



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Justice

Minutes of Proceedings

Thursday 2 October 2025

Room 30, Parliament Buildings, Belfast

Present: Paul Frew MLA (Chairperson)

Maurice Bradley MLA

Ciara Ferguson MLA

Brian Kingston MLA

Patsy McGlone MLA

Present by Video or Teleconference:

Dierdre Hargey MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

Danny Baker MLA

Doug Beattie MLA

Connie Egan MLA

In Attendance: Kathy O'Hanlon (Assembly Clerk)

Thomas McKillop (Senior Assistant Assembly Clerk)

Gareth Black (Assistant Assembly Clerk)

Stephen Corr (Clerical Supervisor)

Easton Vance (Clerical Supervisor)

Aaron Pakenham (Clerical Officer)

The meeting commenced at 2:04pm in public session.

The Chairperson welcomed Brian Kingston MLA as a Member of the Committee.

Maurice Bradley joined the meeting at 2:05pm

Agreed: That the oral evidence sessions with officials from the Department of Justice on the Access NI Filtering amendment and AccessNI's Annual Performance and Activity Report 2024-25, and on the pre-legislative scrutiny of the Victims and Witnesses of Crime Bill, 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 a number of Committee 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 18 September 2025.

3. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

4. Justice Bill and the Annual Performance and Activity Report 2024-25 – Access NI oral evidence

The following Department of Justice officials joined the meeting at 2:08pm:

John Paul Napier, *Assistant Secretary, Information Systems Division*

Brian Thomson, *Head of AccessNI*

Amanda Jenner, *Policy Official, AccessNI*

Deirdre Hargey joined the meeting at 2:08pm

The officials provided evidence on the proposed amendment to the Justice Bill on AccessNI filtering, as well as AccessNI's Annual Performance and Activity Report for 2024-25.

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

Agreed: The officials agreed to provide the Committee with the link to the criterion for referrals of Enhanced Checks to the PSNI.

The evidence session was recorded by Hansard.

The Chairperson thanked the officials and they left the meeting at 3:15pm.

5. Victims and Witnesses of Crime Bill – Pre-legislative Scrutiny – Department of Justice oral evidence

The following officials from the Department of Justice joined the meeting at 3:15pm:

Julie Wilson, *Deputy Director, Victims Support and Judiciary Division*

Claire Campbell, *Assistant Head of Victims and Witnesses Branch*

Deirdre McDaid, *Bill Team, Victims and Witnesses Branch.*

The officials provided evidence on proposals for inclusion in a draft Victims and Witnesses of Crime Bill, as well as a proposed consultation for a draft Victims and Witnesses of Crime Strategy for Northern Ireland 2025-30 paper.

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

Agreed: To forward any remaining questions not asked during the session to the Department for response.

The evidence session was recorded by Hansard.

The Chairperson thanked the officials and they left the meeting at 3:56pm.

6. Justice Bill — written papers

6.1 Response regarding the Justice Bill Call for Evidence

The Committee noted further correspondence from an individual regarding their response to the Committee's Justice Bill - Call for Evidence.

Agreed: To respond to the individual confirming that their submission will be amended as requested.

6.2 Justice Bill – Requests for further information table

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

6.3 Justice Bill reprint

The Chairperson reminded Members that it has been necessary to reprint the Justice Bill due to it being moved onto the new Bill software and advised that hard copies would be circulated to all Members.

The Chairperson informed Members that it was also necessary for the proposed Departmental amendments to be revised to align with changes to page and line numbers in the reprinted Bill; and noted that the Department confirmed that no changes have been made to the substance of the proposed amendments so the text remains otherwise untouched.

7. SL1 The Damages for Bereavement (Variation of Sum) Order (Northern Ireland) 2025

The Committee considered a proposal by the Department of Justice to make a Statutory Rule under Article 3A(5) of the Fatal Accidents (Northern Ireland) Order 1977 (“the 1977 Order”). The Rule will increase the fixed amount payable for damages for bereavement under the 1977 Order in line with inflation.

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

8. Prisoner Ombudsman for Northern Ireland Retention and Disposal Schedule

The Committee further considered the Prisoner Ombudsman for Northern Ireland's Retention and Disposal Schedule, following a response to a request for further information from the Prisoner Ombudsman agreed at the meeting of 18 September 2025. The Schedule is subject to the negative resolution procedure and the statutory period will end on 13 October 2025.

Deirdre Hargey expressed appreciation for the response from the Prisoner Ombudsman.

Paul Frew highlighted that, although the Prisoner Ombudsman's response did provide the rationale for changes to the latest Schedule, it did not detail how this Schedule differs from previous versions.

Agreed: That the Committee is content with the Prisoner Ombudsman for Northern Ireland's Retention and Disposal Schedule.

Agreed: To inform the Committee for Communities of the Committee's decision on this matter, as the Public Records Office for Northern Ireland falls under the policy responsibility of the Department for Communities.

