



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Justice

Minutes of Proceedings

Thursday 11 June 2026

Room 30, Parliament Buildings, Belfast

Present: Paul Frew MLA (Chairperson)

Doug Beattie MLA

Connie Egan MLA

Ciara Ferguson MLA

Brian Kingston MLA

Patsy McGlone MLA

Present by Video or Teleconference:

Emma Sheerin MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

Aoife Finnegan MLA

Maurice Bradley MLA

In Attendance: Kathy O'Hanlon (Assembly Clerk)

Thomas McKillop (Senior Assistant Assembly Clerk)

Gareth Black (Assistant Assembly Clerk)

Paula Morrow (Clerical Supervisor)

Aaron Pakenham (Clerical Officer)

The meeting commenced at 2.11pm in public session.

Agreed: That the oral evidence session with the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission (NIHRC) on the Criminal Justice (Sentencing etc) Bill will be recorded by Hansard.

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

On behalf of the Committee, the Chairperson expressed condemnation of recent incidents of violence and anti-social behaviour. The Chairperson endorsed the Northern Ireland Executive's statement of 10 June 2026 appealing for calm across society, and acknowledged the recent statement made by the Ogilvie family. The Chairperson put on record the Committee's thanks to the emergency services for their efforts in responding to these incidents of public disorder, and extended the best wishes of the Committee to anyone impacted by these incidents.

1. Apologies

There were no apologies.

2. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 4 June 2026.

3. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

4. Criminal Justice (Sentencing etc) Bill – Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission oral evidence

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 2.15pm:

Alyson Kilpatrick, Chief Commissioner, NIHRC

Dr Claire McCann, Senior Policy Researcher, NIHRC

Emma Osborne, Policy and Research Officer, NIHRC

The witnesses provided oral evidence on the Criminal Justice (Sentencing etc) Bill.

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

During the evidence session, the witnesses agreed to provide the Committee with follow-up information on:

- Aggravator models in other jurisdictions that capture multiple and intersectional forms of hostility.
- The NIHRC response to the public consultation on Charlotte's Law.

The evidence session was recorded by Hansard.

The Chairperson thanked the witnesses and they left the meeting at 3.32pm.

5. Criminal Justice (Sentencing etc) Bill – Written papers

5.1 – Belfast City Council – Response to Call for Evidence

The Committee noted a response to its Call for Evidence on the Sentencing Bill from Belfast City Council.

5.2 – WRDA and Rainbow Project correspondence

The Committee noted joint correspondence from the Women’s Resource and Development Agency (WRDA) and the Rainbow Project requesting an opportunity to provide joint oral evidence to the Committee on the Sentencing Bill, with a specific focus on ‘Aggravation by hostility’.

5.3 – Consideration of oral evidence for the Sentencing Bill

The Committee considered what other organisations or individuals it wishes to hear oral evidence from, to assist scrutiny of the Criminal Justice (Sentencing etc) Bill.

Agreed: To seek the views of the organisations listed in the table prepared by the Committee team on providing oral evidence to the Committee.

Agreed: To write to the Women’s Rights Network NI, the NI Indian Nurses Forum, WAVE Trauma Centre, the NI Council for Racial Equality, and the NI Council for Ethnic Minorities to invite them, in the first instance, to provide a written submission on the Sentencing Bill.

Agreed: That Members will forward to the Committee Clerk, in advance of next week’s Committee meeting, the names of any further individuals or organisations they would like to be considered for providing oral evidence on the Bill.

Agreed: To seek an update from the Department of Justice on any work conducted or consideration given to

those matters not in the Sentencing Bill that have been raised in the written submissions.

Agreed: To forward the submission from the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People to the Department of Justice for response to the points raised in the submission. .

6. SL1 Special Educational Needs and Disability Tribunal (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026

The Committee considered a proposal from the Department of Justice to make a Statutory Rule under powers conferred by the Education (Northern Ireland) Order 1996 and the Special Educational Needs and Disability (Northern Ireland) Order 2005. The Rule will introduce new processes for mediation in disputes and new rights of appeal to the Special Educational Needs and Disability Tribunal.

The Rule will be subject to the negative resolution procedure.

The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Education stating that it was content with the Rule. The Committee also noted that, in its response, the Committee for Education advised that their consideration of Special Educational Needs and Disability regulations is ongoing and final position on the Department of Education's regulations, and subsequently the regulations proposed by the Department of Justice, has not yet been reached.

Agreed: To postpone determination of its position on the SL1 until the Committee for Education has reached its decision on the related regulations; and to inform the Department of this position.

