



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

## Committee for Justice

### Minutes of Proceedings

**THURSDAY 13 JUNE 2024**

**Room 30, Parliament Buildings, Belfast**

**Present:**

Joanne Bunting MLA (Chairperson)

Deirdre Hargey MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

Doug Beattie MLA

Stewart Dickson MLA

**Present by Video or Teleconference:**

Maurice Bradley MLA

Sinéad Ennis MLA

Ciara Ferguson MLA

Justin McNulty MLA

**Apologies:**

Alex Easton MLA

**In Attendance:** Caroline Perry (Assembly Clerk)  
Sarah-Anne McKinley (Assistant Assembly Clerk)  
Jonny Redpath (Assistant Assembly Clerk)  
Aaron Pakenham (Clerical Supervisor)

*The meeting commenced at 2.06pm in open session.*

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that the oral evidence session with the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland and the oral evidence session with departmental officials on Budget 2024-25 and the June Monitoring Round would be recorded by Hansard.

*Joanne Bunting declared an interest in relation to an immediate family member who works in the legal profession.*

*Deirdre Hargey declared an interest in relation to her sister who works for the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service.*

## **1. Apologies**

As above.

*Justin McNulty joined the meeting (virtually) at 2.08pm.*

## **2. Draft Minutes**

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 30 May 2024.

## **3. Matters Arising**

There were no matters arising.

#### **4. Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland**

Stephen Herron, the Director of Public Prosecutions; Michael Agnew, the Deputy Director of Public Prosecutions; Marianne O’Kane, the Senior Assistant Director (Serious Crime and Regions); and Peter Luney, the Senior Assistant Director (Resources and Change) joined the meeting at 2.09pm.

The witnesses provided an overview of the work of the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland.

*Justin McNulty left the meeting (virtually) and rejoined (in person) at 2.21pm.*

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

The witnesses agreed to provide a copy of the modernisation 2030 strategy — ‘PPS 2030’ — and information on the programmes that are in place to help to tackle low-level crime.

The oral evidence session was reported by Hansard.

*Ciara Ferguson left the meeting at 2.34pm.*

The Chairperson thanked the witnesses for their attendance and they left the meeting.

#### **5. Budget 2024-25 and June Monitoring Round — Department of Justice Officials**

Hugh Widdis, the Permanent Secretary of the Department of Justice; Deborah Brown, the Director of Justice Delivery; Mark Goodfellow, the Director of Safer Communities; Sean Holland, the Director of Access to Justice; Glyn Capper, the Director of the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service; and Lorraine Montgomery, the Acting Director of Corporate Services in the Reducing Offending Division, joined the meeting at 3.48pm.

The officials briefed the Committee on Budget 2024-25, the June Monitoring Round and a number of other issues.

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

The officials agreed to provide follow-up information on a number of matters, including Transformation bids that receive ministerial approval; confirmation that equality screening has been completed for Budget 2024-25; and collaborative working between the Department of Justice and the Department of Health, including a list of subject areas and actions being taken at the highest level to address duplication.

The oral evidence session was reported by Hansard.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their attendance and they left the meeting.

## **6. Draft SR — The Damages (Process for Setting Rate of Return) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2024**

The Committee considered Draft SR The Damages (Process for Setting Rate of Return) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2024, which will make changes to the statutory methodology by which the Government Actuary has to set the personal injury discount rate for Northern Ireland.

The Committee noted that the Examiner of Statutory Rules had raised no issues with regard to the technical aspects of the Rule.

**Agreed:** The Committee for Justice considered Draft SR The Damages (Process for Setting Rate of Return) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2024 and recommended that it be approved by the Assembly.

The Chairperson advised Members that she would outline the Committee's views and concerns during the debate on the Statutory Rule, which was scheduled for 17 June 2024.

## **7. SL1 — The Police Pensions (Remediable Service) (Amendment) Regulations**

The Committee considered a proposal for a Statutory Rule under the Public Service Pensions Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 and the Public Service Pensions and Judicial Offices Act 2022 to further support the Scheme Manager and Pension Administrator

to effectively deliver the McCloud Retrospective Remedy and to correct omissions and minor drafting errors.

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

## **8. Department of Justice Draft Corporate and Business Plan 2024-25**

The Committee noted the Department of Justice's draft Corporate and Business plan for 2024-25. The Committee was advised that the draft plan is subject to change given the budgetary situation and that it will be subject to formal consideration when a Programme for Government is agreed.

## **9. AccessNI Performance and Activity Report 2023-24**

The Committee noted AccessNI's Performance and Activity Report for 2023-24.

## **10. Forward Work Programme**

The Committee noted the updated forward work programme.

