



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

## Committee for Justice

### Minutes of Proceedings

**Thursday 20 March 2025**

**Room 30, Parliament Buildings, Belfast**

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

Maurice Bradley MLA

Stephen Dunne MLA

Connie Egan MLA

Ciara Ferguson MLA

**Present by Video or Teleconference:**

Deirdre Hargey MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

Danny Baker MLA

Doug Beattie MLA

Justin McNulty MLA

**In Attendance:** Kathy O'Hanlon (Assembly Clerk)

Thomas McKillop (Senior Assistant Assembly Clerk)

Jonny Redpath (Assistant Assembly Clerk)

Stephen Corr (Clerical Supervisor)

Aaron Pakenham (Clerical Officer)

**Agreed:** That the meeting should begin in closed session for a briefing from  
Assembly Legal Services on the Biometrics provisions in the Justice Bill.

*The meeting commenced at 2.08pm in closed session.*

## **1. Apologies**

There were no apologies.

## **2. Justice Bill — Part 1: Biometric Data: Retention etc. — Legal Services oral briefing**

Simon Kelly, a Legal Adviser with Assembly's Legal Services Office, joined the meeting at 2.09pm.

The official provided an analysis of human rights issues in Part 1 of the Justice Bill — "Biometric Data: Retention etc."

*Justin McNulty joined the meeting at 2.10pm.*

*Deirdre Hargey joined the meeting at 2.16pm.*

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

*Stephen Dunne joined the meeting at 2.35pm.*

The official agreed to provide information on the following:

- the key principles of the Marper and Gaughran cases;
- circumstances in which penalty notices may be given; and
- retention periods after death.

The Chairperson thanked the official and he left the meeting at 2.58pm.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to request formal legal advice from Assembly Legal Services in relation to photographs and biometric data.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to ask the Department of Justice for information in relation to DNA and fingerprints.

The Committee noted that the Committee Clerk will liaise with the PSNI about future evidence sessions on the Justice Bill.

*The meeting moved into public session at 3.07pm.*

**Agreed:** That the oral evidence session with the Department of Justice on the proposed Legislative Consent Memorandum for the Crime and Policing Bill would be recorded by Hansard.

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

*Danny Baker declared an interest in relation to an immediate family member who works for the Probation Board for Northern Ireland.*

*The Chairperson noted that a number of Committee Members are members of the All Party Group on Access to Justice.*

### **3. Draft Minutes**

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 13 March 2025.

### **4. Matters Arising**

There were no Matters Arising.

## **5. Crime and Policing Bill — Legislative Consent Memorandum (LCM) — Department of Justice oral evidence**

The following witnesses from the Department of Justice joined the meeting at 3.09pm:

- Debbie Corry, Acting Head of Organised Crime Branch;
- Lorraine Ferguson-Coote, Head of Criminal Policy Unit;
- Therese Murphy, Head of Police Human Resources Policy and Policing Strategy; and
- Lesley McCombe, Head of Community Safety Partnership branch.

The witnesses provided oral evidence on a proposed Legislative Consent Memorandum for the Crime and Policing Bill.

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

During the evidence session, the witnesses agreed to provide:

- the Human Rights Memorandum from the Home Office;
- advice from the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission (NIHRC) in respect of any of the provisions in the Bill that are to be extended to Northern Ireland, including the advice on access to the driving licence database;
- details of international law enforcement information-sharing agreements and who has access to the relevant databases;
- clarification of why the provisions apply only to the GB driving licence database;
- information on the consideration of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child;
- information on any potential costs to the PSNI of implementing the proposed new measures;
- details of penalties or sentences to be applied to any new offences; and
- information on any forthcoming Regulations in relation to the LCM, including what procedure will be applied.

The evidence session was reported by Hansard.

The Chairperson thanked the witnesses and they left the meeting at 4.13pm.

**Agreed:** To ask the PSNI for information on its engagement with the Home Office regarding the scope of the legislation in relation to the banning of paramilitary flags and paraphernalia.

