



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Justice

Minutes of Proceedings

Thursday 9 October 2025

Room 30, Parliament Buildings, Belfast

Present:

Paul Frew MLA (Chairperson)

Dierdre Hargey MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

Doug Beattie MLA

Connie Egan MLA

Ciara Ferguson MLA

Brian Kingston MLA

Patsy McGlone MLA

Present by Video or Teleconference:

Danny Baker MLA

In Attendance:

Kathy O'Hanlon (Assembly Clerk)

Thomas McKillop (Senior Assistant Assembly Clerk)

Gareth Black (Assistant Assembly Clerk)

Easton Vance (Clerical Supervisor)

Aaron Pakenham (Clerical Officer)

Apologies: Maurice Bradley MLA

Agreed: That the meeting begin in closed session for a discussion on the Committee's strategic priorities, following the Strategic Planning meeting on 25 September 2025.

The meeting commenced at 2.01pm in closed session.

1. Apologies

As above.

2. Committee for Justice – Strategic Priorities

Agreed: To schedule an oral evidence session with Department of Justice officials for pre-legislative scrutiny of the Sentencing Bill.

Agreed: To ask the Department for updated figures for bills taxed by the Taxing Master.

Agreed: To proceed with scheduling a joint oral evidence session on reasonable chastisement / equal protection with officials from the Department of Health and the Department of Justice, and relay to the Departments the aspects of this topic that Members indicated they would like to focus on in this session.

The Committee noted that the research commissioned from Assembly Research and Information Services on issues relating to family courts is likely to be available after Christmas recess.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the draft note of its Strategic Planning session held on 25 September 2025 and to proceed with all other actions contained in the notes.

The meeting moved to public session at 2.13pm.

Agreed: That the oral evidence session with officials from the Department of Justice on October Monitoring, Future Years Exercise and 5 Year Plans, will be recorded by Hansard.

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

Committee Members expressed unanimous and unequivocal condemnation of a recent protest outside the home of the Minister of Justice. It was noted that this was the second act this week designed to intimidate an Executive Minister, after an explosive device was left outside Minister of Infrastructure's constituency office. Members highlighted that, while the right to protest appropriately is sacrosanct in a democratic society, protests and gatherings outside the homes of any public representative are wholly unacceptable.

3. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 2 October 2025.

4. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

5. October Monitoring, Future Years Exercise and 5 Year Plans – Department of Justice oral evidence

The following Department of Justice officials joined the meeting at 2.20pm:

Richard Logan, Finance Director;
Andrea Quail, Head of Financial Planning, Strategy and Support; and
Louise Blair, Head of Financial Planning and Support

The officials provided evidence on a number of fiscal matters for the Department of Justice that included the 2024-25 Annual Report and Accounts, the 2024-25 final outturn, monitoring rounds, an update on bids to the Public Sector Transformation Fund, and the budgetary future.

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

During the session, the officials agreed to provide more information from relevant business areas on the joint Ending Violence Against Women and Girls transformation bid, including the structure and relationship between the Department and the Department of Health and the PSNI; and an update on the bids submitted by the Department which have not proceeded to the next stage of the Second Tranche of funding.

Agreed: To request an update on the new electronic tagging contract and progress on the new electronic tagging GPS transformation project.

The evidence session was recorded by Hansard.

The Chairperson thanked the officials and they left the meeting at 3.09pm.

6. Justice Bill — written papers

6.1 Department of Justice – Justice Bill: Further queries regarding proposed amendments

The Committee noted the response from the Department of Justice providing further information in relation to several of the planned Departmental amendments.

Agreed: To seek clarification of why the two-year retention provision for penalty notices under Section 60 of the Justice Act (NI) 2011, included in Schedule 2 of the Criminal Justice Act (NI) 2013 and approved by the Assembly, was never commenced.

6.2 Department of Justice – Response regarding RalSe’s paper on the Justice Bill: Organised Crime Amendments

The Committee noted a paper from the Department of Justice responding to the scrutiny points raised by a RalSe paper on the Department’s proposed amendment to the Justice Bill on Organised Crime.

6.3 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.

6.4 Professor McGlynn – Response to Deepfake consultation

The Committee considered a copy of Professor Clare McGlynn of Durham University’s response to the Department’s consultation on creating, sharing and requesting sexually explicit deepfakes.

Agreed: To schedule an oral evidence session with Prof. McGlynn when the outcome of the Department’s consultation and further

information on the Department's proposed amendment are available.

7. SL1 The Criminal Justice (Northern Ireland) Order 2008 (Retention and Disposal of Seized Motor Vehicles) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2025

The Committee considered a proposal by the Department of Justice to make a Statutory Rule under powers conferred by Article 66 of the Criminal Justice (Northern Ireland) Order 2008 ('the 2008 Order'), as amended. The proposed Rule will increase by 28% the fees to be paid by vehicle owners in respect of the removal and storage of vehicles which have been seized because the vehicle has been driven carelessly, inconsiderately or illegally off-road and is causing, or is likely to cause, alarm, distress or annoyance to members of the public. The Rule will be subject to the negative resolution procedure.

Agreed: That the Committee is content with the proposal for the Statutory Rule.

8. SL1 The Enforcement of Fines and Other Penalties (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2025

The Committee considered a proposal by the Department of Justice to make a Statutory Rule under powers conferred by section 23(1), (7) and (8) of the Justice Act (Northern Ireland) 2016 to increase the levels of charges set by the Department in relation to the removal, storage or disposal of vehicles seized under a seizure order in specified circumstances by 28%. The Rule will be subject to the negative resolution procedure.

