



**Northern Ireland
Assembly**

COMMITTEE FOR JUSTICE

**OFFICIAL REPORT
(Hansard)**

**Justice Delivery Directorate and Related
NDPBs**

2 June 2011

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

COMMITTEE FOR JUSTICE

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Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mr Paul Givan (Chairperson)
Mr Raymond McCartney (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Sydney Anderson
Mr Stewart Dickson
Mr Colum Eastwood
Mr Seán Lynch
Mr Alban Maginness
Mr Peter Weir
Mr Jim Wells

Witnesses:

Mr Anthony Harbinson)	
Mr Mark McGuckin)	Department of Justice
Mr Ray Murray)	
Ms Karen Pearson)	

The Chairperson:

I welcome Mr Anthony Harbinson, the director of justice delivery in the Department of Justice (DOJ); Mr Ray Murray, the deputy director of information services; Mr Mark McGuckin, the deputy director of the reform programme; and Ms Karen Pearson, the deputy director of personnel and office services. Again, the evidence session will be recorded by Hansard. I invite Anthony to introduce his work, after which we will ask some questions.

Mr Anthony Harbinson (Department of Justice):

I welcome the chance to brief the Committee on the role of the justice delivery directorate. Glyn Capper, who is head of our financial services division, is also with us this afternoon. He will join me for the next sessions when we deal with money in some more depth.

I wish to outline our directorate's general role, the progress that we have made since the new Department's creation and our hopes for the present four-year mandate. I will turn first to the day-to-day work of the directorate. I know that the Committee has received a briefing note on our role, but, generally, we support the Department's business delivery and facilitate achievement of its strategic objectives by providing internal services for the core and its agencies. Specifically, those vital services include logistical services, personnel, finance, information technology, procurement, accommodation and records management.

Our work is fundamental to resource management, best practice and value for money, and we often operate at higher levels of confidentiality than those required in other Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) Departments. Our response times and the support that we provide ensure effective front line delivery in many difficult areas of the criminal justice system. We have an established reputation for delivering to the highest standards, and I hope that we can maintain that over the coming years.

We view our role as a central one at the hub of the Department, rather than one that is confined to back-office services. In addition to providing guidance and direction for the Department, our work also encompasses some public-facing aspects. The justice delivery directorate leads on diversity and corporate social responsibility in the Department of Justice. Those important concerns enable the Department to be representative of and responsive to the community that we serve.

If I may be indulged for a moment, I will mention two specific examples. First, the directorate takes the lead on prompt payment of invoices. That is essential to local businesses in the present financial climate. I can confirm that the Department has been able to meet the 10-day target for the payment of invoices in more than 95% of cases month by month. Secondly, we have a range of strategic concerns, such as sustainability, and we are eager to address environmental issues

generally. A notable achievement during the 2010-11 financial year was the reduction in electricity use and CO2 emissions, which were realised through the implementation of power management software.

I will now turn to how we have performed over the past year. At our initial Committee briefing last year, we identified closer alignment and integration with the wider NICS on corporate service systems, policies and procedures as a key priority post-devolution. That integration is now well under way, and we have already achieved a number of milestones. I will list those as briefly as possible, but I am happy to discuss them in more detail if Committee members so wish.

The Department's joint project with the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) to assimilate Department of Justice staff to NICS terms and conditions successfully delivered the required changes at the end of March. We are also now fully integrated with a range of NICS central service contracts and shared services. For example, we have become a partner in the following bodies: the Centre for Applied Learning; Network NI, which is a wide-area network for integration with other NICS Departments; NI Direct, which will ensure more central public access to information; and IT Assist's Microsoft Enterprise agreement for NICS contract integration. We will also improve our procurement procedures through Central Procurement Directorate, which is part of DFP. In records management, the Department has upgraded versions of its electronic document and records management system to align with the rest of the NICS.

The Department of Justice core is also fully integrated with HR Connect. The Department has taken its place in participating in centralised NICS management and governance bodies, such as those relating to service-wide shared services and business-specific steering groups.

During the year, we have continued to build on our plans for integration and alignment. The Department of Justice reform programme, established last September, now facilitates the majority of our integration. It is a key driver in the Department for achieving optimal efficiency. The overall aim of the programme is to deliver a Department that is structured and resourced to support the Minister of Justice and the Northern Ireland Executive in the delivery of the

Programme for Government and ministerial priorities. The programme also aims to play a leading role in fostering a common identity for the core Department and its agencies and arm's-length bodies.

The reform programme is setting the strategic direction. Individual projects are being taken forward by deputy directors, who have taken the lead in managing and implementing the projects relevant to their business areas. I will elaborate on that major change programme a little later.

Over recent months, we have worked closely with DFP to explore options for joining the NICS finance system, Account NI. We have made significant progress, and a business case has been developed. I hope that we can begin the process of moving to Account NI over the next few weeks.

During the 2010-11 financial year, the Department's information and communication technology network shared services were extended to include Forensic Science Northern Ireland and more Youth Justice Agency sites. In addition, the operational and technical aspects of Causeway — the criminal justice centralised information system — were moved into my directorate's information services division last year.

Sound financial management has been, and continues to be, a key objective for the Department and the Executive to ensure that we continue to perform against the Programme for Government and ministerial priorities in these difficult financial times. One of my directorate's most important achievements during the 2010-11 financial year was to work closely with the Minister to secure an appropriate financial settlement for the four-year Budget 2010 period. The Committee will have received a separate briefing note on that, and I will say more about it later.

