



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

## Committee for Justice

### Minutes of Proceedings

**Thursday 12 March 2026**

**Room 30, Parliament Buildings, Belfast**

**Present:**

Paul Frew MLA (Chairperson)

Emma Sheerin MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

Doug Beattie MLA

Maurice Bradley MLA

Connie Egan MLA

Ciara Ferguson MLA

Aoife Finnegan MLA

Brian Kingston MLA

**Apologies:**

Patsy McGlone MLA

**In Attendance:**

Kathy O'Hanlon (Assembly Clerk)

Thomas McKillop (Senior Assistant Assembly Clerk)

Aaron Pakenham (Clerical Officer)

**In attendance by video or teleconference:**

Gareth Black (Assistant Assembly Clerk)

Joshua Devlin (Clerical Supervisor)

The meeting commenced at 2.01pm in public session.

**Agreed:** That the oral evidence session with the Chief Constable and Sir Iain Livingstone on Operation Kenova and Operation Denton will be recorded by Hansard.

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

*Brian Kingston declared that he is related to the late RUC Constable Paul Hamilton, whose murder was investigated in Operation Turma and is contained in the Kenova Final Report.*

## **1. Apologies**

As above.

## **2. Draft Minutes**

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 5 March 2026.

## **3. Matters Arising**

### **3.1 Department of Justice: Crime and Policing Bill: Third Legislative Consent Memorandum**

The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Justice which advised that Executive agreement has been secured to bring forward a third

Legislative Consent Motion for the Crime and Policing Bill in respect of the age verification requirements for online sale and delivery of knives and crossbows. Members noted that the Legislative Consent Memorandum had been laid under Standing Order 42A (9), and that the debate on the LCM had been scheduled on the Order Paper for 16 March 2026.

#### **4. Operation Kenova and Operation Denton – PSNI Chief Constable and Sir Iain Livingstone oral evidence**

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 2.05pm:

John Boucher – Chief Constable, PSNI; and  
Sir Iain Livingstone – Officer in Overall Command, Operation Kenova

The witnesses provided oral evidence on Operation Kenova and Operation Denton.

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

*Aoife Finnegan left the meeting at 3.25pm.*

The evidence session was recorded by Hansard.

The Chairperson thanked the witnesses and they left the meeting at 3.39pm.

#### **5. SR 2026/34 The Judgment Enforcement Fees (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2026**

The Committee noted Statutory Rule 2026/34 The Judgment Enforcement Fees (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2026, which will amend the Judgment Enforcement Fees Order (Northern Ireland) 1996 to implement inflationary increases to existing fees for the delivery of business in the Enforcement of Judgments Office.

The Rule is not subject to any Assembly procedure and is due to come into operation on 1 April 2026.

**6. SR 2026/35 The Court of Judicature (Non-Contentious Probate) Fees (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2026**

The Committee noted Statutory Rule 2026/35 The Court of Judicature (Non-Contentious Probate) Fees (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2026, which will amend the Court of Judicature (Non-Contentious Probate) Fees Order (Northern Ireland) 1996, to make inflationary increases to existing fees for the delivery of non-contentious probate proceedings in the Court of Judicature.

The Rule is not subject to any procedure and is due to come into operation on 1 April 2026.

*The Committee considered Agenda item 8 next.*

**7. SR 2026/37 The Magistrates' Courts Fees (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2026**

The Committee noted Statutory Rule 2026/37 The Magistrates' Courts Fees (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2026, which will amend the Magistrates' Courts Fees Order (Northern Ireland) 1996 to implement inflationary increases to existing fees charged for the delivery of civil and family proceedings in the Magistrates' Courts and prescribe new fees.

The Rule is not subject to any procedure and is due to come into operation on 1 April 2026.

**8. SR 2026/36 The County Court Fees (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2026**

The Committee noted Statutory Rule 2026/36 The County Court Fees (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2026, which will amend the County Court Fees Order (Northern Ireland) 1996 to implement inflationary increases to existing fees for the delivery of civil and family proceedings in the county court, as well as prescribing new fees in the Small Claims Court.

The Rule is not subject to any procedure and is due to come into operation on 1 April 2026.

**9. SR 2026/38 The Family Proceedings Fees (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2026**

The Committee noted Statutory Rule 2026/38 The Family Proceedings Fees (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2026 made under powers conferred by section 116(1) of the Judicature (Northern Ireland) Act 1978, which will amend the Family Proceedings Fees Order (Northern Ireland) 1996 to implement inflationary increases for the delivery of business in respect of family proceedings, as well as prescribe a new fee for an ex-parte application to a judge in matrimonial proceedings for an injunction.

