



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Employment and Learning

OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

Local Employment Intermediary Service
(LEMIS): DEL Briefing

6 February 2013

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

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Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mr Basil McCrea (Chairperson)
Mr Thomas Buchanan (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Jim Allister
Mr Sydney Anderson
Mr Phil Flanagan
Mr David Hilditch
Mr Chris Lyttle
Mr Fra McCann
Ms Bronwyn McGahan
Mr Pat Ramsey

Witnesses:

Mr Sam Bailie	Department for Employment and Learning
Mr Damian McCann	Department for Employment and Learning
Mr Brian Smart	Department for Employment and Learning

The Chairperson: I welcome Brian Smart, head of the not in employment, education or training (NEET) strategy branch; Damian McCann, from the employment service policy branch; and Sam Bailie, the Local Employment Intermediary Service (LEMIS) policy manager. Members should look at page 6 of the tabled papers. I am not a great fan of tabled papers, because the members get them set in front of them and they cannot do the work. It is more helpful if we can get them in advance. That is not an admonishment, just a reminder.

Mr Brian Smart (Department for Employment and Learning): We were asked at short notice to produce the paper last week, so there is a specific reason for that.

The Chairperson: OK. I am told that you are innocent.

Mr Smart: Thank you.

The Chairperson: In general terms, I prefer to get them in the pack, if possible. I understand that it was short notice.

Mr Smart: It will be useful if I provide you with a little bit of the history of the Local Employment Intermediary Service. It is a community employment initiative that is designed to help the hardest to reach in targeted areas to find employment. The service is provided by local community employment organisations in Belfast, Londonderry, Strabane, Newry and Mourne, Moyle, Cookstown and other

areas identified by the Noble indices. The programme is voluntary in nature. People volunteer to come on it; there is no mandatory aspect to it. We work very closely with people who have a common employability barrier to finding work; namely, homeless people, ex-offenders or ex-prisoners, people with a history of drug or alcohol abuse, and people who are leaving care. We have a range of LEMIS mentors who also travel to meet clients with a common employment barrier in local areas throughout Northern Ireland. LEMIS provides an impartial and confidential advice and support service and tailored assistance to help voluntary clients overcome personal barriers.

The LEMIS client base is the long-term unemployed and the economically inactive — those deemed furthest from the labour market. Benefit claimants make up 76% of caseloads, and non-benefit claimants 24%. The main priority groups are those claiming incapacity benefit, employment and support allowance (ESA), income support and carer's allowance.

There are three component parts to LEMIS: Client Engagement, where an employment mentor will provide one-to-one mentoring and advice to clients; the Skills for Employment option, which is where an employment mentor will encourage and motivate clients to avail themselves of training, education and work-placement opportunities to help improve their prospects of getting into full-time employment; and the Into Employment option, where an employment mentor helps clients to carry out job-search activities, complete CVs, application forms and improve job interview techniques. The mentor will also provide childcare and benefit advice for clients returning to work and support them when they enter employment.

I will give some figures on the performance of the Into Employment option. The number of clients caseloaded from April 2007 to December 2012 was just under 10,000. Of those, 2,365 entered full-time employment during the same period, so that is roughly 25% of clients caseloaded. The annual budget is £1.6 million, and LEMIS's costs since April 2007, when it was introduced, are £9.3 million, with a caseload unit cost of just under £1,000. For those who entered into full-time employment, the unit cost is just under £4,000.

I will outline some key components of the success of LEMIS. Since 2007, LEMIS has been an effective, low-cost employment intervention that delivers value for money. The service has a number of key strengths and characteristics. It is not a programme or a process. It is delivered as a service to clients who, by and large, come forward voluntarily. Clients participate at a time and pace that suits them. We take time to ensure that we can get people along a road rather than processing through a particular process. Employment mentors are there to provide one-to-one support to clients and to help them to overcome the issues that may be preventing them from finding and keeping a job. The service, uniquely, is delivered by community employment organisations in the community that they serve. These organisations are familiar with the issues in the local area and also have extensive knowledge of the local labour market. Unemployment mentors are qualified to a minimum of NVQ level 3 in Advice and Guidance, ensuring quality and expertise in delivering a professional service to those who they come into contact with. A strong client-mentor relationship exists, providing an opportunity to gain trust and respect and to progress clients into employment, education or training.

The service is performance-focused, and the funding model has been designed and weighted to reward LEMIS providers for moving clients into employment. The flexible discretionary fund encourages creativity and innovation by LEMIS providers to respond quickly to the employment needs of employers and employment opportunities that arise. It helps to reduce levels of social exclusion by delivering a high-quality and outcome-focused service. It has a track record of moving people who are long-term unemployed, including those with no history whatsoever of employment, into sustainable employment. It has been successful in attracting a balanced ratio of male and female clients of all priority groups, age groups and benefit recipients.

Recently, FGS McClure Watters evaluated the LEMIS programme between 2007 and 2009. That was published in 2009, and the key findings from that are as follows. LEMIS is well-placed to help to reduce levels of social exclusion, provided that it continues to deliver a high-quality and outcome-focused service. In year 1, 22% of clients caseloaded entered employment; in year 2, that rose to 27%; and 73% of those entering employment sustained that employment. The figures could possibly have been higher for a number of reasons, including strict qualifying criteria, employers not supplying information and the transition period.

The evaluation found that the client cost for those going into employment was just under £5,000, compared with £9,367 under the Working Neighbourhood pilot scheme, which operated in England, and £7,159 under Labour Market Intermediaries, which was a forerunner of LEMIS. Under Steps to Work, the cost was just over £5,000. The previous mainstream programme, New Deal, cost £6,800.

