



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

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**COMMITTEE FOR  
FINANCE AND PERSONNEL**

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**OFFICIAL REPORT**  
(Hansard)

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**Department of Finance and Personnel  
Business Plan 2010-11**

24 March 2010

**NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY**

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**COMMITTEE FOR  
FINANCE AND PERSONNEL**

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**Department of Finance and Personnel  
Business Plan 2010-11**

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24 March 2010

**Members present for all or part of the proceedings:**

Ms Jennifer McCann (Chairperson)  
Mr Peter Weir (Deputy Chairperson)  
Mr Simon Hamilton  
Mr Fra McCann  
Mr Mitchel McLaughlin  
Mr David McNarry  
Mr Adrian McQuillan  
Mr Declan O'Loan  
Mr Ian Paisley Jnr  
Ms Dawn Purvis

**Witnesses:**

Mr Colm Doran )  
Ms Deborah McNeilly ) Department of Finance and Personnel  
Mr David Orr )

**The Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel (Ms J McCann):**

I welcome David Orr, director of corporate services in the corporate services group (CSG) of the Department, Deborah McNeilly, the head of the finance branch in CSG, and Colm Doran, head of business planning and corporate governance. Please make some brief opening remarks. In particular, please explain any changes between the 2009-2010 business plan and the draft 2010-11 plan, as some of the objectives and targets appear to have been changed or dropped.

This session is being reported by Hansard. I remind members, witnesses and those in the

Public Gallery that all mobile phones must be switched off as their signals interfere with the recording equipment.

**Mr David Orr (Department of Finance and Personnel):**

Good morning Chairperson and members of the Committee. Thank you for allowing us to appear before the Committee today.

We are here to discuss the Department of Finance and Personnel's draft operational plan for 2010-11. It has been seen by the Minister, who is generally content with it. We want to discuss it with the Committee, and we are happy to take questions on its various elements. In answer to your question, Chairperson: this year, we have tried to concentrate on the key strategic issues facing the Department, such as financial management; people management, including sick absence; data security; and customer services, which is the delivery of the shared services that the Department provides to other Departments. Therefore, there are fewer targets in the draft high-level plan. However, that does not mean that targets have been dropped; many have been included in the directorate-level plans that are being finalised, and we will send those to the Committee as we did last year.

Indeed, many of the detailed actions that we undertake are included in the various action plans; for example, CPD is developing an action plan in response to the Committee's review of procurement practice, and there is an action plan on data security. We are not dropping actions; we are focusing on the key strategic issues.

**Mr O'Loan:**

Thank you for coming before the Committee. I could ask questions on many issues, but I will just pick one or two and leave the rest for other members.

Our old friend PEDU, which you tell us is to be used to drive higher levels of performance and efficiency, was described in last year's business plan as the accepted mechanism through which Departments can be helped. Have you dropped that idea? Is PEDU currently being used as the accepted mechanism for driving efficiencies across Departments? Have you made any progress with the fundamental issue concerning PEDU, which is that it can only operate by invitation, and therefore does not seem to be proving very effective across the board? Looking to the future, there are heavy question marks over how PEDU will be used.

**Mr Orr:**

As I understand it, this is the wording that is used in the PSA. We are not moving back from supporting PEDU. Ministers are accountable for the effectiveness and efficiency of their Departments, and PEDU is one tool that they can use to assist them in that task. Officials are due to brief the Committee on PEDU on 14 April, and members may well be able to explore that matter in more detail with Richard Pengelly then. However, from the point of view of the business plan, we have kept the reference to PEDU being one of the tools to drive higher levels of performance and efficiency.

**Mr O'Loan:**

With respect to workplace accommodation, we all know the history of Workplace 2010. The Department has stated that it is still committed to the principles of Workplace 2010 and to getting a modern Civil Service estate, which is something that I am also committed to and supportive of. Why are there no objectives for that this time around?

**Mr Orr:**

I will speak about that in the next session; but in summary, the termination of Workplace 2010 was a significant issue, and members know why it was terminated. We have had to start from scratch on our accommodation strategy, and we are bringing an early draft to the Committee later this morning. To be frank, it is constrained by the availability of conventional finance.