The Rule is not subject to any procedure and is due to come into operation on 1 April 2026.

**10. SR 2026/39 The Court of Judicature Fees (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2026**

The Committee noted Statutory Rule 2026/39 The Court of Judicature Fees (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2026, which will amend the Court of Judicature Fees Order (Northern Ireland) 1996 to provide for inflationary increases to the majority of existing fees for the delivery of civil and family proceedings in the Court of Judicature.

The Rule is not subject to any procedure and is due to come into operation on 1 April 2026.

*Aoife Finnegan returned to the meeting at 3.44pm.*

## **11. Criminal Justice (Sentencing etc) Bill – Correspondence**

### **11.1 An individual – Proposed Victims’ Rights and Sentencing Amendments**

The Committee noted correspondence from an individual, following their engagement with the Victims Commissioner Designate, which asks the Committee to consider a number of amendments to the Criminal Justice (Sentencing etc) Bill, as part of its scrutiny of the legislation.

### **11.2 Men’s Alliance NI – Request to meet committee**

The Committee noted a request from the Chair of Men’s Alliance Northern Ireland to meet with the Committee to discuss issues that male victims of domestic abuse face, as well as their concerns on sentencing for female perpetrators of domestic abuse. The correspondence also requests that the organisation be advised of any calls to evidence in the area of domestic abuse, especially of males.

**Agreed:** To respond to Men’s Alliance NI and advise that the Committee would welcome a formal response to its Call for Evidence on the Criminal Justice (Sentencing etc) Bill when it launches.

### **11.3 Marie Collins Foundation – Request to provide evidence on the Criminal Justice (Sentencing etc) Bill**

The Committee noted correspondence from the Marie Collins Foundation requesting to be included on the email list for the Call for Evidence on the Criminal Justice (Sentencing etc) Bill.

**Agreed:** To add the Marie Collins Foundation to the Committee’s list of stakeholders who will be directly notified of the Committee’s Call for Evidence on the Bill and invited to submit a response.

## **12. Victims and Witnesses of Crime Bill - Pre-legislative scrutiny – Correspondence**

### **12.1 Department of Justice response – Caoimhe’s Law Amendment**

The Committee considered a response from the Department of Justice in relation to the potential inclusion of ‘Caoimhe’s Law’ in the forthcoming Victims and Witnesses of Crime Bill by way of Committee amendment. The response advised that, to date, the Department has not conducted any detailed policy work on this issue and provided an outline of the detailed work that would need to be undertaken to bring forward an amendment to the forthcoming Bill.

The Department reiterated that the Justice Minister’s view remains that the Department does not have the capacity to progress this work, but she remains supportive of the Justice Committee bringing forward an amendment.

**Agreed:** To write to the Department to reiterate that there is consensus among Members in terms of support for Caoimhe’s Law, however, the Committee does not have the resources to conduct the necessary detailed policy and consultation work as set out in the Department’s letter to develop such an amendment robustly; and that it is the Committee’s view that the Department is significantly better

placed to deliver this amendment, and the Committee stands ready to assist the Department in this work.

**Agreed:** To forward the Department’s correspondence to the Committee for Infrastructure for information.

### **13. Department of Justice Five-year Equality Action Plan and Disability Action – Consultation on draft - Department of Justice written paper**

The Committee noted a paper from the Department of Justice providing the Department’s draft Equality and Disability Action Plans, as well as an Audit of Inequalities 2025-2030 recently coordinated by the Department’s Equality Officer. The paper advised that a public consultation is being launched on both draft Action Plans.

### **14. Domestic Abuse in Private Family Law Proceedings – RaISe written paper**

#### **14.1 RaISe written paper – Rapid Literature Review: Domestic Abuse in Private Family Law Proceedings**

The Committee noted an Assembly Research and Information Service (RaISe) Literature Review into aspects of domestic abuse in Private Family Law Proceedings.

**Agreed:** To forward the RaISe paper to the Minister of Justice, the Minister of Health and the Minister of Finance to seek their response to the key issues raised in the research.

**Agreed:** To schedule an oral briefing on the paper with the Research Officer who prepared the paper.

**Agreed:** To invite the Commissioner Designate for Victims of Crime to provide oral evidence on the report “Totally Invisible” – the experiences of domestic

violence and abuse victims/survivors and children engaging with private law family court processes in Northern Ireland.’

