



NEWS RELEASE

Date Issued 19 November 2014

For immediate Issue

DPP calls for radical reform of criminal justice processes

The Director of Public Prosecutions has called for a cohesive and radical reform of criminal justice processes to improve services for victims.

Speaking at the Justice Committee today (Wednesday 19 November) Barra McGrory QC highlighted a range of issues including reform of the Committal System, the implementation of a Statutory Case Management system and processes around early guilty pleas.

He said: "I commend the work of the Minister and the Department of Justice for the immense body of work that has gone to create the Fairer, Faster Justice Bill.

"In that context, I believe that this is the right time to push further, for a cohesive set of reforms that will have the combined ability to bring about positive change.

"I outlined to the Justice Committee at my previous appearance in 2012, and separately to the Minister for Justice, the extent of reform required. I do so, not just from the perspective of reducing avoidable delays and costs within the systems, important as these are, but also from the perspective of the experience of victims within the system.

"The incremental reforms intended by the Bill may result in the creation of a two-tier criminal justice system, with some categories of offences being fast-streamed and others not.

"If reform is carried out in a radical and cohesive way we can reduce the burden on victims while ensuring that the rights of a defendant are not diminished. In particular, I would highlight the necessity to go further in the reform of the Committal system

and a process for the effective use of early guilty pleas alongside the establishment of a Statutory Case Management approach and Legal Aid reform.”

The Director detailed for the Justice Committee a series of reform recommendations including:

- Extension of the reform of Committal processes
- Clearer processes around early guilty pleas, aligned with Legal Aid reform
- Robust Statutory Case Management system at Crown Court level, which will include application of time limits.
- The needs of victims and witnesses should inform any change from the County Court and Petty Sessions districts to a Single Jurisdiction arrangement.

ENDS

Note to editors:

1. Link to PPS consultation response can be found at; <http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/Documents/Justice/Justice-Bill/written-submissions/Public-Prosecution-Service.pdf>
2. The PPS is the principal prosecuting authority in Northern Ireland. In addition to taking decisions as to prosecution in cases investigated by the police in Northern Ireland, it also considers cases investigated by other statutory authorities, such as HM Revenue and Customs.
3. The Public Prosecution Service is regionally based, with four regions in total, each coterminous with one or more divisions. Each region is headed by a Regional Prosecutor (Assistant Director of Public Prosecutions) who has overall responsibility for decision making on investigation files and for the conduct of prosecutions in that region. Additionally, there are also a number of Sections, each headed by an Assistant Director, which deal with specialised or complex areas of work, these include; Central Prosecutions, Fraud and Departmental, Policy and High Court and International.

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