We can put the fact that the cost ratios are lower down to the fact that we have voluntary participation on the programme with people who want to change their circumstances rather than perhaps being subjected to the jobseeker's allowance (JSA) regime.

In year 2, 64% of clients entered employment, and did so within 12 weeks of being caseloaded, so moving clients into employment who have been unemployed for less than a year and those with no history of sustained employment is a success feature of the programme. Although the programme is voluntary in year 1, only 17% of people disengaged before 13 weeks. In year 2, only 14% of the clients left the programme before eight weeks.

As I said, we have success in attracting a 50:50 ratio among males and females, and we have success in attracting client groups from all priority groups: woman returners; youths; and people who have problems with drugs or alcohol.

The Chairperson: Brian, I will stop you there, because we can read the stuff.

Mr Smart: OK, sure.

The Chairperson: Is there anything in particular that you want to add? I do not need you to read through it all.

Mr Smart: It may be useful to bring in Sam at this point to talk about the refocusing of LEMIS, which is aimed at helping and assisting the Pathways to Success strategy.

Mr Sam Bailie (Department for Employment and Learning): As Brian said, we have done quite a lot of work on LEMIS. Since it started, we have tried to engineer a true partnership with the community and community groups. Where we see communities that have well developed social assets, we feel that they can deliver a service. Government does not necessarily have to be in it. We have taken a step back on LEMIS, so, the community is delivering this service, not government. We have put quite a lot of work into it. We have been successful in doing that and in getting value for money, keeping the cost down and working with all the different clients groups. We now want to try to refocus LEMIS to help us with our Pathways to Success strategy to work with young people who are not in employment, education or training. That will be a big move and change of focus for us within the funding model. So, we will look at that and then we will also use LEMIS to deliver a new community family support programme (CFSP), which is a pilot that we are about to run. It has just been designated as a signature project for Delivering Social Change.

That is what we have on the road forward. I am happy to take any questions.

The Chairperson: The bit that Sam talked about is on page 12. Members may want to have a look at a few of the details on that.

At the moment, I have Pat, Jim and Phil who want to ask questions. Members can indicate that they wish to speak. I have a few short questions. Who was LEMIS aimed at originally? I know that you said, but to tighten it, what were its roots?

Mr Bailie: Ten years ago, the Department had what were called targeted initiatives. They were, basically, in Belfast, Derry/Londonderry and Strabane's areas of worst multiple deprivation, based on their local industries. There was a culture of people going on training programmes, and it just seemed that they would go round and round; there were very little outputs. I think that Maria Eagle was the Minister responsible at the time. When we evaluated them, targeted initiatives were found to be good engagement in the communities but they were quite expensive and did not have good outcomes. We asked where we would go with this. Do we continue on with it, with the same client group of those who are hardest to reach and to help? Maria Eagle said, "You can have the money for this, on one condition, and that is that these people have to get into employment". So that is why it was called the Local Employment Intermediary Service. It was focused purely on employability and employment, and that is where we went. Basically, though, it had the same client group as targeted initiatives.

The Chairperson: OK.

Mr Damian McCann (Department for Employment and Learning): Primarily, we are talking about clients who are on incapacity benefit, ESA, income support and are lone parents, returners to the

labour market or carers. Those would be the benefit recipients, but around 25% of our client base consists of people who do not claim any benefits.

The Chairperson: That is interesting. So, what is the focus now moving to? That is what it was; what is the refocusing going to be?

Mr D McCann: We are in the middle of a contracting period. We have a further year to run, with the option to extend it to a last year. So, as Brian and Sam said, we have moved across into a new division and are now part of the NEET strategy. Our emphasis is going to be on young people, but not to the detriment of any of the other client groups. It is just to put a focus on that and to try to help out the situation with youth unemployment. We are continuing to work in partnership with the organisations that are delivering this to enhance the performance and to get more people into work, training and education.

The Chairperson: But why are you here? Why did you want to talk to us? What is it that you would like to tell us that you are doing differently? OK; I know that you are now in a new division and you have got a wee bit of NEETs coming in, but what else is happening? What is the difference?

Mr Smart: As far as the NEET strategy is concerned, one of the things identified was the need to engage with people in their communities to identify lots of young people who unfortunately find themselves not engaging. One of the things that came out of the Committee was the whole issue, for example, of an education maintenance allowance (EMA) for young people who are participating in European social fund (ESF) programmes. That also provides them with the opportunity to re-engage and for their parents to be able to get a child benefit.

We believe that LEMIS providers are uniquely placed to be able to bring as many young people as possible in the NEETs category into mainstream activity and get a positive outcome by moving them into employment or training, thus refocusing to aid the NEETs strategy going forward.

The Chairperson: It is not clear to me exactly where we are heading on this. It just needs a wee bit of sharper focus for us, so maybe when we ask the questions —

Mr Bailie: On the point that you made about us being here, I thought that the Committee invited us because it was a follow-up from the session that you had on Steps 2 Success.

The Chairperson: It will, indeed, have been, Sam, but I am trying to get focus. When witnesses come here, what is worth us knowing and engaging with? You will find in the questions that the Committee is particularly interested in NEETs and the hard-to-reach people. However, the issue for us is that we need to understand — at least I hope that the Committee will understand — precisely what it is that you offer and how it is different from other schemes such as Steps to Work or Steps 2 Success. When you mention refocusing, I would like to know what the focus was and what it is now. I would also like to know more about the pilot programme: why it is being piloted and what will be different as a result of that? I am just giving you a wee bit of direction on what we might like but my colleagues will, I am quite sure, ask the questions.