## 15. Correspondence

The Committee considered the following items of correspondence:

- The Executive Office (TEO) – Response clarifying that changes to the processes and implementation of the Troubles Permanent Disablement Payment Scheme to address unintended consequences can only be made via Westminster.

**Agreed:** To write to the Secretary of State to outline the Committee’s concerns and ask what consideration has or will be given to amending the Regulations to deal with unintended consequences.

- Correspondence from the TEO Committee to ask for an update on any issues identified or discussed in relation to the Windsor Framework and wider EU matters.

**Agreed:** To respond to the TEO Committee providing an outline of the Committee’s consideration of the Windsor Framework in the context of the Justice Bill.

- Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland (CJINI) Report – Special Measures in Northern Ireland’s Criminal Courts: An inspection of their use and operation.

**Agreed:** To ask the Department of Justice, the PSNI and the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland for their response to the report’s findings and recommendations.

- Separate responses from the PSNI and the Northern Ireland Policing Board providing their views on relevant provisions within the Adult Protection Bill, currently being considered by the Committee for Health.

**Agreed:** To forward both the PSNI and Policing Board's responses to the Committee for Health to inform their scrutiny of the Bill.

- A forwarded letter to the Justice Minister from Pam Cameron MLA requesting that the Minister meets with the McCollum family to outline their experience and concerns in seeking justice for Ian McCollum.

**Agreed:** To seek clarification from the Justice Minister on where cases such as this sit within the justice system in view of the strike by the Criminal Bar Association (CBA), given that some cases are still progressing despite the CBA strike.

**Agreed:** To respond to the Member to advise that, although the Committee is sympathetic to the issues raised, it is unable to become involved in individual cases but has requested clarification from the Justice Minister on the position of such cases.

- Correspondence from Nina Briggs offering to provide a written or oral briefing on research and work to better understand and provide empirical data in relation to anti-immigration unrest and aspects of modern slavery and the sexual exploitation of ethnic minorities in Northern Ireland.

**Agreed:** To ask the individual to provide the Committee with written material in the first instance..

- Forwarded correspondence between an individual and the Office of the Police Ombudsman which relates to a report by the Police Ombudsman on investigation of the PSNI's response to dealing with vulnerable persons, commenced in March 2023 but which has still not been published.

**Agreed:** To ask the Police Ombudsman for an update on the status of the report and when publication can be expected.

- Correspondence from an individual seeking response to a number of questions regarding the Police Injury on Duty scheme and the Committee for Justice's oversight of its review.

**Agreed:** To ask the Department of Justice for a response to relevant questions included the correspondence.

The Committee noted the following items of correspondence:

- An invitation from the Northern Ireland Survivor Council to an Expert Insights event in the Long Gallery on Thursday 30 April.
- Committee for the Executive Office – Copy correspondence to the Department of Justice enquiring if a prevalence study has been, or could be established to access the gap between the needs and current provisions for the victims of historical institutional child abuse.
- Police Service of Northern Ireland – Response on CJINI Follow-Up Review of Child Sexual Exploitation in Northern Ireland.
- Dementia Northern Ireland – Copy correspondence to the Minister of Justice and the Minister of Health in relation to the Mental Capacity Act (NI) 2016- Lasting Power of Attorney.
- Northern Ireland Youth Assembly – February update.
- Further correspondence from an individual on their case.

## **16. Forward Work Programme**

### **16.1 Forward Work Programme**

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

## **17. Chairperson's Business**

There was no Chairperson's business.

## **18. Any Other Business**

There was no other business.

## **19. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting**

Members were advised that the next meeting will take place on Thursday 19 March at 2.00pm in Room 30, Parliament Buildings.

**Agreed:** That the meeting move into closed session to continue Committee deliberations on the Justice Bill, planned Departmental amendments, and potential Committee amendments.

*The meeting was suspended at 4.09pm.*

*The meeting resumed in closed session at 4.18pm with the following Members present:*

Paul Frew, Chairperson

Emma Sheerin, Deputy Chairperson

Doug Beattie

Maurice Bradley

Connie Egan

Aoife Finnegan

Brian Kingston

## **20. Justice Bill – Committee Deliberations**

*Ciara Ferguson returned to the meeting at 4.19pm.*

Liz Marsh, Assembly Clerk, Bill Office, attended the meeting to provide advice on various technical aspects of the Justice Bill, the planned Departmental amendments and the consideration of potential Committee amendments.

