



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Justice

Minutes of Proceedings

THURSDAY 21 November 2024

Room 30, Parliament Buildings, Belfast

Present:

Joanne Bunting MLA (Chairperson)

Deirdre Hargey MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

Doug Beattie MLA

Stephen Dunne MLA

Connie Egan MLA

Ciara Ferguson MLA

Present by Video or Teleconference:

Maurice Bradley MLA

Sinéad Ennis MLA

Justin McNulty 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 to consider Committee Business.

The meeting commenced at 2.02pm in closed session.

1. Apologies

There were no apologies.

2. Committee Business

Dr Frank Geddis, Clerk Assistant, joined the meeting at 2.02pm.

The official briefed the Committee on a draft response to correspondence from an individual that the Committee considered at its meeting on 10 October 2024 regarding the Northern Ireland Troubles (Legacy and Reconciliation) Act 2023 and a number of other matters.

Sinéad Ennis joined the meeting at 2.04pm.

Stephen Dunne joined the meeting at 2.08pm.

There followed a question-and-answer session.

Sinéad Ennis left the meeting at 2.17pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed for the draft letter to be issued, subject to a suggested addition, some reordering of aspects of the draft and final clearance by the Chairperson.

Agreed: The Committee agreed for the original correspondence to be forwarded to the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee and the Committee for The

Executive Office — subject to the agreement of the individual who sent it — and to provide contact details for both Committees and the Northern Ireland Office to give the individual the option of making direct contact.

Sinéad Ennis rejoined the meeting at 2.20pm.

The Chairperson thanked the official and he left the meeting.

The meeting moved into public session at 2.28pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the oral evidence session with the Commissioner Designate for Victims of Crime and the oral evidence session with the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission 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.

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 14 November 2024.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the concurrent meeting of the Committee for Justice and the Committee for Health held on Thursday 7 November 2024.

4. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

5. Justice Bill and the 2024 Victim Survey – Commissioner Designate for Victims of Crime

Geraldine Hanna, the Commissioner Designate for Victims of Crime; and Aongus O’Keeffe, Policy and Research Officer, joined the meeting at 2.31pm.

The witnesses briefed the Committee on the Justice Bill and the 2024 Victim Survey.

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

The oral evidence session was reported by Hansard.

Sinéad Ennis left the meeting at 3.03pm.

The Chairperson thanked the witnesses and they left the meeting.

6. Justice Bill – Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission

Alyson Kilpatrick, the Chief Commissioner; Dr Colin Caughey, Director of Policy; Dr Hannah Russell, Senior Policy and Research Officer; and Dr Ivanka Antova, Policy and Research Officer, joined the meeting at 3.55pm.

The witnesses briefed the Committee on the Justice Bill.

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

The oral evidence session was reported by Hansard.

The Chairperson thanked the witnesses and they left the meeting.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to commission legal advice from the Assembly’s Legal Services Office on each Part of the Justice Bill.

Agreed: The Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission agreed to provide information on how it believes that the stigmatisation of children who have their biometric data recorded can be avoided, in reference to Part 1 of the Justice Bill.

7. The Arbitration Bill — Legislative Consent Memorandum — Draft Committee Report

The Committee considered a draft report on the Legislative Consent Memorandum for the provisions in the Arbitration Bill to be extended to Northern Ireland.

Title Page, Contents Page and Committee Membership and Powers Page

The Committee considered the Title Page, Contents Page and Committee Membership and Powers Page as drafted.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content with the Title Page, Contents Page and Committee Membership and Powers Page.

Background

The Committee considered the Background section of the report (paragraphs 1 to 9) as drafted.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content with the Background section of the report.

Purpose of the Legislative Consent Memorandum

The Committee considered the Purpose of the Legislative Consent Memorandum section of the report (paragraphs 10 to 12) as drafted.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content with the Purpose of the Legislative Consent Memorandum section of the report.

Committee Consideration of the Legislative Consent Memorandum

The Committee considered the Committee Consideration of the Legislative Consent Memorandum section of the report (paragraphs 13 to 25) as drafted.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content with the Committee Consideration of the Legislative Consent Memorandum section of the report.

Conclusion

The Committee considered the Conclusion section of the report (paragraph 26) as drafted.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content with the Conclusion section of the report.

Appendices

The Committee considered the Appendices section of the report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content that the Appendices be included in the report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content for the minutes of this meeting (21 November 2024) to be added to Appendix 3 when agreed.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content for the Report on the Arbitration Bill Legislative Consent Memorandum to be published and issued to all MLAs.