Mr P Ramsey: You and your team are very welcome. Relatively speaking, it seems to be a good model for success when you have 25% securing full-time employment, although you qualify that by intimating that only 75% of those retain that employment. I would be looking for more data. Your service is for the most vulnerable. How are they identified and referred, and how do get into the system?

Mr Bailie: This is delivered in communities, and people in those communities are best placed to know the issues. All LEMIS providers working in those communities are behind a shopfront on a main thoroughfare, so it is not like going into a jobcentre or a jobs and benefits office (JBO). For a lot of people, that is a big deal in itself. A lot of people will not engage with government in any shape or form. So, just having a shopfront where somebody can walk in straight off the street and present themselves is what happens with LEMIS. That is one of the big differences between LEMIS and the likes of Steps 2 Work in mainstream employment.

People will just present. There will be a lot of outreach in communities. In Derry, we have a contract in the city side and the Waterside, and there is a community workshop to deliver both contracts. Those people are out in community organisations and different outreach centres and people will just

come and present. If they have problems or want to try to change their circumstances, they know that that service is available, and it is not a big deal to come in and use it.

Mr P Ramsey: So, there is no referral system, for example, from NIACRO or the probation service?

Mr Bailie: No, but there will be a referral system in the community and family support pilot because that is a different issue. When we refocus, there will be a lot of referrals from the likes of NIACRO and a lot of the health trusts and integrated services.

Mr P Ramsey: I can understand that 25% who are not on benefits want to secure help in progressing into employment. I do not understand the other 75% who are possibly on long-term incapacity benefit just walking in off the street. I fail to grasp that, if I am being honest.

Mr Bailie: You have to remember, too, that welfare change is coming down the track. There is a big fear factor in a lot of communities and people want to engage with something. They know that maybe their circumstances are going to change and we are very keen to offer something to people that they can avail themselves of on their own terms rather than be mandated to do something. That is a big selling point for a lot of people out there. We are only dealing with maybe 2,000 clients a year, compared with 65,000 people on the JSA register or whatever it is at the minute. It is a small intervention, but those people will come voluntarily to see whether they can have a change in their circumstances.

Mr D McCann: You are talking about people who are on incapacity benefit and ESA, and you cannot understand why they would not want to avail themselves of this. The statistics show that 10% of our caseload, which was 223 last year, were incapacity benefit clients; 322 were on ESA, which is 15%; and people on income support represented 33%. So, people are voting with their feet and coming to our LEMIS offices and outreach centres from those groups. It is basically the same as everybody else: they want to better their lives and get into employment and move on.

Mr P Ramsey: If somebody comes in who has been on long-term incapacity benefit, do they do a placement or one day of work as part of the career guidance or the training programme that they are given?

Mr Bailie: There is a range of things. We have introduced lots of different things. This is another different feature with LEMIS: because we have one foot in the community and one foot in the Department, we are not constrained by the same sort of maybe bureaucracy or structures. So, we can move faster, introduce things and try different things. We have introduced community and voluntary programmes where we have said to people, "OK, you want to try something. Let us try eight hours a week. You can do eight hours a day or you can do two hours one day, or whatever. We will try it for 10 weeks." It introduces people and helps them move along and test things to see whether it will be successful and work for them.

Mr Smart: The other aspect is that we have an innovation fund in LEMIS. We can fund bespoke training that is not available through the mainstream. For example, we could have someone who is interested in getting some qualifications around sustainable energy, which is a recent one that we were able to fund. When courses come up that people are interested in doing to enhance their employment abilities, we can respond in a bespoke way to those people.

Mr P Ramsey: In all the areas that you have identified, including my constituency, Belfast, Strabane and Newry and Mourne, can you give us the figures on the database you have of people who have secured employment and the range of employment that they have secured in those areas?

Mr Bailie: Yes.

The Chairperson: OK; you can supply that in the future.

Mr Allister: Does LEMIS have a staff complement.

Mr Bailie: Yes; 15 people work in the background to deliver the LEMIS service. Damian and I look after the policy and the operational management.

Mr Allister: Is the cost of the staff in the annual budget?

Mr Bailie: It is in the evaluation cost.

Mr Allister: So, is it in the annual £1.6 million?

Mr Bailie: No.

Mr Allister: So, LEMIS costs more than £1.6 million.

Mr Bailie: That is the programme cost.

Mr Allister: LEMIS has a staff of 15, so to speak, and then the programme is farmed out to local providers. Is that right?

Mr Bailie: It is contracted out.

Mr Allister: Is it they who provide the employment mentors?

Mr Bailie: Yes.

Mr D McCann: Yes; they have three mentors, so you are talking about 11 contract areas, which is 33 mentors, plus the proportion of management time and receptionists or whatever. It is in the contract that they must have three qualified client-facing mentors.

Mr Allister: Are there 11 different providers?

Mr D McCann: Yes. Well, some providers have two contract areas.

Mr Allister: That is what I am asking. How many different providers are there?

Mr D McCann: One contract only has two, which is the city side and the Waterside, and all the rest have just one contract.

Mr Allister: Who is the provider for Moyle?

Mr Bailie: Network Personnel.

Mr Allister: Where does it provide? Where is its shopfront in Moyle?

Mr Bailie: In Ballycastle.

Mr Allister: So, there is no reach, for example, into Bushmills?

