



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Justice

Minutes of Proceedings

Thursday 24 September 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)

Paula Morrow (Clerical Supervisor)

Aaron Pakenham (Clerical Officer)

The meeting commenced at 2.01 pm in public session.

Agreed: That the oral evidence sessions with the families of Lisa Dorrian and Charlotte Murray, the Marie Collins Foundation, and the Commissioner for Older People NI on the Criminal Justice (Sentencing etc) Bill will be recorded by Hansard.

1. Apologies

As above.

2. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 17 September 2026.

3. Matters Arising

3.1 – Department of Justice - Response to the Committee for the Executive Office correspondence

The Chairperson reminded Members that, at the meeting on 17 September 2026, the Committee agreed to ask the Department of Justice for a copy of its response to the Committee for the Executive Office on the Ministry of Defence's handling of Armed Forces Veterans' claims to the Troubles Permanent Disablement Scheme.

Members noted that the Department had since advised that the response will be issued directly to the individual who raised the concerns with the TEO Committee, and therefore will not be copied to the Justice Committee.

3.2 – Department of Justice – Response to correspondence from an individual regarding Industrial Tribunals and Fair Employment Tribunals

The Committee was advised that, in response to correspondence to the Department of Justice requesting comment on concerns raised by an individual regarding the Industrial Tribunals and Fair Employment Tribunals, the Department advised that it has no locus in these Tribunals and responsibility for them sits with the Department for the Economy.

Agreed: That the correspondence be forwarded to the Minister for the Economy for a response.

3.3 - Criminal Justice (Sentencing etc) Bill – Men’s Advisory Project submission

The Committee noted a submission from the Men’s Advisory Project Northern Ireland in response to the Sentencing Bill.

Agreed: That the Men’s Advisory Project be invited to provide oral evidence on the Sentencing Bill.

4. Criminal Justice (Sentencing etc) Bill – Families of Lisa Dorrian and Charlotte Murray oral evidence

The following witness joined the meeting at 2.07pm:

Joanne Dorrian, John Dorrian, Michelle Dorrian, Sinead Corrigan,
Mary Murray

The witnesses provided oral evidence on the Criminal Justice (Sentencing etc) Bill.

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

The evidence session was recorded by Hansard.

On behalf of the Committee, the Chairperson expressed gratitude to the witnesses for attending today's meeting and conveyed support for their ongoing campaign for justice.

The Chairperson thanked the witnesses and they left the meeting at 2.48pm.

Agreed: To seek clarity from the Department on:

- Why Clause 24(2) is deemed necessary and under what circumstances the Department expects that a court might deem a disclosure 'contrary to interests of justice'.
- Why, in relation to Clause 29(2), a reduction in tariff would not apply for the purposes of incentivising disclosure if that disclosure came within 1 month of the custodial period being due to end.

5. Criminal Justice (Sentencing etc) Bill – Marie Collins Foundation oral evidence

The following witness joined the meeting at 2.51pm:

Karen Garland, Head of Policy, Marie Collins Foundation

Patsy McGlone joined the meeting at 2.51pm.

The witness provided oral evidence on the Criminal Justice (Sentencing etc) Bill.

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

During the evidence session the witness agreed to provide further information on:

- The Ofcom Protect Children report establishing a correlation between child exposure to pornography and Child Sexual Abuse Material (CSAM) later in life.
- Views on a potential gap in Clause 31 of the Sentencing Bill compared to the provisions in Helen's Law for a Parole Board to take into account the failure of offenders to disclose the identity of a child in an indecent image when considering their release; as well as potential wording for an amendment to the Bill which might address such a gap.
- Views on the addition of 'denunciation' of offenders or offences at Clause 1 (2) in terms of the purposes and principles of sentencing.

The evidence session was recorded by Hansard.

The Chairperson thanked the witness and she left the meeting at 3.53pm.

6. Criminal Justice (Sentencing etc) Bill – Commissioner for Older People NI oral evidence

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 3.53pm:

Siobhan Casey, Commissioner for Older People NI

Anna Doran, Policy & Research Officer, COPNI

Raymond Johnston, Legal Officer, COPNI

The witnesses provided oral evidence on the Criminal Justice (Sentencing etc) Bill.

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

Patsy McGlone left the meeting at 4.40pm.

During the evidence session the witnesses agreed to provide further information on the provisions in Scotland relating to age as an aggravator by hostility.

The evidence session was recorded by Hansard.

The Chairperson thanked the witnesses and they left the meeting at 4.55pm.

The Committee noted a response from the Department of Justice to concerns raised in oral evidence from the Public Prosecution Service regarding aggravation by reason of vulnerability.

Agreed: To forward the Department's response to the Public Prosecution Service for comment.

The Committee noted that the Department of Justice is scheduled to provide oral evidence on the Sentencing Bill on 8 October, at the end of the evidence gathering on the Bill.

Agreed: To forward the Table of Issues on the Sentencing Bill to the Department for a response to the issues raised in the evidence received to date.

