



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

## Committee for Justice

### Minutes of Proceedings

**Thursday 18 September 2025**

**Room 30, Parliament Buildings, Belfast**

**Present:** Paul Frew MLA (Chairperson)

Stephen Dunne MLA

Connie Egan MLA

Ciara Ferguson MLA

Patsy McGlone MLA

**Present by Video or Teleconference:**

Doug Beattie MLA

Danny Baker MLA

**Apologies:** Dierdre Hargey (Deputy Chairperson)

Maurice Bradley

**In Attendance:** Kathy O'Hanlon (Assembly Clerk)

Thomas McKillop (Senior Assistant Assembly Clerk)

Gareth Black (Assistant Assembly Clerk)

Stephen Corr (Clerical Supervisor)

*The meeting commenced at 2.04pm in open session.*

The Chairperson expressed thanks to Joanne Bunting MLA for her contribution and dedication to the work of the Committee during her tenure as Chairperson.

**Agreed:** That the Chairperson would write to Joanne Bunting to formally express the Committee's appreciation for her contribution to the work of the Committee.

**Agreed:** That the oral evidence session with the Open University and Youth Workers on 'Learning from 'Why Riot' – Addressing the 'whys' beneath youth violence' will be recorded by Hansard.

*Danny Baker declared an interest in relation to an immediate family member who works for the Northern Ireland Probation Board.*

## **1. Apologies**

As above.

## **2. Draft Minutes**

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 11 September 2025.

### **3. Matters Arising**

#### **3.1 Lady Chief Justice's Office – Consultation on 'Media Access to Family Courts' Pilot**

The Committee considered a draft response to the consultation on media access to family courts pilot being undertaken by the Office of the Lady Chief Justice.

**Agreed:** The Committee approved the draft response for issue to the Office of the Lady Chief Justice.

#### **3.2 Assembly and Executive Review Committee – Review of Assembly Committee Engagement of Cross-cutting Executive Strategies**

The Committee considered a draft response to the Assembly and Executive Review Committee's (AERC) review of Committee engagement on cross-cutting Executive strategies.

**Agreed:** The Committee approved the draft response for issue to AERC.

### **4. Learning from 'Why Riot' - Addressing the 'whys' beneath youth violence – Open University and Youth Workers oral evidence**

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 2:09pm:

John D'Arcy, *Director, Open University in Ireland;*

Gabi Kent, *Learning from Why Riot Research Lead, Open University;*

Stephen Hughes, *Learning from Why Riot Co-Researcher, St Peter's Immaculata Youth Centre;*

Colm Fanning, *Learning from Why Riot Co-Researcher, Lagmore Youth Project;*

Daire Owens, *Learning from Why Riot Co-Researcher, Lagmore Youth Project;*

Eamon Feerick, *Learning from Why Riot Co-Researcher, St Peter's Immaculata Youth Centre.*

The witnesses provided an overview of the content and findings of the 'Learning from Why Riot?' research project.

*Patsy McGlone joined the meeting at 2:17pm.*

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

*Danny Baker declared an interest as he had previously engaged with some of the witnesses.*

The witnesses agreed to provide follow up information on the development of the research project's meaningful change framework, when available.

The evidence session was recorded by Hansard.

The Chairperson thanked the witnesses and they left the meeting at 3:47pm

## **5. Justice Bill — written papers**

### **5.1 Northern Ireland Assembly Legal Services Paper – Justice Bill: Follow Up Queries**

The Committee considered a paper from Assembly Legal Services paper which provided follow up responses to queries on the Justice Bill raised by Members during various briefings before the summer recess.

**Agreed:** To request more information from the Department of Justice on a number of queries raised in the paper.

### **5.2 Justice Bill – Requests for further information table**

The Committee noted a document prepared by the Committee team which tracks Committee requests and responses received in relation to the Justice Bill.

## **6. SR 2025/137 The Planning Fees (Deemed Planning Applications and Appeals) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2025**

The Committee considered Statutory Rule 2025/137 The Planning Fees (Deemed Planning Applications and Appeals) (Amendment) Regulations

(Northern Ireland) 2025. The Rule will amend the Planning Fees (Deemed Planning Applications and Appeals) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015 to increase the fees payable in relation to applications and appeals to the Planning Appeals Commission (“PAC”).

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

**Agreed:** That the Committee for Justice has considered SR 2025/137 The Planning Fees (Deemed Planning Applications and Appeals) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2025 and has no objection to the Rule.

## **7. Department of Justice Retention and Disposal Schedule**

The Committee considered a response from the Department of Justice to queries raised in respect of the Department’s Retention and Disposal Schedule which were raised at the meeting on 11 September 2025.

The Schedule was laid with the Business Office on 3 July 2025 by the Department for Communities and is subject to the negative resolution procedure.

**Agreed:** That the Committee for Justice is content with the Department of Justice’s Retention and Disposal Schedule.

**Agreed:** To inform the Committee for Communities of the Committee’s decision on this matter.

## **8. Prisoner Ombudsman for Northern Ireland Retention and Disposal Schedule**

The Committee considered the Prisoner Ombudsman for Northern Ireland’s Retention and Disposal Schedule which was laid by the Department for Communities on 8 September 2025 and is subject to the negative resolution procedure.