The Committee was advised that the proposed evidence session on the forthcoming Justice Bill, which had been scheduled for 27 June 2024, will no longer take place as Second Stage will not happen prior to summer recess.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that it was content with the proposed items in the forward work programme for the meeting of 27 June 2024 and that no evidence session should be added unless absolutely necessary.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that it was content for the Chairperson and the Deputy Chairperson to meet the Committee Clerk to agree a forward work programme for September to December.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that it was content for the Chairperson and the Deputy Chairperson to hold informal meetings with stakeholders over one or two days during summer recess and that they would update the Committee accordingly.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to Beverley Wall, the Director General of the Northern Ireland Prison Service, to express its gratitude for accommodating the Committee's visit to Maghaberry Prison on 6 June 2024 and for accommodating the previous visits to Magilligan Prison and Hydebank Wood Prison for the Justice spokespersons from each of the main political parties.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Governor of Magilligan Prison and the Governor of Hydebank Wood Prison to express its gratitude for accommodating previous visits for the Justice spokespersons from each of the main political parties.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Justice, David Kennedy, the Director of Prisons in the Department of Justice, and Tracy Megrath, the Governor of Maghaberry Prison, to express its gratitude for accommodating the Committee's visit to Maghaberry Prison on 6 June 2024.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to Patsy McGonagle, a member of the Independent Monitoring Board for Prisons, to express its gratitude for meeting Committee Members during the visit to Maghaberry Prison on 6 June 2024.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that six-monthly evidence sessions with the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland were not required and that they should be scheduled as and when required, and at least once a year.

## **11. Correspondence**

- i. The Committee noted the itinerary for the visit to the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service on 20 June 2024.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to reschedule the visit to the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service.

- ii. The Committee considered a response from the Department of Justice regarding issues raised following the evidence session with the Independent Monitoring Board for Prisons.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to forward the response to the Independent Monitoring Board for Prisons.

- iii. The Committee considered a response from the Department of Justice regarding the evaluation of the Family Drugs and Alcohol Courts pilot.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to note the item and to consider further when the evaluation is complete.

- iv. The Committee considered correspondence from the Department of Justice regarding the judicial review of the Justice (Sexual Offences and Trafficking Victims) Act (Northern Ireland) 2022.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department to request an update from the Minister on decisions on the way forward before summer recess.

- v. The Committee considered correspondence from the Department of Justice containing a copy of the Youth Justice Agency's business plan for 2024-25.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to note the item and to consider scheduling an oral evidence session with the Youth Justice Agency later in the year for an update on progress.

- vi. The Committee considered a response from the Department of Health regarding the proposed Adult Protection Bill.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to note the item; to forward the correspondence to the Committee for Health; and to consider scheduling a concurrent meeting with the Committee for Health on the Adult Protection Bill after its introduction;

- vii. The Committee noted an invitation from the Probation Board for Northern Ireland to attend a video launch and panel discussion on 26 June 2024 on 'Changing Lives: The Inside Story of the Probation Service'. Members were advised to respond by email if they wished to attend.

- viii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Northern Ireland Assembly's Head of IT regarding a constituency office survey for Members. Members were reminded that the completion date for the survey had been extended to Friday 14 June 2024.

The Committee noted the following:

- ix. a copy of correspondence from the Department of Justice to the Committee for Communities regarding an anti-poverty strategy and the consideration of poverty when considering budgets;
- x. a response from the Department of Justice regarding checks on staff who work in accommodation used for asylum seekers;
- xi. an invitation from the Department of Justice to the Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson to attend a passing out event for the Northern Ireland Prison Service;
- xii. an update from the Department of Justice on the Legislative Consent Motion for the Prison Media Bill;
- xiii. correspondence from the Department of Justice regarding an amendment to statutory guidance for stalking protection orders;
- xiv. a copy of correspondence from the Department of Justice to the Business Office regarding a memorandum issued under Standing Order 42A for the Post Office (Horizon System) Offences Act 2024 to be laid before the Northern Ireland Assembly;
- xv. a news release and report from the Department of Justice regarding the publication of the Organised Crime Task Force's annual report for 2022-23;
- xvi. a response from the Department of Justice with details on the modernisation pillar of the Enabling Access to Justice programme;
- xvii. the sixteenth report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules; and
- xviii. correspondence from the Northern Ireland Assembly's Head of Communications regarding sharing Zoom links.



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

The Chairperson thanked the Deputy Chairperson and Committee Member Ciara Ferguson for their attendance at the Committee visit to Maghaberry Prison.

The Deputy Chairperson provided an overview of the visit. She expressed her gratitude to the officials who arranged it and to the prisoners who they engaged with during the visit. She also pointed out that there were areas of the prison that were not accessed during the visit and suggested that it would be appropriate to see such areas during a future visit.

## **13. Any other Business**

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that there would be no Committee meeting on 20 June 2024.

## **14. Date, Time and Place of Next Meeting**

Members were informed that the next Committee meeting is scheduled for Thursday 27 June 2024 at 2.00pm in Room 30, Parliament Buildings.

*The Meeting was adjourned 4.58pm.*

Joanne Bunting MLA

Chairperson, Committee for Justice