

Committee for Justice

OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

World Police and Fire Games 2013

3 May 2012

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

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Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mr Paul Givan (Chairperson)

Mr Raymond McCartney (Deputy Chairperson)

Mr Stewart Dickson

Mr Tom Elliott

Mr Seán Lynch

Ms Jennifer McCann

Mr Patsy McGlone

Mr Peter Weir

Mr Jim Wells

Witnesses:

Mr David Ferguson 2013 World Police and Fire Games
Mr Alistair McGowan 2013 World Police and Fire Games
Mr Max Murray Northern Ireland Prison Service

The Chairperson: I welcome David Ferguson and Alistair McGowan from the 2013 World Police and Fire Games organisation, and of course Max Murray, who has stayed with us. This will be recorded by Hansard. David, you can briefly outline the 2013 games, and then members may have some questions.

Mr Max Murray (Northern Ireland Prison Service): Do you mind if I do the introduction, as the board member present? You will know that the board is chaired by Deputy Chief Constable Judith Gillespie, who is ably assisted by the vice-chair Peter Craig. I am a board director. The board comprises other directors from Belfast City Council and the Northern Ireland Tourist Board. There are three non-executive directors as well.

It is my privilege to have been involved with the games for the past two years. I have found it to be an extremely energising and encouraging experience, and I feel totally enthused about bringing the games to Belfast in 2013. I was at the games in New York last year when 17,000 competitors attended — it was actually bigger than the Olympics. Even in New York, where you would think that the games would be swallowed up, no matter where you went you ran into people wearing World Police and Fire Games badges, and there was an immediate rapport and identity. Indeed, I went to O'Hara's pub at Ground Zero on a Saturday afternoon looking for some peace and quiet about two miles away down at the bottom of Manhattan, and there were the Finnish and Swedish competitors. It is all about

camaraderie, sport and what the Americans call the first responders — the fire, police and prison services.

Mr David Ferguson (2013 World Police and Fire Games): Thank you, Max. I think that I have been allocated about eight to 10 minutes to run quickly through what the games are. I assume that members have copies of the slides that I have been using for a very standard presentation.

The World Police and Fire Games are a biennial event for serving and retired members of the services. Their purpose is to promote sport and fraternity in the police and firefighting communities.

Max mentioned some figures. The games are the third largest competitive sporting event in the world after the Olympic Games and the World Masters Games and, in competitive numbers, are bigger than the Commonwealth Games. We estimate somewhere in the region of 10,000 or 12,000 athletes for Belfast next year, based on the actual figure from New York. The number of competitors in New York was round about 17,000 to 18,000. With those competitors come, we think based on previous games, an estimated 15,000 friends and family. We do not know what the actual figure was for New York, but it was huge. Based on games before that, we estimate about 15,000 friends and family. More than 75 countries will be represented.

To give an example of the calibre of the company that we are keeping: the games started in San Jose in the mid-80s. They moved out of the US to Canada in 1989. They went worldwide in Melbourne in 1995. They came to Europe — to Stockholm — in 1999. They were in Barcelona in 2003. The 2007 games were significant; those were the games at which Belfast's bid was successful, leading to preparations for next year's games. As Max said, last year they were held in New York. The games after ours will be in Fairfax, Virginia, followed by Montreal in 2017. The 2019 hosts will be selected in Belfast next year. So you can see the calibre of the company that we are keeping. These are top cities across the world.

Where are we now? On the financial side, a business case for expenditure on the games has been approved by the Executive. That business case was updated recently and, again, approved. The overall cost of the games was originally estimated at just under £11 million. The addendum that has just been approved takes that figure up to just under £14 million. However, there has also been a commensurate increase in the benefits figure. Of that just under £14 million, the Executive have pledged just over £6 million and Belfast City Council just under £500,000. The balance of the just under £14 million will come from entry fees, commercial income, stakeholders, staff and sponsorship. There are a number of stakeholders: the three services — police, fire and prisons — Northern Ireland Tourist Board, Sport NI and Belfast City Council.

The body to deliver the games was set up in March last year following an Executive decision on how the games would be delivered and what funding the Executive would put in to ensure their delivery. Technically, the company came into being on, and has been functioning since, 28 February 2011.

