

COMMITTEE FOR JUSTICE

END OF SESSION REPORT – 1 SEPTEMBER 2014 – 31 AUGUST 2015

REMIT, POWERS AND MEMBERSHIP

The Committee for Justice is a Statutory Departmental Committee established in accordance with paragraphs 8 and 9 of the Belfast Agreement, Section 29 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and under Assembly Standing Order 48.

The Committee has a scrutiny, policy development and consultation role with respect to the Department of Justice (DoJ) and has a role in the initiation of legislation.

The Committee has the power to:

- consider and advise on departmental budgets and annual plans in the context of the overall budget allocation;
- consider relevant subordinate legislation and take the committee stage of primary legislation;
- call for persons and papers;
- initiate inquiries and make reports; and
- consider and advise on any matters brought to the Committee by the Minister of Justice.

The Committee has 11 members including a Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson and a quorum of 5.

The membership of the Committee during the reporting period has been as follows:

Mr Alastair Ross (Chairman) ¹

Mr Raymond McCartney (Deputy Chairman)

Mr Stewart Dickson

Mr Sammy Douglas ²

Mr Paul Frew ³

Mr Chris Hazzard ⁴

Mr Sean Lynch

Mr Alban Maginness

Mr Patsy McGlone

Mr Edwin Poots ⁵

Mr Neil Somerville ⁶

1. With effect from 10 December 2014 Mr Alastair Ross replaced Mr Paul Givan as Chairman.
2. With effect from 6 October 2014 Mr Sammy Douglas replaced Mr Sydney Anderson.
3. With effect from 6 October 2014 Mr Paul Frew replaced Mr Jim Wells.
4. With effect from 6 October 2014 Mr Chris Hazzard replaced Ms Rosaleen McCorley
5. With effect from 6 October 2014 Mr Edwin Poots replaced Mr William Humphrey.
6. With effect from 30 June 2015 Mr Neil Somerville replaced Mr Tom Elliott.

Overview

1. During the Assembly session 2014-15 the Committee for Justice completed a substantial work programme during which it scrutinised a wide range of criminal justice issues including those referred to it by the Department of Justice and others of public interest. The Committee also completed the Committee Stage of the Justice Bill and considered a large number of Statutory Rules.
2. Details of Committee expenditure during this reporting period are included at Annex A.

Meetings

3. The Committee held 42 meetings, two of which took place outside Parliament Buildings at NIACRO's Head Office in Belfast and the Inn of Court in the Royal Courts of Justice. During the visit to NIACRO Committee members took the opportunity to meet senior managers and staff to discuss the programmes being delivered including Jobtrack, Choose2Change and New Directions and the support NIACRO provides to address and prevent reoffending behaviour. Prior to the meeting held in the Inn of Court Members met informally with representatives of the Bar Council and young barristers to discuss a range of issues and challenges relating to funding for, and the operation of, the legal system.



Committee meeting at the Inn of Court, Royal Courts of Justice

4. The Lord Chief Justice, the Rt Hon Sir Declan Morgan QC, and the Chief Constable, George Hamilton, both attended meetings during the session to discuss a range of issues relating to policing and the administration of justice.
5. There were five occasions when a short part of the meeting was held in closed session. The closed sessions were scheduled in accordance with normal procedural convention to enable the Committee to take privileged legal advice on a range of issues and to take advice on and discuss a possible amendment to the Justice Bill.

Engagement - Events, Informal Meetings and Visits

6. In addition to the external meetings the Committee also visited the Lagan Search and Rescue Team in Belfast to view the facilities and meet with staff to discuss the voluntary work they carry out in support of the PSNI.



