



Committee for Justice

Minutes of Proceedings

Thursday 15 January 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

Brian Kingston MLA

Patsy McGlone MLA

Present by Video or Teleconference:

Danny Baker MLA

In Attendance: Kathy O'Hanlon (Assembly Clerk)

Thomas McKillop (Senior Assistant Assembly Clerk)

Gareth Black (Assistant Assembly Clerk)

Aaron Pakenham (Clerical Officer)

The meeting commenced at 2.03pm in public session.

Agreed: That the oral evidence session with Police Service of Northern Ireland on the Justice Bill and proposed Departmental amendments will be recorded by Hansard.

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

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

1. Apologies

There were no apologies.

2. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 11 December 2025.

3. Matters Arising

3.1 An individual – Further correspondence regarding the Prisoner Release Victim Information Scheme

3.2 Department of Justice response – follow up to oral evidence session with the Permanent Secretary – pre-release testing

The Committee considered further correspondence from an individual regarding their engagement with the Minister of Justice and her Department on the Prisoner Release Victim Information Scheme and the legality of Pre-Release Testing of prisoners in advance of the expiry of their tariff expiry date.

Members also considered a response from the Department related to the same matter, which provided information on the regulations governing Pre-Release Testing, and presented the Department's view that there is no conflict or override between the relevant primary and secondary legislation.

Agreed: To request legal advice from Assembly Legal Services on the Department's position on the legislation governing Pre-Release Testing prior to tariff expiry dates.

4. Justice Bill – Police Service of Northern Ireland oral evidence

The following witnesses from the Police Service of Northern Ireland joined the meeting at 2.09pm:

Anthony McNally, Assistant Chief Constable;
Gary McDonald, Chief Superintendent; and
Gerry Doherty, Chief Inspector

Patsy McGlone joined the meeting at 2.10pm.

The witnesses provided oral evidence on the Justice Bill and planned Departmental amendments.

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

Danny Baker left the meeting at 3.06pm.

The evidence session was recorded by Hansard.

During the session, the witnesses agreed to provide the following:

- PSNI guidance in relation to female detainees;
- Further information on the types of offences that Community Resolution Notices can be used for;
- Information on the levels and nature of crimes committed by 10-14 year olds in Northern Ireland; whether the PSNI has identified any emerging trends in serious crime among this demographic;
- reoffending rates for 10-14 year olds; and
- Information on the number of children aged 10-14 who have engaged in criminality who have had adverse childhood experiences or been subject to child criminal exploitation, if available.

Patsy McGlone left the meeting at 4.08pm

The Chairperson thanked the witnesses and they left the meeting at 4.10pm.

Doug Beattie left the meeting at 4.10pm

Agreed: The Committee agreed to move into closed session at 4.11pm.

5. Justice Bill – Legal advice from the Examiner of Statutory Rules

Angela Kelly, the Examiner of Statutory Rules, joined the meeting at 4.11pm.

The Examiner provided Members with a briefing in response to the Committee's request for advice as part of its scrutiny of the Delegated Powers in the Justice Bill.

The Examiner also provided a preliminary view on her technical scrutiny to date of Statutory Rule 2025/190 The Police Pensions (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2025.

Patsy McGlone returned to the meeting at 4.17pm.

The Chairperson thanked the Examiner and she left the meeting at 4.22pm.

The meeting moved into public session at 4.23pm.

6. SR 2025/190 The Police Pensions (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2025

The Committee considered Statutory Rule SR2025/190 The Police Pensions (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2025, which will amend the Police Pensions Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015 (the 2015 Regulations). The Rule will provide officers in the 2015 Police Pension Scheme who were previously excluded from accessing ill-health retirement for the period 1 April 2015 to 31 March 2024 with the option to elect to retire under ill-health retirement if they satisfy the requirements for those benefits, subject to the full employee contribution for that period having been paid. The Rule is subject to the negative resolution procedure and will come into operation on 1 February 2026.

Agreed: To defer formal consideration of the Rule until the Examiner of Statutory Rules has completed her report.

