



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

## Committee for Justice

### Minutes of Proceedings

**Thursday 19 February 2026**

**Room 30, Parliament Buildings, Belfast**

**Present:**

Paul Frew MLA (Chairperson)

Emma Sheerin MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

Maurice Bradley MLA

Connie Egan MLA

Aoife Finnegan MLA

Brian Kingston MLA

Patsy McGlone MLA

**Present by Video or Teleconference:**

Doug Beattie MLA

Ciara Ferguson MLA

**In Attendance:**

Kathy O'Hanlon (Assembly Clerk)

Thomas McKillop (Senior Assistant Assembly Clerk)

Gareth Black (Assistant Assembly Clerk)

Joshua Devlin (Clerical Supervisor)

Aaron Pakenham (Clerical Officer)

The meeting commenced at 1.32pm in closed session.

**Agreed:** That the meeting begin in closed session to continue Committee deliberations on the Justice Bill and the planned Departmental amendments.

*Maurice Bradley joined the meeting at 1.32pm*

*Emma Sheerin joined the meeting at 1.32pm.*

## **1. Apologies**

There were no apologies.

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

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

*Aoife Finnegan joined the meeting at 1.36pm.*

The Committee discussed the planned Departmental amendments on Restorative Justice, the Rehabilitation of Offenders, Access NI filtering, and Serious Organised Crime, and identified a number of areas that Members would like to engage further on with the Department of Justice.

The Committee also noted a number of matters raised during written and oral evidence on the Bill and that amendments in relations to some of these areas have been tabled by individual MLAs.

Members also discussed various aspects of the review mechanisms that the Committee is giving active consideration to for Youth Custody and Supervision Orders, as well as for Live Links in custody and in courts and tribunals.

*Liz Marsh left the meeting at 2.21pm.*

*The Committee agreed to consider Agenda item 11 next.*

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

The Committee considered correspondence 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 amendment. The correspondence advised that the Minister does not consider the Department to have the resources to consult and develop legislative provision on this issue and has, instead, recommended that the Committee consider tabling such an amendment that is within the scope of the Victims and Witnesses of Crime Bill.

**Agreed:** To respond to advise that, while Members are strongly supportive of seeing the provisions in Caoimhe’s Law come into legislation, the scale of policy development and legislative expertise required to do so robustly is beyond the Committee’s current capacity and Members are of the view that the Department is significantly better placed to conduct this work; and that the Committee would therefore encourage the Department to launch a public consultation on the proposed legislation at the earliest opportunity.

*The meeting moved to public session at 2.32pm.*

**Agreed:** That the oral evidence session with Departmental officials on the Draft Multi-Year Budget Proposals, and the joint evidence session with the Department of Justice, the PSNI and the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland on the Proposed Expansion of Out-of-Court Disposals, will be recorded by Hansard.

#### **4. Draft Minutes**

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 12 February 2026.

#### **5. Matters Arising**

The Chairperson put on record the agreed actions arising from the Committee's consideration of the proposed departmental amendments, and other aspects of the Justice Bill, considered previously by Members in closed session.

**Agreed:** To inform the Department of Justice that the Committee is actively considering an amendment to the Restorative Justice amendment to include a provision for the Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland (CJINI) to carry out initial, pre-accreditation inspections of newly accredited restorative justice organisations prior to them becoming operational, and that the Committee would welcome the Department's views on this proposal.

**Agreed:** To advise the Department that the Committee had agreed that an amendment should be made to provide for a review of the operational effectiveness of the new Youth Custody and Supervision Orders and to ask if the Minister would consider bringing such a provision forward by way of an amendment at Consideration Stage.

**Agreed:** That the Bill Clerk will provide draft text on a potential amendment to include a review mechanism provision for Live Links for custody and for courts and tribunals.

## **6. Draft Budget proposals 2026-27–2029/30 – Department of Justice oral evidence**

The following officials from the Department of Justice joined the meeting at 2.34pm:

Richard Logan, Finance Director;  
Michelle McLoughlin, Head of Financial Strategy; and  
Ashleigh Regan, Head of Future Years Budget.

The officials provided oral evidence on the Minister of Finance’s proposed draft multi-year budget allocations for the Department of Justice, and the Department’s Spring Supplementary Estimates for 2025-26.

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

During the evidence session the officials agreed to provide the Committee with follow-up information on the contractual arrangements and expenses in relation to temporary consultants / trainee consultant posts within the State Pathology Department.

The evidence session was recorded by Hansard.

The Chairperson thanked the officials and they left the meeting at 3.21pm.

## **7. Out of Court Disposals – Proposed expansion of Out of Court Disposals including Penalty Notices in the Justice Act (NI) 2011 – Summary of consultation responses and proposed way forward – oral evidence**

The following officials joined the meeting at 3.21pm:

Lisa Rocks, Director of Justice Performance Team, Department of Justice  
Barry Doran, Justice Performance Team, Department of Justice

Gary McDonald, Chief Superintendent, PSNI

Peter Luney, Senior Assistant Director, PPS

The officials provided oral evidence on the outcome of the public consultation on the proposed expansion of Out-of-Court Disposals and the proposed next steps.