I do not think that there is any point in making grand promises that we will be able to do significant things on the accommodation strategy, but we want to do what we can. The business plans of CSG and properties division contain the relevant targets, and we can let you know about those.

**Mr O'Loan:**

As you say, we will be coming back to that in more detail.

We are aware that, to a significant degree, Land and Property Services (LPS) is not achieving its targets for the collection of rates. By quoting the collection target as a cash amount of £970 million rather than as a percentage, you seem to be shifting the goalposts. I have significant concerns about that, because it does not tell us what proportion that £970 million is of the

outstanding rate for the current year and what is outstanding from previous years. Quoting separate percentages for both would provide much clearer information. Is this an example of a target being changed because it is proving difficult to meet? That is what it looks like.

**Mr Orr:**

The targets have not yet been finalised and we still have the opportunity to adjust them. In 2009-2010, rate collection is predicted to be around 94.5%. The Committee speaks to John Wilkinson from the LPS frequently, so members know the reasons for that. The cash value will be worked out on the basis of a higher percentage than this year's prediction, so the percentage that will be used to predict next year's rate collection will be higher than 94.5%. We have focused on the cash value because it is important, for the purposes of the Northern Ireland block and for the councils, to know what is being collected. We are not moving the goalposts. When the target is finalised, we will be happy to provide an explanation of how that relates to the target for the current year, 2009-2010, the actual collection value for 2009-2010, and the target for 2010-11.

**Mr O'Loan:**

I think that you should consider how you present that target. A target for collecting £970 million has been stated. What percentage is that figure of the total rate, both in terms of the amount that will arise next year and the amount outstanding at the end of the current year?

**Mr Orr:**

It is around 95% to 95.5%.

**Mr O'Loan:**

Am I right in saying that the target is 98%?

**Mr Orr:**

Yes, but I do not think that that is achievable in the current financial climate. I am being open with you in saying that. That target has not been achievable in the past few years. We need to increase the current amount of collection, bearing in mind the financial circumstances and the circumstances of ratepayers.

**Mr Weir:**

Collection and valuation are, in many ways, interlinked, and there is strong willingness across

local government to be involved. The big difference between local government and central government with respect to rates revenue is that although it is of benefit to central government, it makes up a relatively limited proportion of overall spend, whereas it is the lifeblood of councils. An extra percentage or two can make a critical difference to local government. Do you have any specific plans to work more closely with councils on the issue? Are you open to proposals from local government to have a much more enmeshed system?

A year or two ago, when there were problems, many councils, together with the Department, took proactive action such as sending staff out to knock doors. That proved to be quite a productive exercise. Strategically, and in the long run, are you open to a greater level of involvement with councils? That need not involve the Department's ceding of control but the sharing of responsibility with councils.

**Mr Orr:**

That might be a very attractive idea to the LPS. However, I assure you that it works co-operatively with councils. It meets councils and their representative bodies regularly.

**Mr Weir:**

Presumably, you would welcome an opportunity to deepen that co-operation.

**Mr Orr:**

Yes.

**Mr McNarry:**

You have a target for collecting £970 million, and you explained that target to Declan. What is the cash value of a 5% reduction of debt?

**Mr Orr:**

The opening debt at the start of the year is approximately £160 million, and 5% of that is around £8 million.

**Mr McNarry:**

I will not use the word "happy", because I am sure that DFP is not happy about it: is DFP satisfied with the LPS target of reducing by 5% the debt of £160 million that is carried forward

year on year? Can the LPS not do better than that?

**Mr Orr:**

It can do better than that by writing off old debt. However, to do so is expensive for both the block grant and the councils, because debt that is written off is scored against income.

**Mr McNarry:**

Is the LPS ever going to get that debt paid?

**Mr Orr:**

That question must be considered carefully. It is a good point. I must explain that, even if that opening debt of £160 million were reduced during the year to £80 million, new debt would come in. The process of debt reduction and replacement by more debt is a constant one.

**Mr McNarry:**

Will you clarify whether the £160 million of debt will be lost or added to the predicted cash income of £970 million?

**Mr Orr:**

The £970 million includes the debt that the LPS hopes to recover.

**Mr McNarry:**

I do not know how anybody can present those figures and say that everything will be all right. Whoever is going after that money is not being ambitious enough.