9. Renewal of the Secretary of State's Direction under Section 1A(7) of the Prison Act (Northern Ireland) 1953 as amended by Schedule 4 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 (Devolution of Policing and Justice Functions) Order 2010 – Department of Justice written paper

The Committee considered a written paper from the Department of Justice on the renewal of Secretary of State's Direction under Section 1A(7) and (8) of the Prison Act (Northern Ireland) 1953.

Agreed: To ask the Department of Justice for more detail on what ‘operational prison matters’ referred to in the paper involves; how many prison officers currently fall under the remit of this Direction; and for more information on who prison officers who are operating within this Direction are ultimately accountable to.

10. Miscarriage of justice compensation payment – Saved living expenses – Department of Justice written paper

The Committee considered a written paper from the Department of Justice advising of the Justice Minister’s decision to remove references to deductions from miscarriage of justice compensation payments for “saved living expenses” from the Guidance for Assessors of Compensation for a Miscarriage of Justice.

Agreed: To request clarification on what, if any, retrospective compensation was issued to those who had had ‘saved living expenses’ deducted from their compensation payment before the provision was removed from guidance in England and Wales in 2023; and if no retrospective compensation was made, the rationale for why this was the case.

11. Correspondence

The Committee considered the following items of correspondence:

- Copy correspondence from the House of Lords Northern Ireland Scrutiny Committee to the Minister of State at the Home Office regarding the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission’s (NIHRC) comments on the compliance of Clause 71 (Power of scan for child sexual abuse images at the border) in the Crime and Policing Bill with Article 2 of the Windsor Framework.

Agreed: To forward the correspondence to the Windsor Framework Democratic Scrutiny Committee.

Agreed: To seek the views of the Department of Justice on the NIHRC's comments on the compliance of Clause 71 of the Crime and Policing Bill with Article 2 of the Windsor Framework.

- Correspondence from the Committee for Finance providing information from the Department of Finance notifying the Finance Committee that the Public Office (Accountability) Bill (known as the Hillsborough Law) was introduced to Parliament on 16th September.

Paul Frew declared an interest in relation to his proposals for a Member's Bill for an individual duty of candour within healthcare in Northern Ireland, which are currently subject to consultation.

Agreed: To request an overview from the Department of Justice on the provisions in the Hillsborough Law Bill that may be extended here that fall within its remit.

- Correspondence from an individual regarding a personal matter.

Agreed: To respond to the individual advising that a number of matters raised in their correspondence fall outside the remit of the Department of Justice, and that the Committee has a busy work programme and is unable to pursue any matters within the Department's remit.

- Correspondence from an individual regarding a personal matter.

Agreed: To respond to the individual to again advise that the Committee is unable to intervene in, investigate or adjudicate on individual cases.

The Committee noted the following items of correspondence:

- Notification of the publication of the Official Statistics Bulletin on Northern Ireland Youth Justice Agency Annual Workload Statistics 2024/25.
- Notification of the publication of the Official Statistics Bulletin on the Domestic Abuse and Civil Proceedings Act 2021.
- A list of cross-cutting strategies compiled by The Executive Office.
- Correspondence from the Committee for Finance providing correspondence from the Department of Finance advising of a delay to the introduction of the Cyber Security and Resilience (Network and Information Systems) Bill and associated legislative consent.
- A copy of the Department of Finance's Fiscal and Budget context briefing to all MLAs.
- Correspondence regarding the launch of third annual Commissioner for Victims of Crime Office Victim Survey.
- Further correspondence from an individual regarding a personal matter.

12. Forward Work Programme

12.1 Committee Draft Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered the draft Committee forward work programme.

Agreed: To proceed with the sessions in the Committee's forward work programme.

12.2 NI Judicial Appointments Commission (NIJAC) – Invitation to Information Session for the Executive Office Committee and Justice Committee with NIJAC

Members noted an invitation from the Chief Executive of the Northern Ireland Judicial Appointments Commission (NIJAC) to an information session with NIJAC on Monday 17 November 2025.

Agreed: Members will notify Committee staff of their availability to attend the session.

13. Chairperson's Business

13.1 Queen's University Belfast – Invitation to Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson to 'AI and the future of Work', Lord David Willets & Panel event

The Committee noted invitations for the Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson to an event taking place Riddel Hall on Wednesday 22 October which explores 'AI and the Future of Work.'

13.2 Victim Support NI – Invite to Hate Crime Awareness Week event

The Chairperson informed Members that Victim Support NI has invited the Committee to its annual Hate Crime Awareness Week event on the afternoon of 16 October 2025, as part of its ongoing 'We Stand Together' campaign.

Agreed: To respond to Victim Support NI, thanking them for their invitation, assuring them of the Committee's interest in the important matters the event addresses, but advising that the

Committee is meeting formally on the same afternoon as the event and, therefore, Members will be unable to attend.

14. Any Other Business

There was no other business.

15. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting

Members were advised that next meeting will take place on Thursday 9 October at 2.00pm in Room 30, Parliament Buildings.

The Meeting was adjourned at 4:20pm.

Paul Frew MLA

Chairperson, Committee for Justice

9 October 2025