members were advised that a response from the Secretary of State to the Committee's concerns about the apparent unfairness of different outcomes to the applications of people who had very similar experiences, and its request for information on what consideration had or will be given to amending the Victims' Payment Regulations 2020 to deal with such unintended consequences, will be considered at next week's meeting.

**Agreed:** To consider the correspondence at next week's meeting alongside the Secretary of State's correspondence.

- Two further items of correspondence from an individual regarding Injury on Duty awards, the first of which was previously discussed in closed session. The second item included the reissuing of questions - and one new question – that the Committee previously forwarded to the Policing Board for response, and had agreed at last week's meeting to forward the Policing Board's response to the individual.

**Agreed:** To forward the new question from the second item of correspondence to the Department of Justice

and the Policing Board for response; and to direct the individual to details of the targeted consultation which are available on the Department's website.

- A series of emails from an individual to various people regarding their personal case. Members were advised that several further emails had been received since the meeting pack had been issued.

**Agreed:** That it is not necessary to include the additional emails in the meeting packs for future meetings.

The Committee noted the following items of correspondence:

- Public Accounts Committee - Update regarding primacy of Northern Ireland Audit office reports.
- Figtech - Response to a Committee request for a written briefing on Covert Digital Support Provision for Coercive Control Victims in Northern Ireland.
- An individual - Copied correspondence to Justice Minister regarding concerns over procedural fairness in family proceedings.

*Doug Beattie left the meeting at 4.09pm.*

## **10. Forward Work Programme**

### **10.1 and 10.2 – Department of Justice Forward Work Programme – May 2026 and the Committee's Draft Forward Work Programme**

The Committee considered the Department's proposed forward work programme for May and the latest draft of the Committee's forward work programme.

**Agreed:** To schedule the proposed work items from the Department of Justice in the Committee's forward work programme.

**Agreed:** That the concurrent meeting with the Committee for the Executive Office to take evidence on the Police Ombudsman's report on the Abuse of Position for Sexual Purposes by PSNI Officers be schedule for Tuesday morning at 9:30am/10.00am on a suitable date.

### **11. Chairperson's Business**

There was no Chairperson's business.

### **12. Any Other Business**

There was no other business.

### **13. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting**

Members were advised that next meeting will take place on Thursday 30 April at 2.00pm in Room 30, Parliament Buildings.

*The meeting was adjourned at 4.15pm.*

**Paul Frew MLA**  
**Chairperson, Committee for Justice**  
**30 April 2026**