**Mr Orr:**

We will consider that point.

**Mr McNarry:**

The LPS must do better. That situation is not acceptable. The LPS is at risk of sending out a signal that it is not serious about debt collection, and that is part of the problem.

**Mr Orr:**

May I respond to that point?

**Mr McNarry:**

Are you saying that the LPS is not sending out that signal?

**Mr Orr:**

No, it is not.

**Mr McNarry:**

The figures say otherwise.

**Mr Orr:**

The number of court actions that the LPS initiates and pursues is indicative of —

**Mr McNarry:**

How much do those cost?

**Mr Orr:**

I do not have the figures with me. A paper with the relevant figures was given to the Committee.

**Mr McNarry:**

It costs a significant sum of money to chase debt, and a lot of it is debt that you are not prepared to write off, as you probably should do given the circumstances you are in.

**Mr Orr:**

It is expensive to chase debt, and although the LPS is chasing that debt strongly, DFP may have to consider writing it off. That will have an impact on the councils and the block grant.

**Mr McNarry:**

Has the LPS factored in the credit card collection proposals to those figures? What benefit or effect might those have?

**Mr Orr:**

I do not have that level of detail with me. I will get back to the Committee about that.



**Mr McNarry:**

Is it anticipated that the debt will be reduced and that the LPS will collect rates to the cash value stated should those proposals proceed?

**Mr Orr:**

I will have to come back to the Committee to confirm whether that is the case. I do not have that detail with me.

**Mr McNarry:**

Do you know whether credit cards will be used as a method of payment?

**Mr Orr:**

I cannot speak to that at the moment. I will come back and advise the Committee about that. This is not my area, Chairperson. I am doing my best to answer the questions. I will certainly come back to the Committee with the relevant information.

**Mr McNarry:**

That is fair enough. You are always very fair with us. I asked that question for a specific reason.

**Mr F McCann:**

Since the Committee's first meeting in the present term, the LPS has taken major strides in rate collection. However, I was reading an article recently that said that 30,000 people owed rates or had missed their payments. Is that figure accurate, or does the number increase and decrease? How much does it equate to in cash terms?

**Mr Orr:**

I do not know the answer to that. However, John Wilkinson will be meeting the Committee on 14 April. May I give him notice of these questions so that he will be armed and able to provide an answer?

**Mr F McCann:**

Yes, certainly.

**Mr Orr:**

We will respond to the question on credit card payment before 14 April.

**Mr McQuillan:**

I have great sympathy for people who cannot afford to pay their rates. We should be targeting those who can afford to pay but who choose not to do so.

Last year, sick absence targets for the Civil Service and DFP were 9·5 days and 8·5 days respectively. Why have no targets been set for this year? What are the targets?

**Mr Orr:**

The sick absence targets were set over a number of years, and the last target set by Ministers was for the 2009-2010 financial year. As Mr McQuillan has said, the NICS target for 2009-2010 was 9·5 days and DFP's target was 8·5 days. Ministers will be setting new targets for sick absence, but they want to wait until the out-turn for 2009-2010 is finalised. We will send those targets to the Committee at that stage.

I will give the Committee an update on the DFP position. The DFP target is 8·5 days, and I think that the result will be slightly higher, at 8·8 days. We have experienced a reduction, year on year, from 14·3 days in 2004, and, although we will not be complacent, because more work must be done, a result of 8·8 days will represent an improvement. It is interesting to note that the CBI average for large private sector organisations is 9·5 days, and the Committee has the figures for district councils. DFP is well below those levels. We have put a strong focus on sick absence, and that focus will continue. This year's target has not yet been set, but we will let the Committee know when that has happened.

**Mr McQuillan:**

Given that sickness levels have been reduced to 8·8 days, will next year's target be more ambitious than 8·5 days?

**Mr Orr:**

I think that it will. The CBI average demonstrates that we are reaching a reasonable — I will not say acceptable — level. However, we cannot expect reductions of 0·5% year on year. The reductions will be in the region of 0·1% or 0·2%.

**Ms Purvis:**

I refer to page 12 of the draft plan, which mentions staff satisfaction surveys. During last year's discussion on the draft operational plan, we heard that the customer and staff satisfaction targets for 2009-2010 were 75%. What satisfaction levels were reflected in the 2009-2010 surveys?