The company's board agreed four main objectives for the games. The first of them, which the board places above the other three, is to be the friendliest and most successful games. We would never be the biggest. We cannot compete with the likes of New York, but we do want ours to be the friendliest and most successful games ever. There is an economic objective. Given the amount of money going into the games, we need an economic return, and we want to secure a return on that investment. There is a social and community cohesion objective and a legacy to be achieved from the games. That is not only important for the federation but, in particular, it is extremely important for the services as well as for the Government. Finally, there is an image and profile objective. This is a tremendous opportunity to show the world what we are capable of and to enhance our reputation, which has been growing with a succession of events, particularly over the past year or two.

In the first six to nine months of the company's existence, the priorities were placed in a different order than they are now. The immediate and obvious priority was to get the company up and running by getting in place the right resources and staff, policies, processes, systems and governance, which is standard fare. Whether you are delivering a games or producing widgets, you need those things in place. We also needed a comprehensive programme and resource plan. It was out of that resource

planning work that the addendum to the business case was produced, because we went back to some detailed work on the likely cost of the games.

While that important work was being done, we needed to focus on the immediate priorities, to make sure that we did not lose ground or time. Last year, the immediate priority was the New York games — an important event for the Belfast games because it signalled the formal handing over of the flag to the company and to the city and the start of getting down to the serious work of preparing and delivering the games in 2013. There were other issues with long lead times. We needed to make decisions or prepare to make them on which sports we would host and where the events would take place. We needed to start seriously on our communications activity, where there is a lot of work is to be done. Related to that is our PR and marketing activity and, critically, work on sponsorship, because we depend on a certain amount of sponsorship money to ensure that the games can be delivered. A huge effort will need to be put into recruiting, training, assessing, vetting and deploying volunteers. We estimate that we will need somewhere in the region of 3,500 to 4,000 volunteers to help us put the games on. Finally, an issue that is ever-present for any functioning organisation is the need for ICT support, and some of the stuff that we will need has a longer lead time than usual.

Those three sets of priorities — the functioning company, the programme and resource plans and the immediate priorities — have really flipped over in this calendar year. We have put in place a programme management regime, we have a programme plan, and we have revised our resource plans. It is an extremely important piece of work. Those are the foundations for successful delivery, but the focus now has to be on delivery. We have got the company up and running, and we are focusing on delivery. That means continuing towards getting decisions on sports venues, on the fees that will be charged for the individual sports and so on; getting the work on recruiting the volunteers up and running; and continuing with our PR, marketing and communications activity, which is critically important for sponsorship. If you are to try to get money for sponsorship, the market needs to know that these games are coming, and it needs to understand how significant they are for Belfast and Northern Ireland in commercial terms, legacy terms and a whole range of terms.

We are also focusing on procuring the goods and services that we will need to deliver the games. A lot of quite detailed and complicated work is necessary there. We have also been focusing on the legacy of the games, and we might pick up some more about that in questions afterwards. We have also been preparing for registration for the games for the athletes, opening in November of this year. That is the main focus this year, but, of course, we still need to keep the company ticking over as a functioning company, and that is our final priority for the year. We will be more and more focused on delivery as this year goes through, and there will then be the big push for the last six to eight months, when there will be a lot of hard work to be done.

In no particular order, I will go through the challenges that we face. The obvious one is the economic climate. From an economic point of view, it is a real challenge to generate the sponsorship income that we think we need to ensure that the games wash their face. There is the sheer challenge of delivering a major sporting event, with, we estimate, 65-plus sports being hosted in 35 venues. There is a lot of work to be done in that area and not a great deal of time to do it. When I came into the company at the end of June last year, I counted that there were 110 Fridays to go until the games. There are now 64 or 65 Fridays to go. That is not a lot of Fridays, and there really is a lot of work to be done in the time. There is a big challenge to recruit the volunteers that we want to get into the company to help us to deliver the games. Getting those 3,500 to 4,000 people assessed, vetted, trained and deployed is a major challenge. Security is an ever-present issue. Thankfully, at the moment, the security threat is assessed as low, and I hope that it remains that way. We need to keep an eye on that.

There are issues to do with accommodation. The simple fact is that Belfast does not have the hotel space to cater for 10,000 athletes and 15,000 visitors. We have been looking at some quite creative ways to generate the accommodation that we think we will need. By the way, if anyone has a spare room, we can take your name and address before we leave.

