



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Justice

Minutes of Proceedings

Thursday 5 February 2026

Room 30, Parliament Buildings, Belfast

Present:

Paul Frew MLA (Chairperson)

Emma Sheerin MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

Doug Beattie MLA

Maurice Bradley MLA

Connie Egan MLA

Aoife Finnegan MLA

Brian Kingston MLA

Patsy McGlone MLA

Present by Video or Teleconference:

Ciara Ferguson MLA

In Attendance:

Peter McCallion (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 1.30pm in closed session.

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

1. Apologies

There were no apologies.

2. Justice Bill – Committee Deliberations

Maurice Bradley joined the meeting at 1.38pm.

Liz Marsh, Assembly Clerk, Bill Office, attended the meeting to provide advice on various aspects of the Justice Bill.

The Committee discussed the Justice Bill Part 3 – Use of Live Links; Part 4 – Administration of Justice; and Part 5 – Final Provisions. Members identified a number of areas that they wished to request more information on or discuss further with Departmental officials.

Maurice Bradley left the meeting at 2.02pm.

The meeting moved to public session at 2.02pm.

Agreed: That the oral evidence session with the Justice Minister, and the Committee Deliberations on the Justice Bill with Department of Justice officials, will be recorded by Hansard.

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

3. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 29 January 2026.

4. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

5. Ministerial Briefing – Minister of Justice oral evidence

Naomi Long, Minister of Justice and Hugh Widdis, Permanent Secretary, Department of Justice joined the meeting at 2.05pm.

The Minister briefed the Committee on a number of issues, including:

- progress on key Departmental workstreams;
- Departmental budget allocations;
- the Criminal Bar Association’s withdrawal of services and the ongoing relationship between the Bar Council and the Department of Justice;
- the publication of the names of PSNI Officers on the NI Courts website;
and
- the Justice Bill and the Department’s wider legislative agenda.

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

Maurice Bradley returned to the meeting at 2.15pm.

Pasty McGlone left the meeting at 3.38pm.

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

- Feedback from the PSNI to the Justice Minister on the proposed Repeal of Vagrancy amendment.

The evidence session was recorded by Hansard.

The Chairperson left the meeting at 4.18pm

The Deputy Chairperson took the Chair at 4.18pm.

The Deputy Chairperson thanked the Minister and her official and they left the meeting at 4:34pm.

The meeting was suspended at 4.34pm.

The meeting resumed in public session at 4.40pm with the following Members present:

Emma Sheerin, Deputy Chairperson

Doug Beattie

Maurice Bradley

Connie Egan

Ciara Ferguson

Aoife Finnegan

Brian Kingston

6. Justice Bill – Committee Deliberations – Department of Justice oral evidence

The following officials joined the meeting at 4.40pm:

Lisa Boal, Head of Police (PACE) Policy and Legislation Branch, Department of Justice; and

Andrew Laverty, Bill Manager, Department of Justice.

The officials provided further information on specific aspects Part 1 of the Justice Bill that Members had agreed to seek clarity on during last week's Committee deliberations on the Justice Bill, and also on some matters discussed during the closed session at today's meeting.

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

Aoife Finnegan left the meeting at 5:13pm.

The evidence session was recorded by Hansard.

The Chairperson thanked the officials and they left the meeting at 5.15pm

7. Justice Bill – Written Papers

7.1 – Police Service of Northern Ireland – Response following the oral evidence session held on 15 January 2026.

The Committee noted a follow-up paper from the PSNI, following their oral evidence session with Members on 15 January 2026, which provides further information on the PSNI's guidance on dealing with female detainees in custody settings; the types of offences that Community Resolution Notices are used for; and a number of matters related to crimes committed by children in the 10 to 14 age bracket.

8. Sentencing Bill – Pre-legislative Scrutiny - Correspondence

The Committee noted correspondence from an individual expressing concern regarding the hate crime aspects within the forthcoming Sentencing Bill, specifically the potential that 'transgender' could be added as a statutory aggravator for hate crime at a later stage.

9. SL1 The Police and Criminal Evidence (Northern Ireland) Order (Codes of Practice) Order 2025 – Department of Justice written paper

Agreed: To defer consideration of the SL1 to a future meeting of the Committee.

10. Correspondence

The Committee considered the following items of correspondence:

- Correspondence from the Northern Ireland Survivor Council requesting that the organisation serve as a formal consultant to the Committee on issues relating to childhood sexual abuse and wider sexual violence.

Agreed: To add the Northern Ireland Survivor Council to the Committee's stakeholder list and respond to the organisation advising of this position.

- Further correspondence from Causeway Coast Dog Rescue (CCDR) requesting a review of the Committee's initial decision not to undertake a formal investigation or inquiry into animal welfare and oversight within NI prisons. Members noted that the Committee had previously reviewed that decision at its meeting on 27 November 2025 and wrote to CCDR to reiterate its position.

Agreed: To note the further correspondence from CCDR.

The Committee noted the following items of correspondence:

- Committee for Finance - Copies of Departmental November and December public expenditure outturn and forecast outturn returns.
- Lady Chief Justice - Copy correspondence to the Minister of Justice regarding a vacancy that will shortly arise in the Court of Appeal.

- Further copy correspondence from an individual to Craigavon Courthouse and Carla Lockhard MP regarding an ongoing personal issue.
- Pivotal tracker report - 'Two years of the restored Northern Ireland Executive'.
- Northern Ireland Police Fund Annual Report and Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2025.

11. Forward Work Programme

11.1 Forward Work Programme

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

Agreed: To hold next week's scheduled oral evidence sessions with the Public Prosecution Service and the Police Service of Northern Ireland on delays in the criminal justice system as a joint evidence session.

12. Chairperson's Business

There was no Chairperson's business.

13. Any Other Business

There was no other business.

14. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting

Members were advised that next meeting will take place on Thursday 5 February at 2.00pm in the Room 30, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 5.20pm.

Paul Frew MLA
Chairperson, Committee for Justice
12 February 2026