Committee Members spending the afternoon with Lagan Search and Rescue

7. In March 2015 the Committee agreed to undertake work to proactively identify and discuss innovative approaches that could be adopted to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the justice system in Northern Ireland with the initial emphasis on youth justice.
8. As part of this work the Committee held three Justice Seminars with keynote speakers between April and June 2015. The Committee also undertook a visit to London and the Chairman and Deputy Chairman visited Holland to meet with representatives from the Hague Institute for the Internationalisation of Law and the Dutch Legal Aid Board. Further details of this work are included in the body of the report.
9. In May 2015 the Committee held an informal stakeholder event to discuss emerging themes and issues relating to business crime and identify key actions that could be taken to improve the reporting and recording of that type of crime.
10. The Chairman and Deputy Chairman also held meetings with the Minister of Justice, the Lord Chief Justice, senior PSNI officers and a range of key stakeholders to discuss criminal justice issues and priorities and the Committee met with the Anti-Slavery Commissioner designate to discuss his role and responsibilities in the context of Northern Ireland.

Primary Legislation

Human Trafficking Bill

11. The Committee for Justice completed the Committee Stage of the Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Further Provisions and Support for Victims) Bill and published its report on 10 April 2014. At that time the Committee noted that, depending on the results of the Department of Justice consultation on proposals to strengthen the response to human trafficking in Northern Ireland, which had been informed by measures contained in the draft Modern Slavery Bill published by the Home Secretary in December 2013, the Department may bring forward proposals that could impact on a number of provisions in the Bill. The Committee agreed that it would give consideration to any further proposals when the results of the consultation were available.

12. In September 2014 the Department of Justice advised the Committee that further work had been carried out, in conjunction with Lord Morrow, in relation to the Human Trafficking Bill since the completion of the Committee Stage and outlined a range of additional amendments to be brought forward which would result in a major restructuring of the Bill. Some of the amendments had implications for existing provisions in the Bill or for draft amendments previously provided to the Committee. The Committee considered the new amendments, which covered a range of issues including changes to the sentencing framework for human trafficking and slavery-like offences, new civil prevention orders and the confiscation of criminal assets of perpetrators and agreed that it was content to support them. The Committee subsequently wrote to all MLAs advising them of the new amendments and the Committee position on them given the substantial changes since the Committee had published its report on the Bill.

Justice Bill

13. The Committee dedicated a significant amount of time during the 2014-2015 session to scrutiny of the Justice Bill which covered a wide range of policy areas and aimed to improve the operation of the justice system by improving services for victims and witnesses, speeding up the justice system and improving the efficiency and effectiveness of key aspects of the system. The Committee also

considered a range of amendments and a number of proposed new provisions brought to its attention by the Department of Justice, the Attorney General for Northern Ireland and Mr Jim Wells MLA.

14. The Committee Stage of the Bill began on 25 June 2014 enabling the Committee to invite written evidence over the summer period and commence oral evidence sessions and detailed consideration of the clauses and provisions of the Bill and the various proposed amendments in the autumn.

15. The written and oral evidence raised a number of issues and concerns regarding the provisions in the Bill, particularly in relation to the proposals for a single jurisdiction for county courts and magistrates' courts, the committal for trial provisions, the proposals for prosecutorial fines and Violent Offences Prevention Orders and the proposed changes relating to early guilty pleas. The proposed amendments by the Attorney General for Northern Ireland and Mr Jim Wells MLA also attracted a diverse range of views which the Committee explored in detail with the Department of Justice, the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, the Attorney General for Northern Ireland and key stakeholders. The Committee report on the Justice Bill which was published in April 2015 can be found here:

<http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/assembly-business/committees/2016-2017/justice-2/reports/report-on-the-justice-bill-nia-3711-15/>

16. The Committee particularly welcomed the provisions in the Bill relating to the creation of new Statutory Victim and Witness Charters, a statutory entitlement for a victim to be given the opportunity to make a Victim Impact Statement and the introduction of a statutory framework for the management of cases, all of which had been included as a direct result of the findings and recommendations it had made in its Inquiry into the Criminal Justice Services available to Victims and Witnesses of Crime. The Committee also supported proposed new provisions to improve protection for children and vulnerable adults.

17. In relation to the proposed amendments by the Attorney General, the first of which would amend the Coroners Act (Northern Ireland) 1959 which provides him

with the power to direct an inquest where he considers it 'advisable' to do so to confer on him a power to obtain papers and provide a clear statutory basis for disclosure in circumstances relating to deaths in hospital or where there was otherwise a suggestion that medical error may have occurred, and the second which would confer rights of audience equivalent to those of barristers in private practice on any barrister or solicitor working in his office and designated by him, the Committee decided not to take them forward as Committee amendments having considered all the views expressed.

