



**Northern Ireland
Assembly**

COMMITTEE FOR JUSTICE

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

THURSDAY 26 NOVEMBER 2020

Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings, Belfast

Present: Mr Paul Givan MLA (Chairperson)
Ms Linda Dillon MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Doug Beattie MLA
Ms Sinéad Bradley MLA*
Ms Jemma Dolan MLA
Mr Gordon Dunne MLA
Mr Paul Frew MLA
Ms Emma Rogan MLA
Ms Rachel Woods MLA

* This Member attended the meeting via video conferencing.

Apologies: None

In Attendance: Mrs Christine Darrah (Assembly Clerk)
Mrs Kathy O'Hanlon (Senior Assistant Assembly Clerk)
Miss Leanne Johnston (Assistant Clerk)
Mrs Allison Mealey (Clerical Supervisor)

The meeting commenced at 2.04 p.m. in closed session.

1. Domestic Abuse and Family Proceedings Bill – Proposed Amendments for Further Consideration Stage – Advice from the Assembly Bill Clerk

Ms Stephanie Mallon, Assembly Bill Clerk, joined the meeting to provide advice on the Department of Justice's proposed amendments for Further Consideration Stage of the Bill.

Mr Dunne left the meeting at 3.11 p.m.

Mr Beattie left the meeting at 3.11 p.m.

The Chairperson thanked Ms Mallon for her advice and she left the meeting.

The meeting moved into public session at 3.13 p.m.

Mr Frew left the meeting at 3.13 p.m.

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

Ms Rogan left the meeting at 3.13 p.m.

Ms Woods left the meeting at 3.13 pm.

The Chairperson declared an interest in relation to Agenda Item 9 with the issue being relevant to an extended family member.

2. Apologies

As above.

Mr Frew joined the meeting at 3.14 p.m.

Mr Beattie joined the meeting at 3.14 p.m.

Mr Dunne joined the meeting at 3.14 p.m.

3. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 19 November 2020.

4. Matters Arising

Ms Woods joined the meeting at 3.16 p.m.

Ms Rogan joined the meeting at 3.17 p.m.

Item 1 – Correspondence from the Department of Justice on the Counter-Terrorism and Sentencing Bill

The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Justice providing a copy of a letter from the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice, Chris Philp MP, to the Minister of Justice indicating the intention of the UK Government to proceed with the Counter-Terrorism and Sentencing Bill without amendment and without the legislative consent of the Northern Ireland Assembly.

Members placed on the record their individual positions in relation to this decision with some welcoming the decision while others outlined their concerns in relation to it.

5. Domestic Abuse and Family Proceedings Bill – Proposed Departmental Amendments for Further Consideration Stage

The following officials joined the meeting at 3.27 p.m.:

Dr Veronica Holland, Head of Violence Against the Person Branch, Department of Justice

John Bradley, Head of Branch, Civil Legal Aid Reform, Department of Justice

Steven Martin, Deputy Director, Enabling Access to Justice, Department of Justice*

Paul Andrews, Chief Executive, Legal Services Agency Northern Ireland*

(*These officials joined via video conferencing)

The officials outlined the purpose of each of the Department's proposed amendments.

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

Mr Beattie left the meeting at 5.19 p.m.

The Chairperson left the meeting at 5.27 p.m.

The Deputy Chairperson took the Chair at 5.27 p.m.

The Chairperson rejoined the meeting and resumed the Chair at 5.30 p.m.

Mr Dunne left the meeting at 5.47 p.m.

The oral evidence session was reported by Hansard.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their attendance.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request a number of changes to the Department's proposed amendments in relation to Information-sharing with schools etc; Report on the operation of Part 1 of the Act; Independent Oversight of Part 1 of the Act; Training within relevant bodies; and Protective Measures for Victims of Abuse.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to consider the text of the revised amendments and the text of any amendment that the Department of Justice provided to the eligibility to civil legal aid provision at the meeting scheduled for Tuesday 1 December 2020.

Ms Dolan left the meeting at 6.39 p.m.

The meeting was suspended at 6.39 p.m.

The meeting recommenced at 7.02 p.m.

Present: Mr Paul Givan MLA (Chairperson)
Ms Linda Dillon MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Ms Sinéad Bradley MLA*
Mr Paul Frew MLA
Ms Emma Rogan MLA
Ms Rachel Woods MLA

6. Update on the Tackling Paramilitary Activity, Criminality and Organised Crime Programme

The following officials joined the meeting by video conferencing at 7.02 p.m.:

Adele Brown, Programme Director, Department of Justice
Christopher Farrington, Tackling Paramilitary Activity, Criminality and Organised Crime Programme Team, Department of Justice
Mary Lemon, Tackling Paramilitary Activity, Criminality and Organised Crime Programme Team, Department of Justice

The officials provided an update on the delivery of the Tackling Paramilitary Activity, Criminality and Organised Crime Programme to date and the proposed second phase from 2021-24.

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

The officials agreed to provide further information on several issues.

The oral evidence session was reported by Hansard.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their attendance.

7. Criminal Justice (Committal Reform) Bill – Provisional Timetable and Motion to Extend the Committee Stage

The Committee considered a provisional timetable for the Committee Stage of the Criminal Justice (Committal Reform) Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content with the proposed timetable for the Committee Stage of the Bill.