7. Justice Bill – Written Papers

7.1 Department of Justice – Response regarding the Justice Bill – Table of Evidence

The Committee considered the Department of Justice's response to the summary table of the key issues raised and comments made in written and oral evidence received by the Committee on the Justice Bill and the planned Departmental amendments.

Members noted that the Department's response advised that the regulatory framework within which the police officer misconduct process operates had been reviewed and a targeted consultation had been conducted, and that the Department now intends to progress two proposals arising from the review by way of further amendment to the Justice Bill, with a number of other matters being subsequently brought forward by secondary legislation.

Agreed: To ask the Department to provide the Committee with the outcome of the review and consultation and further details on the proposed way forward.

7.2 Department of Justice – Response regarding the revised text of draft

Clause 29A

The Committee considered revised the text of the new Clause 29A of the planned Departmental amendment relating to the AccessNI filtering to reflect that Schedule 8ZA be amendable via the draft affirmative procedure, rather than the negative resolution procedure contained in the original draft provision.

Agreed: To ask the Department to highlight the parts of the text which have been revised and request that future revised texts are clearly marked for ease of reference.

7.3 Department of Justice – Response regarding the Justice Bill: DNA Fingerprint Review Mechanism

The Committee noted a response from the Department of Justice to information requested by Members regarding whether an individual whose appeal to the PSNI to have their data deleted is denied, has the right of appeal to the new Biometrics Commissioner; and if the Biometrics Commissioner should have Developed Vetting (DV) clearance to allow them to make decisions where matters of national security are involved

7.4 Department of Justice – Response regarding Restorative Justice and the Interim Protocol Lead

The Committee noted a response from the Department of Justice regarding restorative justice, which included details of the areas involved in the first phase of the roll-out of restorative justice and a copy of the documentation outlining the role and remit of the Interim Protocol Lead.

7.5 Department of Justice – Response regarding the Justice Bill – Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission (NIHRC) commentary on the Windsor Framework

The Committee noted a response from the Department of Justice to Members' request to provide the Committee with a copy of any commentary by the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission regarding compliance of the Justice Bill with the Windsor Framework as part of Human Rights considerations.

7.6 Department of Justice – Response regarding the RaISe paper on the Justice Bill Legal Aid Taxation

The Committee noted a response from the Department of Justice to the scrutiny points raised in the Assembly Research and Information Service's (RaISe) paper on the Justice Bill – Legal Aid Taxation.

7.7 Minister of Health – Response regarding the provision of secure care accommodation

The Committee noted a response from the Minister of Health to its request for an update on any action taken in relation to a report recommendation by an earlier Health Committee that the restriction on the voluntary sector from providing secure care accommodation should be lifted.

Agreed: To forward the Health Minister's response to the individual who had raised the issue with the Committee.

Agreed: To ask the Department of Health whether secure care accommodation in other health jurisdictions across the UK and Ireland is provided by the voluntary sector in addition to statutory bodies, and

whether its position was benchmarked against these other jurisdictions.

7.8 UK National Preventive Mechanism – Justice Bill: Part 2 – Children

The Committee noted correspondence from the Chair of the National Preventive Mechanism (NPM) Northern Ireland Subgroup and Interim Head of the NPM outlining the Subgroup's position on Part 2 of the Justice Bill in relation to child custody.

7.9 Justice Bill – Requests for Further Information

The Committee noted a document prepared by the Committee team which tracks Committee requests and responses received in relation to the Justice Bill.

8. SL1 The Rehabilitation of Offenders (Exceptions) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2026

The Committee considered a proposal for a Rule to amend the Rehabilitation of Offenders (Exceptions) Order (Northern Ireland) 1979. The Rule will make provision for new exclusions under the Rehabilitation of Offenders (Exceptions) Order (Northern Ireland) 1979 in respect of individuals whose suitability is being assessed for the purposes of delivering adult restorative justice interventions, and individuals undertaking a self-employed / personal employment role with vulnerable groups. The proposed Rule will be subject to the negative resolution procedure.

The Committee noted the response from the Department of Justice advising that a consultation on the proposed Rule would be disproportionate as this is considered a narrow legislative amendment to address potential safeguarding gaps.

Agreed: That the Committee is content with the proposal for the Statutory Rule.