18. The views expressed in the written and oral evidence received on the proposed amendment by Mr Jim Wells MLA to restrict lawful abortions to National Health Service premises except in cases of urgency when access to National Health Service premises is not possible and where no fee is paid and which included an additional option to the existing legislation to provide for a period of 10 years imprisonment and a fine on conviction on indictment to be imposed were divided with organisations and individuals either strongly supporting it or indicating strong opposition to it. While opinion within the Committee was also divided with some Members supporting the proposed amendment and others opposing it the Committee agreed to take it forward at Consideration Stage. The amendment did not receive the support of the Assembly.

19. The Committee also engaged extensively with the Department of Justice regarding the inclusion of a specific clause in the Bill which allowed the Department to amend, appeal or revoke primary legislation agreed and passed by the Assembly by way of secondary legislation, which would not be subject to the level of scrutiny that primary legislation receives. The Committee was of the view that powers should be provided for an exact purpose rather than be broad in nature and, whilst noting that this type of clause is a common occurrence in Bills, was not content with the wide ranging powers it provided and agreed to oppose its inclusion in the Bill. This position was supported by the Assembly at Consideration Stage and the clause was removed from the Bill.

Justice No.2 Bill

20. The Justice (No.2) Bill was introduced to the Assembly on 30 June 2015 and covers a range of issues including arrangements for the collection and enforcement of financial penalties and the establishment in statute of the Prisoner Ombudsman's main functions in terms of complaints, deaths in custody investigations and investigations requested by the Department.
21. The Committee received a briefing on the principles of the Bill from departmental officials on 23 June 2015 and, given the limited time available for the Bill to complete its passage before the end of the mandate, subsequently agreed arrangements to seek written evidence in anticipation of the Committee Stage commencing in September 2015.

Mental Capacity Bill

22. In January 2015 the Committee considered the results of the public consultation on the draft Mental Capacity Bill. Following receipt of the final version of the Bill in April 2015 the Committee wrote to the Business Committee asking it to establish the Ad Hoc Joint Committee which had previously been agreed by the Committee and the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety as the preferred mechanism to undertake scrutiny of the Bill. The Ad Hoc Committee was subsequently established and held its first meeting on 19 May 2015.

Legislative Consent Motions

23. The Committee agreed to support a Legislative Consent Motion (LCM) to extend the provisions in the Modern Slavery Bill relating to the establishment of the office of Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner, the introduction of new enforcement powers in relation to ships in order to tackle human trafficking and slavery where they occur at sea and the enhancement of transparency in supply chains to Northern Ireland. A short report setting out the Committee's deliberations and conclusions was issued to inform all Assembly Members in advance of the plenary debate and can be found here:

<http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/assembly-business/committees/2016-2017/justice-2/reports/report-on-the-legislative-consent-motion-the-modern-slavery-bill/>

The LCM was subsequently agreed by the Assembly on 8 December 2014.

24. The Committee also agreed to support an LCM to extend provisions in the Serious Crime Bill relating to proceeds of crime legislation, Serious Crime Prevention Orders, new and additional offences relating to female genital mutilation and the criminalisation of the possession of material containing practical advice on how to commit a sexual offence against a child to Northern Ireland on the basis that the crimes being addressed by the Bill were cross jurisdictional and best tackled in a consistent manner across the United Kingdom and there was a need for the measures to come into force at the same time for judicial and law enforcement purposes. The Committee report that was prepared to help inform Assembly Members in advance of the debate on the issue in Plenary can be found here:

<http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/assembly-business/committees/2016-2017/justice-2/reports/report-on-the-legislative-consent-motion-serious-crime-bill/>

The LCM was subsequently agreed by the Assembly on 8 December 2014.