The Committee discussed a number of potential Committee amendments to the Justice Bill and planned Departmental amendments, and considered draft text of potential Committee amendments prepared by the Bill Clerk. Matters discussed included the commencement of Part 1 of the Bill; the review of the operation of the new Youth Custody and Supervision Orders (YCSO); the review of Live Links in custody and in courts and tribunals; and pre-accreditation checks of restorative justice providers.

The Committee also considered the proposed Department of Justice amendment on the Repeal of Vagrancy together with a draft amendment prepared by the Bill Clerk. Members were unanimous in their support for the repeal of the outdated vagrancy legislation, but could not reach a consensus on whether there was a need for replacement legislation.

Proposed: Connie Egan proposed that the Committee take forward an amendment to repeal the current vagrancy legislation but without any replacement legislation, as per the Department's proposed amendment.

The question was put that the Committee take forward an amendment to repeal the current vagrancy legislation but without any replacement legislation, as per the Department's proposed amendment.

The Committee divided: Ayes: 4; Noes: 4

Ayes: Emma Sheerin, Connie Egan, Ciara Ferguson, Aoife Finnegan.

Noes: Paul Frew, Doug Beattie, Maurice Bradley, Brian Kingson.

The motion fell.

Proposed: Brian Kingston proposed that the Committee take forward an amendment to repeal the current vagrancy legislation together with further amendments to create an offence for trespassing with intent to commit criminal and an offence for arranging or facilitating begging for gain.

The question was put that the Committee take forward an amendment to repeal the current vagrancy legislation together with further amendments to create an offence for trespassing with intent to commit criminal and an offence for arranging or facilitating begging for gain.

The Committee divided: Ayes: 4; Noes: 4

Ayes: Paul Frew, Doug Beattie, Maurice Bradley, Brian Kingson.

Noes: Emma Sheerin, Connie Egan, Ciara Ferguson, Aoife Finnegan.

The motion fell.

*Liz Marsh left the meeting at 5.51pm.*

*The meeting moved to public session at 5.51pm.*

### **Committee Deliberations**

The Chairperson put on record the actions arising from the Committee's deliberations on the Justice Bill and associated amendments, agreed during the discussions in closed session.

**Agreed:** To bring forward a Committee amendment at Clause 33, Page 43, Line 22 to commence the provisions in Part 1 of the Justice Bill within five years of Royal Assent.

**Agreed:** To accept the minor technical amendments to the text of the Committee's agreed amendment to make a regulation-making power to enable the Department of Justice provision for the retention and use of photographs, which will add a reference to 'the Justice Act (Northern Ireland) 2026' and change the period by which the regulations must be laid before the Assembly from '3 years' to '5 years'.

**Agreed:** That the Committee is content with the Department of Justice's rationale for 63Z1(5) on page 17 of the Bill and the nature and circumstances under which powers to remove content from a Biometrics Commissioner's report would be used.

**Agreed:** That the Committee is content with the Department's advice that the operation of the YCSOs will be captured in existing Youth Justice Agency workload statistic reports; and that the Committee therefore will not bring an amendment on this but will consider the annual statistics as part of its ongoing scrutiny role.

**Agreed:** To bring forward an amendment, as drafted by the Bill Clerk, to insert a new Clause 21(A) for the review of the use of Live Links provisions that are in the Bill as introduced.

**Agreed:** To ask the Department of Justice to clarify to where the statistical information on the use of live links in courts and tribunals can be accessed; and to ask the Bill Clerk to draft a Committee amendment – similar to that drafted by the Bill Clerk for the review of the Live Links provisions in the Bill – to review the operation of the provisions within

the planned Departmental amendment on live links in courts and tribunals for consideration by the Committee once the Departmental amendment has been tabled.

**Agreed:** To seek CJINI’s views on a potential Committee amendment to the Department’s Restorative Justice amendment, which has not yet been tabled, to include a provision for CJINI to carry out initial, pre-accreditation inspections of newly accredited restorative justice organisations prior to them becoming operational; to ask the Bill Clerk to prepare a draft Committee amendment to that effect for Members’s consideration; and to clarify with the Department what pre-accreditation governance checks will be undertaken.

**Agreed:** To inform the Department of Justice that the Committee will not table an amendment to repeal the vagrancy legislation.

*The meeting was adjourned at 5.53pm.*

**Paul Frew MLA**  
**Chairperson, Committee for Justice**  
**19 March 2026**