



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

## Committee for Justice

### Minutes of Proceedings

**Thursday 14 May 2026**

**Room 30, Parliament Buildings, Belfast**

**Present:**

Paul Frew MLA (Chairperson)

Emma Sheerin MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

Maurice Bradley MLA

Connie Egan MLA

Brian Kingston MLA

**Present by Video or Teleconference:**

Doug Beattie MLA

Ciara Ferguson MLA

**Apologies:**

Patsy McGlone MLA

Aoife Finnegan MLA

**In Attendance:** Kathy O’Hanlon (Assembly Clerk)  
Thomas McKillop (Senior Assistant Assembly Clerk)  
Gareth Black (Assistant Assembly Clerk)  
Aaron Pakenham (Clerical Officer)

*The meeting commenced at 2.05pm in public session.*

**Agreed:** That the oral evidence session with the Department of Justice, the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) and the Public Prosecution Service (PPS) on Child Criminal Exploitation, and the session with the Assembly Research and Information Service (RaISe) on the Criminal Justice (Sentencing etc) Bill, will be recorded by Hansard

*Ciara Ferguson joined the meeting at 2.06pm.*

*Maurice Bradley joined the meeting at 2.06pm.*

*The Chairperson noted that a number of Committee Members are members of the All-Party Group on Access to Justice.*

## **1. Apologies**

As above.

## **2. Draft Minutes**

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 7 May 2026.

### 3. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

### 4. An Inspection of Child Criminal Exploitation in Northern Ireland – Department of Justice, PSNI and PPS joint oral evidence

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 2.08pm:

Graham Walker, Head of International Criminal Justice Cooperation,  
Department of Justice (DoJ);  
Colleen Cartwright, Policy Official, DoJ;  
Eilis McGrath, Assistant Director, Belfast Region, PPS;  
Davy Beck, Assistant Chief Constable, PSNI; and  
Zoe McKee, Detective Chief Superintendent, PSNI.

The witnesses provided oral evidence on the Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland's (CJINI) recently published inspection report into Child Criminal Exploitation in Northern Ireland, as well as other matters related to child criminal exploitation.

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

During the evidence session the witnesses agreed to provide the Committee with the following information:

- An overview of data relating to missing children in Northern Ireland.
- A breakdown of referrals to the National Referral Mechanism.

The evidence session was recorded by Hansard.

The Chairperson thanked the witnesses and they left the meeting at 3.30pm.

**Agreed:** That the meeting move to closed session in order to discuss the Minister's update on bringing forward provisions to criminalise aspects of the creation and

distribution of non-consensual sexually explicit deepfake materials.

*The meeting moved into closed session at 3.30pm.*

## **5. Criminal Justice (Sentencing etc) Bill – Written papers**

### **5.1 – Minister of Justice – Briefing on the deepfake amendment: Way forward**

The Committee considered a briefing paper from the Minister of Justice providing an update on the proposed content and drafting of deepfake provisions. The Minister advised of her intention to table deepfake provisions as an amendment at Consideration Stage of the Sentencing Bill.

**Agreed:** To respond to the Minister to advise that the Committee will not be able to begin its detailed consideration of the deepfake provisions until the outcome of the consultation and the text of the draft amendment are available; and to suggest that the Minister will wish to ensure that the risk that such an amendment may be judged to be beyond the scope of the Bill has been appropriately considered.

**Agreed:** To invite the Minister to appear before the Committee to discuss the proposed deepfake provisions and the proposed approach.

**Agreed:** That Committee staff circulate the Department's Consultation on Proposals to Criminalise Sexually Explicit Deepfake Images document of 19 June 2025 to Members for information.

## **5.2 – Informal meetings with victims of crime**

The Chair outlined an update from the Office of the Commissioner Designate for Victims of Crime Northern Ireland (CVOONI) on proposed approaches for hearing oral evidence from victims as part of the Committee’s scrutiny of the Sentencing Bill.

**Agreed:** To hold a series of small, informal meetings facilitated by CVOONI to hear from victims during the normal weekly meeting time on Thursday 25 June 2026.

**Agreed:** To respond to CVOONI to advise that the themes that it would be most beneficial to hear from victims on should focus on matters related to the provisions and purpose of the Sentencing Bill.

*The meeting returned to public session at 3.55pm.*

## **6. Criminal Justice (Sentencing etc) Bill – RaISe oral briefing**

The following Assembly officials joined the meeting at 3.55pm:

Judith Bailie, Research Officer, Northern Ireland Assembly Research and Information Service (RaISe);  
Kathryn Barr, Research Officer, RaISe; and  
Nathan Mulholland, Research Officer, RaISe.

The Research Officers provided an oral briefing on the Bill Paper for the Sentencing Bill, and on the ‘Review of Costs’ paper for the Bill which scrutinises key implications for the public purse in relation to the provisions in the Bill. The briefing was followed by a question-and-answer session.

The briefing was recorded by Hansard.

The Chairperson thanked the witnesses and they left the meeting at 4.37pm.

**Agreed:** To forward the questions and scrutiny points in the RaISe papers to the Department of Justice for response.

## **7. Criminal Justice (Sentencing etc) Bill – Written papers continued**

### **7.1 – Community Restorative Justice Ireland and Northern Ireland Alternatives – Response to Call for Evidence**

The Committee noted a joint response to its Call for Evidence on the Sentencing Bill from Community Restorative Justice Ireland and Northern Ireland Alternatives.

