



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Justice

Minutes of Proceedings

THURSDAY 3 October 2024

Room 21, Parliament Buildings, Belfast

Present:

Joanne Bunting MLA (Chairperson)

Deirdre Hargey MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

Doug Beattie MLA

Stewart Dickson MLA

Ciara Ferguson MLA

Present by Video or Teleconference:

Maurice Bradley MLA

Stephen Dunne MLA

Justin McNulty MLA

Sinéad Ennis MLA

In Attendance:

Caroline Perry (Assembly Clerk)

Thomas McKillop (Senior Assistant Assembly Clerk)

Jonny Redpath (Assistant Assembly Clerk)

Mark McConnell (Clerical Supervisor)

Aaron Pakenham (Clerical Officer)

The Committee agreed to start the meeting in closed session for a briefing from Legal Services and the Clerk Assistant on the Justice Bill.

The Committee agreed that the agenda item regarding training in effective questioning would take place as an informal session following the formal meeting.

The Committee agreed that a Bill Office official could sit in the public gallery during the closed and informal sessions.

The meeting commenced at 1.33pm in closed session.

1. Apologies

There were no apologies.

Deirdre Hargey joined the meeting at 1.36pm.

2. Justice Bill: Committee Stage Approach

Simon Kelly, a Legal Adviser with the Assembly's Legal Services Office, and Frank Geddis, Clerk Assistant, joined the meeting at 1.37pm.

The Clerk Assistant outlined the implications of the High Court judgment *In Re Mediahuis and others' applications for judicial review*, with particular reference to the recently introduced Justice Bill.

The Legal Adviser provided an introductory overview of the aspects of European Convention on Human Rights that are engaged by the Justice Bill

Maurice Bradley joined the meeting at 2.03pm.

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

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

There followed a discussion about the timing of the Committee Stage of the Justice Bill, with a number of potential options considered.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Youth Assembly and other youth organisations would be approached to consider giving evidence on the Bill.

The Chairperson informed Members that a formal decision regarding the length of the extension to the Committee Stage will need to be taken at the Committee meeting next week to enable a motion to be tabled in the Business Office within the 30-day period set out in Standing Orders.

The meeting moved into public session at 2.53pm.

Deirdre Hargey declared an interest in relation to an immediate family member who works for the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service.

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

3. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 26 September 2024.

4. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

5. Forward Work Programme

The Committee noted the updated Forward Work Programme and a proposed Department of Justice Forward Work Programme.

6. Correspondence

- i. The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Justice regarding the Minister's intention to publish a domestic abuse training statement, as is required under section 32 of the Domestic Abuse and Civil Proceedings Act (Northern Ireland) 2021.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Justice to signal its agreement to the publication of the training statement.

- ii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Finance. This contained a response from the Department of Finance that provided details of the Minister of Finance and departmental officials' engagement on the cost of insurance premiums in Northern Ireland.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that Members would consider raising any issues during the informal meeting with the Association of British Insurers, which is scheduled to take place on Tuesday 15 October 2024.

Deirdre Hargey left the meeting at 2.56pm.

- iii. The Committee noted an invitation from Queen's University Belfast for Committee Members to attend the launch of the Centre for Public Policy and Administration on Friday 25 October 2024.

The Chairperson advised Members that they should reply directly to Queen's if they wish to attend.

The Committee noted the following:

- iv. correspondence from the Department of Justice regarding the Minister of Justice's intention to publish a written ministerial statement on the Domestic Sexual Abuse strategy;
- v. a response from the Department of Justice regarding the Youth Justice Agency's staff retention and recruitment allowance;
- vi. a response from the Department of Justice regarding the early release of prisoners in England and Wales;

- vii. a response from the Department of Justice providing a breakdown of the costs of the Domestic Abuse and Safety Support Service;
- viii. a response from the Department of Justice regarding probation practice in Northern Ireland and planned legislation;
- ix. an update from the Department of Justice on the implementation of the Post Office (Horizon System) Offences Act 2024;
- x. correspondence from the Department of Justice regarding the Government Actuary's review and determination of the personal injury discount rate in Northern Ireland;
- xi. correspondence from the Department of Justice providing information on the "No Bill" provision in the Justice Bill;
- xii. correspondence from the Committee for The Executive Office advising that it has invited the PSNI to give evidence on 2 October 2024;
- xiii. a response from the Northern Ireland Audit Office regarding injury-on-duty schemes for officers in the Police Service of Northern Ireland and the Northern Ireland Prison Service;
- xiv. correspondence from the Strategic Investment Board regarding the Investing Activity Report for the Department of Justice;
- xv. correspondence from an individual regarding an article in the Irish News about the PSNI citing national security reasons for not releasing details about writing off a bill; and
- xvi. correspondence from Family Mediation NI regarding a family mediation showcase.

Deirdre Hargey rejoined the meeting at 2.57pm.

7. Chairperson's Business

There were no items of Chairperson's Business.

8. Any Other Business

The Chairperson referred Members to the key findings report on the 2024 Victim Survey.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to invite the Commissioner Designate for Victims of Crime to attend an evidence session to discuss the report.

9. Date, Time and Place of Next Meeting

Members were informed that the next Committee meeting is scheduled for Thursday 10 October 2024 at 2.00pm in Room 30.

Members were reminded that a formal decision regarding the length of the extension to the Committee Stage will need to be taken at the Committee meeting next week to enable a motion to be tabled in the Business Office within the period set out in Standing Orders.

The Meeting was adjourned at 2.58pm.

Joanne Bunting MLA

Chairperson, Committee for Justice