Statutory Rules

25. The Committee considered 32 Statutory Rules during the period of this report. Eight of the Rules were subject to the draft affirmative procedure and after consideration the Committee recommended these should be affirmed by the Assembly. The other Rules were subject to the negative resolution procedure and, following scrutiny, the Committee agreed that it had no objections to them.

26. The Statutory Rules covered a diverse range of areas including: amendments to give effect to and ensure compliance with a number of EU Directives including the Directive on the Right to Interpretation and Translation in Criminal Proceedings; changes relating to AccessNI checks; a revision of the list of organisations that Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland has the power to

inspect; changes to commence Civil Legal Services as a result of the transfer of powers from the Legal Services Commission to an Agency of the Department of Justice; revisions to Police and Criminal Evidence Codes of Practice A to H to reflect current policing procedures and practices; and procedures to make improvements in the administration of insolvencies.

27. In relation to proposals for a Statutory Rule to change the remuneration rates for solicitors and counsel representing defendants granted criminal legal aid for cases in the Crown Court the Committee considered written and oral evidence from departmental officials, the Bar Council and the Law Society and sought clarification on a range of issues including the likely impact on access to justice of further reductions and the implications of recent court judgements relating to legal aid fees. The Committee also took account of the assessment of the impact of the Department of Justice Legal Aid reform package it had commissioned from Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland.

28. In April 2015 the Committee agreed it was content with the Statutory Rule but also sought clarification from the Department of Justice regarding the nature of its intended consultation on how to address the issue of exceptionality and the timescale for its completion.

29. During the last reporting period (2013 – 2014 session) the Committee agreed it was content with a proposal by the Attorney General for Northern Ireland (AGNI) to add the PSNI to the list of organisations to which he issues guidance on human rights standards under Section 8 of the Justice (Northern Ireland) Act 2004. The Committee subsequently agreed the Statutory Rule required to bring the change into effect during this session. The Committee also approved three other Statutory Rules laid by the Attorney General which brought into operation human rights guidance he had prepared for the Probation Board for Northern Ireland, the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunal Service in relation to support for victims and witnesses and the Youth Justice Agency on conditions of detention.

Inquires

Inquiry into the issues of public confidence around how the Criminal Justice System has handled allegations of sexual abuse from within the republican community involving the republican movement

30. Following the broadcasting of a BBC Spotlight Programme on 14 October 2014 in which allegations were made regarding potential interference in the justice process the Committee agreed that the Minister of Justice should attend to discuss the matter and that consideration should be given to the options available to undertake an inquiry.

31. The Minister attended a meeting on 21 October 2014 following which the Committee considered a number of options and agreed to hold an Inquiry into the issues of public confidence around how the Criminal Justice System has handled allegations of sexual abuse from within the republican community involving the republican movement. To inform the Inquiry terms of reference the Committee agreed to request a copy of the Report of the Keir Starmer Independent Review of the Prosecution of Related Sexual Abuse and Terrorism cases by the Public Prosecution Service, the Report of the Review by the Attorney General for Northern Ireland of the decision by the Public Prosecution Service in October 2011 not to prosecute Mr Gerry Adams TD and the Report of the Police Ombudsman's investigation into a complaint relating to the PSNI handling of the M Cahill case.

32. Following receipt of the Keir Starmer Report and the Attorney General's Report the Director of Public Prosecutions and senior officials attended the Committee meeting on 11 June 2015 to give oral evidence on the findings and recommendations and answer Members' questions.

33. The Police Ombudsman's Office has advised the Committee that a report on the investigation into the M Cahill complaint is being prepared and the Committee will consider the findings and recommendations when it is available.

The Review of Judicial Appointments Policy and Procedures

34. The Committee deferred work on the Review of Judicial Appointments Policy and Procedures during this session given the need to prioritise completion of the Committee Stage of the Justice Bill and consider other issues of public interest.
35. The Committee will give consideration to how it can progress this work before the end of the mandate at the beginning of the next session.