Mr Bailie: There is. It is done on an outreach basis. When we extended the service to the new areas in Ballycastle, Cookstown, and Newry and Mourne, we came across challenging issues that we never saw in all the years that we had been in Belfast, Derry or Strabane.

Mr Allister: But the provision is quite patchy. It is in Belfast, Londonderry, Strabane, Newry and Mourne, and Moyle.

Mr Bailie: That is because we went on the Noble indices. We took the top three, which were Belfast, Derry and Strabane first of all, and then the next three, which were Newry and Mourne, Cookstown and Moyle.

Mr Allister: Yes, but we all know that the Noble indices conceal a lot of deprivation because of the size of the units. I could take you to areas of my constituency that are as bereft of opportunity as any that you will find in the headline Noble indices but there is no reach or ambition for them at all.

Mr Bailie: There is. LEMIS is available to anyone in Northern Ireland who has a common employability barrier.

Mr Allister: OK. How does LEMIS reach someone who lives on the Doury Road estate, which is one of the most deprived estates in Northern Ireland?

Mr Bailie: They will refer on an outreach basis to the organisation that has the contract in that area.

Mr Allister: There is no referral.

Mr Bailie: There is a referral for people who have a common employability barrier. That is the only way that we can —

Mr Allister: I am sorry; I thought that you told us that the referral would be for the family units. Is that not an area that you are moving into?

Mr Smart: I think that we are confusing LEMIS with the community family support programme, which Sam talked about earlier.

Mr Allister: Yes, but you told us that there would be referrals. You said that there were no referrals in the employment scheme.

Mr Bailie: In the main, when the people present themselves —

Mr Allister: So, take my question: how does a person who lives in that deprived estate in Ballymena get help from LEMIS?

Mr D McCann: If they do not have a common employability barrier, they will not get any help.

Mr Allister: They will not get any help? So, do we have a situation where this is very patchy and, indeed, probably, looking at the designations, not reaching across the community in a balanced way?

Mr D McCann: One of the things that you have to understand is that we have a limited budget.

Mr Allister: No, no, never mind the budget, answer my question. Is it reaching across the community in a cross-community, balanced way?

Mr D McCann: Absolutely.

Mr Allister: Even though the focus is on Strabane, Newry and Mourne, Londonderry and Ballycastle, along with Belfast?

Mr D McCann: In the contract areas, the service is offered to everybody.

Mr Allister: In the contract areas, but it is not offered to anyone in my constituency.

Mr D McCann: But you are not in a contract area.

Mr Allister: So a person from the Doury Road estate in Ballymena who is long-term unemployed and has no prospects is of no interest to LEMIS?

Mr D McCann: But LEMIS is a targeted initiative. That is how it started, and it has evolved from that. That is why we have moved into the three new areas.

Mr Bailie: A person from the Doury Road who has a common employability barrier and a history of alcohol or drug misuse, or is an ex-offender or ex-prisoner, or is a care leaver, will have access to LEMIS.

Mr Allister: How?

Mr Bailie: They will have it on an outreach basis.

Mr Allister: Is there an outreach in Ballymena?

Mr D McCann: They will travel to those areas.

Mr Bailie: Our mentors will travel to those areas.

Mr Allister: And do they?

Mr Bailie: Yes.

Mr Allister: So, how many clients do you have in Ballymena?

Mr D McCann: We do not have the details of that, but last year we had 235 clients with a common employability barrier throughout all the contract areas in Northern Ireland.

Mr Allister: Well, perhaps you could send us the figures outlining how many clients you have in Ballymena.

Mr D McCann: OK.

Mr Allister: Thanks very much.

Mr Smart: We accept that the areas have been limited and they have been targeted. We have a limited budget, but the majority of people, for example, as Sam said, will fall into JSA, which is a mandatory programme. We are trying to engage with those people who are non-claimants.

We will get help and support from the Careers Service for 16- and 17-year-olds, who will be caseloaded and referred to providers within the collaboration and innovation fund as well as LEMIS.

The Chairperson: I will stop you there. Mr Allister has established a concern that the provision is patchy. You should not see that as being negative. The issue is about whether what you are doing is really good. I do not mind having informal ways of reaching —

Mr Bailie: I accept Mr Allister's point. We were tasked with introducing a community employment service to target those areas. We have tried to do that. We are finding problems in other areas now, especially the rural areas, that we never had before, because travel is a big issue.

The Chairperson: I agree, Sam. However, the Committee will want to know certain things. You said earlier in your submission that there were challenges, but you did not tell us what the challenges are. We want to know that. Pockets of deprivation, particularly in certain communities, tend to be in a smaller geographic area or perhaps in a ward. It will be a super output area or something like that. I am sure that all of us here will be able to talk about estates in very high levels of deprivation. It is not clear to us exactly where your provision fits in with the totality of what is being offered. We are moving to Steps 2 Success to try to get uniformity of provision across the whole of Northern Ireland. Mr Allister has raised an issue, and it would be right for you to address it for us. I am sure that you will do that.

Anybody who has seen me chair in the past knows that there are times when I will be fairly strict with people making a presentation. I am not doing that in this case, because I understand that yours is a different type of provision. However, we need to understand what it is, and if it is successful, as Mr Allister indicated, the budget is not the issue. If we have a problem, we will find money or encourage the Department to find money. This is a chance for us to understand it. Jim, have you finished?

Mr Allister: Yes. That is fine.

Mr Flanagan: Gentlemen, thanks for the presentation, even though the Chair cut you short. I have never heard of the organisation or service before. Do you work for the Department or for an outside agency? I do not understand that.

