



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Justice

Minutes of Proceedings

Thursday 25 June 2026

Room 30, Parliament Buildings, Belfast

Present:

Paul Frew MLA (Chairperson)

Emma Sheerin MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

Maurice Bradley MLA

Aoife Finnegan MLA

Brian Kingston MLA

Patsy McGlone MLA

Present by Video or Teleconference:

Doug Beattie MLA

Connie Egan MLA

Ciara Ferguson MLA

In Attendance:

Kathy O'Hanlon (Assembly Clerk)

Thomas McKillop (Senior Assistant Assembly Clerk)

Gareth Black (Assistant Assembly Clerk)

Paula Morrow (Clerical Supervisor)

Aaron Pakenham (Clerical Officer)

The meeting commenced at 2.18 pm in public session.

Emma Sheerin joined the meeting at 2.19pm.

Emma Sheerin left the meeting at 2.19pm.

Agreed: That the oral evidence sessions with Peter Dolan on the Criminal Justice (Sentencing etc) Bill and the introductory briefing with officials on the Victims and Witnesses of Crime Bill will be recorded by Hansard.

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

Emma Sheerin returned to the meeting at 2.20pm.

1. Apologies

There were no apologies.

2. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 18 June 2026.

3. Matters Arising

Members noted that, at last week's meeting, the Committee agreed to forward a response from the Commissioner Designate for Victims of Crime along with correspondence from an individual to the Department of Justice for response to concerns raised by the individual regarding post-separation economic abuse.

Agreed: To forward the CVOCNI response to the individual for information, while awaiting the Department's response.

On behalf of the Committee, the Chairperson offered congratulations to Jacqui Durkan following the recent announcement of her appointment as the new Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland, and thanked her for her work and engagement with the Committee during her tenure as Chief Inspector of the Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland (CJINI).

Congratulations were also expressed to James Corrigan who will fulfil the role of interim Chief Inspector of CJINI.

Agreed: To write to Jacqui Durkan and James Corrigan to express the Committee's congratulations to each of them on their respective new appointments and thanks for their work with CJINI.

4. Criminal Justice (Sentencing etc) Bill – Mr Peter Dolan oral evidence

The following witness joined the meeting at 3.23pm:

Peter Dolan, Road Safety Campaigner, The Enda Dolan Foundation

Maurice Bradley joined the meeting at 3.23pm.

The witness provided oral evidence on the Criminal Justice (Sentencing etc) Bill.

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

On behalf of the Committee, the Chair expressed gratitude to Peter and Niamh Dolan for attending today's meeting, extended the thoughts of Members on the loss of their son Enda and conveyed support for their ongoing campaign relating to road traffic offences.

The evidence session was recorded by Hansard.

The Chairperson thanked the witness and he left the meeting at 3.13pm.

Agreed:	To seek clarity from the Department of Justice on whether an offender on licence who is subsequently convicted of repeat road traffic offences would be required to serve their remaining licence term in prison; and whether a driving disqualification for road traffic offenders who are also serving a custodial sentence commences upon release from prison, or runs concurrent with their prison sentence.
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The meeting was suspended at 3.16pm.

The meeting recommenced at 3.21pm with the following Members present:

Paul Frew (Chairperson)

Emma Sheerin (Deputy Chairperson)

Doug Beattie

Connie Egan

Ciara Ferguson

Brian Kingston

The Chairperson advised that, although the Committee has previously agreed to hear evidence from the Law Society of Northern Ireland and the Bar of Northern

Ireland together on the Criminal Justice (Sentencing etc) Bill, representatives from the Bar are unavailable to attend Committee with the Law Society at the meeting on 2 July.

Agreed: To proceed with a separate session with the Law Society next week and to schedule a session with the Bar after summer recess.

5. Victims and Witnesses of Crime Bill – Introductory Briefing – Department of Justice oral evidence

The following officials joined the meeting at 3.22pm:

Julie Wilson, Director, Victims Support Division, Access to Justice Directorate;

Emma Crozier, Bill Manager, Head of Victims and Witnesses Branch, Access to Justice Directorate;

Christopher McElwee, Head of Hate Crime Branch, Community Safety Division, Safer Communities Directorate;

Lesley Cowan, Victims and Witnesses Branch, Access to Justice Directorate; and

Wendy Murray, Victims and Witnesses Branch, Access to Justice Directorate.

