



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

## Committee for Justice

### Minutes of Proceedings

**Thursday 21 May 2026**

**Room 30, Parliament Buildings, Belfast**

**Present:**

Paul Frew MLA (Chairperson)

Emma Sheerin MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

Ciara Ferguson MLA

Aoife Finnegan MLA

Brian Kingston MLA

Patsy McGlone MLA

**Present by Video or Teleconference:**

Doug Beattie MLA

Connie Egan MLA

**Apologies:**

Maurice Bradley 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 2.01pm in public session.*

*Aoife Finnegan joined the meeting at 2.02pm.*

**Agreed:** That the oral evidence session with the Probation Board for Northern Ireland on the Criminal Justice (Sentencing etc) Bill will be recorded by Hansard.

### **1. Apologies**

As above.

### **2. Draft Minutes**

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 14 May 2026.

### **3. Matters Arising**

There were no matters arising.

### **4. Criminal Justice (Sentencing etc) Bill – Probation Board for Northern Ireland oral evidence**

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 2.04pm:

Amanda Stewart, Chief Executive, Probation Board for Northern Ireland (PBNI);

Gillian Montgomery, Director of Operations (Community and Courts), PBNI; and  
Stephen Hamilton, Director of Operations (Prisons, Programmes and Public), PBNI.

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 written information on matters that they believe could be worthwhile to have included in the Bill, such as an opt out process for the Victim Information Scheme and a presumption against short sentences.

*Patsy McGlone left the meeting at 3.19pm.*

The evidence session was recorded by Hansard.

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

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

### **5.1 – Committee for the Executive Office**

The Committee noted a nil return to its Call for Evidence on the Sentencing Bill from the Committee for the Executive Office.

### **5.2 – Information Commissioner's Office**

The Committee considered a response to its Call for Evidence on the Sentencing Bill from the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO). The response highlighted that the ICO considers the Bill to significantly increase the volume, scope and duration of offender personal data processed across the justice system, and also increases the collection, recording and disclosure of data about victims. The ICO recommended that the Committee reassure itself that any current and new

systems for managing data are fit for purpose in light of the anticipated expansion, and that the Department of Justice's assessment that a Data Protection Impact Assessment was not required for the Bill remains appropriate.

**Agreed:** To forward the ICO's submission to the Department for response.

### **5.3 – HERe NI**

The Committee noted a response to its Call for Evidence on the Sentencing Bill from HERe NI.

### **5.4 – Women's Resource and Development Agency**

The Committee noted correspondence from the Women's Resource and Development Agency (WRDA) advising of its intent to submit written evidence in response to the Call for Evidence on the Sentencing Bill, as well as a briefing paper from the WRDA outlining their evidence and work to date for the inclusion of a Misogyny Statutory Aggravator in the Bill by way of amendment.

### **5.5 – An individual – Jonny's Law (Drug-related deaths)**

The Committee noted correspondence from an individual requesting that the Committee consider the inclusion of provisions within the Sentencing Bill for 'Jonny's Law', which seeks to ensure universal equality and recognition for all families affected by drug-related deaths.

### **5.6 – Multiple individuals – Support for Jade's Law**

The Committee considered correspondence from several individuals requesting that provisions for 'Jade's Law' be included within the Sentencing Bill by way of an amendment.

**Agreed:** To inform the individuals that the Finance Minister is taking this matter forward and aims to introduce legislation early in the next Assembly mandate.

### **5.7 – Commissioner for Victims of Crime Northern Ireland – Informal Meetings Update**

The Chair outlined an update on engagement with the Office of the Commissioner Designate for Victims of Crime Northern Ireland (CVOONI) on proposed approaches for hearing oral evidence from victims as part of the Committee's scrutiny of the Sentencing Bill.

**Agreed:** That an informal meeting, facilitated by CVOONI, be held to enable the Committee to hear evidence on the Bill from the families of victims of road traffic offences.