Mr Bailie: We are in the Department. We tried to introduce a community employment service that is run by the community in the community. We take a step back from it. The people in those communities see it as the community delivering the service and not government. I think that we have been reasonably successful with that.

Mr Flanagan: That is fine. That is a great initiative, and I do not think that too many would argue with some form of community employment initiative. Jim tried to get a few answers out of you, and, for once, he has not managed to. It is usually only Ministers that he cannot get answers out of.

Mr Allister: I get used to it.

Mr Flanagan: He picked a small area in Ballymena, but we could pick any area anywhere. You said that outreach happens, but I have been an MLA for 18 months, and I have never once heard of that organisation. How does somebody living in the estate that Jim spoke about know that your organisation exists?

Mr Bailie: The onus is on the organisations that we contract with to go into those areas and run the outreach service. They go into community centres and doctors' surgeries and advertise that service in local areas. Fermanagh was never in the mix for that, but it is a service done on an outreach basis for people with a common employability barrier.

Mr Flanagan: Are the areas that you provide a service in the six most deprived local government areas? Was it decided on that basis?

Mr Bailie: They were ranked on the Noble indices.

Mr Flanagan: Is it a local government district area or a smaller measurement than that?

Mr Bailie: I think that it was a district area. We just took the Noble indices as they stood.

Mr Flanagan: You can take the Noble indices as they stand, but you can break them down by local government or go to a smaller area.

Mr Bailie: I think that it was probably a local government area originally. When I came into the job, I think that that is what it was based on.

Mr Flanagan: Your services exist in Belfast, so somebody who lives in a fairly affluent area and who has experienced some of those problems can still connect with your services. In other council areas and communities, there are significant levels of deprivation, isolation and complete disengagement from society as a whole. What are those people supposed to do?

Mr Bailie: From the Department's perspective, we are trying to get the Steps 2 Success programme uniformly across those areas. We acted like a safety net for some of those areas, with what the budget could stand, and we have tried to do that. We were originally in three areas, and we have tried to move out to six areas. We are coming up against difficulties and challenges that we have never faced before, and we have to try to find solutions to those, especially in rural areas, as that is one of the big issues. If you are in Belfast and you want to engage and go on a course, you can nearly walk to the end of the street and there will be something there for you, but if you live in Crossmaglen or Newry and Mourne, it is different. We are finding that travelling is the big problem.

Mr D McCann: Can I just make one more point? You are talking about 2,000 people per annum volunteering to use LEMIS. Even in the contract areas in which we provide a service, we did an exercise and looked at each ward within each contract area for the benefit recipient, and we were only penetrating 2% of the actual benefit recipients in those particular wards. There were some wards where we were not getting any caseload, but that is the nature of it being a voluntary thing. Steps to Work is for JSA clients. You can still have voluntary participation in that, but, in the main, Steps to Work is for JSA clients, and LEMIS is primarily for all those other groups that we have talked about. We will take clients that are on JSA and that have multiple barriers to employment. I just want to make that point.

Mr Flanagan: What do you plan to do when or if the review of public administration happens, and we move to a situation in which there are 11 councils instead of 26? Will you re-evaluate what you are doing or will you just continue to operate?

Mr Bailie: We do not sit back and just introduce a programme and run it. We are evaluating it all the time, looking at how it is progressing and what we are doing. We are trying to refocus it now. With the extra money that we are getting for the programme, we are going to try and see where the greatest concentration of NEETs are. It could mean that if there are big concentrations of NEETs in areas such as the Doury Road, we will have to recontract into those areas.

Mr B McCrea: Sam, the evidence that you offered was from McClure Watters in 2009. There has been a significant change in the circumstances since then. Mr Flanagan made his point. What we are saying is that what you were doing was not known to us, and, if you are doing good things, we would like to know about them, and it may well be that we need to extend them. If you are an add-on, you need to consider whether that is the right and proper use of money. Those are the questions that came back in. I am letting this session run on a bit longer because I think it is of interest to members. It would be interesting to know exactly what you do that is different. We got the bit about the shop front and that people can wander in; and there is a bit about engagement and how you get people involved, but there is still a bit of "whatever it takes out there, but we cannot tell you what it is" happening. There is a bit of this that you need to help us with.

Before you answer, Sam, I want to bring in some other folks, but I am trying to help you. That is the bit that we are struggling with. If you can make a compelling case, then we will ask the Minister and the Department, in a supportive way, to do more about this issue. Do not take it when we are asking you questions that we are being negative. We are just saying that we do not quite understand the remit. I will bring in the vice-chair at this stage.

Mr Buchanan: I have a couple of questions. How long has LEMIS been in existence?

Mr Bailie: Since April 2007.

Mr Buchanan: Have you worked in the four or five areas for all those years?

Mr Bailie: No. For the first few years, it was just Belfast, Derry/Londonderry and Strabane. We then introduced the LEMIS 2 model in April 2011. We reinvested some of the savings made from the engagement in extending the service to three areas; Newry and Mourne, Moyle, and Cookstown. That happened in those areas in about 2011.

Mr Buchanan: Did you ever make any contact with any of the local district councils to see, from their perspective, exactly where the targeted areas of deprivation were in their localities?

Mr Bailie: Yes. I have had meetings with Moyle District Council. It is particularly hard, and that is a difficult area. In respect of trying to get people into employment, things are difficult at the minute, but there are opportunities in Belfast. The mentors and those who work in those areas can link people with opportunities. However, in areas such as Moyle, it is really difficult. We have tried to do all we can. We went to speak to the council to see whether we could get any support from councillors to try to get people to use the system. It will take a while for that to embed in those new areas.

