Northern Ireland Assembly

Committee for Justice

Minutes of Proceedings

Thursday 22 October 2026

Room 30, Parliament Buildings, Belfast

Present: Emma Sheerin MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

Doug Beattie MLA

Connie Egan MLA

Ciara Ferguson MLA

Brian Kingston MLA

Patsy McGlone MLA

Present by Video or Teleconference:

Paul Frew MLA (Chairperson)

Aoife Finnegan MLA

Apologies: Maurice Bradley MLA

In Attendance: Kathy O'Hanlon (Assembly Clerk)

Thomas McKillop (Senior Assistant Assembly Clerk)

Gareth Black (Assistant Assembly Clerk)

Paula Morrow (Clerical Supervisor)

Aaron Pakenham (Clerical Officer)

The meeting commenced at 2.01pm in closed session with the Deputy Chairperson in the Chair.

Agreed: That the meeting begin in closed session to continue the deliberation stage of the Criminal Justice (Sentencing etc) Bill; and for advice from the Examiner of Statutory Rules on the SL1 to amend Schedule 3 of The Justice (2011 Act).

1. Apologies

As above.

2. Criminal Justice (Sentencing etc) Bill – Deliberations

The Committee discussed aspects of Part 1, Part 5, Part 6, Part 7 and Part 8 of the Criminal Justice (Sentencing etc) Bill.

The Committee identified several areas that Members would like to explore further, including potential Committee amendments, or matters which they wished to request further clarification on from the Department of Justice.

The Committee discussed the aggravators at Clause 33 and if misogyny should be added to Part 6 as a standalone aggravator.

Members of Sinn Fein, the SDLP, the Alliance party, and Doug Beattie (Independent) expressed that they would be content to support such an amendment.

Members of the Democratic Unionist Party shared that they were content that the four aggravator groups in Clause 33 in the Bill as introduced were sufficient, as

the provision at Clause 35 (1)(a) to allow the Department to amend section 33 to add further kinds of hostility by which an offence may be aggravated as required, adequately futureproofed the legislation.

The question was put:

That the Committee is content to explore adding an amendment at Part 6 of the Bill to include 'misogyny' as a standalone aggravator.

The Committee divided: Ayes: 5; Noes: 2

Ayes: Emma Sheerin, Doug Beattie, Connie Egan, Ciara Ferguson, Patsy McGlone

Noes: Paul Frew and Brian Kingston.

The motion was carried.

Aoife Finnegan joined the meeting at 2.55pm.

The Committee also agreed to consider those matters raised in evidence that are not included at the Bill at the next meeting.

3. SL1 The Justice (2011 Act) (Amendment of Schedule 3) Order (Northern Ireland) 2026 – Update to football bodies, championships and leagues - Examiner of Statutory Rules advice

Angela Kelly, Examiner of Statutory Rules, attended the meeting to provide advice on the technical aspects of the draft of the Statutory Rule that the Department of Justice proposes to make, which will amend Schedule 3 to the Act to update references to football bodies, championships and leagues in relation to regulated matches for the purposes of Part 4 of the Justice Act (Northern Ireland) 2011.

Angela Kelly left the meeting at 3.38pm.

The meeting moved to public session at 3.40pm.

4. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 15 October 2026.

5. Matters Arising

5.1 SL1 The Justice (2011 Act) (Amendment of Schedule 3) Order (Northern Ireland) 2026 – Update to football bodies, championships and leagues

Agreed: To seek clarification from the Department of Justice on whether the organisations named in the proposed Rule are referenced by their formal names and whether there is a clear public understanding of their meaning, including by those tasked with enforcing the laws; and whether they are the same bodies as those currently referenced in Schedule 3 to the Justice Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 with a change of name or if they are different entities.

6. Financial Services and Markets Bill – Legislative Consent Motion – Department of Justice oral evidence

The following officials joined the meeting at 3.42pm:

Debbie Corry, Head of Organised Crime Branch, Department of Justice;
Beverley Lane, Policy Officer Organised Crime Branch, Department of Justice; and
Uel Boyd, PSNI.

The officials provided oral evidence on the Department of Justice's proposal to seek legislative consent to extend provisions in the Financial Services and Markets Bill to Northern Ireland.

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

During the evidence session, officials agreed to provide further information on the powers available in the Republic of Ireland for addressing the criminal use of cryptoassets and responding to emerging developments in the sector, including a comparison with the powers that would be available in Northern Ireland following the extension of the relevant provisions of the Financial Services and Markets Bill.

The evidence session was recorded by Hansard.

The Deputy Chairperson thanked the officials and they left the meeting at 3.59pm.

Agreed: That the Committee is content, in principle, with the proposal to extend legislative consent for certain measures in the Financial Services and Markets Bill, subject to sight of the final Memorandum.

7. Finance Update – Department of Justice oral evidence

The following officials from the Department of Justice joined the meeting at 4.00pm:

Richard Logan, Finance Director;
Michelle McLoughlin, Head of Financial Strategy; and
Louise Blair, Head of Financial Support.

The officials provided an update on the Department's financial position, including the 2024-25 Annual Report and Accounts, the 2025-26 Final Outturn, the in-year budgetary position and multi-year budget bids, and updates on Transformation funding and bids.

Paul Frew left the meeting at 4.03pm.

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

The Deputy Chairperson left the meeting at 4.25pm.

The Clerk took the Chair at 4.26pm and called Doug Beattie to move

"that Connie Egan take the Chair of the Committee."

Ciara Ferguson seconded the proposal.

The Clerk asked for any other nominations and none were proposed.

The Clerk put the question that Connie Egan takes the Chair.

Members unanimously elected that Connie Egan take the Chair.

