



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

## Committee for Justice

### Minutes of Proceedings

**Thursday 28 May 2026**

**Room 30, Parliament Buildings, Belfast**

**Present:**

Paul Frew MLA (Chairperson)

Emma Sheerin MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

Maurice Bradley MLA

Connie Egan MLA

Ciara Ferguson MLA

Brian Kingston MLA

Patsy McGlone MLA

**Present by Video or Teleconference:**

Doug Beattie MLA

Aoife Finnegan 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.*

*Maurice Bradley joined the meeting at 2.02pm.*

**Agreed:** That the oral evidence sessions with the Department of Justice and with the British Association for Shooting and Conservation (BASC) on the Department's proposed amendments to Firearms Licensing Fees and the Banded System will be recorded by Hansard.

*Patsy McGlone declared an interest in relation to an insurance policy held with the British Association of Shooting and Conservation.*

### **1. Apologies**

There were no apologies.

### **2. Draft Minutes**

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 21 May 2026.

### **3. Matters Arising**

There were no matters arising.

#### **4. Firearms licensing fees – Consultation on Proposed Amendments to Firearms Licensing Fees and the Banded System - Department of Justice oral evidence**

The Committee noted correspondence from the Ulster Farmers' Union advising of its concerns about the fee increases proposed by the consultation on amendments to firearms licencing fees and the banded system. .

The Committee noted that the Minister had issued an urgent Written Statement on 27 May 2026 advising that the consultation on the proposed changes to firearms licencing fees and the banded system had been withdrawn.

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 2.05pm:

Christopher George, Head of Firearms and Explosives Branch;  
Dr Jennifer Stewart, Firearms and Explosives Branch;  
Claire Duncan, Firearms and Explosives Branch; and  
Mark Roberts, Chief Superintendent, PSNI.

The witnesses provided oral evidence on the Department of Justice's proposed amendments to the Firearms (Northern Ireland) Order 2004 (the 2004 Order) for the "banded system" and fees payable for firearms licensing and related services and the withdrawal of the consultation.

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

*Emma Sheerin declared an interest in relation to a family member who holds a licensed firearm.*

*Doug Beattie left the meeting at 2.52pm.*

During the evidence session, the PSNI agreed to provide the Committee with further information on:

- Why the cost-recovery deficit is so large compared to the deficit in 2016;
- The number of applications currently in the system that are considered 'complex files';

- An outline of the benefits of the online system for licensing applications;
- Details of the fees paid for obtaining information required for applications from third parties;
- The numbers of staff qualified to process firearms licences in 2016 compared to present day;
- A breakdown of the current Firearms and Explosives Branch (FEB) staff, including grades and areas they currently work on;
- Costs of FEB staff overtime; and
- Costs of processing the backlog of firearms licence applications.

The evidence session was recorded by Hansard.

The Chairperson thanked the witnesses and they left the meeting at 3.46pm.

*Patsy McGlone left the meeting at 3.46pm.*

#### **5. Firearms licensing fees – Consultation on Proposed Amendments to Firearms Licensing Fees and the Banded System - The British Association for Shooting and Conservation oral evidence**

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 3.47pm:

Tommy Mayne, Director, BASC Northern Ireland;

Dr Alex Murray, Head of Law, BASC;

Gavin Walsh, Former Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance (NIPSA) representative.

The witnesses provided oral evidence on the Department of Justice’s public consultation on its proposed amendments to the Firearms (Northern Ireland) Order 2004 for the “banded system” and fees payable for firearms licensing, and related services.

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

*Patsy McGlone returned to the meeting at 4.00pm.*

The evidence session was recorded by Hansard.

The Chairperson thanked the witnesses and they left the meeting at 4.43pm.

*Patsy McGlone left the meeting at 4.43pm.*

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

The Committee noted forty-three responses from individuals and stakeholders to the Call for Evidence on the Criminal Justice (Sentencing etc) Bill, including thirty-one responses via Citizen Space. Members will consider what further oral evidence sessions may be required on the Bill in due course.

