Northern Ireland Assembly

Committee for Justice

Minutes of Proceedings

Tuesday 20 October 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

Present by Video or Teleconference:

Doug Beattie MLA

Aoife Finnegan MLA

Apologies: Maurice Bradley MLA

Patsy McGlone MLA

In Attendance: Kathy O'Hanlon (Assembly Clerk)

Thomas McKillop (Senior Assistant Assembly Clerk)

Gareth Black (Assistant Assembly Clerk)

Danielle Saunders (Clerical Supervisor)

The meeting commenced at 9.36am in closed session.

Agreed: That the meeting begin in closed session to continue the deliberation stage of the Criminal Justice (Sentencing etc) Bill.

1. Apologies

As above.

2. Criminal Justice (Sentencing etc) Bill – Deliberations

Aoife Finnegan joined the meeting at 9:41am.

Emma Sheerin joined the meeting at 9.47am.

The Committee discussed Clause 1(4), Part 3, Part 4 and Part 5 of the Criminal Justice (Sentencing etc) Bill. Liz Marsh, Assembly Clerk, Bill Office, was in attendance to provide advice to the Committee.

The Committee identified several areas that Members would like to explore further, including potential Committee amendments, or matters which they wished to request further clarification on.

Aoife Finnegan left the meeting at 10:28am.

The Committee noted follow-up correspondence from the Equality Coalition relating to their recent oral evidence with the Committee on the Criminal Justice (Sentencing etc) Bill.

Liz Marsh left the meeting at 10:55am.

The meeting moved to public session at 10:56am.

3. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 13 October 2026.

4. Criminal Justice (Sentencing etc) Bill – Recording of Decisions

The Chairperson put on record a number of actions agreed by Members during the Committee's deliberations on the Criminal Justice (Sentencing etc) Bill in closed session.

Agreed: To advise the Department of Justice that the Committee is considering potential amendments on the following matters and ask if the Minister would be content to bring them forward at Consideration Stage:

- To insert an amendment that would include 'culpability' and 'harm' to Clause 1(4) of the Bill; and the Department's views on the text of a draft amendment proposed by Professor Brown and on the implications of removing Clause 1(4) altogether.
- To insert new article 3A(c) at Clause 18 to include that that court must explain to victims, in ordinary language, the effect of a life sentence order.
- In Clause 18, to create a provision whereby an offender can be compelled to attend court to be present for the explanation to the offender under 3A(b) and face sanctions if they refused to attend or are disruptive during sentencing proceedings.

- In Clause 19, to add a child being present at the time of a murder as an aggravating factor at paragraph 5(1) of the new Schedule A1 at Schedule 3.

Agreed: To seek the views of the Department of Justice and the Public Prosecution Service on including a statutory duty at Clause 21 to inform victims of their right to request a review of a sentence they believe to be unduly lenient, and what the implications of such a duty might be in practice.

Agreed: To consider increases in the percentage terms at Clause 24 (5)(a) and Clause 29(3) further at the next Committee meeting.

Agreed: To request clarification from the Department of Justice as to whether the inclusion of (AP/2) in the formula at subsection (5) automatically applies a reduction of 50% in every case, and how that sits with the provision at subsection (3) that the reduction "may be *up to* 50 per cent of the additional custodial period."

5. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting

Members were advised that the next meeting will take place on Thursday 22 October at 2pm in Room 30, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 10.59am.

Paul Frew MLA
Chairperson, Committee for Justice
3 November 2026