



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

## Committee for Justice

### Minutes of Proceedings

**THURSDAY 5 December 2024**

**Room 30, Parliament Buildings, Belfast**

**Present:** Deirdre Hargey MLA (Deputy Chairperson)  
Stephen Dunne MLA  
Connie Egan MLA  
Ciara Ferguson MLA

**Present by Video or Teleconference:**

Doug Beattie MLA  
Maurice Bradley MLA  
Jemma Dolan MLA  
Justin McNulty MLA

**Apologies:** Joanne Bunting MLA (Chairperson)

**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 to consider Committee Business and for a briefing on post-legislative scrutiny.*

*The meeting commenced at 2.02pm in closed session.*

## **1. Apologies**

As above.

### **1.1 Matters Arising**

Dr Frank Geddis, Clerk Assistant, joined the meeting at 2.03pm.

*Stephen Dunne joined the meeting at 2.04pm.*

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to note correspondence from an individual received in response to the Committee's letter to that individual regarding issues raised about the Northern Ireland Troubles (Legacy and Reconciliation) Act 2023 and a number of other matters.

The official briefed the Committee on matters arising as a result of the aforementioned correspondence.

The briefing was followed by a question-and-answer session.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to schedule another briefing for its meeting of 12 December 2024 to consider a draft letter on the above matter.

The Deputy Chairperson thanked the official and he left the meeting.

## **2. Post-legislative scrutiny: Committee approach**

Jonny Redpath, Assistant Assembly Clerk to the Committee for Justice, joined the meeting at 2.11pm.

The official provided an updated briefing to the Committee on post-legislative scrutiny work that has been conducted by the Committee for Justice team.

*Jemma Dolan joined the meeting at 2.46pm.*

The briefing was followed by a question-and-answer session.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that it was content for the questions as outlined in the meeting pack and during the briefing to be sent to the Department of Justice.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to extend the usual deadline for a response from the Department until the end of February 2025.

The Deputy Chairperson thanked the official.

*The meeting moved into public session at 2.50pm.*

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that the oral evidence session with Department of Justice officials regarding an update on the Gillen Review and the oral evidence session with Department of Justice officials on the Enabling Access to Justice Reform Programme would be recorded by Hansard.

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

## **3. Draft Minutes**

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 21 November 2024.

#### **4. Matters Arising**

The Deputy Chairperson reminded Members that the item of business that had initially been scheduled to be taken under matters arising was dealt with in closed session.

#### **5. Gillen Review — update on implementation — Department of Justice**

Julie Wilson, the Deputy Director of the Victims Support and Judiciary Division; Nigel Bloomer from the Gillen Review Implementation Team; and Claire Campbell from the Victims and Witnesses and Gillen Policy Branch, joined the meeting at 2.52pm.

The officials briefed the Committee on the implementation of the Gillen Review Report into the law and procedures in serious sexual offences in Northern Ireland.

The briefing was followed by a question-and-answer session.

*Connie Egan left the meeting at 3.35pm.*

The witnesses agreed to keep the Committee updated on the progress of implementing the Gillen Review's recommendation that research into serious sex offences and minority communities should be carried out. The witness advised the Committee that work on this had not yet started.

The witnesses agreed to provide the Committee with the performance framework that the Department uses to monitor its progress on the Gillen recommendations.

The witnesses agreed to provide the Committee with a written update on work that the Department is doing to address delays in the justice system, with particular reference to the Gillen recommendations.

The oral evidence session was reported by Hansard.

The Deputy Chairperson thanked the witnesses and they left the meeting.

## **6. Enabling Access to Justice Reform Programme — Department of Justice**

Steven Allison, the Deputy Director of the Enabling Access to Justice Division; Bronagh O'Reilly, Programme Manager; John Bradley, Head of Civil Legal Aid Reform; and Chris Barry, Head of Taxation Review, joined the meeting at 3.50pm.

The witnesses briefed the Committee on the Enabling Access to Justice Reform Programme, including the Burgess Review of Criminal Legal Aid.

