



**Northern Ireland  
Assembly**

**COMMITTEE FOR JUSTICE**

**MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS**

THURSDAY 19 NOVEMBER 2020

Room 30, Parliament Buildings, Belfast

Present: Mr Paul Givan MLA (Chairperson)  
Ms Linda Dillon MLA (Deputy Chairperson)  
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: Mr Doug Beattie MLA

In Attendance: Mrs Christine Darragh (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 public session.*

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

The Deputy Chairperson, Linda Dillon MLA apologised unreservedly for a term she used during the Committee for Justice meeting on Thursday 12 November 2020.

**1. Apologies**

As above.

*Ms Rogan joined the meeting at 2.06 p.m.*

## 2. Draft Minutes

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 12 November 2020.

## 3. Matters Arising

### Item 1 – Correspondence from the Minister of Justice on amendments to the Domestic Abuse and Family Proceedings Bill

The Committee noted correspondence from the Minister of Justice setting out her updated position in relation to amendments prior to the Consideration Stage of the Domestic Abuse and Family Proceedings Bill and indicating her intention to bring forward additional amendments at Further Consideration Stage of the Bill.

The Committee considered correspondence from the Department of Justice providing the text of proposed amendments for Further Consideration Stage of the Bill on guidance on data collection, Operation Encompass, reporting on the operation of Part 1 of the Act, independent oversight of Part 1 of the Act, training and eligibility to civil legal aid.

*Mr Dunne joined the meeting at 2.09 p.m.*

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to request a range of further information in relation to the proposed amendment on eligibility to civil legal aid.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to request the attendance of the Bill Clerk at the meeting on 26 November to provide advice on the amendments.

### Item 2 – Response from the Department of Justice on the Troubles Permanent Disablement Payment Scheme

The Committee considered a response from the Department of Justice providing further information on the Troubles Permanent Disablement Payment Scheme.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to the First Minister and deputy First Minister to request clarification of how the statutory duty of the Commissioner for Victims and Survivors in relation to oversight is being carried out, given the post is currently vacant.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Justice to request clarification of how the Department is ensuring appropriate oversight of the development of the Scheme in the absence of a Commissioner for Victims and Survivors and an update on discussions with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on the provision of funding for the payments.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to provide a copy of the correspondence to the Committee for the Executive Office and request that it keeps the Committee updated on the matter.

#### **4. Draft Three Year Northern Ireland Organised Crime Strategy – Results of the Consultation and Proposed Next Steps**

The following officials joined the meeting by video conferencing at 2.51 p.m.:

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

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

Andrea Watson, Organised Crime Branch, Department of Justice

The officials provided an overview of the results of the consultation and the Department's proposed next steps.

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

*The Chairperson left the meeting at 3.09 p.m.*

*The Deputy Chairperson took the Chair at 3.09 p.m.*

*The Chairperson rejoined the meeting and resumed the Chair at 3.15 p.m.*

The officials agreed to provide further information on a number of issues.

The oral evidence session was reported by Hansard.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their attendance.

The Committee noted the draft Organised Crime Strategy.

*The Committee agreed to take Agenda Items 6 to 11 before Agenda Item 5.*

#### **5. Criminal Justice (Committal Reform) Bill – Proposals for Committee Stage**

The Committee considered proposals to seek written evidence on the Criminal Justice (Committal Reform) Bill including a draft media sign-posting notice, a draft letter seeking evidence on the Bill and a list of key stakeholders.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed a closing date of Friday 15 January 2021 for receipt of written evidence.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed that it was content with the media sign-posting notice, the list of key stakeholders and the letter to issue seeking written evidence on the Bill.

#### **6. SL1: Amendments to Rule 22 of the Parole Commissioners (Northern Ireland) Rules 2009**

The Committee considered a proposal by the Department of Justice to make a Statutory Rule to amend Rule 22 of the Parole Commissioners' Rules (Northern Ireland) 2009 to introduce provisions which allow registered victims or other parties (where it is considered to be in the public interest) to receive summaries of parole decisions.