9. Police and Criminal Evidence (PACE) - Remuneration pilot - Consultation - Department of Justice written paper

The Committee noted a paper from the Department of Justice advising of the introduction of a Police and Criminal Evidence (PACE) remuneration pilot as part of the broader aims of the Enabling Access to Justice Programme. The new remuneration rates are to be given effect by way of a Direction, rather than a legislative amendment. The pilot is due to commence on 16 March 2026, subject to approval of the business case by Department of Finance.

10. Adult Restorative Justice Strategy – Annual progress report 2024-25 - Department of Justice written paper

The Committee noted the Department of Justice's third Annual Report on the Adult Restorative Justice Strategy, which was published on 9 January 2026. The report covers work taken forward during the 2024-2025 financial year.

11. Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service Estate Strategy – Planned consultation on the future of Limavady Courthouse – Department of Justice written paper

The Committee considered a paper from the Department of Justice giving notice of the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service (NICTS) intention to commence consultation activities to inform the Justice Minister's decision about the future of Limavady Courthouse.

Several Members expressed concerns in relation to the centralisation of court services, and the potential loss to investment and access to justice in rural areas.

Agreed: To ask the Department of Justice for the information on:

- Whether any impact assessments, including a rural impact assessment, have been conducted by the Department as part of its consideration of the potential closure of Limavady Courthouse;
- What organisations the Department is engaging with as part of its pre-consultation work with key stakeholders;
- Why the NICTS believes it needs to do consultation on the future of Limavady Courthouse now, when there is a broader review of the NICTS estate pending;
- What measures the Department intends to take to mitigate any impacts if the Courthouse is closed;
- What consideration the Department has given to the future use of the courthouse, if it closes, to develop and benefit the Limavady area.

12. Correspondence

The Committee considered the following items of correspondence:

- A response from the Department of Justice to points raised by an individual in relation to fireworks legislation.

Agreed: To forward the Department's response to the individual who raised the matter.

- A copy of the Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland's (CJINI) Follow-Up Review of its 2020 inspection report on the Criminal Justice System's Response to Child Sexual Exploitation in Northern Ireland.

Agreed: To ask the Department of Justice, the PSNI and the Public Prosecution Service for a response to CJNI's assessment of the recommendations each are responsible for.

- Copy correspondence from the Committee for Infrastructure to the Minister for Infrastructure and Minister of Justice regarding recording images at road traffic accidents.

Agreed: To request a copy of the Minister of Justice's response to the Committee for Infrastructure.

- Correspondence from Peter Martin MLA requesting that the Committee consider The Bar of Northern Ireland's handling of a complaint he had raised against a Barrister.

Agreed: To ask the Bar for clarity on the procedures and policies for handling complaints regarding their members, including timeframes, appeals processes, and communication with complainants.

- Correspondence from the Women's Resource and Development Agency (WRDA) providing the Committee with new research on the Role of Firearms in Violence Against Women and Girls.

Agreed: To forward the research to the Department of Justice and the PSNI for their views on its findings and recommendations.

Agreed: To invite WRDA to give oral evidence on the research at a suitable time in the Committee's forward work programme.

- Correspondence from the Assembly's Public Engagement Manager inviting the Committee's participation as part of the Assembly's Engagement Programme at this year's Balmoral Show.

Agreed: That the Committee would not formally participate but that individual Members may attend in other capacities.

- Further correspondence from an individual regarding public finance accountability and governance in relation to Dalradian Gold.

Emma Sheerin declared an interest on the basis that the correspondent has previously raised complaints about her.

Agreed: To respond to the individual advising that the issue they raise is a matter for the PSNI and that they should direct their concerns to the Northern Ireland Policing Board.

- Copy correspondence to the Public Prosecution Service regarding a personal case that the Committee is aware of.

Agreed: To respond to the individual advising that the committee is unable to intervene, investigate or adjudicate individual cases, and they might consider contacting their local MLA and/or seek independent advice.

- A letter from the Department of Justice providing an update on the second Legislative Consent Motion in respect of additional measures included in the Crime and Policing Bill, along with a copy of the Memorandum which was laid in the Assembly on 13 January.