**Agreed:** To ask the Prisoner Ombudsman for Northern Ireland to detail how this schedule differs from the previous version.

Members agreed to consider if they are content with the Schedule when the response from the Prisoner Ombudsman is available.

**9. Aarhus Convention – Call for Evidence: Summary of responses –  
Department of Justice written paper**

The Committee noted a written paper from the Department of Justice providing an update on the response to the Call for Evidence on access to justice in relation to the Aarhus Convention; and advising that the Aarhus Convention Compliance Committee (ACCC) had published a draft report in August 2025 on the UK's compliance with Decision VII/8s.

**10. Domestic Abuse and Civil Proceedings Act (Northern Ireland) 2021 –  
Annual domestic abuse training statement – Department of Justice written  
paper**

The Committee considered a draft annual training statement from the Department of Justice outlining the uptake of training in relation to domestic abuse undertaken across the PSNI, Public Prosecution Service, NI Courts and Tribunals Service and other relevant statutory bodies between 1 August 2024 and 31 July 2025.

**Agreed:** To ask the Department for further information on what other actions can be taken to increase awareness and training on domestic abuse across the Northern Ireland Civil Service; details of the precise figures in relation to training delivered within the NI Courts and Tribunals Service; and how sustainable the training initiatives are across the bodies included in the report.

## **11. Safer Communities / Organised Crime – Update on strategic approach – Department of Justice written paper**

*Connie Egan left the meeting at 4:00pm.*

The Committee considered written papers from the Department of Justice detailing end of year delivery against the 2024-25 Organised Crime Addendum Action Plan, and a copy of the agreed Organised Crime Action Plan for 2025-26, along with an update on the strategic approach to safer communities/organised crime.

**Agreed:** To request further information from the Department on what the cost implications of the Action Plan are, including the impact of extending the plan for the further year, as well as for an update on the deliverability of all the actions in the Action Plan.

## **12. Strategic framework for Youth Justice – Annual progress report and updated action plan – Department of Justice written paper**

The Committee considered the 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Report on the Department's Strategic Framework for Youth Justice, covering work taken forward over the 2024-25 financial year, as well as the revised Action Plan for 2025-26.

**Agreed:** To request an oral evidence session with Departmental officials on the Youth Justice strategic framework, annual progress report and action plan.

## **13. Correspondence**

The Committee considered the following items of correspondence:

- Continued correspondence from an individual in relation to a personal issue along with a draft response.

**Agreed:** That the draft response be issued to the individual advising that no further responses will be issued to future correspondence

from the individual, unless it raises new issues that are relevant to the Committee's role.

**Agreed:** To note any future correspondence from the individual.

- Copy correspondence from Protective Mothers NI to the Finance Committee, the Department of Health, and Children's Court Guardians Agency regarding issues with Family Courts.

Members noted that issues relating to Family Courts will be at next week's strategic planning meeting.

The Committee noted the following items of correspondence:

- An amended version of the report on the operation of Domestic Abuse and Civil Proceedings Act (Northern Ireland) 2021 from the Department of Justice.
- A copy of the Department of Finance's response to the Committee for Finance regarding the handling and retention of sensitive data in relation to the Deaths, Still-Births and Baby Loss Bill.

#### **14. Forward Work Programme**

The Committee considered the Department of Justice's proposed forward work programme.

The Committee noted the update from the Department advising that, due to diary commitments, the Permanent Secretary is unavailable to provide oral evidence to the Committee before the meeting of 6 November 2025.

**Agreed:** To reschedule the oral evidence session with the Departmental Permanent Secretary for 6 November 2025.

**Agreed:** To include the items in the Department's proposed forward work programme in the Committee's forward work programme.



The Committee considered the draft Committee forward work programme.

**Agreed:** To proceed with the sessions in the Committee's forward work programme, subject to the changes as agreed at today's meeting.

## **15. Chairperson's Business**

### **15.1 NICCY's International Children's Day Event, 20 November 2025, Stormont**

The Chairperson informed Members that the Youth Panel of the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY) have invited him to attend an event celebrating International Children's Day at Stormont on 20 November 2025 and to deliver a short presentation in his capacity as Justice Committee Chairperson.

**Agreed:** The Committee was content that the Chairperson attend the event and deliver a short presentation.

## **16. Any Other Business**

The Chairperson, on behalf of the Committee, expressed thanks to outgoing member Stephen Dunne MLA for his dedication and contribution to the work of the Committee during this mandate.

Stephen Dunne expressed thanks to Members, as well as to the Committee team, for all of their support.

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

Members were advised that next meeting will be the Committee's strategic planning event and will take place on Thursday 25 September at 2.00pm in Room 106, Parliament Buildings.

The Meeting was adjourned at 4.12pm.

**Paul Frew MLA**

**Chairperson, Committee for Justice**

**2 October 2025**