Justice Innovation Seminars and Visits

Seminars

36. During the session the Committee for Justice introduced a series of seminars to assist it in proactively identifying and discussing innovative approaches that could be adopted to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the justice system in Northern Ireland. Seminars were held in April, May and June and focused on the issue of innovation in the youth justice system.
37. The first seminar took place in April and the Lord Chief Justice, Sir Declan Morgan QC, delivered the keynote address on youth justice and innovations that have the potential to speed up and improve the system. The ensuing discussion covered the benefits of a diversionary approach for young people, the use of digital technologies and statutory time limits in Youth Courts
38. At the second seminar in May, the Bar Council gave the keynote address and again focused on innovation in the youth justice system with practicing barristers providing perspectives from the defence and the prosecution side in relation to youth justice cases and changes that could be adopted.



Committee Members with the Chairman of the Bar and other representatives from the Bar Council

39. The third seminar in June was taken by the Law Society and considered the issue of Initiatives in Children's Order Public Law Proceedings. The discussion focused on the issue of social media and its use and application in the justice system.

Visits

40. In June 2015 the Committee undertook a visit to London, the aim of which was to build on the Justice seminars and explore and discuss innovative approaches currently being used or piloted in England and Wales in the areas of youth justice, digitisation of the courts and social media.

41. During the visit the Committee met with representatives of the Civil Justice Council and the Centre for Justice Innovation, the Lord Chief Justice of England and Wales, Lord Thomas of Cwmgiedd, and Sir Brian Leveson, President of the Queen's Bench, Mr Bob Neill MP, Chair of the House of Commons Justice Committee and Lord Neuberger, President of the Supreme Court and Lord Kerr.

42. The visit provided a very useful opportunity to discuss and exchange views and ideas on a range of initiatives including 'problem solving courts', changing technology and social media and its effects on the justice system, the use of online courts, and innovative approaches in the courts.



Committee Members meeting with the President of the Supreme Court, Lord Neuberger and Lord Kerr at the Supreme Court

43. In July 2015 the Chairman and Deputy Chairman visited The Hague to meet with the developer of an online dispute resolution platform and the Dutch Legal Aid Board to discuss how the Rechtwijzer system works in the Netherlands and possible other applications for the platform. While in The Hague, the Chairman and Deputy Chairman also met with the Deputy Director of Europol to discuss cybercrime and the President of the Dutch Council of the Judiciary to discuss the running of the Dutch Court Service.

44. The Committee intends to continue this area of work in the next session and will use the information and evidence gathered to assist its consideration of priorities for the next mandate.

Programme for Government

45. The Committee received regular reports from the Department of Justice on progress to deliver the seven Programme for Government commitments for which the Department has responsibility.

46. The Committee was particularly interested in the commitment to reduce the levels of serious crime and requested further information from the Department of Justice on the current levels of serious crime and how progress to reduce the levels was measured.

Budget Scrutiny

47. The Committee held seven oral evidence sessions on budgetary matters focusing particularly on the June, October and January Monitoring Rounds given the in-year financial pressures faced by the Department of Justice. The Minister of Justice and the Permanent Secretary attended on two occasions and the Chief Constable also attended to discuss the PSNI budget position and pressures.

48. In December 2014 the Committee considered the draft 2015-16 budget for the Department of Justice in relation to both resource and capital funding. The Committee was very concerned that the final budget allocations would not protect the delivery of essential front-line services and advised the Department that a cost-benefit analysis and an analysis of the likely impact of proposed reductions on and cost to other areas of the criminal justice system was essential otherwise the outcome would be short-term false economies. The Committee also indicated that it expected the Department and its Agencies and NDPBs to be innovative and collaborative in their approach to delivering services to ensure best use was made of the limited funding available and sought and received an assurance that budget allocations would support the Programme for Government commitments that fall to the Department of Justice to deliver.

49. The procurement process and the viability and delivery of the Desertcreat Community Safety Training College Capital Project continued to be of concern to the Committee. Two oral evidence sessions were held with the Minister of Justice and with Programme Board Members and senior officials to discuss the position regarding the procurement process and business case, the assessments being undertaken to ascertain the viability of the project and the availability of funding, and written up-dates were requested to enable the Committee to scrutinise the position at regular intervals.

