



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Justice

Minutes of Proceedings

11 March 2021

Meeting Location: Room 30, Parliament Buildings, Belfast

Present: Mr Paul Givan MLA (Chairperson)

Mr Paul Frew MLA

Present by Video or Teleconference:

Ms Linda Dillon MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

Mr Doug Beattie MLA

Ms Sinéad Bradley MLA

Ms Jemma Dolan MLA

Ms Rachel Woods MLA

Apologies: Mr Gordon Dunne MLA

Ms Emma Rogan MLA

In Attendance: Mrs Christine Darrah (Assembly Clerk)

Mrs Clairita Frazer (Assistant Clerk)

In Attendance by Video or Teleconference:



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Mrs Kathy O'Hanlon (Senior Assistant Clerk)

Mrs Allison Mealey (Clerical Supervisor)

The meeting commenced at 2:05 p.m. in open session

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the oral evidence sessions should be reported by Hansard.

1. Apologies

As above.

The Clerk informed the Committee that, under Standing Order 115(6), Gordon Dunne MLA had delegated authority to the Chairperson, Paul Givan MLA, to vote on his behalf and Emma Rogan had delegated authority to the Deputy Chairperson, Linda Dillon MLA, to vote on her behalf.

2. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 4 March 2021.

3. Matters Arising

Item 1 - Criminal Justice (Committal Reform) Bill – Response from the Public Prosecution Service

The Committee noted the response from the Public Prosecution Service outlining its views on statutory time limits for criminal cases which had been requested following the oral evidence session on 11 February 2021.



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Item 2 - Domestic Abuse and Civil Proceedings Bill – Correspondence from the Minister of Justice

The Committee noted correspondence from the Minister of Justice advising that the Domestic Abuse and Civil Proceedings Bill had received Royal Assent and that the Department is working with partners towards the new offence coming into force before the end of the year.

Item 3 – Department of Justice 2021-22 Budget Outcome and Priorities

The Committee noted that an announcement on the final budget settlement for 2021-22 was expected by the end of March and the Committee for Finance is likely to request responses from Statutory Committees on the outcome for their respective departments by the end of the first week in May.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to reschedule the departmental oral evidence session on the budget outcome and priorities from the previously agreed date of 15 April to either the meeting on 22 or 29 April 2021.

4. Legal Aid - Update on Progress to Implement Northern Ireland Audit Office and Public Accounts Committee Recommendations and Action Plan to address Fraud and Error

The following officials joined the meeting at 2.10 p.m.

Paul Andrews, Chief Executive, Legal Services Agency

Mandy McKay, Director of Operations, Legal Services Agency

Mr Andrews outlined the key issues in respect of the findings of the two reports on fraud and error and the work to address the Northern Ireland Audit Office and Public Accounts Committee recommendations.

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

The oral evidence session was reported by Hansard.



Northern Ireland Assembly

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their attendance.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request a copy of the Business Consultancy Services Final Report when available and regular updates on progress to deliver the action plan to address the fraud and error findings and recommendations.

5. Draft Modern Slavery Strategy 2021-22 – Outcome of Consultation and Proposed Next Steps

The following officials joined the meeting via StarLeaf at 3.08 p.m.

Cathy Galway, Deputy Director, Protection and Organised Crime Division,
Department of Justice

Sinead Simpson, Head of Organised Crime Branch, Department of Justice

Ms Galway outlined the key issues highlighted in the consultation responses and how these would be reflected in either the 2021-22 strategy or the future proposed three-year strategy.

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

The oral evidence session was reported by Hansard.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their attendance.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it wished to see and consider an updated version of the strategy highlighting changes made following the consultation before it is finalised and published.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Justice for a response on a range of issues raised during the oral evidence session.



Northern Ireland Assembly

6. Damages (Return on Investment) Bill – Consideration of Committee Timetable

The Committee considered the timescale that is likely to be needed to undertake the Committee Stage of the Damages (Return on Investment) Bill taking into account the volume of legislation that has to be managed and scrutinised over the coming months, other work priorities that have to be completed, the need for flexibility to deal with other issues that may arise unexpectedly and the resources available.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that an extension of the Committee Stage for the Bill until the start of Halloween recess would be required but, if possible, it would be completed earlier.

The Chairperson advised the Committee that proposals for seeking written evidence and a potential timetable based on the agreed extension would be prepared for consideration at the meeting on 18 March 2021.

The Committee considered a briefing paper provided to all MLAs by the Association of British Insurers (ABI) prior to the Second Stage debate on the Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request the views of the Department of Justice on the issues raised in the briefing paper regarding the notional investment portfolio used in the Scottish model to calculate a compensation settlement.

