Northern Ireland Assembly

Committee for Justice

Minutes of Proceedings

Tuesday 3 November 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
	Ciara Ferguson MLA
	Brian Kingston MLA
Present by Video or Teleconference:	
	Aoife Finnegan MLA
Apologies:	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 deliberations on the Criminal Justice (Sentencing etc) Bill.

1. Apologies

As above.

2. Criminal Justice (Sentencing etc) Bill – Deliberations

Brian Kingston joined the meeting at 9:37am.

Aoife Finnegan joined the meeting at 9:40am.

Liz Marsh, Assembly Clerk, Bill Office, was in attendance to provide advice to the Committee.

The Committee discussed the following matters not currently included in the Bill:

- Helen's Law
- Jade's Law
- Jasmin's Law
- Jonny's Law
- Increased Offender's Levy
- Free access to Sentencing Remarks
- Victim Information Scheme (VIS) Opt-out
- Early Guilty Pleas
- Presumption of a victim's ability to read out a Victim Impact Statement (VPS)
- Harper's Law

- Removal of the defence of reasonable chastisement

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.

Brian Kingston left the meeting at 10:26am.

Aoife Finnegan left the meeting at 10:29am

Liz Marsh left the meeting at 10:59am.

The meeting moved to public session at 10:59am.

3. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 20 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 ask if the Minister would be content to bring forward an amendment that will include in the Bill those aspects of the Prisoners (Disclosure of Information About Victims) Act 2020 (known as Helen's Law) which relate to the requirement for the Parole Board to take into account the failure to disclose the identity of a child or children in images of sexual abuse when considering the release of a convicted child sex offender.
- To request that the Department proceeds as quickly as possible with the aggravator for the offence of supplying

drugs to children or vulnerable people ("Jasmin's Law") which the Department has previously advised the Committee it will take forward as part of its current review of sentencing policy.

- To ask the Bill Clerk to prepare an amendment to make provision for free access to sentencing remarks for victims; and to seek the Department's views on such an amendment and whether the Minister would be content to bring it forward at Consideration Stage.
- To ask the Bill Clerk to prepare an amendment to change the current opt-in procedure for the Victim Information Scheme to an opt-out scheme; and to seek the Department's views on such an amendment and whether the Minister would be content to bring it forward at Consideration Stage.
- To ask the Bill Clerk to prepare an amendment to give victims the right to read their Victim Personal Statement in court; and to seek the Department's views on such an amendment and whether the Minister would be content to bring it forward at Consideration Stage.

Agreed: To write to the Committee for Finance to encourage it to include 'Jade's Law', which seeks to automatically suspend parental responsibility of any parent convicted of murdering or committing voluntary manslaughter against their partner or ex-partner with whom they share children, in its Legacy Report.

The Committee also noted a response from the Department of Justice to correspondence from the UK National Preventative Mechanism regarding the impact of the Criminal Justice (Sentencing etc) Bill on the prison population.

Agreed: To forward the Department's response to the UK National Preventative Mechanism for information.

5. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting

Members were advised that the next meeting will take place on Thursday 5 November at 2pm in Room 30, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 11.02am.

Paul Frew MLA
Chairperson, Committee for Justice
10 November 2026