The briefing was followed by a question-and-answer session.

The witnesses agreed to keep the Committee updated with any concerns raised about, or support expressed for, the reform programme, before the consultation responses are published.

The oral evidence session was reported by Hansard.

The Deputy Chairperson thanked the officials and they left the meeting.

## **7. Vehicle Recovery, Storage and Disposal Statutory Charges Review — Report on Consultation Responses and Way Forward — Department of Justice written paper**

The Committee noted a written paper from the Department of Justice on the responses received and the proposed next steps following the Department's consultation on the review of vehicle recovery, storage and disposal statutory charges.

## **8. Domestic Abuse Protection Notices and Orders — Department of Justice written paper**

The Committee noted a written paper from the Department of Justice on its failure to lay Regulations within the required time frame regarding Domestic Abuse Protection Notices and Domestic Abuse Protection Orders as required by section 27 of the Domestic Abuse and Civil Proceedings Act (Northern Ireland) 2021.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Justice regarding victims of domestic abuse being unable to access non-molestation orders and to ask how the Department plans to address this.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the PSNI for further information on the estimated costs that the PSNI would likely incur as a result of implementing Domestic Abuse Protection Notices and Domestic Abuse Protection Orders, as outlined in the Department's paper.

## **9. Forward Work Programme**

The Committee noted an updated Committee forward work programme.

## **10. Correspondence**

- i. The Committee considered an invitation from the Minister of Justice to the Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson to attend the launch of the Executive Programme on Paramilitarism and Organised Crime's 'First Study on the prevalence of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) in Northern Ireland'.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that it was content for the Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson to attend.

- ii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Justice regarding the 2024-25 October Monitoring Round outcome.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to forward the correspondence to the Committee for Finance.

- iii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Justice requesting additional time to respond to the Committee's queries following its consideration of an open letter from the Mental Health Champion for Northern Ireland.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to the request for additional time.

- iv. The Committee noted a forwarded return from the Department of Justice to the Department of Finance detailing Budget 2025-26 equality impacts.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to forward the correspondence to the Committee for Finance.

- v. The Committee noted an Executive News Service release regarding the reappointment of Jacqui Durkin as Chief Inspector of Criminal Justice in Northern Ireland.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Chief Inspector to congratulate her on her reappointment.

- vi. The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Finance regarding the establishment of the Northern Ireland Banking and Financial Services Landscape inquiry.
- vii. The Committee noted the Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland report 'Transforming the Criminal Justice System in Northern Ireland — a Strategic Overview'.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to request oral evidence on the matter from Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland.

- viii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Director General of the Northern Ireland Prison Service regarding the recent inspections by Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland of Hydebank Wood and Women's Prison.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to visit Hydebank Wood College and to hold a Committee meeting there at a future date.

- ix. The Committee noted a response from the Northern Ireland Office regarding biometrics retention in the Justice Bill and the Independent Commission for Reconciliation and Information Recovery (Biometric Material) Regulations 2024.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to consider further when scrutinising the biometrics provisions in the Bill.

- x. The Committee noted an invitation from the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission to attend the launch of the Annual Human Rights Statement 2024.

- xi. The Committee noted correspondence from Hourglass requesting to meet the Chairperson to discuss recommendations for data collection for males over 65 years old with experiences of intimate partner violence.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to include the issue during the proposed informal meeting with Hourglass on the economics of abuse.

Jemma Dolan referred to a recent interaction that she had with Hourglass and encouraged the Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson to attend. The Deputy Chairperson advised that she would liaise with the Chairperson.

- xii. The Committee noted an invitation from the Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland to attend the conference Systems to Support our People — Embedding a Trauma Informed Approach.

