



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Justice

Minutes of Proceedings

Thursday 30 April 2026

Room 30, Parliament Buildings, Belfast

Present: Paul Frew MLA (Chairperson)
Emma Sheerin MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Connie Egan MLA
Ciara Ferguson MLA
Brian Kingston MLA
Patsy McGlone MLA

Present by Video or Teleconference:

Doug Beattie MLA

Apologies: Maurice Bradley 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 2.03pm in closed session.

Agreed: That the meeting begin in closed session to receive procedural advice on the Minister of Justice's proposed approaches to bringing forward the Deepfake amendment to the Justice Bill.

1. Apologies

As above.

2. Justice Bill – Deepfake amendment – procedural advice

Dr Frank Geddis, Clerk Assistant, attended the meeting to provide procedural advice to assist the Committee's consideration of the Justice Minister's proposed approaches to bringing forward the Deepfake amendment to the Justice Bill.

Dr Frank Geddis left the meeting at 2.41pm.

Agreed: To advise the Minister of the Committee's view that it is for her, as Minister, to determine the best approach to progressing the amendment; that the Committee has concerns with the risks it perceives with each of the Minister's proposed approaches; that the Committee recognises the importance of the issue and wishes to engage constructively with the Department to ensure that the legislation is as robust as possible; and to request that the Committee is provided with the outcome of the

consultation, the final policy position and the drafting instructions to the Office of the Legislative Counsel at the earliest opportunity.

The meeting moved to public session at 2.41pm

Agreed: That the oral evidence session with The Bar of Northern Ireland on the proposed new Clause 27A of the Justice Bill regarding taxation reform 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 23 April 2026.

4. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

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

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 2.44pm:

Denise Kiley KC, Vice Chair of the Bar Council

Laura Vance, Family Bar Association

David Mulholland, Chief Executive, Bar of Northern Ireland

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 3.53pm.

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

6.1 – Clerk’s Memo – Criminal Justice (Sentencing etc) Bill – Update on Committee Stage

The Committee considered an update on its ongoing Call for Evidence of the Criminal Justice (Sentencing etc) Bill, as well as a number of proposals for receiving evidence on the Bill following the conclusion of the Call for Evidence.

Agreed: That the closing date for the Call for Evidence be extended to 22 May 2026.

Agreed: That the Committee proceed with scheduling oral evidence with a number of key stakeholders, to ensure that the evidence sessions can begin promptly following closing of the Call for Evidence.

Agreed: That the Clerk liaise with the Commissioner Designate for Victims of Crime Northern Ireland (CVOONI) to explore a proposed approach to informal meetings that would enable the Committee to hear directly from victims of crime on the provisions of the Bill.

The Committee also noted a number of matters not currently within the Bill that the Committee has been asked to consider as part of its scrutiny of the legislation.

6.2 – Northern Ireland Policing Board – Response to Call for Evidence

The Committee noted a response from the Northern Ireland Policing Board to advise the Committee of the Policing Board's views on a number of the provisions within the Sentencing Bill.

6.3 – Retail NI – Response to Call for Evidence

The Committee noted a submission in response to the Sentencing Bill from Retail NI and will consider the paper further when planning additional oral evidence sessions after the Call for Evidence has closed.

6.4 – Committee for Infrastructure – Response to Call for Evidence

The Committee noted a nil response to its Call for Evidence from the Committee for the Infrastructure.

7. SL1 Special Educational Needs and Disability Tribunal (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026

The Committee considered a paper from the Department of Justice advising of its intention to make a Statutory Rule under powers conferred by the Education (Northern Ireland) Order 1996 and the Special Educational Needs and Disability (Northern Ireland) Order 2005.

Agreed:

- To issue a call for views on the proposed Statutory Rule using the standard survey;
- To publish the SL1, Appendix A and a draft copy of the proposed statutory rule and any relevant departmental documentation on the committee website;
- To consider the proposed Statutory Rule at the meeting on 21 May 2026;

- To write to the Department of Education and the Committee for Education to request their views of on the proposed Statutory Rule.

8. Review of State Pathologist's Department – Department of Justice written paper

The Committee considered an independent review report of the State Pathologist's Department, and the Department of Justice's and State Pathologist's joint response to the recommendations contained in the independent report.

Agreed: To seek clarity from the Department on what is meant by accepting recommendations 'in principle', as well as an update on any work that the Department has conducted in relation to the absence of a perinatal or paediatric pathologist for Northern Ireland and the impact of parents having to travel to Liverpool to access this service.

9. Correspondence

The Committee considered the following items of correspondence:

- A response from the Department of Justice to number of questions that the Committee had received from an individual regarding the Police Injury on Duty scheme and the Committee for Justice's oversight of its review.

Agreed: To forward the Department's response to the individual who had raised the matter with the Committee and to advise that the Committee has noted that the review is ongoing.

- A number of further questions from an individual in relation to Injury on Duty awards following a previous response from the NI Policing Board.

Agreed: To forward the individual's latest questions to the Department of Justice and the Policing Board for a response.

- Correspondence from an individual seeking clarification on the Committee's powers to scrutinise both the Northern Ireland Policing Board and the Department of Justice.

Agreed: To respond to the individual advising of the relevant sections of the NI Assembly's Standing Orders, the Belfast Agreement and the Northern Ireland Act 1998, which outline the powers and responsibilities of Assembly Statutory Committees.

- A response from the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland to correspondence the Committee had issued in relation to regulations for the Troubles Permanent Disablement Payment Scheme (TPDPS) and the role of the Victims' Payments Board.

Agreed: To forward to the Secretary of State's correspondence to the Executive Office for a response.

- Correspondence from an individual raising concerns about the Victims' Payment Board and decisions being taken on claims to the Troubles Permanent Disablement Payment Scheme.

Agreed: To advise that the Committee has engaged on the issues raised and forward a copy of the Secretary of State's correspondence for information.

- A request for views from the Committee for Finance on the Marriage and Civil Partnership Bill.

Agreed: To respond to the Finance Committee with a nil response.

- Copies of correspondence from an individual to other individuals in relation to a personal case.

Agreed: That any future items relating to the case that the Committee has been copied into are not included in the meeting pack.

The Committee noted the following items of correspondence:

- Department of Justice - Response regarding engagement with the Programme on Paramilitarism and Organised Crime (EPPOC) in the development of the collective strategic approach to safer communities.
- Committee for Finance - 2025-26 Public Expenditure Outturn and Forecast Outturn - March Position.
- Independent Autism Reviewer for Northern Ireland - First annual report of the Independent Autism Reviewer.
- ISNI - Investing Activity Report for Department of Justice, April 2026.
- An individual - Ongoing personal matters.

10. Forward Work Programme

10.1 - Committee's Draft Forward Work Programme

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

Agreed: To schedule the concurrent meeting with the Committee for the Executive Office on the Police Ombudsman's

report on the Abuse of Position for Sexual Purposes by PSNI Officers for Tuesday 2 June 2026 at 9:30am.

Agreed: To reschedule an information event with the Northern Ireland Judicial Appointments Commission (NIJAC), which had also been scheduled to take place on 2 June 2026.

11. Chairperson's Business

There was no Chairperson's business.

12. Any Other Business

There was no other business.

13. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting

Members were advised that next meeting will take place on Thursday 7 May at 2.00pm in Room 30, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 4.11pm.

Paul Frew MLA
Chairperson, Committee for Justice
7 May 2026