**Mr Colm Doran (Department of Finance and Personnel):**

The customer satisfaction survey result for DFP was 73%, which is an improvement from 68% in the previous year. This year's staff attitudes survey was completed on an NICS-wide basis, and results for all Departments are not available yet.

**Ms Purvis:**

In that case, how are you supposed to measure the response or meet the target?

**Mr Orr:**

The survey has been undertaken, but the results are not yet available. They will be published within the next few weeks. We will inform the Committee of the results when we come back to report our performance against the targets.

**Ms Purvis:**

Did any major issues arise from the surveys?

**Mr Orr:**

The customer survey showed a 5% improvement, but we did not meet our target — we fell short by 2%. We received good information from customers, and we want to work with them in 2010-11, using tools such as customer journey mapping. Rather than simply surveying customers at the end of a process, we will ask them about their experiences at various stages during the processes and determine whether anything could be done better. The focus for 2010-11 will be on working with customers more proactively in order to make real changes.

**Ms Purvis:**

Was that one of the issues that arose from the surveys? Was it that you were talking to customers at the end of a process rather than consulting them throughout?

**Mr Orr:**

Yes. Our customers welcome being involved in helping us to make our processes more customer-focused.

**Ms Purvis:**

Did any other issues arise from the surveys?

**Mr Doran:**

Issues raised in the customer survey will be captured in the departmental improvement plan, but involvement in the process is one of the areas that we want to focus on. Communication with customers was also highlighted in a couple of surveys, and we will focus on that in our improvement plan.

**Ms Purvis:**

What are the customer satisfaction targets for the year ahead?

**Mr Orr:**

We have not set a target for 2010-11. We want to proceed with customer journey mapping to see what is possible in relation to customer focus.

**Ms Purvis:**

Is the Department looking at long-term strategic targets for customer satisfaction, or will targets be dropped?

**Mr Orr:**

We are looking for quality engagement with our customers to improve our interaction with them and to understand what they expect. Most of our customers are internal Civil Service customers; we have relatively few external customers, although the LPS is an exception. It is important to examine our customer processes and find out how our customers want us to perform differently. We will undertake a self-assessment of our activities against the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) standard, or something similar, so that we can benchmark our performance for customers and staff against best practice.

We have not worked out exactly how we will do that. There are a number of methodologies

available. We will have a workshop tomorrow, which will be followed by a further workshop in early April, to try to work out how to benchmark performance. I cannot give you an exact answer, but I hope that I can assure you that we are focusing on customers. Clear customer focus is a key DFP value, and we want to continue in that vein.

**Mr McNarry:**

I have a couple of questions. Will the plan mean that there will be no further job losses in the Department?

**Mr Orr:**

The reductions in posts for 2010-11 have been identified. We are working our way through that process. Provided that our budgets for 2010-11 remain as we expect, and that process is ongoing, our plans for 2010-11 are in place. I cannot give any commitments or guarantees about 2011-12, because that will be subject to the Budget 2010 process.

**Mr McNarry:**

Annex B of the operational plan shows the Department's organisational structure. I see that there is a vacancy on the departmental board for an independent board member. Are you permitted to tell me the annual operating cost of the board, including the independent board member once that vacancy is filled?

**Mr Orr:**

We will do that.

**Ms Deborah McNeilly (Department of Finance and Personnel):**

The salaries of board members are disclosed in our annual accounts. That might be helpful.

**Mr McNarry:**

Yes, it would be. I would like information on any other costs that there might be. I do not want to get into the cost of water, because a lot of people give off about the volume of water that you people drink.

**Mr Orr:**

We do not use bottled water in DFP.

**Mr McNarry:**

Is it Beaujolais?

**Mr Orr:**

It is from the Silent Valley or whatever other reservoir serves our area.

**Mr McNarry:**

That is the best stuff. I would be grateful if you could give me that information.

**Mr Orr:**

Is it the cost of the independent board members that you are interested in?

**Mr McNarry:**

No; I am interested in the cost of the board — the DFP company.

**Mr Orr:**

Including salaries?