Connie Egan took the Chair at 4.27pm.

The Deputy Chairperson returned to the meeting and took the Chair at 4.27pm.

Doug Beattie left the meeting at 4.37pm.

The Deputy Chairperson thanked the officials and they left the meeting at 4.42pm.

Committee for Finance correspondence

The Committee noted correspondence from the Finance Committee requesting information on any written or oral Departmental budget briefings recently received by the Committee. The Deputy Chairperson advised that the Clerk will respond on behalf of the Committee.

8. Criminal Justice (Sentencing etc) Bill – Recording of decisions

The Deputy Chairperson put on record a number of actions agreed by Members during the Committee's deliberations on the Criminal Justice (Sentencing etc) Bill in closed session.

Agreed: To advise the Department of Justice that the Committee is considering potential amendments on the following matters and

ask if the Minister of Justice would be content to bring them forward at Consideration Stage:

- The inclusion of provision at Part 1 of the Bill for sentencing remarks to be broadcast;
- The inclusion of 'misogyny' as a standalone aggravator at Part 6 of the Bill; and
- The inclusion of a monitoring and review mechanism for the reporting of offences included under Part 6 of the Bill.

Agreed: To request the Department's views on the following:

- Increasing the additional custodial period percentage in Clause 24 (5) and increasing the proposed percentage reduction to sentence in Clause 29 (3).
- Increasing the maximum sentence at Clause 41 from '20 years' to 'life'; and
- Making provision for minimum sentences in respect of serious road traffic offences.

Agreed: To ask the Department for the following:

- That the Committee be provided with work undertaken and the draft text of the transgender aggravator included in earlier drafts of the Bill but subsequently removed prior to introduction;
- Clarification of how the term 'assaults' is defined in relation to Clause 37;
- Information on why, in Clause 38, only certain specified offences are included, and clarification of how offences such as prolonged harassment or stalking of an individual due to their work would be captured; and
- Information on what powers or legislation currently exist to refuse entry to retail premises.

Agreed: To ask the Rainbow Project for views on what term(s) would sufficiently cover hostility to transgender people at Clause 33 of the Bill.

9. Victims and Witnesses of Crime Bill – Written papers

The Committee noted a submission from The Executive Office Racial Equality Subgroup on the Victims and Witnesses of Crime Bill.

10. Justice Bill – Further Consideration Stage amendments

The Committee further considered a paper from the Department of Justice advising of its intention to make a number of amendments to the Committee's amendments to the Justice Bill relating to Clause 4 (the retention, use and destruction of photographs), and Clause 37 (the review of police use of live links), which the Department intends to table at Further Consideration Stage of the Bill.

Agreed: To further consider the Department of Justice's draft amendments to the Committee's amendments at Clauses 4 and 37 of the Justice Bill at the meeting on 5 November 2026.

11. Armed forces Bill – Legislative Consent Memorandum

The Committee noted a response from the Department to points raised in an earlier response from the PSNI on the measures in the Armed Forces Bill that it is proposed are extended to Northern Ireland.

12. Immigration and Asylum Bill - Legislative Consent Memorandum

The Committee noted a paper from the Department advising that an indicative memorandum would be laid in the Assembly giving notice of the need for a Legislative Consent Motion (LCM) in respect of measures in the Immigration and Asylum Bill.

Members noted that an oral evidence session on the proposed LCM is scheduled for the meeting of 5 November 2026.

13. Police (Conduct) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026 – Consultation outcome

The Committee noted an update and report from the Department of Justice on the outcome of its targeted consultation on a draft Statutory Rule to introduce amendments to the Police (Conduct) Regulations (NI) 2016.

14. Enabling Access to Justice – Legal Aid Scope, Merits and Financial Eligibility

The Committee noted an update and two consultation papers from the Department of Justice in relation to its intention to launch an eight-week public consultation exercise to seek views on proposals to reform specific areas of Civil Legal Services.

Aoife Finnegan left the meeting at 4.52pm.

15. Correspondence

The Committee considered the following items of correspondence:

- Further correspondence from an individual in response to recent correspondence from the Department of Justice and the office of the Lady Chief Justice regarding concerns about the adequacy of support and provisions available to litigants in person, particularly in relation to reasonable adjustments to ensure the effective participation of persons with disabilities in court proceedings.

Agreed: To note the individual's most recent correspondence; to provide a response clarifying

the Committee's position on its use of supplementary material provided by the individual to support the matters requested to be raised with the Department; and to advise that they contact the Office of the Lady Chief Justice regarding the proposed Practice Direction.

The Committee noted the following items of correspondence:

- Minister of Justice – Copy correspondence to an individual regarding a request for an exemption from the rule of law.
- Department of Justice – Response to request for further information on the accommodation element of the Bail Support scheme pilot for women.
- Department of Justice – Response providing an update on the withdrawn Firearms Licensing Consultation.
- Northern Ireland Policing Board – Response regarding legislation governing the Misuse of Scramblers and E-Scooters.
- PSNI – Copy correspondence to the Committee for Health regarding Right Care Right Person implementation.
- An individual – Regional facilities for Children and Young people.

16. Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered a proposed forward work programme for November from the Department of Justice and the latest draft of the Committee's forward work programme.

Agreed: To schedule the written briefings as proposed by the Department; and that the Clerk will liaise with Departmental officials regarding the scheduling of their proposed oral briefings.

17. Chairperson's Business

There was no Chairperson's business.

18. Any Other Business

There was no other business.

19. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting

Members were advised that the next meeting will take place on Tuesday 3 November at 9.30am in the Room 29, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 4.55pm.

Paul Frew MLA
Chairperson, Committee for Justice
5 November 2026