Maurice Bradley returned to the meeting at 3.23pm.

Aoife Finnegan returned to the meeting at 3.24pm.

The officials provided oral evidence on the Victims and Witnesses of Crime Bill, which was introduced in the Assembly on 22 June 2026.

Patsy McGlone returned to the meeting at 3.29pm.

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

During the evidence session the officials agreed to provide the Committee with the following:

- Clarification of whether the work being conducted by The Executive Office to develop a consistent policy for Northern Ireland Commissioners, for which amendments may be required to this Bill at Consideration Stage, may impact on other Commissioners within the Department of Justice's remit; and
- Clarification on who determines how hostility is defined in relation to special measures in cases involving aggravation by hostility.

The evidence session was recorded by Hansard.

The Chairperson thanked the officials and they left the meeting at 3.54pm.

Agreed: To request a Delegated Powers Memorandum for the Bill from the Department of Justice.

Agreed: That the Committee staff forward the Delegated Powers Memorandum to the Examiner of Statutory Rules in the Committee's absence, if received over the summer recess period.

6. Finance update – Department of Justice oral evidence

The following officials joined the meeting at 3.55pm:

Richard Logan, Finance Director;

Michelle McLoughlin, Head of Financial Strategy; and

Louise Blair, Head of Financial Support.

The officials provided an update on a number of financial matters, including the provisional outturn, the Draft Budget, the 2026-27 Contingency Planning Envelope and updated pressures for 2026-27.

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

Doug Beattie left the meeting at 4.23pm.

The Chairperson thanked the officials and they left the meeting at 4.34pm.

7. SR 2026/107 The Police and Criminal Evidence (Northern Ireland) Order 1989 (Codes of Practice) Order 2026

The Committee considered Statutory Rule SR 2026/107 The Police and Criminal Evidence (Northern Ireland) Order 1989 (Codes of Practice) Order 2026. The Rule brings into force revisions to existing Codes of Practice A to H and the introduction of new Code I.

The Rule is subject to the negative resolution procedure and will come into operation on 1 July 2026.

Emma Sheerin left the meeting at 4.36pm.

Members noted that the Departmental note agreed to be published alongside the PACE Codes, which made explicit reference to ‘no career detriment’ for officers or staff members who decline to conduct a search involving a transgender person, or to a transgender officer exempt from searching, has been laid alongside the Rule, the Explanatory Memorandum and the Codes.

The Committee also noted that there have been no changes to the policy content since the SL1 was submitted to the Committee; and that the Examiner of Statutory Rules has advised that the Rule is not required to be drawn to the special attention of the Assembly.

Agreed: That the Committee for Justice has considered SR 2026/107 The Police and Criminal Evidence (Northern Ireland) Order 1989 (Codes of Practice) Order 2026 and has no objection to the Rule.

8. SL1 The Justice (2011 Act) (Amendment of Schedule 4) Order (Northern Ireland) 2026 – Expansion of Out of Court Disposals

Agreed: To defer formal consideration of the proposed Rule until the information requested from the PSNI and the Department of Justice on the impact of not having assaults on police included in the expansion of Out of Court Disposals has been received.

Emma Sheerin returned to the meeting at 4.39pm.

9. Armed Forces Bill – Legislative Consent Memorandum update – Department of Justice written paper

The Committee considered a response from the Department of Justice to Members' request for clarity on why the Minister is not seeking consent to extend the provisions of Clause 2 of the Bill – which requires certain authorities to have due regard to the Armed Forces Covenant – to Northern Ireland. The Department advised that it would be more appropriate for The Executive Office to seek consent to extend those provisions on behalf of NI Departments..

Agreed: To ask The Executive Office if any consideration has been given to extend the provisions of Clause 2 of the Bill to Northern Ireland.

10. Financial Services and Markets Bill - Legislative Consent – Department of Justice written paper

The Committee noted a paper from the Department of Justice advising of the Justice Minister's intention to seek legislative consent in due course for a measure contained in the Westminster Financial Services and Markets Bill, which was introduced in the House of Lords on 19 May 2026.