## **7. Justice Bill – Written Papers**

### **7.1 and 7.2 – Ministerial amendments**

The Committee noted the tabled Ministerial amendments to Part 1 of the Justice Bill relating to Biometrics. The tabled amendments contain a number of changes which were not present in the text of the draft amendments provided to the Committee during the Committee Stage of the Bill, and the Committee therefore did not have an opportunity to consider or take an agreed position on them as part of its Committee Stage scrutiny.

### **7.3 - Non-filterable List Committee**

The Committee noted a copy of the draft Terms of Reference for the new Non-Filterable List Committee for the AccessNI Filtering Scheme.

### **7.4 - Police Barred and Advisory Lists – Departmental correspondence**

Members noted correspondence from the Department of Justice providing a copy of the Ministerial amendments to the Justice Bill which create provision to produce a police barred and advisory list for Northern Ireland; and make provision that will enable officers who retire or resign while the subject of an investigation, and who have been added to the advisory list, to be brought back for misconduct proceedings, which may also be concluded in their absence.

### **7.5 - Clause 27A Taxation Reform – Departmental correspondence**

The Committee noted an update from the Department of Justice in response to some of the points raised during recent evidence sessions with the Bar of Northern Ireland and the Law Society for Northern Ireland on the Ministerial amendment for new Clause 27A of the Justice Bill in relation to taxation reform.

**Agreed:** To forward the Department's correspondence to the Law Society and the Bar for information.

### **8. SL1 Special Educational Needs and Disability Tribunal (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026**

**Agreed:** To defer consideration of the SL1 until the position of the Committee for Education is available.

*Connie Egan left the meeting at 4.51pm.*

### **9. Police Officer Misconduct and Vetting Procedures – Intention to consult - Department of Justice written paper**

The Committee noted a paper from the Department of Justice providing an update on progress to introduce legislative amendments in relation to the police officer misconduct and vetting procedures; and giving notice of the Department's intention to commence a targeted consultation on a draft Statutory Rule to introduce amendments to the Police (Conduct) Regulations (NI) 2016.

**10. Legal Aid Remuneration – Consultation on maintaining an up-to-date table of offences and classification of criminal cases – Department of Justice written paper**

The Committee noted a paper from the Department of Justice giving notice of its intention to conduct a targeted consultation on proposals on how the Legal Services Agency classify criminal cases not already classified in the legal aid legislation.

**11. Compensation Awards for Miscarriages of Justice – Consultation on Proposals to Amend Statutory Maximum Compensation Awards – Department of Justice written paper**

The Committee noted a paper from the Department of Justice giving notice of its intention to conduct a public consultation on the statutory maximum amounts of compensation payable for miscarriages of justice under section 133 of the Criminal Justice Act 1988, as it applies to those cases in Northern Ireland which fall to the Department of Justice.

**12. Correspondence**

The Committee considered the following items of correspondence:

- A response from the Department of Justice regarding the Extern Prisoner Support Project.

**Agreed:** To forward the Department's response to Extern for information.

- Further correspondence from an individual in relation to support for litigants in person, including support for self-litigants with disabilities.

**Agreed:** To forward the individual's response to the Department of Justice for comment on key matters it asserts that the

Department's previous response has not addressed, and for a response to the specific questions raised.

The Committee noted the following items of correspondence:

- Committee for Finance - Guidance to Departments in absence of a budget for 2026-27.
- Prisoner Ombudsman for Northern Ireland - Independent investigation report into the circumstances surrounding the serious adverse incident involving Mr Stephen Smith.
- Ulster University - Invitation to "A representative police service for today's Northern Ireland?" discussion event, 8 June 2026, Ulster University, Belfast, York Street.

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

#### **13.1 - Committee's Draft Forward Work Programme**

The Committee 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 the next meeting will take place on Thursday 4 June at 2.00pm in Room 30, Parliament Buildings.

*The meeting was adjourned at 4.58pm.*

**Paul Frew MLA**

**Chairperson, Committee for Justice**

**4 June 2026**