The Chairperson: Max might have some. [Laughter.]

Mr McCartney: No doubling up now, Max. [Laughter.]

Mr McGlone: You better make sure that the TV licence is paid. [Laughter.]

Mr Ferguson: Our top aim is to deliver the most successful and friendliest games. I am not too concerned about making the 2013 games the friendliest games; we are a friendly place and are known for it. Therefore, the real challenge is making the games the most successful ever.

The immediate and obvious economic reward from having the games is that an influx of 25,000 visitors will create income of between £18 million to £23 million. However, that is just the immediate economic benefit. There will also be a boost for many sectors across Northern Ireland, particularly hotels, restaurants and bars. The tourism industry will benefit immediately, and that will not just be confined to Belfast. There will be an opportunity to capture and keep the visitors for the periods just before and after the games.

The second major reward is repeat business. There is huge future tourism potential from the event as there has been from other events, and it will help to consolidate things that have happened over the past couple of years. There is also an opportunity to show the world that we are capable of putting on major sporting events. That is, potentially, a big reward for us. You would be surprised at the number of our top-quality facilities that have been cleared by the federation.

The final reward is one that I mentioned when I spoke about aims and objectives: the reputation of this place. There is a huge opportunity to enhance our growing reputation and the success that we have begun to enjoy from the political process that we have been working through for the past 20 years and more. The games will also give us the opportunity to enhance our reputation across these islands and internationally. I will stop for breath there.

Mr Weir: David, thank you for your presentation. First of all, clearly, this is a tremendous coup for Northern Ireland, as you indicated in terms of the potential positive spin-offs are very great in relation to it. I just want to touch on three issues very quickly, and I will just maybe get them all out of the way in one go.

First, I want you to comment in terms of the robustness of the numbers in terms of competitors. In your presentation, I noticed that the numbers are quite variable from venue to venue, although that may be the nature of the Police and Fire Games. I was a little surprised that there is a projection for 10,000 competitors here when the actual number at the latest games in New York was 18,000. That seems to be quite a large gap. There may be a good explanation for that, but I would have thought that most sporting games you have quite often tended to get a not dissimilar amount of athletes in each one, so just in relation to that.

Secondly, just in terms of whenever you touched upon the security side of things, just in terms of the broad costings in terms of police implications, I mean, locally in terms of PSNI, in terms of the implications that you have any projections in terms of numbers or the cost, whether that would be borne as part of the overall package, whether, if you like, you are expecting to see a degree of support in kind, if you like, from the police and whether that has been factored in in that side of things.

Finally, just maybe in terms of an item of detail, I notice on your provisional list of sports that the sport of horseshoes is included, and there are various others that I could ask about. I have not come really across the sport of horseshoes before. Is that throwing horseshoes or what? I am just curious in relation to that. I suppose if you maybe deal with the two more. I see Mr Elliott smiling at me, and maybe I am showing my lack of rurality at this particular point in that regard.

Mr Elliott: Were you thinking of throwing the horseshoe when it was on the horse? [Laughter.]

Mr Weir: I just was not quite sure in relation to that. But I suppose particularly if you could deal with those couple of other initial questions.

Mr Ferguson: I will give you an initial response and then invite colleagues to comment if they wish to do so. The estimated figure for Belfast is consistent with the pre-New York trends. New York was an

exception, probably because it was New York and it was the tenth anniversary of 9/11 and so on; it had a lot of resonance. I regard that as a spike in what has been a generally upward trend in participants at the games. It is consistent with what happened in Vancouver and in other cities before that

Mr Weir: I notice you mentioned in relation to that you were going to start getting the registrations I think from November. Is there sort of a degree of some sort of fallback position? If it turns out that the numbers, when it comes to registration, start being quite sort of quite different to what you had anticipated — say it is 11,000 or 12,000 — do you have some degree of provisional plans to put in place if there are additional numbers?

Mr Ferguson: There are two things. First, we have what will progressively become a very aggressive PR and marketing campaign, particularly with the athletes. We will use a number of channels to make sure that they are encouraged to come to the games. We had many encouraging signs from our presence in New York. There is a clear interest in coming here, which was in evidence even before registration; just over £1 million of hotel bookings have been taken over the past three to six months.

