



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Justice

Minutes of Proceedings

Thursday 13 November 2025

Room 30, Parliament Buildings, Belfast

Present:

Paul Frew MLA (Chairperson)

Dierdre Hargey MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

Ciara Ferguson MLA

Brian Kingston MLA

Patsy McGlone MLA

Present by Video or Teleconference:

Danny Baker MLA

Doug Beattie MLA

Maurice Bradley MLA

Connie Egan 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)

The meeting commenced at 2.02pm in open session.

Agreed: That the oral evidence sessions with RetailNI, Homeless Connect and the Simon Community on the Repeal of Vagrancy amendment to the Justice Bill, and the oral evidence session with Department of Justice officials on the Strategic Framework for Youth Justice, will be recorded by Hansard.

Deirdre Hargey joined the meeting at 2.03pm.

Patsy McGlone joined the meeting at 2.03pm.

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

Ciara Ferguson and Brian Kingston declared an interest in relation to their membership of the All Party Group on Homelessness.

Brian Kingston declared an interest in relation to his membership of the Committee for Finance.

It was noted that several Committee Members are members of the All Party Group on Access to Justice.

Maurice Bradley joined the meeting at 2.05pm.

1. Apologies

There were no apologies.

2. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 6 November 2025.

3. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

4. Justice Bill – Repeal of Vagrancy legislation amendment – RetailNI oral evidence

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 2.06pm:

Glyn Roberts, Chief Executive, RetailNI

Chris O'Reilly, Vice President, RetailNI

The witnesses provided oral evidence on the planned Departmental amendment to the Justice Bill on the Repeal of Vagrancy legislation.

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

The evidence session was recorded by Hansard.

The witnesses agreed to provide further information on Public Space Protection Orders, as well as any additional considerations they may have on ways of addressing any potential gaps that may arise due to the repeal of the vagrancy legislation.

The Chairperson thanked the witnesses and they left the meeting at 3.13pm.

5. Justice Bill – Repeal of Vagrancy legislation amendment – RetailNI oral evidence

The following witness joined the meeting at 3.13pm:

Mark Baillie, Head of Policy and Programmes, Homeless Connect

Cathy Brolly, Public Affairs and Policy Manager, Simon Community

The witnesses provided oral evidence on the planned Departmental amendment to the Justice Bill on the Repeal of Vagrancy legislation.

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

The evidence session was recorded by Hansard.

The witnesses agreed to provide the Committee with their views on Professor Kevin Brown's submission on the Repeal of Vagrancy amendment to the Justice Bill and to confirm which Health and Social Care Trusts are involved in the Housing First initiative.

The Chairperson thanked the witnesses and they left the meeting at 3.52pm.

The Committee noted that, with the exception of the scheduled sessions with the PSNI and the Department of Justice, today's evidence sessions were the last evidence sessions with stakeholders on the Justice Bill.

Agreed: That the table of issues arising from the oral and written evidence received by the Committee on the Justice Bill be forwarded to the Department of Justice for response.

Danny Baker and Deirdre Hargey left the meeting at 3.52pm.

6. Strategic Framework for Youth Justice – Department of Justice oral evidence session

The following witness joined the meeting at 3.55pm:

Veronica Holland, Deputy Director of Reducing Offending
Stephen Martin, Chief Executive, Youth Justice Agency
Jenny McAlarney, Policy Official, Reducing Offending

The officials provided oral evidence on the Strategic Framework for Youth Justice.

Deirdre Hargey returned to the meeting at 4.01pm.

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

Doug Beattie left the meeting at 4.17pm.

The evidence session was recorded by Hansard.

The Chairperson thanked the officials and they left the meeting at 4.40pm.

7. Justice Bill – Live Links Amendments – RalSe written paper

The Committee noted a paper by the Assembly's Research and Information Service (RalSe) which provides an overview of the planned amendment to the Justice Bill regarding Live Links within the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service.

Agreed: To forward the RalSe paper to the Department of Justice for its response to the scrutiny points within the paper.

Pasty McGlone left the meeting at 4.41pm.

8. Justice Bill — written papers

8.1 Department of Justice – Response regarding Restorative Justice and Community Resolution Notices

The Committee noted a response from the Department of Justice to questions asked by Members on the proposed Restorative Justice amendment to the Justice Bill.

Agreed: To ask Community Restorative Justice Ireland and Northern Ireland Alternatives for their views on the Departmental response.

8.2 Justice Bill – Requests for further information table

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

9. Crime and Policing Bill – Legislative Consent – Correspondence

9.1 Department of Justice – Update on Progress of Crime and Policing Bill

The Committee noted a written paper from the Department of Justice providing an update on the progress of the Crime and Policing Bill at Westminster, and advising of two further measures that the Minister of Justice would be keen to extend to Northern Ireland within the second Legislative Consent Motion, subject to Executive approval.

9.2 House of Lords Northern Ireland Scrutiny Committee – Crime and Policing Bill

The Committee noted copy correspondence from the House of Lords Northern Ireland Scrutiny Committee to the Minister of State at the Home Office regarding Clause 71 in the Crime and Policing Bill.