7. Victims and Witnesses of Crime Bill – Written papers

7.1 – Minister of Justice – Motion to extend Committee Stage

The Committee noted correspondence from the Minister of Justice on the Committee's agreement to extend the Committee Stage of the Victims and Witnesses of Crime Bill until 22 January 2027.

7.2 - 7.6 – Victims and Witnesses of Crime Bill – Written submissions

The Committee considered submissions in response to the call for evidence on the Victims and Witnesses of Crime Bill from the following bodies:

- Committee for Education;
- Committee for Infrastructure;
- Committee for the Executive Office;
- Committee for Communities; and
- Academics based at the University of Glasgow

Patsy McGlone returned to the meeting at 4.47pm.

7.7 – Victims and Witnesses of Crime Bill – oral evidence planning

The Committee considered an update on its ongoing call for evidence on the Victims and Witnesses of Crime Bill, as well as a number of proposals for receiving evidence on the Bill following the conclusion of the Call for Evidence.

Agreed: To invite the Commissioner Designate for Victims of Crime NI, Victim Support NI, Criminal Justice Inspection NI and the PSNI to provide oral evidence on the Bill.

Agreed: That Members consider which additional stakeholders they wish to propose that the Committee invites to give oral evidence on the Victims and Witnesses of Crime Bill.

The Chairperson advised Members that agenda items 8 and 9 will be considered together.

8. SL1s The Police Act 1997 (Criminal Records) (Amendment No. 2) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026

9. The Rehabilitation of Offenders (Exceptions) (Amendment No. 2) Order (Northern Ireland) 2026

The Committee considered a proposal from the Department of Justice to make two Statutory Rules to address potential safeguarding gaps by permitting Enhanced AccessNI checks, including barred list checks, for registered health care professionals employed or engaged by the Department for Communities.

Both Rules will be subject to the negative resolution procedure.

Agreed: To issue a call for views on the proposed Statutory Rules using the standard survey; to publish the SL1s and the draft Statutory Rules on the Committee's website; and to consider both proposed Statutory Rules at the meeting on 15 October 2026.

10. SL1 The Justice (2011 Act) (Amendment of Schedule 3) Order (Northern Ireland) 2026 – Update to football bodies, championships and leagues – Correspondence

The Committee noted further correspondence from Mr Jamie Bryson on the Department's proposal to make a Statutory Rule to update references to football bodies, championships and leagues in relation to regulated matches for the purposes of Part 4 of that Act.

The Committee also noted a response from the Department of Justice providing confirmation from the Department for Communities that its correspondence which corrected earlier information provided to the Committee does not directly impact the SL1 and the draft Statutory Rule.

11. Armed Forces Bill – Legislative Consent Memorandum – Correspondence

The Committee noted correspondence from the PSNI expressing its views on the potential extension to Northern Ireland of certain measures in the Armed Forces Bill.

Agreed:	To forward the PSNI's response to the Department for a response to the matters raised and clarity requested.
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12. Budget 2026-27 to 2029-30 - Information Gathering Exercise – Department of Justice written paper

The Committee noted the Department of Justice's response to the Department of Finance's recent Budget 2026-27 to 2029-30 Information Gathering Exercise.

13. Correspondence

The Committee considered the following items of correspondence:

- Copied correspondence from the Committee for Infrastructure to the Department for Justice regarding car insurance awards in Northern Ireland and the Department's response.

Agreed: To ask the Department what is being done about the matter, and whether the Department is considering any initiatives to address it.

- Correspondence from the Committee for the Executive Office regarding the report on 'The Prevalence and Impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences in Northern Ireland'.

Agreed: To request a response from the Department to the report and its findings.

- Further correspondence from an individual requesting that the Committee give consideration to safeguarding, accountability and justice in faith organisations.

Agreed: To ask the Department for Health, the Department of Justice and the Department for Communities to clarify the role of their respective Departments on this matter.

The Committee noted the following items of correspondence:

- Assembly and Executive Review Committee - Review into the development of a formal process and guidance on the handling of Westminster Statutory Instruments which include a role for the Assembly.
- Individual - Concerns regarding the implementation of the Children (NI) Order 1995.
- Assembly Research and Information Service (RalSe) - KESS Series 9 Programme.

14. Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered a proposed forward work programme for October from the Department of Justice and the latest draft of the Committee's forward work programme.

Agreed: To schedule the proposed work items from the Department of Justice into the Committee's forward work programme.

15. Chairperson's Business

There was no Chairperson's business.

16. Any Other Business

There was no other business.

Emma Sheerin left the meeting at 5.10pm.

17. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting

Members were advised that the next meeting will take place on Tuesday 29 September at 9:30am in the Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings.

The Chairperson reminded Members that the Committee agreed to meet informally with a family immediately following the Committee meeting on 29 September 2026, to discuss their experiences relevant to the Road Traffic Offences provisions in the Sentencing Bill.

The meeting was adjourned at 5.11pm.

Paul Frew MLA

Chairperson, Committee for Justice

1 October 2026