Agreed: To ask the Committee for Education to provide the Committee with an update once it has reached its final decision on the related regulations.

7. Strategic approach to Safer Communities/Organised Crime – Organised Crime Task Force Strategic Plan 2026-27

The Committee noted a paper from the Department of Justice providing an update on work to develop a strategic plan to tackle organised crime in Northern Ireland, which included an Action Plan for the Organised Crime Task Force setting out its programme of activity for the coming year.

8. Correspondence

The Committee considered the following items of correspondence:

- A Follow-Up Review by the Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland (CJINI) on the implementation of recommendations in its 2023 Review of Probation Approved Premises in Northern Ireland.

Agreed: To ask the Department of Justice, the Probation Board, the PSNI, and the NI Housing Executive for their comments and views on the Follow-Up Review's assessment of progress against the 2023 report's recommendations.

- Copied correspondence from the Health Committee to the Justice Minister requesting an update on the status of work relating to the Right Care, Right Person model.

Agreed: To request a copy of the Minister's response to the Health Committee, when available.

- Copied correspondence from the Health Committee to the Justice Minister in relation to the commencement of Section 1 of the Mental Capacity Act (NI) 2016.

Agreed: To request a copy of the Minister's response to the Health Committee, when available.

- Copied correspondence from the Committee for Communities to Department of Justice providing a copy of a briefing paper from Housing Rights to Support Homeless Prevention in Northern Ireland and requesting information on any work by the Department relating to homelessness prevention.

Agreed: To request a copy of the Department's response, when available.

- A response from the Department for Communities to questions of future funding for the Prisoner Support Project.

Agreed: To forward a copy of the Department for Communities' response to Extern for information.

- Further correspondence from Neurology Justice Collective raising concerns in relation to Neurology Recall, access to justice and patient safety.

Agreed: To forward a copy of the correspondence to the Committee for Health for information.

- A submission from an individual setting out a proposal for reform of the Industrial Tribunals (Northern Ireland) Rules of Procedure.

Agreed: To forward the submission to the Committee for the Economy for information, in view of the Department for the Economy's policy responsibility for industrial tribunals.

- Correspondence from an individual to the Private Office of the Justice Minister in relation to ongoing concerns with the Department’s review of Pre-Release Testing.

Agreed: To request a copy of the Minister’s response to the individual, when available.

The Committee noted the following items of correspondence:

- Department of Justice - Response providing the breakdown of figures relating to child exploitation and referrals to the National Referral Mechanism (NRM).
- Department of Justice - Response regarding prosecution for school non-attendance.
- NI Policing Board and PSNI - Foundations and Future: Policing 2026 and Beyond - 25 Year Anniversary Event – Save the date.
- Committee for Finance - HM Treasury Open Book Review of Northern Ireland Executive Budget.
- An individual - Response to Committee correspondence regarding the outcome of a claim to the Victims’ Payments Board.
- Chair of the Northern Ireland Scrutiny Committee - Copy correspondence to Sarah Jones MP, Minister for Policing and Crime, regarding Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on monitoring and controlling drug precursors and repealing Regulations (EC) No 273/2004 and (EC) No 111/2005.
- An individual - Fol request for information relating to SR 147/2024; Request for oral session with officials; The PSNI and PSNI Reserve (Injury Benefit) (Amendment) (No.2) Regulations 2024.
- An individual - publishing of written submission.

9. Forward Work Programme

9.1 Committee's Draft Forward Work Programme

The Committee noted the latest draft of the Committee's forward work programme.

Members noted that the Minister of Justice is seeking to introduce the Victims and Witnesses of Crime Bill on 22 June 2026. The Committee will receive oral evidence from Departmental officials on 25 June in advance of the Second Stage debate, and plans for the Committee's Call for Evidence on this Bill will be considered by the Committee on 2 July.

Agreed: To ask the Assembly Research and Information Service to prepare a list of key stakeholders or expert witnesses that the Committee may wish to seek oral or written evidence from to assist its consideration of the Bill.

Members noted that it will be necessary to schedule additional meetings in September and October, most likely on Tuesday mornings, to facilitate the evidence sessions on the Sentencing Bill.

10. Chairperson's Business

There was no Chairperson's business.

11. Any Other Business

There was no other business.

12. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting

Members were advised that the next meeting will take place on Thursday 18 June at 2.00pm in Room 30, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 4.05pm.

Emma Sheerin MLA

Deputy Chairperson, Committee for Justice

18 June 2026