



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Justice

Minutes of Proceedings

Thursday 1 October 2026

Room 30, Parliament Buildings, Belfast

Present:

Paul Frew MLA (Chairperson)

Emma Sheerin MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

Maurice Bradley MLA

Connie Egan MLA

Ciara Ferguson MLA

Brian Kingston MLA

Patsy McGlone MLA

Present by Video or Teleconference:

Doug Beattie MLA

Aoife Finnegan 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 2.01 pm in public session.

Maurice Bradley joined the meeting at 2.02pm.

Agreed: That the oral evidence sessions with Retail NI and NI Retail Consortium, and the Equality Coalition on the Criminal Justice (Sentencing etc) Bill will be recorded by Hansard.

Patsy McGlone joined the meeting at 2.03pm.

1. Apologies

There were no apologies.

2. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 24 September 2026.

Aoife Finnegan joined the meeting at 2.04pm.

3. Matters Arising

3.1 – Criminal Justice (Sentencing etc) Bill – Men’s Advisory Project oral evidence session

Agreed: That the Men’s Advisory Project oral evidence session on the Sentencing Bill will be scheduled for the meeting on Tuesday 6 October 2026.

3.2 – Minister of Justice – Response regarding a prisoner abscondment

The Committee noted a paper from the Minister of Justice responding to the Committee’s questions on the circumstances surrounding the compassionate temporary release and subsequent unlawful absence of Gary Anderson, as well as next steps for the Department of Justice in reviewing the abscondment and identifying any lessons to be learned.

Members also noted that an Urgent Written Ministerial Statement from the Justice Minister – embargoed until 3pm on 1 October 2026 – on the independent review of the circumstances of the abscondment had been circulated in advance of the meeting.

4. Criminal Justice (Sentencing etc) Bill – Retail NI and NI Retail Consortium oral evidence

The following witness joined the meeting at 2.05pm:

Glynn Roberts – Chief Executive, Retail NI

Neil Johnston – Director, NI Retail Consortium

The witnesses provided oral evidence on the Criminal Justice (Sentencing etc) Bill.

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

Emma Sheerin joined the meeting at 2.30pm.

The evidence session was recorded by Hansard.

The Chairperson thanked the witnesses and they left the meeting at 3.04pm.

Patsy McGlone left the meeting at 3.04pm.

5. Criminal Justice (Sentencing etc) Bill – written papers

5.1 – Commissioner Designate for Victims of Crime – Breaches of Suspended Sentences

The Committee noted correspondence from the Commissioner Designate for Victims of Crime providing her views on whether Schedule 2 of the Sentencing Bill makes any provision for a custodial sentence if suspended sentence orders are breached.

6. Victims and Witnesses of Crime Bill – Written papers

6.1 – 6.23 – Victims and Witnesses of Crime Bill – Written submissions

The Committee noted several submissions in response to its call for evidence on the Victims and Witnesses of Crime Bill from a number of individuals and from the following bodies:

- Men's Alliance;
- Rape Crisis NI;
- Women's Aid Federation;
- Information Commissioner's Office;
- Women's Policy Group;
- The Bar of Northern Ireland;
- Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland;
- Nexus;

- European Forum for Restorative Justice;
- Police Service of Northern Ireland;
- Anti Trafficking Monitoring Group;
- Criminal Justice Inspection NI; and
- Voice and Justice Alliance.

Agreed: That Members will consider any additional stakeholders or individuals they may wish to hear oral evidence from to assist the Committee's scrutiny of the Bill.

Agreed: To forward the submission from the Information Commissioner's Office to the Department of Justice for a response to the issues raised.

7. Justice Bill - Correspondence

The Committee considered an update from the Department of Justice highlighting some technical and drafting 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 request advice from the Bill Clerk on the Department's proposed amendments.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to take agenda items 9 and 10 next.

8. Financial Services and Markets Bill – Legislative Consent Motion

The Committee considered a paper from the Department of Justice updating Members and seeking the Committee's views on the Justice Minister's intention to seek legislative consent to extend measures contained in the Westminster Financial Services and Markets Bill to Northern Ireland.

Agreed: That the Committee request an oral briefing from the Department on the proposed Legislative Consent Motion.

9. Bail Support – Update on pilot scheme for women

The Committee noted an update from the Department of Justice on the Bail Support Scheme for women, which is due to be introduced as a pilot in autumn 2026.

Agreed: To ask the Department for further clarity on the use and nature of accommodation provisions in the pilot, including what supervision arrangements may need to be in place in these contexts.

10. Criminal Justice (Sentencing etc) Bill – Equality Coalition oral evidence

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 3.17pm:

Patricia McKeown, Co-Convener Equality Coalition, & Regional Secretary UNISON; and

Daniel Holder, Co-Convener Equality Coalition, & Director, Committee on the Administration of Justice (CAJ).

The witnesses provided oral evidence on the Criminal Justice (Sentencing etc) Bill.

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

Patsy McGlone rejoined the meeting at 3.28pm.

During the evidence session the witnesses agreed to provide further information on:

- Examples of what ‘for any other reason’ in Clause 36(7)(b) might refer to; and
- How ‘psychological harm’ might be incorporated into Clause 36(7)(b) of the Bill as a factor in making someone vulnerable.

The evidence session was recorded by Hansard.

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

11. Miscarriage of justice compensation payment - Consultation report on proposals to amend statutory maximum limits for miscarriages of justice

The Committee noted an update from the Department of Justice providing an overview and next steps following its consultation on statutory maximum awards for miscarriages of justice.