The Committee noted the following:

- xiii. correspondence from the Department of Justice advising that it has commissioned a review of the State Pathologist's Department, which included the associated terms of reference;
- xiv. the Department of Justice report 'Report of the Appointed Person for Northern Ireland under sections 195I, 291, and 303F of the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 and under article 103H of the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 (External Requests and Orders) Order 2005 for the period 01.04.23 until 31.03.24';
- xv. correspondence from the Department of Justice providing further information on the commencement of section 28(1) and section 28(3) of the Investigatory Powers (Amendment) Act 2024;
- xvi. a notification from the Department of Justice about the publication of the statistics bulletin 'Youth Engagement Statistics in Northern Ireland 2023-24';
- xvii. correspondence from the Department of Justice providing an update on public sector transformation bids being considered at stage 2 of the process;



- xviii. correspondence from the Department of Justice informing of the laying before the Assembly of the report 'Security Industry Authority Annual Report & Accounts 2023-24';
- xix. a response from the Department of Justice regarding a letter sent by the Committee about late papers;
- xx. a news release from the Department of Justice regarding the Department of Health, and Department of Justice's Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy Small Grant Scheme;
- xxi. a news release from the Department of Justice regarding the statement from the Minister of Justice on the Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland report 'Transforming the Criminal Justice System';
- xxii. a news release from the Department of Justice regarding a consultation on proposals for a Victims and Witnesses of Crime Bill;
- xxiii. correspondence from the Department of Justice notifying that the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service has published two quarterly bulletins: 'Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service Provisional Figures – July to September 2024'; and 'Mortgages: Actions for possession bulletin – July to September 2024';
- xxiv. correspondence from the Department of Justice regarding the 'Consultation on Proposals for Inclusion in a Victims and Witnesses of Crime Bill';
- xxv. correspondence from the Committee for Finance providing a forwarded response from the Department of Finance regarding the timeliness of departmental responses to its summer 2024 information-gathering exercise to inform the 2025-26 Budget;
- xxvi. a response from the Committee for Finance to a letter from the Committee for Justice regarding amendments to the NICS Handbook sickness absence policy;

- xxvii. correspondence from the Committee for Finance providing a forwarded response from the Department of Finance regarding proposals under consideration by the Interim Public Sector Transformation Board;
- xxviii. forwarded correspondence from the Committee for The Executive Office to the Public Prosecution Service regarding historical institutional abuse prosecutions;
- xxix. forwarded correspondence from the Committee for The Executive Office to the Police Service of Northern Ireland regarding historical institutional abuse prosecutions;
- xxx. correspondence from Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland providing a corrected report on an inspection of Hydebank Wood Women's Prison due to an incorrect date;
- xxxi. correspondence from the Police Service of Northern Ireland highlighting how it is working to keep communities safe;
- xxxii. correspondence from the Commissioner Designate for Victims of Crime Northern Ireland providing further information on other Commissioners with the ability to operate on a wide scope beyond the criminal justice system;
- xxxiii. a press release from the Prisoner Ombudsman regarding a Death in Custody Report;
- xxxiv. a report from Investing Strategy Northern Ireland detailing Department of Justice investing activity;
- xxxv. correspondence regarding the Women's Parliament meeting, which is scheduled for Friday 28 February 2025; and
- xxxvi. the Research and Information Service briefing paper 'Chancellor's Autumn Budget 2024: initial considerations for Northern Ireland'.

## **11. Chairperson's Business**

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Justice to request a progress update on the implementation of the Housing First model, with particular reference to collaboration between the Department of Justice, the Department of Health and the Department for Communities.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Justice to ask for information on the difficulties around people being released from prison because they are unable to secure an appropriate bail address, with particular reference to statistics on this issue and any ongoing collaborative work with the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and the Housing Associations.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Minister for Communities, the Lady Chief Justice, the Chair of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, the Director General of the Northern Ireland Prison Service, Peter Toogood from the Department of Health, and the Probation Board for Northern Ireland to advise of the work of Inverary House and to encourage them to visit it.

## **12. Any other Business**

Justin McNulty commended the Committee Clerk and her team for their work on post-legislative scrutiny.

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

Members were advised that the next meeting will take place on Thursday 12 December 2024 at 2.00pm in Room 30, Parliament Buildings.

*The Meeting was adjourned at 4.47pm.*

Joanne Bunting MLA

Chairperson, Committee for Justice