Mr Buchanan: Did you speak to all the councils?

Mr Bailie: Not as yet. When we announced it, I had a brief meeting with people in Newry and Mourne District Council. We did a lot of work with Belfast City Council, Derry City Council and Strabane District Council and worked closely with them through the early parts of the service. As for the new areas, we had just a brief meeting with Newry and Mourne council, and I have not met Cookstown council at all.

Mr Buchanan: We certainly welcome what has been done. Anything getting people into employment is to be welcomed. As was said around the table today, we are at a wee bit of a loss to fully understand exactly what you do. Pat asked a question about whether the folk who go to you have any daytime employment? For instance, are they out a day a week? What are they doing? We did not really get an answer to that. What we got was, "We try new things but we do not really know what

those new things are". Does somebody, for example, work on a shop floor for a day, two days or three days? Do they go to a building site? What is it?

Mr Bailie: They can do that. The point about LEMIS is that there are no restrictions on what is possible. If someone comes up with an innovative idea, I will look at it and make a judgement call. If I think there is a fair possibility that a person will get a job out of it or whatever, we will fund it.

We work with companies and businesses in the community, and our people work in contract areas. If we know that a big organisation such as Tesco is opening a big store, we will set up initiatives and pre-employment training. Our people will have all that training, so that when they go to an interview, they will have all those skills. Mentors can get placements for people so that they can see what jobs are like, and that type of thing. All of this adds to their skills base when they go for a job interview. That is one of the success stories of LEMIS: the fact that the people who are hardest to reach and hardest to help are getting employment in front of people who are possibly even closer to the labour market or who are perhaps on Steps to Work.

Mr D McCann: May I come in here? I think that you were looking for a bit of clarification on LEMIS, what it does, and what makes it different. There are three components to LEMIS: engagement; the skills for employment option; and employment.

Mentors work with voluntary clients who have come through their door, who they have met in outreach, or who have been referred to them. They assess the problems and issues, and they work on the ways in which they can address the barriers in order to get people work-ready. It might be a confidence issue or a training issue. They do an assessment and an action plan, and then they provide tailored assistance for the person.

The next step is deciding whether the person is ready to go into employment or whether they need more skills? We fund short accredited training. That is all that we fund for LEMIS clients. If they need more rigorous or advanced training, we refer them to Steps to Work, where they can go on to a long-term package and get an NVQ or whatever. We can also refer people to an ESA programme and they will get training and employment placements out of that. So, there are about five elements of the skills for employment option.

We also work on interview skills and look at the benefits people are on and at what the difference is. We also encourage them to take that step, take that risk, and we hand-hold them and prepare them for interviews. Basically, that is what the LEMIS service does in the community.

Mr Bailie: This is just a small point, but I will give it to you anyway. People come into jobs and benefit offices (JBOs), where our personal advisers work. For the most part, they are desk-bound; they will be doing a job, and they will see those clients coming in all the time. I have seen our mentors working in the community and taking people by the hand into job interviews, because they do not have the confidence to go themselves. That is the level of support that —

The Chairperson: Sam, I will be clear with you. You seem to think that we are being critical of what you are doing. We are not. We understand that there is a group of people that is hard to reach, but we do not know what you are doing for them. If it is good, we might do more. We are also not clear on where this fits in with Steps to Work, Steps 2 Success or the YES programme. I will tell you the reason why I have been lenient on this, because when people look at the expenditure of public money they question whether it has been applied fairly and across all areas. I do not want to make this so rigorous that it takes away from the — I see Chris. Members are saying that they do not see it in their areas, and they do not know how to come back in.

I want to bring in other members for questions. However, in a way that is not in any way confrontational or negative, I invite you to think about your presentation and perhaps come back for another session in a month or so, when you can explain to us, in a positive way, what you do and answer the questions. It is a wee bit bitty at the moment. If we can fit it into the work programme — and the Clerk will look at that — we will, perhaps, deal with it in that way.

Mr Smart: I think that that is a useful way forward. A number of issues have been raised by members that we would want to address. The short amount of preparation we had for today has probably left us in a situation in which we did not anticipate the questions in the way they have come.

I think that there is an issue about how we decided on regional coverage, and we need to give you a breakdown of employment figures and details of the outreach work across the various council areas in which we are working. We also need to speak about the contact we have had with councils and perhaps work to the future in the context of the NEETs strategy.

The Chairperson: Brian, I do not want to cut you off, but I want to bring members in. If you want to make a closing statement about what you will do we will allow that. I know this is of interest to members and I want to go through it.

Ms McGahan: Thank you for your presentation. Perhaps you said this earlier, but do you work within OFMDFM's new Delivering Social Change framework?

Mr Smart: Yes.

Ms McGahan: OK. That is fine. You mentioned that you provide childcare, but that was all that you said on that. Will you clarify that a bit more? I am interested to know more about that, given that we do not have affordable or accessible childcare.

Mr Bailie: That is the big problem.

Ms McGahan: You said that you provide childcare.

Mr Bailie: Yes, for individuals. It is not a policy of LEMIS that everybody who comes along will get childcare. The budget would not sustain that.

Ms McGahan: So, if a lone parent comes to you —

Mr Bailie: Yes; exactly. We will try —

Ms McGahan: — you will provide childcare.

Mr Bailie: Yes. If they want to try something for a week, or whatever, we will pay the cost of childcare.

Ms McGahan: OK. You have been in existence since 2007. From your experience, what do you feel have been the key ingredients in tackling and breaking that cycle of multi-generational poverty and exclusion?

