



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Justice

Minutes of Proceedings

Thursday 7 May 2026

Room 30, Parliament Buildings, Belfast

Present: Paul Frew MLA (Chairperson)
Emma Sheerin MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Doug Beattie MLA
Connie Egan MLA
Ciara Ferguson MLA
Aoife Finnegan MLA
Brian Kingston MLA
Patsy McGlone 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 2.02pm in public session.

Connie Egan joined the meeting at 2.03pm.

Agreed: That the three oral evidence sessions with the Commissioner Designate for Victims of Crime, the Law Society of Northern Ireland and the Department of Justice 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.

Aoife Finnegan declared an interest as a contributor to the research for the Commissioner for Victims of Crime Northern Ireland's (CVOONI) Totally Invisible report.

1. Apologies

As above.

2. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 30 April 2026.

3. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

4. “Totally Invisible” report – Commissioner Designate for Victims of Crime oral evidence

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 2.05pm:

Geraldine Hanna, Commissioner Designate for Victims of Crime; and
Louise Kennedy, Chief of Staff, CVOCNI

The witnesses provided oral evidence on the *Totally Invisible* report, which accounts the experiences of domestic violence and abuse victims/survivors and children engaging with private law family court processes in Northern Ireland.

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

The Chairperson thanked the witnesses and they left the meeting at 3.39pm.

Connie Egan left the meeting at 3.39pm.

Agreed: To request an update from the Lady Chief Justice on the six-month review of the domestic abuse guidance for Family Court proceedings which was issued in June 2025.

Doug Beattie left the meeting at 3.40pm.

5. Justice Bill – Taxation reform: New Clause 27A – Law Society of Northern Ireland oral evidence

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 3.40pm:

Eoghan McKenna, Society Junior Vice-President and Chair of the Law Society’s Access to Justice Committee; and
Janice Spence, Former member of the Society’s Council and past Chair of the Family Law Committee

Connie Egan returned to the meeting at 3.42pm.

The witnesses provided oral evidence on the proposed Ministerial amendment to the Justice Bill to insert a new Clause 27A that will reform taxation for legal aid cases.

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

The Chairperson thanked the witnesses and they left the meeting at 4.12pm.

6. Justice Bill – Restorative Justice – Accreditation Process outcome – Department of Justice oral evidence

The following official joined the meeting at 4.13pm:

Veronica Holland, Deputy Director, Reducing Offending Division

The official provided oral evidence on the process and outcome of the Department's new adult restorative justice accreditation process.

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

The Chairperson thanked the witnesses and they left the meeting at 4.41pm.

Members indicated that they were content not to proceed with a Committee amendment to the Minister's planned Restorative Justice amendment, to add provision for the Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland (CJINI) to carry out initial, pre-accreditation inspections of prospective restorative justice providers.

7. Criminal Justice (Sentencing etc) Bill – Written papers

7.1 – Equality Coalition – Response to Call for Evidence

The Committee noted a submission in response to its Call for Evidence from the Equality Coalition, which focusses on Part 6 of the Bill and recommends adding an additional aggravated offence of 'misogyny'.

7.2 – Marie Collins Foundation – Response to Call for Evidence

The Committee noted a submission in response to its Call for Evidence from the Marie Collins Foundation, which focuses on an urgent and compelling need for more robust sentencing for Technology-Assisted Child Sexual Abuse (TACSA) and Child Sexual Abuse Material (CSAM) offences.

7.3 – Rape Crisis NI – Response to Call for Evidence

The Committee noted a submission in response to its Call for Evidence from Rape Crisis NI. The response provides views on several of the Clauses in the Bill, and makes a number of recommendations for improving the Bill, including a call for ‘misogyny’ and ‘transphobia’ to be added as aggravators.

7.4 – Committee for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs – Response to Call for Evidence

The Committee noted a submission in response to its Call for Evidence from the AERA Committee. The response asks the Committee to consider potential impacts on and the practical implications of the expansion of community-based requirements within suspended sentences provided for in Part 2 of the Bill, as well as the inclusion of those delivering services in rural areas and in agricultural or environmental contexts, such as inspectors or enforcement officers, in the context of the new offence of assaulting public workers.

7.5 – Committee for Communities – Response to Call for Evidence

The Committee noted a submission in response to its Call for Evidence from the Committee for Communities, which advise of its support for the provisions of the Bill that touch upon the remit of the Department for Communities, and particularly welcomed the breadth of the public worker provisions at Part 6 of the Bill.

7.6 – Committee for Finance – Response to Call for Evidence

The Committee noted a nil response from the Committee for Finance to its Call for Evidence on the Criminal Justice (Sentencing etc) Bill.