Mr McGowan: It is £1.3 million at the moment.

Mr Ferguson: It has gone up in the past week; we have taken £1·3 million in hotel bookings. That is before registration even opens. We will work hard to make sure that the target of a minimum of 10,000 people is met.

Security is outside the games company's responsibility; it is a PSNI matter. A figure for security is included in the business case. It is a modest figure of between £200,000 and £250,000, although I need to get that confirmed for the Committee. Security in connection with the games is a matter exclusively for the PSNI.

Horseshoes is not the only unconventional sport. There are sports that are specifically connected to the fire services; for example, they have a toughest competitor alive and one or two other very particular sports.

Mr McGowan: There is the ultimate firefighter.

Mr Weir: That sounds more like a video game.

Mr Ferguson: It is a pentathlon for seriously fit guys. Horseshoes will not be put on at Belfast.

Mr McGowan: No, although it is a big event.

Mr Ferguson: It is a huge event.

Mr McGowan: They all take it very seriously.

Mr Murray: Many services say that they are competing; they just do not say in what. [Laughter.] At least they can show an entry form.

Mr Weir: I presume, Chair, that, as MLAs are excluded, we will not be putting forward any candidates for the small bore or large bore.

Mr McGowan: The ultimate firefighter and the muster are two events that have never been run anywhere in the UK or Ireland. We are going to run a trial event in September; it will be well flagged. It attracts loads of spectators.

Mr Weir: Again — this is probably in the same boat — what exactly is flag football?

Mr McGowan: Touch rugby.

Mr Weir: Touch rugby seems to be mentioned separately to flag football.

Mr McGowan: It is similar. Touch rugby is like touch, but tag rugby is with a kind of Velcro belt.

Mr Weir: What about flag football?

Mr McGowan: It is the Velcro belt-type thing that they tag. It is a north American term.

Mr Lynch: Thank you for coming here today. Max, did you learn any lessons from your visit to New York?

Mr Murray: Yes; a significant number. We arrived at the same time as hurricane Irene, so, in some ways, there were lessons from that. From the day we arrived, lessons were learned from the reception in the hotel and how we were treated while settling in It is about making people welcome in Northern Ireland; getting them from the airports or from Dublin, England or Scotland. There are critical issues around registration and long queues; there are issues around volunteers and having people at events to show visitors where to go and what to do and to explain what is happening. There were issues around the main venue and trying to find out where the sports and the medal presentations and so on would be. Across the board, in the whole organisation of the games, there was fantastic learning. David was there as well, and I think that he would share that view.

Mr Ferguson: Yes. We debriefed not only the accompanying representatives who were in New York in August but also some members of the team from Northern Ireland who went out from the three services. We had an experienced debriefer facilitate about four or five workshops with groups of people from Northern Ireland who were in New York, either from the company or from the teams.

We compiled a report that at first, when it was in draft, could have been regarded as extremely negative. However, we wanted to find out the positives from New York. In many instances, we were flipping over negative experience in New York into what we should be doing from a positive point of view in Belfast. For example, Max mentioned meeting and greeting at the airport. It is extremely important that the competitors and their visitors, from the day and hour they step off the plane or boat to the day and hour they step back on it, feel that they have really been welcomed here and that they go away having had a good competition and a good time socially and leave with good memories. We need to do that right from the start until they leave.

Mr Lynch: Are you tying in with sporting bodies on the island for the use of their venues? David, you were saying that one of the big issues would be recruiting and vetting volunteers. Could you not use volunteers from existing sporting bodies?

Mr Ferguson: We will be doing some of that to get officials for the games. We have been working with the governing bodies to put on the 60-plus sports, but we will need volunteers for a range of other things. We have engaged an organisation in the third sector, Volunteer Now, which is in the business of promoting volunteering and has practical experience of recruiting and deploying volunteers. In fact, it has assisted with volunteers from Northern Ireland for the Olympics.

Mr Wells: The list of sports does not include cricket.

Mr Ferguson: It does.

Mr Weir: There is Twenty20 cricket.

Mr Wells: That is not real cricket. I am relieved, because I did not see that: I was looking under "C" rather than "Twenty20".

If this goes well, you will have thousands of people coming. However, in order for this to be a great success, the world has to know that it has been a success. Therefore, the media and its organisations are essential. From your experience, are these games televised, or are they simply a get-together of

the three services? Can people in CNN get a 30-second slot or a five-minute review of what has happened?