Agreed: That the Committee is content with the proposal for the Statutory Rule.

9. SL1 The Road Traffic (Northern Ireland) Order 1981 (Retention and Disposal of Seized Motor Vehicles) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2025

The Committee considered a proposal by the Department of Justice to make a Statutory Rule under powers conferred by Article 180C of the Road Traffic (Northern Ireland) Order 1981 ('the 1981 Order'), as amended, to increase the levels of fees set by the Department in relation to the removal and retention of seized vehicles in specified circumstances by 28%. The Rule will be subject to the negative resolution procedure before the Assembly.

Agreed: That the Committee is content with the proposal for the Statutory Rule.

10. Crime and Policing Bill – Second Legislative Consent Memorandum – Correspondence

The Committee noted follow-up information from the Department of Justice requested during the oral evidence session on the second Legislative Consent Memorandum (LCM) for the Crime and Policing Bill on 11 September 2025.

Deirdre Hargey advised that she would be keen to see the draft Codes of Practice in relation to the remotely stored electronic data measure ahead of agreeing the LCM.

Members also noted an update from the Department on further developments related to the second LCM, which advised that it will not be possible to draft clauses to create Barred and Advisory lists for the PSNI. The Department also advised that the Minister of Justice is now seeking to extend two further measures of the Bill to Northern Ireland, which relate to:

- the creation of a statutory defence for persons testing Artificial Intelligence for child sexual abuse material, extreme pornography and non-consensual intimate image abuse; and

- criminalising the possession, distribution or publication of pornography depicting strangulation and suffocation.

Agreed: To inform the Department of the Committee's concern in relation to the gap which will exist with provision to create Barred and Advisory lists for the PSNI not being included in the Crime and Policing Bill; and to ask whether the Department has considered including the necessary provisions within the Justice Bill or any other piece of primary legislation it is intending to bring forward within this Assembly mandate.

11. Restorative Justice and work of Interim Protocol lead – Update - Department of Justice written paper

The Committee noted a written update from the Department of Justice on arrangements for the expansion of adult restorative justice and the new standards and accreditation process.

Agreed: To explore the new standards and accreditation process during the oral evidence session with Community Restorative Justice Ireland and Northern Ireland Alternatives at the meeting on 16 October 2025; and forward the Department's paper to Community Restorative Justice Ireland and Northern Ireland Alternatives for information in advance of the oral evidence session.

12. Correspondence

The Committee considered the following items of correspondence:

- Responses from the Department of Justice and The Bar of Northern Ireland to correspondence from an individual to the Committee regarding Access to the Bar of NI for students.

Agreed: To forward the responses from the Department and The Bar to the individual.

Agreed: To forward the individual's original correspondence, with their permission, to the Committee the Department for the Economy and the Department of Finance for response.

Agreed: To request information on actions being taken by the Department of Justice to proactively address representation of those from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds at the Bar, including details of any cross-departmental work with the Department of Finance and the Department for the Economy and engagement with universities.

- Response from the Department of Justice regarding an update on legal aid remuneration.

Agreed: To seek an update from the Department on engagement with legal profession in relation to the delays on implementing the uplift to legal aid remuneration and the impact this delay is having on some legal practices, as well as a rationale for why no timeframes have been set for implementing the uplift.

- Response from the Department of Justice regarding unlawfully at large prisoners.

Agreed: To seek further information from the Department and from the PSNI on their policies and procedures for handling unlawfully at large individuals, including why photographs of those at large are not released as a public protection measure, and why the unlawfully at large lists that are published only relate to those who have absconded from prison instead of a broader list of individuals currently evading justice.

- Invitation from the Northern Ireland Policing Board to an event on the Consultation of the Revised PSNI Code of Ethics on Wednesday 29 October

Agreed: That Members who wish to attend should R.S.V.P directly via the email address on the invitation.

The Committee noted the following items of correspondence:

- Copy of a Prisoner Ombudsman for Northern Ireland report and press release into a serious adverse incident in Maghaberry Prison.
- Copy of a Prisoner Ombudsman for Northern Ireland report on a death in custody.
- Multiple items of correspondence from individuals raising issues regarding Bailey the dog in Magilligan prison.
- Copy correspondence from Protective Mothers NI to the Committee for Health regarding safeguarding issues

13. Forward Work Programme

13.1 Committee Draft Forward Work Programme

The Committee noted the draft Committee forward work programme.

Agreed: To proceed with the sessions in the Committee's forward work programme.

14. Chairperson's Business

14.1 Joseph Rountree Foundation (JRF) – Invite to JRF Roundtable 17 October

The Committee noted an invitation for the Chairperson to a roundtable discussion on a Poverty-Free Future for Northern Ireland on 17 October 2025. The Chairperson advised Members that he would be unable to attend.

14.2 PACE Codes – Correspondence from the Minister of Justice

The Committee noted correspondence circulated before today's meeting from the Justice Minister to the Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson requesting that any outstanding queries on the amendments to PACE Codes be shared with the Department in advance of the meeting between the Chairperson, Deputy Chairperson and the Minister on 20 October 2025.

Agreed: That Members would forward any queries or issues they wish to raise on PACE Codes to the Clerk to allow these to be forwarded to the Department.

15. Any Other Business

There was no other business.

16. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting

Members were advised that next meeting will take place on Thursday 16 October at 2.00pm in Room 30, Parliament Buildings.

The Meeting was adjourned at 3.44pm.

Paul Frew MLA

Chairperson, Committee for Justice

9 October 2025