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

## **7. Commencement of Northern Ireland Provisions of the Criminal Finances Act 2017 – Consultation on Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 Codes of Practice**

The Committee considered information provided by the Department of Justice on a proposed consultation on Proceeds of Crime Act (POCA) Codes of Practice in relation to the commencement of NI provisions of the Criminal Finances Act 2017.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed that it was content for the consultation to take place and to consider the POCA Codes of Practice further when the results of the consultation are available.

## **8. Funding of Support Hubs**

The Committee considered a response from the Department of Justice outlining that existing funding for Support Hubs would be extended for a further six months while longer-term options are discussed.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to request further information from the Department of Justice on a number of issues and indicate that it wished to be kept up-dated on this matter.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to provide a copy of the Department of Justice response to the Northern Ireland Policing Board and Mid and East Antrim Borough Council who wrote to the Committee on the issue.

## **9. Correspondence**

- i. The Committee considered the Legal Service Agency Northern Ireland Annual Report and Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2020 and the qualification of the 2019-20 financial statements by the Comptroller and Auditor General which highlighted material weaknesses in controls over fraud and error.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to ask the Public Accounts Committee to consider holding a further inquiry into this matter given that the accounts have been qualified for a number of years.

The Committee noted the following:

- ii. A response from the Minister of Justice providing an update on Covid-19 and the Prison Service.
- iii. A response from the Department of Justice providing management information on the emerging trend between the number of cases received and disposed by the courts on a week to week basis and an overview of the position in relation to each type of court business.
- iv. A copy of correspondence from the Committee for the Executive Office to Michael Gove MP, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the

Cabinet Office, regarding the UK's Future Relationship with the European Union.

- v. The Committee for Finance Report on the Committee Stage of the Functioning of Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill.
- vi. The Northern Ireland Policing Board Report on a Review of the Policing Response to Covid-19 during the period 23 March until the end of June 2020.
- vii. The Department of Justice Annual Report and Accounts for year ended 31 March 2020.
- viii. The Police Service of Northern Ireland Annual Report and Accounts for year ended 31 March 2020.
- ix. The Police Service of Northern Ireland Police Pension Accounts for year ended 31 March 2020.
- x. The Northern Ireland Judicial Pension Scheme Annual Report and Accounts for year ended 31 March 2020.
- xi. The Youth Justice Agency Annual Report and Accounts for year ended 31 March 2020.
- xii. The Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland Annual Report and Accounts 2019-20.

## **10. Chairperson's Business**

None.

## **11. Consultation on the Law on Child Sexual Exploitation – Summary of Responses and Proposals for Legislative Changes**

The following officials joined the meeting via video conferencing at 4.14 p.m.:

Brian Grzymek, Director, Criminal Justice Policy and Legislation Legacy Division,  
Department of Justice  
Susanne Corr, Criminal Policy Branch, Department of Justice

The officials provided an overview of the proposed way forward following the consultation on the Review of the Law on Child Sexual Exploitation including proposals for legislative changes.

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.

The Committee noted that there would be an opportunity to consider the legislative proposals further as part of the scrutiny of the Justice (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill and there would also be an opportunity to consider some of the other proposals in this context.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to the Minister of Education to request information on what role the Department of Education has in advising young people of the law on the age of consent for sexual relations and related criminal offences and how it discharges any responsibility it has in this area.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Justice to request information on what role it has in advising young people of the law on the age of consent for sexual relations and related criminal offences, how it discharges any responsibility it has in this area and how it engages with stakeholders on these matters.

## **12. Any Other Business**

None.

## **13. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting**

The next meeting will be held on Thursday 26 November 2020 at 2.00 p.m. in the Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 5.27 p.m.

**Mr Paul Givan MLA**  
**Chairperson, Committee for Justice**