The Committee considered a motion to extend the Committee Stage of the Criminal Justice (Committal Reform) Bill until 11 June 2021.

Question put and agreed:

“That, in accordance with Standing Order 33(4), the period referred to in Standing Order 33(2) be extended to 11 June 2021, in relation to the Committee Stage of the Criminal Justice (Committal Reform) Bill (NIA 11/17-22).”

8. SL1: The Carriage of Explosives (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020

The Committee considered further information provided by the Department of Justice in relation to a proposal to make a Statutory Rule to correct Northern Ireland legislation relating to the carriage of explosives which would otherwise cease to function properly at the end of the EU transition period.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content with the proposal for the Statutory Rule.

9. New Legal Framework for the Personal Injury Discount Rate – Summary of Consultation Responses and Proposed Way Forward

The Committee considered further information provided by the Department of Justice in relation to its proposed way forward regarding a new legal framework for the Personal Injury Discount Rate in Northern Ireland, its decision not to change the current rate at this time and its timetable for potential accelerated passage of the legislation.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request the attendance of the Permanent Secretary of the Department of Justice at the Committee meeting on

Thursday 3 December 2020 to provide additional information and clarification on a range of issues.

10. Action Plan in Response to the Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland Report on ‘The Care and Treatment of Victims and Witnesses in the Criminal Justice System in Northern Ireland’

The Committee noted the copy of a multi-agency action plan provided by the Department of Justice which had been developed to address the findings and recommendations of the Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland Report on ‘The Care and Treatment of Victims and Witnesses by the Criminal Justice System in Northern Ireland.’

The Chairperson advised the Committee that, as agreed at the meeting on 3 September 2020, oral evidence sessions with Criminal Justice Inspectors on the findings and recommendations of the report and with officials from the relevant justice organisations on the response would be scheduled into the Forward Work Programme.

11. Committee Draft Forward Work Programme – December 2020

The Committee considered information provided by the Department of Justice regarding work items that it wished to schedule during December 2020.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to schedule the work items requested by the Department for December 2020.

The Committee considered a letter from the Department outlining some delay in progressing the work on the Stocktake of Policing Oversight and Accountability Arrangements.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the oral evidence session on the key issues to be considered during the Stocktake of Policing Oversight and Accountability Arrangements should be scheduled in January 2021.

The Chairperson advised the Committee that the informal discussion on the Forward Work Programme and priorities for the rest of the mandate that had been deferred from 12 November would take place on 3 December 2020.

12. Correspondence

- i. The Committee considered a response from the Department of Justice providing an update on the implementation of the Gillen Review of Civil Justice and associated matters by the Association of British Insurers.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward a copy of the Department’s response to the Association of British Insurers for information and to consider the offer of a briefing by ABI when dealing with the specific civil justice issues raised.

- ii. The Committee considered correspondence from the Committee for Communities requesting evidence on the Licensing and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request the views/comments of the Department of Justice and the PSNI on the clauses in the Bill relevant to their responsibilities including the new offences, penalties and enforcement requirements and whether there are any resource implications and if so how they will be met.

- iii. The Committee considered information from the Women's Aid Federation regarding the Department of Justice's proposals for a Domestic and Sexual Violence Advocacy Service.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister of Justice to request a response to the issues raised by the Women's Aid Federation.

The Committee noted the following:

- iv. A copy of a response from the Minister of Justice to the Committee for Finance providing an overview of bids submitted by the Department of Justice within the in-year monitoring process and bids for Covid-19 related funding outside the in-year monitoring process.
- v. The Official Statistics Bulletin on 'Youth Engagement Statistics for Northern Ireland 2019/20.'
- vi. A response from the Department of Justice on the timing of the provision of information to the Committee in respect of Statutory Instruments (SIs) relating to EU Exit and the anticipated number of SIs on justice issues.
- vii. The Official Statistics Bulletin on 'Adult and Youth Reoffending in Northern Ireland 2017/18.'
- viii. A response from the Department of Justice providing an update in relation to each of the measures in its 2020/21 Business Plan.
- ix. A memo from the Committee for Finance advising that it will co-ordinate scrutiny of the PEACE PLUS programme across Assembly committees when appropriate.
- x. A memo from the Ad Hoc Committee on a Bill of Rights advising of the attendance of the Lord Chief Justice at its meeting on Thursday 26 November.
- xi. Correspondence from the Working Group on Unification Referendums on the Island of Ireland providing information on the launch of the Group's Interim Report.
- xii. Correspondence from an individual regarding the alleged unsolved death of an individual in London in June 1990.
- xiii. The Probation Board for Northern Ireland Annual Report 2019-20.

13. Chairperson's Business

The Chairperson advised the Committee that he and the Deputy Chairperson had received a request from the Forum on Insurance Lawyers to meet to discuss the recent developments in relation to the Personal Injury Discount Rate in Northern Ireland.

Agreed: The Committee agree that an informal meeting between FOIL, the Chairperson and the Deputy Chairperson should be arranged to which

all Committee Members would be invited to attend if they wished to do so.

12. Any Other Business

None.

13. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting

The next meeting will be held on Tuesday 1 December 2020 at 1.00 p.m. in Room 30, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 8.01 p.m.

Mr Paul Givan MLA
Chairperson, Committee for Justice