Scrutiny of EU Issues

50. In March 2015 the Committee agreed its EU priorities for 2015. They covered a number of legislative and non-legislative proposals including simplifying access to justice; promoting effective remedies and use of technological innovations including the use of e-justice; reinforcing the protection of victims; human trafficking; combatting serious and organised crime; the mutual recognition of decisions and judgments in civil and criminal matters; and the UK's opt-in decision.

51. During the session the Committee considered legislative and other changes required to comply with and implement the EU Directive on Human Trafficking including the completion of the Committee Stage of the Human Trafficking Bill and consideration of the Department of Justice's proposals on 'Strengthening Northern Ireland's Response to Human Trafficking and Slavery'. Of particular interest to the Committee were measures required to implement the EU Directive on standards relating to the rights, support and protection of victims of crime with the Committee having previously made extensive recommendations in this area as part of its Inquiry into the Criminal Justice Services available to Victims and Witnesses of Crime in Northern Ireland.

52. The Committee considered issues regarding the implementation of EU Directive 2008/51/ED in relation to firearms and reducing gun crime in Europe and commissioned a research paper on the application of this Directive in Northern Ireland. The Committee also considered a number of Statutory Rules to implement EU regulations relating to Mutual Recognition of Protection Measures

in Civil Matters and Mutual Recognition of Probation Measures, Licence Supervision and Alternative Sanctions across Member States of the European Union.

53. The Committee continued to receive six-monthly updates from the Department of Justice on the current position in relation to EU Justice and Home Affairs measures, the known impact for Northern Ireland and progress in accessing EU funding schemes.

Policy Scrutiny

54. The Committee scrutinised numerous draft consultation papers and policy proposals on a wide range of criminal justice matters and requested further information and clarification where necessary. Some of the key policy areas considered included:

Criminal and Civil Legal Aid Reform

55. The Committee continued its scrutiny of the Department of Justice's Programme of Reform of Criminal and Civil Legal Aid including proposals for changes to remuneration arrangements for solicitors and counsel representing defendants in Crown Court cases, the scope of civil legal aid, funding of money damages cases, proposals for new civil legal aid fees in Children and Family cases, the deployment of and remuneration for expert witnesses and the introduction of a statutory registration scheme for all providers of publicly funded legal aid in Northern Ireland.

56. To assist its consideration of how access to justice could be protected while addressing the problems and issues including the need to bring the cost of legal aid within budget the Committee took oral evidence from the Bar Council and the Law Society on several occasions and commissioned Criminal Justice Inspection NI to undertake an assessment of the impact of the Department of Justice Legal Aid Reform Package. The Committee also encouraged the Department and the

legal professions to adopt a collaborative approach with the aim of reaching a consensus way forward on the proposed changes.

Proposals to Rationalise the Courts Estate

57. In January 2015 the Committee was advised of a consultation by the NI Courts and Tribunals Service on proposals to rationalise the Courts Estate which included a new configuration of court boundaries and the closure of eight courthouses. Noting the concerns expressed publicly by the Lord Chief Justice regarding the proposals the Committee invited him to attend to discuss the potential impact on court users, in particular vulnerable victims and witnesses, and access to justice at the meeting held in the Inn of Court on 18 March 2015.
58. The Committee also received correspondence from several Councils requesting an opportunity to discuss the proposals and particularly the potential closure of courthouses in their areas. The Committee therefore decided to hold an evidence event at the beginning of July to which all Councils were invited to attend to discuss the likely impact of the proposed closures, ways to improve efficiency and achieve cost savings and how existing buildings could be better utilised.
59. Following the evidence event the Committee requested further information from the NI Courts and Tribunals Service on a range of issues. The evidence taken on the rationalisation proposals and the additional information will inform the Committee's consideration and decisions on the final proposals which are due to be presented by the NI Courts and Tribunals Service in the next session.

Prison Reform

60. The Committee continued to closely monitor the delivery of the Prison Reform Programme, including the Prison Estate Strategy, the Secure College and alternatives to full body searching through regular briefings from senior NI Prison Service officials and consideration of the Prison Review Oversight Group Reports.
61. The Committee also discussed a number of specific issues and concerns with Prison Service officials including staff morale, the high level of staff sick absence,

the number of assaults on staff and prisoners, the turnover rate of new recruits, the number of vacant posts, the training programmes available and drug misuse in prisons.