## **6. Justice Bill**

### **6.1 Department of Justice Written Paper**

The Committee considered a written paper from the Department of Justice advising that it is satisfied that the proposed departmental amendments to the Justice Bill would not be incompatible with the European Convention on Human Rights. The Department also advised that it has considered the legislative competence of the proposed amendments.

**Agreed:** To note the paper from the Department.

The Chairperson advised Members that, as previously agreed by the Committee, the papers will be published on the Committee's web page.

*Justin McNulty left the meeting at 4.16pm.*

### **6.2 Call for Evidence**

The Chairperson informed Members that the Call for Evidence on the Justice Bill and amendments was due to close on 21 March 2025 and that, to date, 10 submissions had been received via Citizen Space and two have been sent directly to the Committee. The Chairperson advised that some organisations had asked to provide their submissions after the closing date.

**Agreed:** To extend the Call for Evidence on Citizen Space until 4 April 2025.

### **6.3 Informal Event with Young People**

The Chairperson reminded Members that Committee staff have been liaising with Include Youth and Voice of Young People in Care (VOYPIC) regarding an informal event with young people and that the organisations have requested that the event is scheduled for after the exam period.

**Agreed:** For the event to be arranged for 3 July 2025.

The Chairperson advised Members that options regarding the round-table event with grassroots organisations will be provided at next week's meeting.

*Justin McNulty returned to the meeting at 4.18pm.*

## **7. SR 2025/35 The Police Trainee (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2025**

The Committee considered a Statutory Rule to lapse the Police Trainee (Amendment) (Coronavirus) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020.

**Agreed:** The Committee for Justice considered SR 2025 No. 35 — the Police Trainee (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2025 and had no objection to the Rule.

## **8. Correspondence**

- A response from the Department of Justice regarding a complaint from two individuals about the handling of domestic abuse cases within the judicial system.

**Agreed:** To forward the Department's response to the individuals concerned.

- A response from the Department of Justice regarding the review of the Northern Ireland Search and Rescue Practitioners' Group.

**Agreed:** To ask the Department of Justice for further information on remuneration and the timeline for the review and to request that the Committee be kept up to date on the review.

The Committee noted the following items of correspondence:

- Correspondence from the Department of Justice regarding equality screening for the 2025-26 draft budget.
- An update from the Department of Justice advising that a cash advance from the NI Consolidated Fund is no longer required.
- Correspondence from the Committee for Finance providing a commissioning note from the Department of Finance seeking further information in order to inform the final 2025-26 Budget; and the response from the Department of Justice to the Department for Finance to that request for further information.
- A response from the Department of Justice to the Committee's request for further information regarding the proposed Statutory Instrument for the Private International Law (Implementation of Agreements) Act 2020.
- A copy of the response from the Department of Justice to the Committee for Education regarding the delay in AccessNI checks for non-teaching staff in schools.
- An update from the Public Accounts Committee outlining the reports that it retains primacy over.
- A report from the Northern Ireland Fiscal Council on the Northern Ireland Executive's 2025-26 draft budget.
- Correspondence from two individuals regarding a historical court case.

## **9. Forward Work Programme**

The Committee considered a proposed Department of Justice forward work programme for April.

**Agreed:** To reschedule the proposed written briefing on the outcome of the consultation and draft legislative proposals for a victims and witnesses of crime Bill for a future date.

**Agreed:** To schedule the other proposed items of business from the Department in the Committee's forward work programme.

The Committee considered an updated forward work programme.

**Agreed:** To proceed with the sessions in the updated forward work programme, subject to the changes as agreed at today's meeting.

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

The Chairperson informed Members that the Minister of Justice wrote to her and the Deputy Chairperson regarding options to make legislative provision for a deepfake offence in Northern Ireland and has invited them to a meeting to discuss this further.

Committee Members outlined a number of issues that they would like the Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson to raise during the informal meeting with the Minister.

#### **11. Any other Business**

There was no other Business.

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

Members were advised that the next meeting will take place on 27 March 2025 at 2.00pm in Room 30, Parliament Buildings.

*The Meeting was adjourned at 4.29pm.*

**Joanne Bunting MLA**

**Chairperson, Committee for Justice**