11. Personal Injury Discount Rate – Outcome of consultation – Department of Justice written paper

The Committee noted a paper from the Department of Justice on the outcome of its consultation on how inflation is taken into account by the Government Actuary when setting the personal injury discount rate. The Department advised that the decisions on the proposed way forward had been taken by the Permanent Secretary due to a potential perceived conflict of interest for the Minister of Justice. The Department has also advised that, as there is currently no available vehicle within the Department's current legislative programme, the intention is to bring forward amendment of the 1996 Act in the next mandate, subject to the views of an incoming Minister of Justice and the Executive.

12. Police Pensions (Amendment) Regulations 2026 – CPI – Consultation – Department of Justice written paper

The Committee noted a paper from the Department of Justice advising of the commencement of a 12-week consultation on the Police Pensions (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026. The purpose of the Regulations being consulted on is to amend the Police Pension Regulations (NI) 2015 to address the interaction between the Consumer Price Index (CPI) and Annual Allowance within the 2015 Police Pension Scheme by moving the effective scheme revaluation date from 1 April to 6 April. In addition, they will also remove the end date for current member contribution rates, which are presently set to expire on 31 March 2027 in line with the scheme valuation requirements.

13. Legal Aid Remuneration – Consultation – Department of Justice written paper

The Committee noted a paper from the Department of Justice providing details of proposals to implement further changes to legal aid remuneration following the recent Accelerated Review of Criminal Legal Aid, as well information on a

targeted consultation for these proposals, which will run for 8 weeks from 26 June 2026.

14. Department of Justice Business Plan – Update on progress against 2025-26 Plan - Department of Justice written paper

The Committee noted a paper from the Department of Justice providing a summary of progress against the Department's 2025-26 Business Plan.

15. Independent Reviewer of Criminal Record Certificates – Annual report

The Committee noted a paper from the Department of Justice providing a copy of the Annual Report 2025/26 of the Independent Reviewer of Criminal Record Certificates.

16. Correspondence

The Committee considered the following items of correspondence:

- The Committee noted a paper from the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission providing advice on the amendments tabled to the Justice Bill to raise the minimum age of criminal responsibility.

Agreed: To publish the paper on the Committee's webpage.

- PSNI response regarding proposed amendments to Firearms Licensing Fees and the Banded System.

Agreed: To forward the PSNI's response to the British Association for Shooting and Conservation for information.

The Committee noted the following items of correspondence:

- Minister of Justice – Copy of a response to the Health Committee providing an update on the Right Care, Right Person.
- Department of Justice - Response regarding Access to Coroners Service for NI.
- Department of Justice - Copy of a response to Assembly and Executive Review Committee's Review of Assembly Committee Engagement on Cross-Cutting Executive Strategies.
- Department of Justice - Notification of publication of Official Statistics Bulletin on the number of prosecutions and convictions at courts in Northern Ireland in 2025.
- Department of Justice - Notification of publication of Official Statistics Bulletin on First Time Entrants to the Criminal Justice System in NI 2024-25.
- Department of Justice - Copy of a response to Committee for Communities regarding Housing Rights: Discussion Paper to Support Homelessness Prevention in Northern Ireland.
- Committee for Communities - Copy of correspondence issued to the Head of the Civil Service and departmental Permanent Secretaries regarding consistency and effectiveness of Child Rights Impact Assessments and Equality Impact Assessments.
- Northern Ireland Fiscal Council - Sustainability Report 2026.
- The Open University in Ireland - Invitation to a free Workshop on AI Law and Legal Training.
- Department of Justice - Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner's Annual Report 2025-2026.

17. Forward Work Programme

17.1 Committee's Draft Forward Work Programme

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

18. Chairperson's Business

There was no Chairperson's business.

19. Any Other Business

There was no other business.

20. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting

Members were advised that the next meeting will take place on Thursday 2 July at 2.00pm in Room 30, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 4.53pm.

Paul Frew MLA

Chairperson, Committee for Justice

2 July 2026