**Mr McNarry:**

Yes; I just want to see how much the board costs.

**Mr McLaughlin:**

Following on from a point made by David McNarry earlier; is there a way of tracking the impact of the efficiency measures on administration costs? I am talking about DFP specifically. I am asking about the outcomes of the efficiency measures on the Department. Can you say whether the staff complement has grown or contracted as a result of the efficiency measures? I am sure that, at the end of the three-year Budget period, you will be looking at some sort of a balance sheet that will show the impact of the efficiency measures.

**Mr Orr:**

We can track the number of staff in the Department.

**Mr McLaughlin:**

Can you track staff costs?

**Mr Orr:**

Yes. For example, between 2009-2010 and 2010-11 we will reduce our staff costs by 200 posts; and I mean 200 funded posts rather than 200 people. Some posts were filled by temporary employees, and we are redeploying others. Therefore, we are able to chart the change in the size of the Department and the administration costs.

The effect of the efficiency measures on the ground can be a little bit more difficult to measure. For example, in March 2009, there were 47 members of the Senior Civil Service in the Department. That figure has been reduced by almost 10% to 43, and a further three or so will be removed during this financial year. You may ask what difference that has made. In my own area, I merged two grade 5 jobs. It is very hard to track the impact of such measures on delivery on the ground, because we are trying to deliver what we promised with less.

Ten years ago, the Department had roughly half of the number of staff that it has now; 3,200 then compared to 1,600 now. The number of staff has doubled in 10 years because of the functions that have been added by various Ministers. The Department has acquired responsibility for rates collection, valuation, accommodation services, CPD, NISRA and the OHS. Therefore, a large number of staff has come into DFP along with a large number of functions. The most recent increase in staffing was when the Department took on the shared services work. We now have IT Assist people from all other Departments working together in the shared services organisation and in Account NI. It may not just be about the total number of staff in the Department; one has to look at the functions too.

**Mr McLaughlin:**

I understand that; but how can the Assembly be satisfied? Those functions had to be delivered anyway. If we are talking about outputs and unit costs, does this demonstrate that there is more efficiency and less administration costs in delivering the same services, albeit that they have been consolidated in the Department?

**Mr Orr:**

It can do. For example, IT Assist delivers IT facilities at a cost of just under £1,500 a person

across the NICS. That cost includes the computer, the network, the secure data storage and the help desk function. We benchmarked that cost against the cost in England, and it is below the English figure by about £200 a person. We aim to lower it to £1,400 or £1,300 a person. There are ways to benchmark those efficiencies.

**Mr McLaughlin:**

That is very helpful. In the February monitoring round, the Minister expressed disappointment that significant reduced requirements were declared. He indicated that those could have been surrendered much earlier had Departments displayed better financial management and reporting. Why has the objective to improve financial management across the public sector been removed from the balanced scorecard?

**Ms McNeilly:**

Work is still ongoing. It has not disappeared as such; it has dropped down into —

**Mr McLaughlin:**

Has it been de-prioritised for some reason?

**Ms McNeilly:**

No.

**Mr McLaughlin:**

Was it not expected that there would be a continued focus? This Committee takes particular interest in that area of financial management.

**Mr Orr:**

Target R2 in the draft plan shows a range of measures that CFG plans to undertake in 2010-11. There will be a strong focus on the monitoring rounds. The Minister's statement was one example of that, and that will continue. There will also be a strong focus on living within budgets and within the acceptable tolerance of underspend, which is mentioned in the plan. I think that good financial management is one of our priorities, and there was no intention to relegate it in any way.



**Mr McLaughlin:**

Perhaps it may be worth taking another look at that. This Committee is awaiting the review of the budgetary and monitoring processes. We have not seen the outcome, but the indications are that there will be a fairly conservative approach. These key instruments allow the Assembly to engage in the budgetary process and the quarterly monitoring rounds to see whether we can further enhance or develop the process of in-year scrutiny. Perhaps there are opportunities for us all to work together. It should be reinserted or restated as one of the priorities.

**Mr Orr:**

We will consider that suggestion.

**Mr F McCann:**

It is obvious that the Department is under severe pressure to deliver on the targets that were set and, at the same time, deliver efficiencies. Sometimes it is an open match. You talked about the reduction of 200 posts. Do you assess each post against your ability to deliver on targets? If not, how are the posts chosen?