Mr McGowan: In previous games, footage has been screened locally. We have been talking to the BBC about being a media partner. The BBC is still deciding exactly what level to go in at, but it will do a couple of pre-game documentaries and will stream coverage on the web. It will also try to sell that to other media organisations such as CNN or Sky, which might be interested. In the past, there has been quite a bit of interest. I agree that international coverage is the way to flag up Northern Ireland. We are working on that at that moment.

Mr Wells: Therefore you would expect some international media coverage.

Mr McGowan: Yes. I cannot say exactly what it will consist of, but it is our intention to have international coverage. That is essential to underpinning what David said about changing the perceptions of Northern Ireland.

Mr Wells: Unless Usain Bolt is a bobby, we are not expecting world-class performances. Are there any sports at international level where the police can hold their own?

Mr McGowan: We have had some really good athletes. We had a fireman called Robbie Bryson who is a fireman, who turned up to do a mountain run in Vancouver. He was running in the Grand Master's Race and won the open title with a record run time. We had another firefighter who turned up to do the mountain bikes and, again, won the event. Therefore we have some very good athletes.

Mr Wells: What is the male/female split?

Mr McGowan: It is about 70% male and 30% female.

Mr Wells: Therefore there is a strong female component in most sports.

Mr McGowan: Yes. Some of the females are in the ultimate firefighter competition, and I have to say that I would not want to argue with them. [Laughter.] They are extremely fit.

Mr Wells: That is the sort of event that could be televised.

Mr McGowan: Absolutely.

Mr Murray: We spoke to the Chinese, who bid to host the 2017 games at Chengdu. They told us how critical it was when they went home. Their local news would broadcast them in New York, and then they would go back to Belfast and be interviewed in Belfast, talking about being in Belfast and what it was like here. Therefore although we talk about local broadcast, there is a worldwide impact, as competitors go back to their own countries and are interviewed by their local news media. It is a big thing.

Mr McGowan: We will also have a media centre, as journalists and camera crews will come with the teams. We will facilitate them, probably in BT Tower.

Mr McGlone: Max, you spoke about communication. I am intrigued because I see that 75-plus countries are represented. Clearly, people with competence in languages and the ability to communicate in the range of tongues that will be there is the key to efficient operation. What provision has been made for that?

On the back of what Mr Wells said, what capacity is there to sell this? Not to the local BBC; that is not the market that you want to attract. It is what you attract on the back of the 10,000 or so visitors that will count.

How long will the visitors be here? Sorry, that is not the proper question. How long will the games last? There might be one or two stragglers staying behind, but most will head off. How have you liaised with the Tourist Board to make sure that, when visitors are here with partners, friends and family, they get to know about the other sights here, whether the new Titanic Quarter or the Giant's Causeway? We must piggyback on that so that it is not just the value of the participants — those least likely to see the sights — but rather those who come with them.

I will be interested to hear that. Good to see you again, David.

Mr Ferguson: And you.

Mr McGlone: I was not aware that you were in this capacity now. It is better than taking planning decisions. [Laughter.]

Mr Ferguson: I will take those points in reverse order. The simple answer to your question is that the visitors will be here for 10 days for the competition itself; it runs from 1 to 10 October 2013. We have a tourism work stream, that is a tourism project, to ensure that we exploit to the maximum the immediate tourism opportunities of 25,000 people arriving, and the ongoing tourism opportunities. As for languages, a good few of the people — not an overwhelming majority — will be coming from the North American continent and from Europe, and many of the Europeans will have some understanding of English. However, we will have interpreters deployed through the volunteers in key places and with key teams to make sure that there are no language problems.

Mr Murray: Let me add one other point. In the New York experience, it was interesting how many people were from Australia and America — I never spoke to anyone whose family did not originate in Ireland. A great deal of genealogy opportunities may arise, so there is work to be done with the Public Record Office, which will be co-located beside the athletes' village. We will try to make the Public Record Office available to people. People are being told to bring their passports, identity cards and any family history with them.

Mr McGlone: A bit of genealogy?

Mr Murray: Yes.