12. NICTS Estate Strategy - Future of Limavady Courthouse – Public Consultation Closure

The Committee noted an update from the Department advising the Committee that, following consideration of its consultation responses on the future of Limavady Courthouse, the Justice Minister intends to proceed with the permanent closure and disposal of the Courthouse. The update also advised that the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service will begin pre-consultation engagement on the future of Magherafelt Courthouse.

13. Committee for Justice End of Session report – 2025-2026 – Consideration of draft report

The Committee considered a draft End of Session report prepared by the Committee team, which provides a high level overview of the work undertaken by this Committee between 1 September 2025 and 31 August 2026.

Title Page, Contents Page and Powers and Membership Page

The Committee considered the Title page, Contents page and Powers and Membership page as drafted.

Agreed: That the Committee is content that the Title page, Table of Contents page and the Powers and Membership pages stand part of the Report.

Overview

The Committee considered the Overview section at paragraphs 1 to 4 as drafted.

Agreed: That the Committee is content that the Overview section at paragraphs 1 to 4 stand part of the Report.

Primary Legislation, Secondary Legislation, Legislative Consent Motions

The Committee considered the Primary Legislation, Secondary Legislation and Legislative Consent Motions sections at paragraphs 5 to 35 as drafted.

Agreed: That the Committee is content that the Primary Legislation, Secondary Legislation and Legislative Consent Motions sections at paragraphs 5 to 35 stand part of the Report.

Budget Scrutiny and Policy Scrutiny

The Committee considered the Budget Scrutiny and Policy Scrutiny sections at paragraphs 36 to 50 as drafted.

Agreed: That the Committee is content that Budget Scrutiny and Policy Scrutiny sections at paragraphs 36 to 50 stand part of the Report.

Visits, Events and Informal Meetings

The Committee considered the Visits, Events and Informal Meetings section of the report at paragraphs 51 to 55 as drafted.

Agreed: That the Committee is content that the Visits, Events and Informal Meetings section at paragraphs 51 to 55 stand part of the Report.

Likely Key Priorities for the Next Session

The Committee considered the Likely Key Priorities for the Next Session section of the report at paragraph 56 as drafted.

Agreed: That the Committee is content that the Likely Key Priorities for the Next Session at paragraph 56 stands part of the Report.

Annex A

The Committee considered the Annex A section of the report as drafted.

Agreed: That the Committee is content that Annex A stands part of the report.

Agreed: That the End of Session Report be published on the Committee's webpage.

14. Correspondence

The Committee considered the following items of correspondence:

- A response from the Department of Justice on aspects of the Conversation Practices (Criminalisation) Bill that may be relevant to the justice sector.

Agreed: To forward the Department's response to the Committee for Communities to assist their scrutiny of the Bill.

- Several items of correspondence from an individual raising concerns regarding multi-agency child safeguarding and the PSNI Public Protection Branch in relation to a case.

Agreed: To respond to the individual advising that the Committee has a strategic, policy and legislative role in relation to justice matters and is unable to intervene in, investigate or adjudicate upon individual cases.

The Committee noted the following items of correspondence:

- Department of Justice – Launch of 'Justice is Changing' awareness campaign.
- Probation Board for Northern Ireland – Response providing an update on the review of the use of privately owned vehicles by Community Service Supervisors.
- Committee for Health – Copy correspondence to the PSNI regarding the Right Care, Right Person Go Live Date.
- Committee for Finance – 2025-26 Public Expenditure Outturn and Forecast Outturn – August Position.
- Committee for Finance – Baby Loss Week – Ribbon Ceremony Invitation.
- Committee for the Economy – Copy correspondence to all Departments regarding the Regional Balance Bill.

- Independent Commission for Reconciliation & Information Recovery – Report on the investigation into the Troubles-related death of Rory O’Kelly.
- An individual – Copy correspondence to the Minister of Justice regarding the views of victims when release of life sentence prisoners is being considered.
- Strategic Investment Board – Investing Activity Report for Department of Justice – September 2026.
- NI Human Rights Commission – Save the Date – Annual Human Rights Statement 2026 – Thursday 10th December at 12pm.

15. Forward Work Programme

15.1 Committee Draft Forward Work Programme

The Committee noted the draft Committee forward work programme.

16. Chairperson’s Business

16.1 – Law Centre NI – Community Voices, Community Solutions Report

The Chairperson reminded Members that he had received an invitation from Law Centre NI to a roundtable event on Monday 12 October 2026, and advised that an embargoed copy of the report had now been made available to the Committee.

The Chairperson advised that, regrettably, he is unavailable to attend the event on this date.

16.2 - KESS Seminar – Invitations to make opening remarks

The Chairperson advised the Committee that he had been invited to deliver opening remarks at the Knowledge Exchange Seminar Series (KESS) event in the Long Gallery on 7 October, but has informed the conveners that he is, regrettably, unable to attend.

Members noted that the Deputy Chairperson has since been invited to deliver the opening remarks.

17. Any Other Business

Agreed: To write to the Department of Justice to request information on the number of responses received and any analysis conducted by the Department on its withdrawn consultation on proposed changes to firearms licensing fees and the banded system.

18. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting

Members were advised that the next meeting will take place on Tuesday 6 October at 9:30am in the Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 4.04pm.

Paul Frew MLA
Chairperson, Committee for Justice
8 October 2026