**Agreed:** That the Committee will hold its normal formal weekly meeting on 25 June 2026.

### **6. Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service Estate Strategy – Public consultation on the future of Limavady Courthouse – Department of Justice written paper**

The Committee noted an update and papers from the Department of Justice in relation to the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service's upcoming public consultation to inform the Justice Minister's decision about the future of Limavady Courthouse.

### **7. Youth Justice Agency – Business Plan 2026-2027 – Department of Justice written paper**

The Committee noted a paper from the Department of Justice providing Members with a copy of the Youth Justice Agency's Business Plan for 2026-27.

*The Committee agreed to consider agenda item 14 next.*

## **8. Victims and Witnesses of Crime Bill**

The Committee noted a paper from the Department of Justice advising that the Minister of Justice has issued a paper to the Executive seeking approval for the introduction of the Victims and Witnesses of Crime Bill. Subject to the Executive and Assembly approvals being provided, the Minister intends to introduce the Bill on 15 June.

## **9. Correspondence**

The Committee considered the following items of correspondence:

- Further correspondence from an individual in relation to Injury on Duty and Retrospective Injury on Duty claims.

**Agreed:** To consider further when responses from the Department of Justice and the Northern Ireland Policing Board to previous correspondence on this matter are available.

- Neurology Justice Collective - Copy of correspondence to the Minister of Health raising access to justice concerns arising from Neurology Recall related litigation.

**Agreed:** To respond to Neurology Justice Collective to identify who they are and, once this is clear, to write to the Department of Justice to ask if they have any access to justice concerns relating to this matter.

The Committee noted the following items of correspondence:

- Department of Justice - Response regarding the Review of State Pathology.
- Extern - Response regarding the Prisoner Release Project and notification of an upcoming event to present research findings on the impact of the project by Queen's University Belfast.
- Prisoner Ombudsman - Independent investigation report into the circumstances surrounding the death of Mr Kibar.
- An individual - Copy of correspondence to the Office for Statistics Regulation regarding official statistics produced by the Department of Education and the Education Authority.

## **10. Forward Work Programme**

### **10.1 and 10.2 – Department of Justice Forward Work Programme – June 2026 and the Committee's Draft Forward Work Programme**

The Committee considered the Department's proposed forward work programme for June and the latest draft of the Committee's forward work programme.

**Agreed:** That the Clerk will liaise with Departmental officials to arrange an alternative date for an oral Finance briefing.

**Agreed:** To schedule the remaining proposed work items from the Department of Justice in the Committee's forward work programme.

## **11. Chairperson's Business**

There was no Chairperson's business.

## **12. Any Other Business**

Ciara Ferguson raised the matter of families not being able to access the Coroners Service over weekends.

**Agreed:** To seek information on the availability of and access to the Coroners Service over weekend periods, and whether lack of access to Coroners Service out of hours is consistent across Northern Ireland or confined to particular regions.

**Agreed:** That the meeting move to closed session in order to receive a legal briefing from the NI Assembly Legal Services on Human Rights considerations for the Criminal Justice (Sentencing etc) Bill.

*The meeting moved into closed session at 3.39pm.*

## **13. Criminal Justice (Sentencing etc) Bill – Human Rights Memorandum – Assembly Legal Services oral briefing**

The following Legal Advisor joined the meeting at 3.39pm:

Htaik Win – Legal Advisor, Northern Ireland Assembly Legal Services.

The advisor provided a legal briefing on human rights considerations for the Criminal Justice (Sentencing etc) Bill.

*Patsy McGlone returned to the meeting at 3.41pm.*

*Brian Kingston left the meeting at 3.49pm.*

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

The Chairperson thanked the Legal Advisor and they left the meeting at 4.04pm.

**Agreed:** To forward the Convention Rights Memorandum to the Department for comment, with particular regard to the compliance of Clause 27 with Article 7 rights, Clause 29 with Article 8 rights and the balance of rights in respect of Clause 33.

*The meeting returned to public session 4.04pm.*

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

Members were advised that the next meeting will take place on Thursday 28 May at 2.00pm in Room 30, Parliament Buildings.

*The meeting was adjourned at 4.04pm.*

**Paul Frew MLA**  
**Chairperson, Committee for Justice**  
**28 May 2026**