Agreed: That the Committee team prepares a draft report for consideration at next week's meeting.

- A response from the Department of Justice regarding the Adult Protection Bill, which is currently being considered by the Health Committee.

Agreed: To ask the PSNI, the Harbour Police, Probation Board, the PPS and the Policing Board for Northern Ireland for views on the provisions in the Bill which may impact on their organisations.

Agreed: To forward the Department's response to the Committee for Health and advise that further comment has been sought from those additional justice organisations.

- Members were advised that, in response to the Committee's request for information from the Department of Justice about the non-publication of the findings of employment tribunals where there is a non-disclosure agreement, the Department had advised that this would be a matter for the Department for the Economy.

Agreed: To write to the Department for the Economy on the matter.

- A response from the Department of Justice regarding the legal aid reform stakeholder lists/engagement papers.

Agreed: To ask the Department for information on when the engagement is expected to commence and how long it will last for.

The Committee noted the following items of correspondence:

- Copy correspondence from the Justice Minister to the Committee for Finance regarding an update on the Review of Arm's Length Bodies (ALB) and ALB Pay Landscape Review.
- Department of Justice - Publication of the Official Statistics bulletin 'Youth engagement statistics in Northern Ireland 2024-25'.
- Department of Justice - Response regarding funding for PSNI data breach.
- Department of Justice - Response providing information on the funding surrendered in the December monitoring round and the transformation bid relating to Ending Violence against Women and Girls.
- Department of Justice - Response regarding the proposals for Statutory Rules for court fees.
- Public Prosecution Service - Response regarding the CJINI report on 'An Inspection of the Management of Organisational Performance in the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland'.
- Public Prosecution Service - Response regarding court referrals for cases of non-fatal strangulation.
- Public Accounts Committee - Primacy of Northern Ireland Audit Office reports.
- House of Lords Northern Ireland Scrutiny Committee - Response regarding the Crime and Policing Bill.
- The Home Office - Copy correspondence to the House of Lords Northern Ireland Scrutiny Committee regarding the impact of the Windsor Framework on the Sentencing Bill deportation provisions.
- The Open University – Follow up to the oral briefing on the 'Learning from Why Riot?' report.
- Independent Monitoring Boards - Concerns over cuts to real term prison education budgets.
- Funds in Court Northern Ireland - Statement of Accounts for the Year Ended 31 March 2025.
- Correspondence from an individual regarding ongoing personal matters – a number of items of correspondence raising the same issues have been received in the Committee Office.

13. Forward Work Programme

13.1 Forward Work Programme

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

The Chairperson advised that the written briefing on the outcome of sexually explicit deepfake consultation, which had been included on the work programme for 29 January, will be rescheduled until a date in February. He also reminded Members that next week's meeting will be held externally at the Inn of Court, The Bar of Northern Ireland.

Members noted that the Finance Minister had commenced a consultation on his proposals for the Draft Budget 2026-2026/30.

Agreed: To ask the Justice Minister for her views on the Finance Minister's draft Budget proposals; and to schedule an oral evidence with Department of Justice officials on the draft Budget proposals.

Agreed: To seek the views of the Department's eight non-departmental public bodies on their indicative 2026-2029/30 draft Budget allocations.

13.2 The Bar of Northern Ireland – Request for the Bar Council to provide oral evidence on the Criminal Bar Association's withdrawal of services

The Committee considered a request from the Bar of Northern Ireland asking that the Bar Council attend a future meeting of the Committee to provide oral evidence on the issue of the withdrawal of services by the Criminal Bar Association following the Minister of Justice's statement to the Assembly on .

Agreed: To respond to the Bar noting the ongoing negotiations to resolve the issues and requesting

that the Bar Council provide a written briefing in the first instance.

14. Chairperson's Business

There was no Chairperson's business.

15. Any Other Business

There was no other business.

16. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting

Members were advised that next meeting will take place on Thursday 22 January at 2.00pm in the Members Room, Inn of Court, the Bar of Northern Ireland.

The meeting was adjourned at 5.10pm.

Paul Frew MLA

Chairperson, Committee for Justice

22 January 2026