7. Commencement of Northern Ireland Provisions of the Criminal Finances Act 2017 – Outcome of Consultation on Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 Codes of Practice and Next Steps

The Committee noted a written briefing paper from the Department of Justice on the outcome of the consultation on three updated draft Codes of Practice and one new draft Code of Practice under the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 to reflect the future commencement of the relevant provisions of the Criminal Finances Act 2017 in Northern Ireland, an update on the position regarding commencement of the Act by the Home Secretary and the proposed next steps.



Northern Ireland
Assembly

8. Troubles Permanent Disablement Payment Scheme – Summary of Committee’s Proposed Actions

The Committee considered a paper setting out the range of potential actions that it had discussed taking forward in relation to the Troubles Permanent Disablement Payment Scheme at the meeting on 4 March and the engagement and work streams being undertaken by the Committee for the Executive Office in relation to this matter.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that arrangements should be made to hold an informal meeting with the reference group comprising of the various victims’ representative groups to hear directly from them on the proposals for the scheme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to ask the Committee for the Executive Office to provide a copy of the response it receives from the Executive Office to its request for further information on the estimated costs of the scheme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to ask the Committee for Finance to provide a copy of the Government Actuary Department’s report when it receives it from the Executive Office.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to ask the Minister of Justice to provide an update following any further meetings with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on funding for the scheme payments.

9. Correspondence

- i. The Committee considered a response from the Department of Justice setting out the political parties and All-Party Groups contacted as part of the Gillen Review Implementation Team’s scoping exercise to ascertain the policy position on Relationship and Sex Education (RSE) in schools and the recommendations in the Review relating to education and awareness.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Justice and outline its view that the approach adopted to consult with political parties outside the Executive was not appropriate.



Northern Ireland
Assembly

- ii. The Committee considered correspondence from the Department of Justice providing an update on funding arrangements for the Regional Support Hubs.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward a copy of the correspondence to the Northern Ireland Policing Board given its interest in the matter.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Justice and outline its concerns regarding the approach used to gauge the views of Policing and Community Safety Partnerships (PCSPs) on the funding issues and arrangements.

- iii. The Committee considered correspondence from the Right Honourable Sir Jeffrey Donaldson MP on behalf of a constituent regarding the need for a change to legislation in Northern Ireland to enable an inquest to be conducted by a Coroners Court in NI in circumstances where a Northern Ireland resident is deceased overseas and their remains are returned to the United Kingdom.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to advise Sir Jeffrey Donaldson MP that it will consider this matter further when the update requested by the Committee on progress made by the Working Group established to explore the implications for the justice system in Northern Ireland of commencing section 49(1) of the Coroners and Justice Act 2009 which would allow such an inquest to take place has been received from the Department of Justice.

The Committee noted the following:



Northern Ireland Assembly

- iv. A response from the Department of Justice providing further information requested by the Committee on the timescales and legislative vehicle to make the necessary changes to the Police (NI) Act 2000 to provide the Northern Ireland Policing Board with an express power of delegation to staff which outlined that provision will be made by way of amendment at Consideration Stage of the Justice (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill.
- v. Correspondence from the Department of Justice advising of the publication of the National Statistics Bulletin, 'Experiences of Crime: Findings from the 2019-20 Northern Ireland Safe Community Survey'.
- vi. A response from the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) regarding a policy change by PSNI Firearms and Explosives Branch that required firearms certificates holders to apply for additional firearms magazines and pay a £30 application fee. Further consideration will be given to this issue when a response is received from the Department of Justice.
- vii. A copy of correspondence, provided by the Committee for Finance, from the Minister for the Economy to the Minister of Finance providing information on Covid-19 business support schemes supported by the Department for the Economy.
- viii. Correspondence from the Lord Chief Justice advising of his intention to retire and outlining the procedure for filling the vacancy.
- ix. Information provided by the NI Assembly Engagement Directorate regarding a research project and on-line survey to inform the development of new arrangements to maximise effective engagement between business and the Assembly following the dissolution of the Northern Ireland Assembly Business Trust.

10. Chairperson's Business

The Chairperson advised Members that he had received a request to meet with the Northern Ireland Retired Prison Officers Fellowship and arrangements would be



Northern Ireland Assembly

made for this to take place after which he would provide the Committee with an update on the issues discussed.

11. Any Other Business

Funding for Restorative Justice Groups

The intention of the Department of Justice to reduce funding for Community Restorative Justice Ireland and Northern Ireland Alternatives was raised.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Justice requesting the rationale for the reduction in funding for the Community Based Restorative Justice organisations, whether development and support for an Adult Restorative Justice approach is a key priority for the Department and information on what equality impact assessment has been carried out on this decision to reduce funding.

A Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy

The petition organised by Women's Aid for a Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy was raised.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister of Justice to ask what steps she intends to take to bring forward a 'Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy'.

12. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting

The next meeting will be held on Thursday 18 March 2021 at 2.00 p.m. in the Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 5.01 p.m.



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Paul Givan MLA

Chairperson, Committee for Justice

18 March 2021