Mr Bailie: That is a very difficult question.

I will give you one example. We got a young fellow a job who had no qualifications. He worked in the community. I thought that that was a success story. The mentors worked with him, brought him along and they actually got him a job. He went home to the family, and his father said, "What do you think you are playing at? Nobody works in this family." That struck me, because everything we do, as a Department, is done for the individual. However, there is another dynamic at work. We were tinkering around with that family's support and trying to see where we would go with that. We were then asked to see whether we could develop a community and family support programme. We put that together. Suddenly, it exploded; it has taken on a higher profile. A lot more money is being allocated to it.

That is one thing. There are bigger dynamics at work, but it is very difficult. It is very hard for people in those communities. Sometimes, you can look at situations, and people will have perceptions and stuff. From our experience of working on the ground, if help is available, people will take that help. If —

The Chairperson: OK, Sam. It is not just that you agree with Bronwyn that there is a problem: you have a pilot study going on, and we would like to know the details of it.

Mr Smart: Do you want some background information on the community and family support programme?

Ms McGahan: That would be fine. I represent south Tyrone. I do not know whether you cut across into the Dungannon area.

You mentioned that you take people by the hand to job interviews. With respect, you are not doing those people any favours. We are trying to break a culture of dependency.

Mr Bailie: But you have to take the first step.

Ms McGahan: I would question that.

Mr Bailie: This is not me saying it; it is the people in those communities. It is the mentors who work on the ground.

Ms McGahan: I represent a neighbourhood renewal area, so I have a fairly good understanding of it. You need a very focused and targeted approach. Maybe you are doing that on the ground, but I am not really getting that kind of information. I will do a follow-up with your Cookstown office with our councillors on the work that you are doing. I had a meeting with NEETS. When I had a one-to-one meeting with them, I got some good information. I will reserve judgement.

The Chairperson: It is OK to have a difference of opinion. You will get the opportunity to come back and address the issues raised. I am interested in that intergenerational issue. We would like to know a wee bit more.

I am under time pressure, so I want to bring people in. We will do a few things at the wrap-up. It is not that you will not get to say your piece.

Mr Hilditch: Like you, Chair, I would be interested in hearing more detail about the challenges mentioned. Like Tom, I had a question about local government. It is important that there is that engagement. Sometimes, in rural areas, local government is the biggest employer. Is it correct that there are 11 providers in six council areas? I take it that most of them are in the Belfast area.

Mr Bailie: There are five areas in Belfast: north, south, east, west and greater Shankill.

Mr Hilditch: Are there geographical barriers for the 11 providers that do outreach work?

Mr D McCann: There are boundaries.

Mr Hilditch: This goes back to Jim Allister's question: where do those start and finish?

Mr D McCann: For the district councils — Cookstown, Moyle, and Newry and Mourne — it is the council boundary area. Derry and Strabane are the same. Derry is divided into Waterside and cityside, and the wards are divided. That was in the specification of the contract.

Mr Hilditch: But they do not go outside those council areas.

Mr D McCann: No. I want to clarify, because —

Mr Hilditch: There is a bit of confusion around that.

Mr D McCann: You have core contract areas. Those are all of Belfast, where there are five contract areas, Strabane, and two contract areas in Derry: Waterside and cityside. You then have Newry and Mourne, Cookstown and Moyle. They are the core contract areas. Outside that, we service the rest of Northern Ireland in three areas for people with a common employability barrier, such as ex-prisoners, people who are homeless, care-leavers and that type of client. They are small numbers. Back in April 2011, we subsumed Progress to Work when we were going out to contract. Then, when we went to the three new areas, we hooked the other three areas on to that. It is a wee bit complicated. They serviced those areas. If I had a map with me, I could show you a bit better.

The Chairperson: Why do we not just leave that bit? If you could provide a geographical map to answer the question, we will deal with that. We get the general gist about where you have gotten to.

Mr F McCann: I am quite willing to wait until we come back for round two. I want to make a couple of proposals for next time; the age bracket of the people who take part in LEMIS, the success rate or otherwise of people who are on incapacity benefit and move into employment, and a list of LEMIS

providers. I have always been of the opinion, especially regarding the evaluation that is done. I think that we have discussed NEETs before and whether that actually gets into those areas. Perhaps, we need a breakdown of the areas where there are successes, where the people come from and the work that is done.

The Chairperson: OK. So, when you come back, you could address those issues. Thank you for that, Fra.

Mr Anderson: I will be brief. Thank you for your presentation, gentlemen. Sam, I think that it was you who kept referring to rural areas. Being a rural dweller myself, it certainly interests me. I appreciate the work that you are doing to try to reach the most vulnerable in society. I am still a bit worried that you are not getting out there. As Jim said when he started the debate, you seem to be working in isolation. You are in pockets. I have looked at your findings. You would probably say that you are quite pleased with some of them. Are you?

Mr Bailie: Anybody could come and say that. That is not my statement. I am not saying that. FGS McClure Watters is saying it. An independent evaluation said that.

Mr Anderson: So, are you saying that you are quite pleased with those findings?

Mr Bailie: No. I am never pleased. We always look for improvement.

Mr Anderson: If that is the case, why has it taken so long — since 2007? Do you not want to expand? I am a councillor in Craigavon. As it has been said this morning, elected members here do not know your organisation.

Mr D McCann: It is a resourcing issue. We do not have the resources to run out —

Mr Anderson: We are coming back to resources.