The financial services division also contributed greatly to ensuring that the Department lived within both its resource and capital budgets for the 2010-11 financial year by working closely with the various spending areas and through providing the Committee for Finance and Personnel and the Minister with detailed information and strategic financial options when necessary. As I said earlier, Glyn Capper will join us for our next evidence sessions. Hopefully, we can take the detailed financial questions that Committee members may have then.

Equal pay has been another major consideration for the Department of Justice over the past year. Following a number of discussions with the Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance and careful consideration of the issues, we do not accept that there is any legal basis for extending the retrospective compensation element of the NICS equal pay settlement to staff in the Department of Justice. We have, however, assimilated staff in the Department to the new NICS pay scales that were introduced as part of the NICS equal pay settlement, with effect from 12 April 2010. We will provide the Committee with written background information on that before 10 June.

Having looked at the progress that we have made over the past 14 months, I turn now to the challenges facing us in the new mandate. An important responsibility of my directorate will be to work with the Department's key spending areas and to provide strategic advice to the departmental board and the Minister to ensure that the Department of Justice lives within its available funding. That is important given the Department's ring-fenced status, which I will explain more fully in the financial overview evidence session. As we move through the Budget 2010 period, the challenge will be to continue to deliver against priorities in the context of a tight financial settlement, something that is facing all areas of the Executive.

I mentioned our reform programme earlier, and I will now outline our approach in more detail. The Department has three core directorates, five agencies and a range of arm's-length bodies, of which I think that there are about 20 in total. We have different roles and different functions. As a result, policy development, delivery and support mechanisms have evolved differently. The reform programme will seek to deliver a revised structure for the Department. That is the best fit to deliver its collective responsibilities and improve its efficient delivery of support services.

The programme has two strands: one focusing on restructuring and the other on corporate services. The first examines how the Department, its agencies and arm's-length bodies can be organised to deliver best against the Minister's key priorities, which he shared with the Committee last week. One key theme that emerged quite early relates to the Department's responsibility to ensure access to justice and how the Department is structured to deliver on justice policy issues. The strand reviews the current policy development arrangements encompassing all aspects of justice and will propose options for enhancing the current provision.

That will be particularly salient given the integration of the Court Service — now the Courts and Tribunals Service — as a Department of Justice agency. A second theme emerging under the restructuring strand is arrangements for the management of offenders, which has developed to embrace reducing offending and reoffending. It needs to take account of the review of prisons and youth justice and complement the reducing offending strategy. The access to justice and reducing offending themes have come together, and the departmental board recently agreed proposals for the overall structure of the Department. Those will now be subject to more-detailed work and then subject to the consideration of the Minister.

A third theme in the strand is the governance arrangements for arm's-length bodies. The project will take stock of the current arrangements and develop proposals for future enhancements, taking into account current best practice. The work will also provide a basis for assessing whether there is scope for rationalisation.

I will now move on to the corporate support services strand of the programme. It is designed to establish common systems and procedures that will ensure consistency and coherence of support service arrangements throughout the Department of Justice. It will also integrate and align them further with the wider NICS approach and delivery models to improve consolidation of the public services further and promote better effectiveness and efficiency.

We have individual projects that are considering each corporate support function. At this stage, we have in place some 11 projects, but the programme is still evolving, and we will add to the projects as new issues are identified. As I mentioned, the programme is being taken forward with Mark and supported by a small team of staff. They are setting the strategic direction and identifying opportunities for further consideration and researching those. They are also supporting the overall programme. Once a project has been defined, it is taken forward by staff in the specific work area alongside their day-to-day work. For each constituent part of the Department, the projects will explore the propriety of delivering the support function from a shared service arrangement. Where appropriate, we will facilitate the migration of Department of Justice provision to DFP's enterprise shared services. However, in doing so, I assure you that we will take care to maintain the operational independence of the individual agencies that we deal with.

The programme remains a developing area. We will continue to engage with the Committee as our thinking evolves. As you have heard from the briefing, the work of the justice delivery directorate encompasses a wide range of day-to-day business activities and change management through the strategic element of reform. In truth, the most important asset in our directorate, the Department and, indeed, the whole Northern Ireland Civil Service is our staff, whose expertise is fundamental to the successful delivery of our services.

I hope that this overview has been helpful to the Committee. I am happy to take any questions that you may have.

The Chairperson:

Thank you very much. Others will get a chance to chip in at the question stage. I appreciate that, Anthony.

One of the issues — correct me if I am wrong — that was highlighted in the last term was that one of the erroneous releases of a prisoner was to do with the information services end of things and ICT. Has that been resolved so that it will never happen again?

Mr Harbinson:

There was a suggestion at one point that it may have had something to do with the operation of the Causeway system and how it facilitated the transfer of information. I think that, subsequently, it was found that it was not anything to do with Causeway. It produced the correct information, but perhaps the end users were not quite as au fait at interpreting it as they should have been.

Mr Ray Murray (Department of Justice):

I will add to that. Although we can never say never, between the Prison Service and the Courts and Tribunals Service a lot of work has been done. They have worked bilaterally to close any business process gaps, because a lot of business process confirmation and system checks were involved. They have worked together to ensure that they have closed down any gaps in those business processes since that last event. There has, therefore, been a lot of bilateral work and integration between the two systems involved, and the PRISM system and Causeway have been

reviewed.

The Chairperson:

Thank you for clarifying that. Computers are never wrong.

Mr Harbinson:

They are, and when they are wrong, they are really wrong.

The Chairperson:

Do any members have questions? I know that we are going to get into the finances, which will be a big part. Perhaps members are holding back until we discuss those issues.

I thank you for that, and I am sure that we will get a lot more from you as we get into more detail on specific issues. Anthony is going to stay for the next two sessions.