7.7 and 7.8 – Correspondence regarding Jade’s Law

The Committee noted individual responses from the Committee for Finance and the Department of Finance in response to a request for views and details of any policy development work in relation to Jade’s Law. Members noted that the Minister of Finance has asked officials to undertake detailed policy development with a view to developing legislation that will be ready early in the next mandate.

7.9 – P Dolan – Death by Dangerous Driving

The Committee considered correspondence from Mr P Dolan, a campaigner for an increase to sentencing tariffs for death by dangerous driving, requesting an opportunity to appear before the Justice Committee to discuss this aspect of the Bill.

Agreed: To invite Mr Dolan to attend a future Committee meeting to give oral evidence on the provisions of the Bill relating to Road Traffic Offences.

8. Police Officer Misconduct and Vetting Procedures – Update – Department of Justice written paper

The Committee considered a paper from the Department of Justice providing an update on progress to introduce legislative amendment in relation to the police officer misconduct and vetting procedures.

Brian Kingston left the meeting at 4.50pm.

Agreed: To ask the Department of Justice for more information on why it is not possible to progress the proposal to remove the requirement of the Police Ombudsman to wait for criminal proceedings to conclude before issuing a memorandum relating to progress of discipline to the PSNI during this mandate; and details of what work has been done to progress this matter within the current mandate.

Agreed: To request an oral briefing on the legislative amendment update and broader issues related to Police vetting and misconduct procedures.

9. Domestic Abuse and Civil Proceedings Act (Northern Ireland) 2021 – A Review of the Effectiveness of Part 1: Year Three Review - Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland report

The Committee considered a copy of the Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland's (CJINI) Year Three Review of the Effectiveness of Part 1 of the Domestic Abuse and Civil Proceedings Act (Northern Ireland) 2021.

Agreed: To ask the Department of Justice, the PSNI and the PPS for comment and response to the findings, recommendations and areas for improvement included in the CJINI report.

10. Correspondence

The Committee considered the following items of correspondence:

- A response from the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland to the Committee's request for information on the publishing of a report into the PSNI's response to dealing with vulnerable persons.

Agreed: To forward the response for information to the individual who raised the matter with the Committee.

- A response from the Committee for Communities to correspondence the Committee had previously forwarded from an individual raising concerns around the operation of the Family Court system and the Child Maintenance Service, with particular reference made to the impact on fathers.

Agreed: To request that this Committee be kept apprised of the Department for Communities' response on this matter.

- Correspondence from the Committee for Education to all Statutory Committees seeking views on two Private Member's Bills that it is currently considering.

Agreed: To issue a nil response to the Committee for Education in relation to both Bills.

- Correspondence from the Committee for the Economy seeking views on two Bills that it is currently considering.

Agreed: To issue a nil response to the Committee for the Economy in relation to both Bills.

- Correspondence from Counsellor Catherine Nelson on behalf of the McElvanna family raising concerns about impact that the industrial action by the Criminal Bar Association is having on the progress of the case of the person accused of causing the collision, in which three individuals died.

Agreed: To advise Cllr Nelson that, while the Committee is not unsympathetic to the concerns raised, it is unable to intervene or become involved in individual cases; and to forward a redacted copy of previous correspondence from the Minister of Justice to the Committee on this issue to Cllr Nelson for information.

Agreed: To request an update on whether the Accelerated Review of Criminal Legal Aid Fees has been completed and information on the next steps, including timescales.

- Forwarded correspondence from an individual to the Justice Minister regarding Pre-Release Testing prior to Tariff Expiry Date.

Agreed: To request a copy of the Minister’s response to the individual on this matter.

The Committee noted the following items of correspondence:

- Chairpersons’ Liaison Group – Updated Guidance: Guide for Witnesses appearing before Assembly Committees and Guide to the Role of Committee Chairpersons.
- Northern Ireland Audit Office – ‘Continuous Improvement Arrangements in Policing’ report.
- An individual – Several further copied correspondence regarding a Health and Social Care appeal hearing.

11. Forward Work Programme

11.1 - Committee’s Draft Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered the latest draft of the Committee’s forward work programme.

Agreed: That the Department of Justice’s oral evidence on the proposed amendments to Firearms Licensing Fees and the “Banded System” will be taken before the oral evidence from the British Association for Shooting and Conservation at the meeting on 28 May 2026.

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 the next meeting will take place on Thursday 14 May at 2.00pm in Room 30, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 5.03pm.

Paul Frew MLA
Chairperson, Committee for Justice
14 May 2026