Mr D McCann: Plus, we have to have ministerial approval as we go through that. As Brian said, we have moved along from the Labour Market Intermediaries, which ran for 10 years. Then came LEMIS for around four years. We, then, produced a paper for the Minister that explained that we had created a new funding model and new ideas. We took all of the findings of the evaluation and built on that. We built on our experience.

Mr Anderson: Damian, to be honest with you, to get public relations and a bit of a profile out there with district councils is not going to cost the world.

Mr Bailie: I am not so sure.

Mr D McCann: It is also about the manpower and staff that we have. We have only a small team.

Mr Bailie: I am not sure that LEMIS will be universal. It has to be a targeted initiative in specific areas.

Mr Anderson: So, it will not be throughout the Province. Do you not think so, Sam? We are getting a different slant on it now.

Mr Bailie: It is like everything that we do: we have to evaluate it and come up with a report. Will it be value for money?

The Chairperson: I am going to cut in on that bit. We would like to see the evaluation. There is a basic tenet in society that if you get a similar problem, you should get a similar solution. So, there will be areas of deprivation in everybody's constituency, and they will look for ways to go forward. Equally, if you have lessons for us that your more universal approach is more successful than the more formal one, we need to know about that. There are issues.

Mr Bailie: Yes. One thing is that, at present, we are sitting in a bit of unknown territory because, all of a sudden, we are having to refocus and look at NEETs. So, there are a lot of questions that need answered. I take your point. If we were doing it in those targeted areas of multiple deprivation, perhaps, they are the areas where we need to contract, as opposed to the big council areas.

Mr Anderson: It concerns me that Sam is now saying, "Maybe this can't be across the whole of Northern Ireland." That concerns me, because a lot of issues then arise. Why would an organisation not want to do provide it across Northern Ireland? As we have all said, we have people sitting there that need help. If you are best placed to deliver that help, you should provide it across the whole of Northern Ireland.

Mr Smart: The Department will look at the new Steps 2 Success programme and putting those things in place. The question of whether you put a safety net across all of Northern Ireland or whether you just do it in the worst areas to get the best value for money is out there.

The Chairperson: I am going to stop things there. I have one more member that I want to bring in. This session has been longer than anticipated.

Mr Anderson: A lot of work needs to come back on the Northern Ireland issue and where the areas are.

The Chairperson: The Floor is still yours, Sydney, if you wish to say more.

Mr Anderson: We need to get something back on that.

Mr Smart: We need to see LEMIS refocus within the context of the NEETs strategy. The NEETs strategy will be linking in, not only with the community family support programme but with the collaboration and innovation fund, which is regionally contracted with 18 organisations throughout Northern Ireland to engage with 5,500 young people who fall into the NEET category.

Members have expressed valuable concerns. We need to look at the outreach work that we are doing and see whether we can provide you with evidence that we are providing coverage, where possible, across Northern Ireland. We need to also look at our communication strategy and our engagement with the regional councils. We also need to prepare in advance of 2015 with the roll-out of RPA. So, there are issues for us here.

We have refocused. LEMIS has come into a new part of the division within the Department. We want to use it as best we can to assist with the NEETs strategy. That will inevitably see change in delivery structures.

The Chairperson: The issues raised by Mr Anderson and others need to be addressed. This session was not supposed to be reported by Hansard, but, with the Committee's approval, I am going to ask Hansard to provide a transcript of it, which we will send you. There are legitimate concerns, so let us see if we can address them. You might well be Northern Ireland's best-kept secret.

Last, but by no means least, Mr Lyttle.

Mr Lyttle: I am aware of the LEMIS project doing good work in my constituency of East Belfast via the East Belfast Mission's Stepping Stone project. Chair, you have done very well when you have held showcase events at Stormont to help inform MLAs and bring providers together to find out a bit more about projects. I wonder whether it might be worthwhile for the Committee to host information or showcase events to help explain further what the LEMIS project does, in conjunction with some case-study testimonies from providers.

The Chairperson: Good idea. What we will do first is get a time slot, because a lot of information would have to be brought to us. We will invite the Department back to talk to us about that. I am quite sure that a lot of positives would come out of it. At that stage, your suggestion would be an excellent one, if there were information for us to disseminate.

Brian, I promised you that you could wrap up.

Mr Smart: As Fra said, we will be coming back for round two and, hopefully, the bell will not ring at that stage. There are lots of important things that we want to tell you about LEMIS. We need to give you information and answer the questions around the historical reasons for the locations of the various LEMIS providers. We also need to put it in context, as I said earlier, within the NEETs strategy and the wider changes to incapacity benefit, JSA and the regime that exist. There is a wider issue here

than simply just LEMIS. We need to move from the general to the specific and be able to provide members with input around LEMIS and show how it is contributing to the wider issue of unemployment. I would welcome the opportunity to get some of our providers to come along and showcase some of the activities that they do and talk about how they are engaging with people on the ground and the about their success stories. So, I look forward to round two, as Fra says, within the next couple of months.

The Chairperson: Mr Allister raised matters around the £1.6 million programme funds and the overheads.

Mr Smart: I have taken notes on that.

The Chairperson: There was also mention of evaluations happening on an ongoing basis. You do not have to give us all your evaluations but we would be interested in where you are coming from with them.

Finally, Bronwyn mentioned the community family support programme as regards intergenerational issues. It would be interesting to get a bit more detail on why you are doing that programme, who is driving it and the issues with it. Obviously, be prepared to engage on the various issues.

Thank you very much for your time. It was a little longer than anticipated, but you will have gathered that the Committee is interested in this area and would like to hear more from you. Thank you very much indeed.

Mr Smart: We very much welcome that. Thank you very much.