



**Northern Ireland
Assembly**

COMMITTEE FOR JUSTICE

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

TUESDAY 27 JANUARY 2015
Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings

- Present:** Mr Alastair Ross MLA (Chairman)
Mr Raymond McCartney MLA (Deputy Chairman)
Mr Sammy Douglas MLA
Mr Tom Elliott MLA
Mr Paul Frew MLA
Mr Seán Lynch MLA
Mr Alban Maginness MLA
- In Attendance:** Mrs Christine Darrah (Assembly Clerk)
Mr Keith McBride (Senior Assistant Assembly Clerk)
Mrs Sinead Kelly (Assistant Assembly Clerk)
Miss Marianne Doherty (Clerical Officer)
- Apologies:** Mr Stewart Dickson MLA
Mr Chris Hazzard MLA
Mr Patsy McGlone MLA

The meeting commenced at 12.49 p.m. in public session.

1. Apologies

As above.

2. Report of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation in Northern Ireland

The Chair of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation in Northern Ireland, Kathleen Marshall, and Derek Williamson, Inspector, Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland joined the meeting at 12.50 p.m.

Ms Marshall briefly outlined the key findings and recommendations of the Independent Inquiry Report into Child Sexual Exploitation in Northern Ireland with particular reference to those relating to criminal justice issues.

A detailed question and answer session followed covering issues including: the level of commitment of the PSNI at both strategic and operational levels to addressing the issue of child sexual exploitation; what improvements are needed; the nature of child exploitation in Northern Ireland compared to other jurisdictions; the issue of young people returning to their abuser, the reasons for this and whether it is common across all jurisdictions; the extent to which underage drinking contributes to the problem of child sexual exploitation; whether the laws relating to underage drinking are being properly enforced by the PSNI; the extent of paramilitary involvement, whether this is organised by individuals and whether it is specific to urban areas or also occurs in rural areas; the perception by some people and communities that was highlighted in the report that certain people and families are ‘untouchable’ and how this can be addressed; the link between social media and child exploitation; the legislation in place to deal with child sexual exploitation; examples of existing legislation that could be used more effectively to deal with the issues; the level of general awareness among parents of child sexual exploitation and the potential dangers; the need to raise awareness of child sexual exploitation; the current perceptions of and difficulties jurors have in understanding child sexual exploitation; what improvements have been made to the structures in place to deal with child sexual exploitation; the benefits from Operation Owl and the Public Protection Units; whether previous reports had signalled a problem but it had not been picked up; how this situation could be avoided in the future; the need to improve the linkage between individual cases and strategic analysis; the need to increase victims confidence in the reporting mechanisms and the handling of cases and how this can be achieved; the low conviction rates and the reasons for this; issues relating to challenges to the credibility of victims; how methods of child exploitation evolve and change over time; the levels of child sexual exploitation across all backgrounds; the need to review the Youth Services; and the recent judicial review and the need for clear guidance regarding arrangements for statutory and voluntary agencies sharing information.

The Chairman thanked Kathleen Marshall and Derek Williamson for the briefing and they left the meeting.

3. Correspondence

The Committee noted an invitation to a NIACRO seminar sponsored by Mr Sammy Douglas MLA on ‘Our Voice: Developing a Charter and Policy Framework for children affected by imprisonment of a family member’ on Wednesday 28 January in Parliament Buildings.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that Members should advise the Clerk if they wished to attend this event.

4. Any Other Business

The Committee briefly discussed the arrangements for the establishment of an Ad Hoc Committee in relation to the Statutory Rule: The Justice (Northern Ireland) Act 2004 (Amendment of Section 8(4)) Order (Northern Ireland) 2015.

5. Date and Time of next meeting

The next meeting will take place on Wednesday 28 January 2015 at 2.00 p.m. in Room 21, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 1.49 p.m.

Mr Alastair Ross MLA
Chairman, Committee for Justice