



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Finance and Personnel

**OFFICIAL REPORT
(Hansard)**

**Vulnerable Witnesses/Business Tenancies:
Proposed Legislation**

8 February 2012

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

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Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mr Dominic Bradley (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Leslie Cree
Mr Paul Girvan
Mr William Humphrey
Mr Ross Hussey
Mr Mitchel McLaughlin
Mr Adrian McQuillan

Witnesses:

Ms Laura McPolin	Department of Finance and Personnel
Mr Oswyn Paulin	Department of Finance and Personnel

The Deputy Chairperson: We move to the next item: proposed legislation on vulnerable witnesses; and business tenancies. Two witnesses from DFP are present: Oswyn Paulin, who is head of legal services; and Laura McPolin, from the civil law reform unit in the Departmental Solicitor's Office. You are very welcome. We will deal first with the legislation on vulnerable witnesses. Oswyn, do you want to start? Can I ask you to be as brief as possible? Some members have to leave, so we want to finish the business as quickly as possible.

Mr Oswyn Paulin (Department of Finance and Personnel): We will be brief, Chairman. In order to assist brevity, it may be simpler to deal with both pieces of legislation in my opening remarks. Is that acceptable?

The Deputy Chairperson: Yes; that is fine.

Mr Paulin: On 26 October 2011, we appeared before the Committee and provided a preliminary briefing on the recommendations of the Northern Ireland Law Commission regarding the taking of evidence from vulnerable witnesses in civil proceedings. The Committee requested an update on that work; it also asked to be briefed on the commission's recommendations on business tenancies. A briefing paper on each of those issues has been provided to the Committee. However, prior to discussing the issues, I wish to provide a short update on the consultation exercise regarding the proposed statutory guidance on forced marriage, which, I believe, we mentioned in a previous Committee meeting.

The draft guidance was shared with the Committee in advance of the consultation, which ran from 10 November to 22 December 2011. At the end of the consultation, we had only three responses. One response simply sought further information on the logistics of the consultation exercise, including the handling of any responses. The analysis of the responses, which is very short, is awaiting ministerial clearance. We hope to be able to provide a copy to the Committee soon.

To turn to the two topics that are listed for discussion today — vulnerable witness and business tenancies — I propose that, in order to shorten the business, we take any queries that the Committee may have rather than rehearse what is in the briefing papers. I hope that the Committee is content with that approach.

Mr McLaughlin: That was brief.

The Deputy Chairperson: The purpose of the session is simply to update members on progress. We will invite you back for a further progress report. Apparently, members have no questions. Thank you very much for your contribution. We look forward to meeting you again.