### **7.2 - Derry and Strabane Policing and Community Safety Partnership – Response to Call for Evidence**

The Committee noted a response to its Call for Evidence on the Sentencing Bill from Derry and Strabane Policing and Community Safety Partnership.

### **7.3 – NI Commissioner for Children and Young People – Response to Call for Evidence**

The Committee noted a response to its Call for Evidence on the Sentencing Bill from the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People.

### **7.4 - J Dorrian and S Corrigan – Charlotte’s Law**

The Committee considered correspondence from Joanne Dorrian and Sinead Corrigan requesting an opportunity to provide oral evidence to the Committee in relation to the Criminal Justice (Sentencing etc.) Bill, specifically the provisions concerning Charlotte’s Law.

**Agreed:** That the Committee receives oral evidence from Joanne Dorrian and Sinead Corrigan on the Sentencing Bill.

### **7.5 – An individual – Jade’s Law**

The Committee noted correspondence from an individual requesting that provisions for Jade’s Law be included in the Sentencing Bill.

**Agreed:** To forward to the individual, and to other individuals who have previously written to the Committee on this issue, a copy of the Finance Minister’s recent correspondence on Jade’s Law.

#### **7.6 - Belfast City Council – Call for Evidence: Extension request**

The Committee considered a request from Belfast City Council for an extension to allow it to submit a response to the Call for Evidence on the Sentencing Bill beyond the closing date, due to its internal processes.

**Agreed:** To allow Belfast City Council to submit its formal response to the Call for Evidence after the response has had an opportunity to be ratified by the full Council on 1 June.

#### **8. SL1 The Justice (2011 Act) (Amendment of Schedule 3) Order (Northern Ireland) 2026**

The Committee considered a paper from the Department of Justice advising of its intention to make a Statutory Rule to amend Schedule 3 to the Justice Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 (‘the 2011 Act’) to update references to football bodies, championships and leagues in relation to regulated matches for the purposes of Part 4 of the 2011 Act.

**Agreed:**

- Issue a call for views on the proposed Statutory Rule using the standard survey;
- Publish the SL1 and the draft copy of the proposed Statutory Rule on the Committee’s website;
- Consider the proposed Statutory Rule at a suitable meeting in June 2026.

- To request the views of the Committee for Communities on the proposed Rule, given that the Department for Communities has responsibility for the policy provisions in the 2011 Act.
- To ask the Department of Justice what the implications of the new Statutory Rule might be for anyone previously convicted of offences under Part 4 of the 2011 Act.

## **9. Improving Health within Criminal Justice Strategy – Proposed Way Forward – Department of Justice written paper**

The Committee noted a paper from the Department of Justice which provided an update on the outcome of discussions between the Departments of Justice and Health on the way forward for Improving Health within Criminal Justice following the expiry of the Strategy and action plan.

## **10. Correspondence**

The Committee considered the following items of correspondence:

- A response from the Department of Justice to a number of follow-up questions relating to the Department's response to the Independent Review of the Northern Ireland Policing Board.

**Agreed:** To request that the Committee is kept informed by the Department on the finalised, agreed position on where Injury-on-Duty and Ill Health Retirements will sit.

- A response from the Department of Justice to a number of questions raised with the Committee by an individual in relation to support for litigants in person, including support for self-litigants with disabilities, and separate correspondence from the individual to provide oral evidence to the Committee.

**Agreed:** To forward the response for information to the individual who raised the matter with the Committee.

**Agreed:** That the Committee was content to note the correspondence.

- Correspondence from a KC who has contacted the Committee in a personal capacity to request the Committee's support in advancing legislative reform in the context of Financial Remedy Proceedings.

*Connie Egan MLA declared an interest on the basis that she has met with the individual on this matter and is supportive of the proposed reform.*

**Agreed:** To forward the correspondence to the Department of Justice and the Department of Finance for a response.

- Correspondence from an individual to the Education Committee in relation to the prosecution of parents of SEN, autistic and disabled children for alleged school non-attendance.

**Agreed:** To forward the Correspondence to the Department of Justice for information.

**Agreed:** To ask Department of Education for information on the number of parents being prosecuted in relation to non-attendance.

- A submission from an individual regarding the absence of accountability mechanisms for the President of the Industrial Tribunals and Fair Employment Tribunal in Northern Ireland.

**Agreed:** To request the views of the Minister of Justice and the Lady Chief Justice on the points raised regarding accountability mechanisms for Tribunal judiciary.

The Committee noted the following items of correspondence:

- Department of Justice: Executive News Service - Launch of a competition for a Commissioner for Victims and Witnesses of Crime.
- Assembly and Executive Review Committee - Copied correspondence to the Department of Justice regarding a request to provide oral evidence on the review of Assembly Committee engagement on crosscutting executive strategies.
- Committee for Finance – Management of the Vote on Account as agreed in the Budget Act (NI) 2026.
- An individual - Response regarding concerns with the Victims' Payments Board.
- An individual - Copied correspondence regarding a Health and Social Care appeal hearing.

## **11. Forward Work Programme**

### **11.1 - Committee's Draft Forward Work Programme**

The Committee noted the latest draft of the Committee's forward work programme.

## **12. Chairperson's Business**

There was no Chairperson's business.

## **13. Any Other Business**

There was no other business.

**14. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting**

Members were advised that next meeting will take place on Thursday 21 May at 2.00pm in Room 30, Parliament Buildings.

*The meeting was adjourned at 4.58pm.*

**Paul Frew MLA**

**Chairperson, Committee for Justice**

**21 May 2026**