The Chairperson advised Members that they will be notified when a date for the debate on the Legislative Consent Motion has been scheduled.

8. SL1 - The Police Trainee (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2024

The Committee considered a proposal for a Statutory Rule under powers conferred by section 36 and section 41 of the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 2000 to lapse the Police Trainee (Amendment) (Coronavirus) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020, which enabled the Chief Constable to early attest trainee police officers as a response to the ongoing coronavirus pandemic at the time.

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

Maurice Bradley left the meeting at 5.07pm.

9. Forward Work Programme

The Committee agreed the content of the updated Committee forward work programme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that its first meeting after Christmas recess would be on 16 January 2025, with the caveat that an earlier meeting can be scheduled if there is an urgent need to do so.

10. Correspondence

- i. The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Justice requesting additional time to respond to correspondence from the Committee regarding the PSNI injury-on-duty scheme and the Northern Ireland Policing Board.

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

- ii. The Committee noted correspondence from Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland regarding the laying before the Assembly of the reports: 'A report of an unannounced inspection of Hydebank Wood Secure College'; and 'A report of an unannounced inspection of Hydebank Wood Women's Prison'.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Justice to ask why a number of recommendations made in the previous full reports have not been achieved or fully achieved.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Director General of the Northern Ireland Prison Service, Beverley Wall; the Director of Prisons, David Kennedy; and the Governor of Hydebank Wood College and Women's Prison, Richard Taylor, to congratulate them on their work, as was reflected in the positive report by Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland.

- iii. The Committee noted correspondence from Hourglass regarding Safer Ageing Week and the research paper 'The Economics of Abuse 2024'.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to consider an informal meeting with Hourglass, the Committee for Justice, the Committee for Health and the Committee for the Economy.

- iv. The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Justice regarding the announcement of a Budget plan by the Minister of Justice.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to delay writing a letter to the Department regarding Legal Aid payments while it considers correspondence from the Department on the October Monitoring Round.

Justin McNulty left the meeting at 5.17pm.

- v. The Committee noted correspondence from the Mental Health Champion for Northern Ireland regarding the PSNI's *Right Care, Right Person* model.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Justice to ask a number of queries about the roll-out of similar programmes in other jurisdictions and what lessons could be learned; for information about the funding of the programme; and for information about ongoing collaboration with the Department of Health.

The Committee noted the following:

- vi. correspondence from the Prisoner Ombudsman for Northern Ireland, which contained a report into a death in custody.

The Chairperson advised Committee Members that the report was embargoed until Monday 25 November 2024.

- vii. correspondence from the Department of Justice regarding the laying before the Assembly of the Report of the Appointed Person for Northern Ireland under sections 195I, 291 and 303F of the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 and Article 103H of the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 (External Requests and Orders) Order 2005;
- viii. correspondence from the Department of Justice regarding the extension of the consultation period on proposals for inclusion in a Victims and Witnesses Bill;
- ix. correspondence from the Committee for Infrastructure to the Department of Justice requesting clarification of the reasons for a switch from Resource to Capital DEL for the Department of Justice in respect of the Northern Ireland Road Safety Partnership; and

- x. a consultation response from the Northern Ireland Youth Assembly on the draft Programme for Government 2024-27.

11. Chairperson's Business

The Committee noted a note of the meeting that the Chairperson had with the Northern Ireland Policing Board on 12 November 2024.

The Committee noted a note of the meeting that the Chairperson had with a delegation from the Supreme Court of the United Kingdom on 13 November 2024.

The Chairperson advised Members that the First Legislative Counsel from the Office of Legislative Counsel has indicated that he is happy to meet informally with the Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson and any Committee Members to discuss the Committee's request for a Keeling schedule in relation to the Justice Bill and the handling of the Bill more generally.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that there was no need for the meeting.

The Chairperson provided an update of a meeting that she and the Deputy Chairperson had with Jacqui Durkin, the Chief Inspector of Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland.

The Chairperson reminded Committee Members about the Northern Ireland Human Rights Statement Launch 2024, which is to take place on Monday 9 December 2024 in the Long Gallery, Parliament Buildings, and advised that they should register directly should they wish to attend.

12. Any other Business

There was no other business.

13. Date, Time and Place of Next Meeting

Members were advised that the next meeting will take place on 5 December 2024 at 2.00pm in Room 30, Parliament Buildings.

The Chairperson reminded Committee Members about the visit to Inverary House on Thursday 28 November 2024 and encouraged them to attend.

The Meeting was adjourned at 5.24pm.

Joanne Bunting MLA

Chairperson, Committee for Justice