

FROM THE OFFICE OF THE JUSTICE MINISTER



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6 May 2025

Dear Kathy,

Legislative provision for a deepfake offence

Thank you for your letter of 11 April 2025. The Minister has asked me to pass on her thanks to the Chair, Deputy Chair and Committee Members for their consideration of her proposal to provide for a deepfake offence by tabling relevant draft clauses as an amendment to the Justice Bill at Consideration Stage, and for their agreement, in principle, to this approach. She has also asked me to highlight her assurance that Members will be kept informed of relevant developments as legislative proposals are progressed.

It is the Minister's intention that a public consultation on these proposals will issue in early July. Subject to the Committee's agreement, officials will provide an oral briefing to the Committee on the scope of the proposals, prior to finalisation of the consultation paper. We would propose the meeting of 26 June to enable the maximum drafting time for the consultation. This will provide an opportunity for Committee members to raise any concerns which may need to be reflected in the paper ahead of its launch.

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Once the Minister has approved the consultation paper for issue, the Committee will be provided with a draft ahead of its publication. As the consultation will be held over the summer, we propose an extended consultation period of ten weeks.

Following the consultation, officials will ensure that Committee members are advised of the analysis of responses and the proposed next steps in advance of publication of a summary report.

When next steps are agreed with the Minister, legislative instructions will be prepared, and subsequent draft clauses will be shared with the Committee as soon as these are available.

Officials will be happy to provide any further briefing at any stage during the process.


**DAVID GRAHAM
DALO**



**Northern Ireland Assembly
Committee for Justice**

David Graham
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11 April 2025

Legislative provision for a deepfake offence

Dear David

You will be aware that the Chair and Deputy Chair of the Committee for Justice met with the Minister of Justice recently to discuss legislative provision for a deepfake offence. During the meeting, the Minister outlined the potential options and advised that her preferred option would be an amendment at Consideration Stage of the Justice Bill.

At the Committee meeting on 10 April 2025, Members agreed that, given the seriousness of the issue, they would be content, in principle, for legislative provision for a deepfake offence to be brought forward as an amendment to the Justice Bill.

The Committee will wish to undertake proper scrutiny of the proposed amendment. However, given that a public consultation will be required before the amendment can be drafted, it seems highly unlikely that the Committee will be able to take the same approach as it has to the scrutiny of the other amendments, which were included in its call for evidence on the Bill. Therefore, to help inform its approach to scrutiny of this matter, the Committee agreed to ask the Department to set out clear timescales for the consultation process and the subsequent drafting of the amendment.

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In order to ensure that Members are fully informed at each stage of the process, the Committee also agreed to request that Departmental officials provide oral evidence on the draft consultation prior to its launch.

I should appreciate a response by 2 May 2025.

Yours sincerely

Kathy O'Hanlon

Kathy O'Hanlon
Clerk to the Committee for Justice