Agreed: To forward the correspondence between the Northern Ireland Scrutiny Committee and the Minister of State to the Department of Justice for information.

Agreed: To write to the Northern Ireland Scrutiny Committee to request that the Committee for Justice be kept updated on the matter.

Maurice Bradley left the meeting at 4:45pm.

10. New single community order for children – Outcome of consultation – Department of Justice written paper

The Committee noted a paper from the Department of Justice providing an update on the outcome of the Department's public consultation on a new single court-ordered community sentence for children, which will replace the seven orders currently available to courts; and advising that that provisions for the new order would be developed to be taken forward in a suitable legislative vehicle in the next Assembly mandate.

11. Court Fees - 2026-2029 - outcome of consultation - Department of Justice written paper

The Committee noted a paper from the Department of Justice providing an update on the outcome of the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service's public consultation on changes to court fees for the period 2026-29 and inviting the Committee's views on the Department's proposed way forward.

Agreed: To ask the Department of Justice for further information on:

- What equality screening was undertaken on the changes to fees and whether any negative impacts on vulnerable groups' accessing justice have been

identified, as well as how the Department plans to mitigate against any negative impacts;

- Details of the support available for families within the Family Courts system and how to ensure that increased fees are not barriers to those who may need to access Family Courts;
- If the impact of the changes on cost recovery will be reviewed on annual basis; and
- How these fee changes align with and support the Speeding Up Justice and Enabling Access to Justice programmes.

12. Correspondence

The Committee considered the following items of correspondence:

- Responses on student access to The Bar of Northern Ireland from the Department of Justice, Department of Finance and the Department for the Economy.

Agreed: To forward all of the responses to the individual who raised the matter of access to The Bar for students with the Committee, inviting any further feedback they may have.

Agreed: To commission research from RalSe on access, training and support in other jurisdictions for aspiring barristers.

- Response from the Department of Justice to questions the Committee had asked in relation to unlawfully at large individuals.

Agreed: To consider further on receipt of the response from the PSNI on this matter.

- Response from the Department of Justice to questions the Committee had asked following its consideration of the Departmental update on the Speeding Up Justice Programme.

Agreed: To ask the Public Prosecution Service for information on the number of cases related to non-fatal strangulation to the Magistrates' Court and the Crown Court and the reasons for prosecuting in particular courts.

- Correspondence from the Assembly and Executive Review Committee (AERC) in relation to a review it is conducting into the development of a formal process and guidance on the handling of Westminster Statutory Instruments

Agreed: That Committee staff prepare a response for consideration and agreement by the Committee, prior to issue to AERC.

- Correspondence from the Health Committee in relation to its Committee Stage work on the Adult Protection Bill.

Agreed: To forward the correspondence to the Department of Justice and ask for its views on the provisions highlighted by the Health Committee that are relevant to the justice sector.

- Correspondence from Causeway Coast Dog Rescue.

Agreed: To respond outlining the current pressures on the Committee's work programme and the focus on statutory duties and strategic priorities; highlight that the Department of Justice has published the findings of a recent inspection of Magilligan Prison

by Animal Welfare officers on its website; and advise that the organisation should direct their concerns via the relevant organisational complaints procedures and, if necessary, the Northern Ireland Public Service Ombudsman.

- Correspondence from the Neurology Action group requesting the tabling of an Assembly Question to the Health Minister.

Agreed: To note the correspondence and advise that the tabling of Assembly Questions is a matter for individual Assembly Members.

- Further correspondence from an individual regarding an ongoing personal matter.

Agreed: To issue the draft response prepared by the Clerk to the individual.

The Committee noted the following items of correspondence:

- An invitation from Amnesty International to a briefing event on ‘New Legacy Legislation: Rights and Rule of Law – Where to Next?’
- An update from the Criminal Bar Association on its position regarding recent media reports of a potential withdrawal of services by the Criminal Bar Association.
- Responses from the Department of Justice, the PSNI, Belfast Harbour Police and Belfast International Airport Constabulary to the findings and recommendations in the Criminal Justice Inspection Northern

Ireland report – An inspection of Airport and Harbour Policing in Northern Ireland.

- Department of Justice Budget 2026-2028 Equality Impacts report.
- Copy correspondence from the Committee for Finance providing an update from the Department of Finance on the Review of Arm's Length Bodies.
- Correspondence from an individual on Female Genital Mutilation and hate crime.
- Further correspondence from an individual on an ongoing personal matter.
- Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland Annual Report and Accounts 2024-2025.

13. Forward Work Programme

The Committee noted the latest draft of the Committee's forward work programme and agreed to proceed with the proposed schedule.

14. Chairperson's Business

The Chairperson advised Members that he had received a letter from the Lady Chief Justice (LCJ) congratulating him on his appointment as Chair and offering to host the Committee at the Royal Courts of Justice for a meeting sometime early next year.

Agreed: To schedule a meeting with the Lady Chief Justice at the Royal Courts of Justice early next year, with a view also holding a formal Committee meeting as part of this visit.

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 20 November at 2.00pm in Room 30, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 5.05pm.

Paul Frew MLA

Chairperson, Committee for Justice

20 November 2025