Mr McGlone: I turn to the PR aspect. You mentioned earlier the potential to work with the likes of Cable News Network (CNN). However, if we have 75-plus countries here, many other countries will be picking up on it.

Mr McGowan: Last month, we appointed a communications company, JPR Communications, which is working on a strategy as to how we can sell this out through Northern Ireland. However, we need a media partner here to sell it on. That partner is the BBC, and we are going to talk to them. We are waiting on the BBC to come back to us with a proposal as to how it will physically do that. I cannot tell you yet that we will definitely have this coverage; however, we are certainly working on it. We have huge coverage already through the service magazines; I think that there are 70 of them in the UK and Ireland. We have had a great deal of coverage back out into Europe and we get that translated through the Visitor and Convention Bureau. We have already been putting in articles and we are starting to wrap that up.

Mr Dickson: What facilities and sporting venues will be used, and where have you identified facilities that do not meet the appropriate standards? Have you been working with facility providers to see what they can do to improve venues to the required standard?

Mr Ferguson: We went through a selection process to identify the 35 venues that we think will meet federation standards and which are equipped to deliver the particular sport or cluster of sports. The final decisions on those have not been taken, but we did go through a process, starting in 2010 with an initial advertisement.

We used different channels to communicate with potential venue owners. Some did not make the first cut because they were well behind the standard required and were eliminated because there was no prospect of their having their venues up to scratch by the time of the games. However, we have got down to 35 venues. We are looking at two or three others on top of those that we will need for backup because of the size of the competition that we expect in relation to a particular sport.

We will announce the decisions on the final venues over the next few weeks. Last week, we finished a very successful visit by the world federation. The entire team of federation directors spent an intensive week with us looking at our venues and discussing the rules for the sports that will be put on. I would say this anyway, but they left with a very positive impression of our state of preparation for the games and are comfortable with where we are.

Mr Murray: In fact, they said that ours were among the best venues that they had seen anywhere in the world. That is the calibre of the venues on our doorstep.

Mr Dickson: Are they identifying any team or group of participants that wants pre-event training facilities or are you assisting them in that?

Mr McGowan: We are planning to offer the opportunity for someone who wants to host a team to train them. Therefore if a boxing club wants to go to west Belfast or east Belfast, we will ask a boxing club there to host them. We had two Olympic medallists at the last games, so we will tell the clubs that there is a Cuban boxing team, for example, and ask whether they want to host them. With basketball in particular, some of the North American teams are almost professional. They are of a very good standard. Therefore we will offer that opportunity probably through councils and ask them whether they want to host a team for a day and then get the kids involved. That is what we are planning to do. We will not know which teams are coming until they register, but we will probably be asking clubs post-Christmas whether they want to host a team.

Mr Dickson: Much of that contact would be done through schools, but schools will be closed and young people and teachers will be on holiday in August. Therefore what plans have you in place to ensure that young people can both spectate at the games and interact with the athletes and the services?

Mr Ferguson: We are starting that process well before the games even start. We have a legacy programme in schools that we will be running from September this year.

Mr McGowan: Every school will be offered the opportunity to link with a fire or police service around the world, so you might have Gilnahirk primary school linking with Adelaide fire service. They will correspond, and each will learn a wee bit about the other's culture. There will then be the opportunity for that school to nominate people to lead them in for the opening ceremony. That is well in hand.

Mr Ferguson: The education programme is not just intended to continue interest right up to the games; it will be part of the curriculum and part of the games' legacy.

Mr McGowan: All the events have free access, so you can watch top-quality ice hockey at no cost. Families will have the opportunity to watch really high-standard hockey, basketball or boxing for free. Therefore it will have a huge community impact.

Ms J McCann: Obviously, you will be looking at local parks and open spaces for venues. On the back of getting schools involved, I was at a recent one about the Olympics torch, where schools are involved and creating that whole exhibition, including primary schools. It would be very good to get ahead of the dates and tie in with the schools because you would get the kids very interested, especially since we are trying to develop sports for our young people. It would be good to get them involved in putting on exhibitions, including the opening ceremony.

Mr Murray: Emergency Eddie was a schools programme where all schools were asked to submit their impression of what Emergency Eddie would look like, and a school in the west was selected, so they are already doing that.

The Chairperson: Thank you very much. I wish you well as you continue to plan.

Mr Murray: Can the Committee arrange the weather?