62. In November 2014 the Committee took evidence from the Independent Assessors and Prison Service officials on the Stocktake Report on the Implementation of the Roe House Agreement and the Prison Service response.

The Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation in Northern Ireland

63. Following the publication of the Report of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation in Northern Ireland the Chair of the Inquiry attended to discuss the findings and recommendations relevant to the justice system. The Minister of Justice subsequently attended to outline the Department's response and the actions it intended to take in response to the report. The Committee sought assurances that a joined-up approach to implement the recommendations would be adopted between relevant Departments and Agencies to ensure the gaps and weaknesses identified would not occur again.

Amendments to Firearms Licensing Fees and Legislation

64. The Committee has been considering proposals by the Department to increase firearms licensing fees and make other miscellaneous amendments to the Firearms (Northern Ireland) Order 2004 since May 2012 and several times had expressed its concern and frustration regarding the lack of progress in relation to this matter and the need for meaningful engagement with stakeholders.

65. During the 2014/15 session the Committee took oral evidence on a number of occasions from departmental officials, PSNI officers and representatives of key stakeholder groups. The Committee therefore welcomed the indication from the Department and stakeholder groups in June 2015 that a level of agreement had been reached in relation to changes to firearms licencing fees and a banded system.

Other Policy Issues

66. Other key policy and performance areas scrutinised by the Committee included:

- Proposals to amend the Criminal Law on Abortion in Cases of Lethal Foetal Abnormality and Sexual Crime
- The Introduction of Statutory Time Limits in the Youth Courts
- A draft Domestic and Sexual Violence Strategy
- A draft Adult Safeguarding Policy
- A draft Desistance Strategy and Action Plan
- The delivery of the Access to Justice Review projects and progress with the Access to Justice Review Part 2
- Proposals for a revised approach to Custodial Arrangements for Children and a review of Community and Custodial Sentencing for Children

Key Priorities for the Next Session

67. The Committee's key priorities until the end of the mandate include:

- The Justice No.2 Bill
- Justice Innovation Seminars and Events including:
 - A seminar by the Hague Institute for the Internationalisation of Law on Online Courts
 - A seminar by the Centre for Justice Innovation on trends across criminal justice, innovative approaches and Problem Solving Courts
 - A conference on Justice in a Digital Age covering Social Media, Cybercrime and the Legal Response to Changing Technologies
 - An event at which Sir Brian Leveson will present his Report on his Review of Efficiency in Criminal Proceedings in England and Wales and discuss innovative approaches.
 - An event at which Lord Neuberger, President of the Supreme Court will speak on innovation in the justice system
- The Legal Aid Reform programme and related subordinate legislation and the outcome of the Access to Justice Review Part 2
- Budget scrutiny including 2015/16 spend and pressures and 2016/17 budget proposals

- The Department's proposals for the Rationalisation of the Courts Estate
- The draft Stopping Domestic and Sexual Violence and Abuse Strategy
- The Prison Reform Programme and prison issues

Committee for Justice

Expenditure for the period 1 September 2014 to 31 August 2015

Budget area	Details	Expenditure
Committee Travel - committee members and staff travel and subsistence in relation to visits and meetings outside Parliament Buildings	Includes the cost of Committee visits to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • London • Holland • Lagan Search and Rescue, Belfast and 2 meetings held outside Parliament Buildings	Total cost £5,911.36
Printing of committee reports	Includes the cost of the Committee Report and CD Roms on the Justice Bill	Total cost £1,901.44
Advertising costs - the cost of public notices relating to Committee Inquiries, the Committee Stage of Bills and meetings held outside Parliament Buildings	Includes the cost of public notices for the Justice No.2 Bill	Total cost £637.87
General expenses	Includes the cost of refreshments and hospitality for Committee meetings, working lunches, seminars, room hire, witness expenses and gifts provided by the Committee during visits.	Total cost £3,012.63
Total Expenditure		£11,463.30