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:

- Requirements for the disclosure of penalty notices as part of applications for travel visas;
- The limits for the issuing of penalty notices in relation to the possession of illegal drugs; and
- More comprehensive table of figures for cases disposed at magistrates' court in Northern Ireland in 2023, beyond those listed in the Department's consultation document as '% of convictions resulting in a Monetary penalty only' and '% of convictions resulting in a Monetary penalty plus another disposal'.

*Doug Beattie left the meeting at 4.08pm.*

The evidence session was recorded by Hansard.

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

## **8. Causing or allowing a child or vulnerable adult to die or suffer serious physical harm – Proposal to increase the existing maximum sentences - Summary of consultation responses and proposed way forward**

The Committee noted a report from the Department of Justice on the public consultation for the Department's proposal to increase the maximum statutory custodial sentences for the offence of 'causing or allowing a child or vulnerable adult to die or suffer serious physical harm' and the proposed next steps.

**9. SR 2026/6 The Disclosure of Victims' and Witnesses Information (Prescribed Bodies) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026**

The Committee considered Statutory Rule 2026/6 The Disclosure of Victims' and Witnesses Information (Prescribed Bodies) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026 which will amend SR 2015/330 The Disclosure of Victims' and Witnesses' Information (Prescribed Bodies) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015 to add ASSIST NI (Advocacy Support Safety Information Services Together Northern Ireland) to the list of prescribed bodies to which the PPS may disclose relevant information about a witness in criminal proceedings for the purposes of advising the witness about support services offered by that body, or to offer or provide support services to the witness.

The Chairperson expressed concern at the significant lapse in time between the Committee's consideration of the SL1 for this Statutory Rule and the Department laying the Rule with the Business Office.

The Rule is subject to the negative resolution procedure and came into operation on 2 February 2026.

The Committee noted that the Rule had initially been laid under 'no procedure' but had subsequently been withdrawn and laid under the correct Assembly control.

The Committee noted that the Examiner of Statutory Rules had no comments to make by way of technical scrutiny.

**Agreed:** That the Committee for Justice has considered SR 2026/6 The Disclosure of Victims' and Witnesses' Information (Prescribed Bodies) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026 and has no objection to the Rule.

## **10. SR 2026/11 The Payment and Electronic Money Institution Insolvency (Northern Ireland) Rules 2026**

The Committee considered Statutory Rule 2026/11 The Payment and Electronic Money Institution Insolvency (Northern Ireland) Rules 2026. The Rule sets out the procedural rules for a special administration procedure for payment and electronic money institutions, established by the Payment and Electronic Money Insolvency Regulations 2021 as amended by the Payment and Electronic Money Institution Insolvency (Amendment) Regulations 2023.

The Rule is subject to the negative resolution procedure and is due to come into operation on 2 March 2026.

The Committee noted that the SL1 for this Rule had been considered on 26 September 2024 and, as the Department for the Economy is responsible for insolvency policy and the Rule is made with the concurrence of the Department of Finance, the Committee agreed to forward the SL1 to both of those Statutory Committees for information. Both Committees were content to note the proposal for the Rule.

The Committee noted that the Examiner of Statutory Rules had advised that she will formally report on the technical aspects of the Rule in her next Report, but has indicated that it will not be required to be drawn to the special attention of the Assembly.

**Agreed:** That the Committee for Justice has considered SR 2026/11 The Payment and Electronic Money Institution Insolvency (Northern Ireland) Rules 2026 and has no objection to the Rule.

## **11. Sentencing Bill – Pre-legislative scrutiny – Correspondence**

The Committee noted a paper from the Department of Justice in response to a paper from the Commissioner for Older People which raised concerns about the

absence of ‘age’ as one of the protected characteristics under the hate crime provisions in the Sentencing Bill.

**Agreed:** To forward the Department’s response to the Commissioner for Older People for information.

**Agreed:** To ask 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.

## 12. Correspondence

The Committee considered the following items of correspondence:

- A response from The Bar of Northern Ireland to correspondence forwarded to the organisation by the Committee from Peter Martin MLA raising concerns about the length of time taken to resolve a complaint he had made to the Bar of Northern Ireland about a barrister.

**Agreed:** To forward The Bar’s response to Peter Martin MLA for information.

- A response from the PSNI to research from the Women’s Resource and Development Agency providing the Committee on the role of firearms in violence against women and girls.

**Agreed:** To forward the response to the WRDA for information.

The Committee noted the following items of correspondence:

- Department of Justice - Response regarding the review of sentencing policy.
- Department for the Economy - Response clarifying why the findings of employment tribunals are not published if a non-disclosure agreement is signed.
- Committee for Finance - Forwarded correspondence from the Department of Finance providing further information on the review of Arm's-Length Bodies.
- Lay Observers - Lay Observers 2024-25 Annual Report.
- Further correspondence from an individual regarding concerns they have on the Policing Board's handling of their FOI request; and copy correspondence to the Policing Board.
- Copy correspondence from an individual to various organisations regarding the Planning Appeals Commission and Dalradian Gold.

### **13. Forward Work Programme**

#### **13.1 Forward Work Programme**

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

### **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 26 February at 2.00pm in the Room 30, Parliament Buildings.

*The meeting was adjourned at 4.23pm.*

**Paul Frew MLA**

**Chairperson, Committee for Justice**

**26 February 2026**