**Mr Orr:**

We undertook that exercise, in preparation for 2010-11, last October and November. Each business area looked at its staffing structure and the activities that each post undertook and compared that with statutory requirements and key strategic business plan requirements that were given priority. Each business area looked methodically at the posts that did not contribute to the statutory and obligatory targets. We identified the areas in which savings would cause least pain. There is never no pain, but we wanted to continue to focus on the key targets in the PSA and in our business plan.

**Mr F McCann:**

Some 200 posts may be going now; and, in the next round, you may have to reduce the number of posts further. There must be a cut-off point at which it is acknowledged that no more posts can go, because the reductions are impacting on the ability to deliver.

**Mr Orr:**

That is correct. There comes a point when one cannot simply argue that it will be more efficient. I am not saying that we have reached that point yet. Indeed, I think that there is still some way to

go. However, there comes a point when it must be acknowledged that one must stop doing certain things. As the Committee has pointed out before, it is a combination of being more efficient and, at times, acknowledging that one has to stop doing certain things in order to work within a budget.

**The Chairperson:**

You touched briefly on public procurement in your opening remarks. Target R2.2 in the draft operating plan outlines only one target in that regard:

“95% of public procurement spend influenced by CoPEs by 31 March 2011.”

I realise that this is not within your responsibility; however, the Committee completed its inquiry recently and, given public procurement’s huge significance and huge budget, surely more public procurement target outcomes should be set rather than having one overriding target.

**Mr Orr:**

Yes; there should be; and, indeed, there are. The CPD has a sustainable procurement action plan in its business plan, which it is working through. The CPD also proposes to produce an action plan in response to the Committee’s review. It may be opportune for Des Armstrong to come to the Committee to talk about that at some stage.

We realise that public procurement is vital. You were very kind to me, Chairperson, but, having held Des’s job in the past, I should know a wee bit more about it than some other areas. Our key focus has been on channelling procurement through centres of procurement expertise (CoPEs). If procurement is channelled through the CoPEs, then the people who deal with procurement day in and day out will know all the sustainable procurement and initiatives and good practice that need to be applied. That is why the 95% target is so important.

**The Chairperson:**

I take your point; but, during our inquiry, we identified problems and difficulties with the fact that there was not regulation across all the CoPEs.

On that point, it might be useful if a briefing paper were submitted to the Committee in advance of evidence sessions such as this because some issues have been raised today and you

cannot be expected to be experts on everything. A briefing paper would be useful to the Committee, so that members could map departmental performance against business plans, the Programme for Government and the PSAs. It would also enable members to inform the Department of the questions that they want to ask, so that the relevant officials could appear and answer those questions at Committee rather than you being put on the spot.

Finally, can I just ask —

**Mr Orr:**

I am sorry to interrupt. Could we try that approach for the session on end-year performance? We will send the Committee a report, and members can identify the areas that they want to scrutinise.

**The Chairperson:**

The operational plan contains no targets in respect of responses to Assembly Questions, Committee queries or valid requests under freedom of information or data protection legislation. Will you explain why those targets been dropped?

**Mr Orr:**

They have not been dropped. We monitor that work on a quarterly basis, and will continue to do so. When drafting a plan, one has to strike a balance between the things that should be done routinely and the key strategic issues. I assure the Committee that the targets mentioned are monitored quarterly by the departmental board. Performance is recorded, and we are happy to let the Committee see those details. We have recently discussed setting operational targets in those areas and, without being complacent, it has proved very beneficial to us. The focus on Assembly Questions and getting information back to the Committee has actually improved performance. We will continue to monitor it next year on a quarterly basis.

**The Chairperson:**

So, you record that information already?

**Mr Orr:**

We do.

**Mr McNarry:**

David and colleagues, I will take you back to Annex C of the operational plan, which concerns rates. I have difficulty with some of it. One of the stated targets is:

“To maintain the valuation list with early, accurate assessments and regular revaluations.”

You told me that there was an opening debt of £160 million circulating. Will you refresh my mind on the figure that I was saying should be written off; was that £68 million? There was clearly an amount that did not seem to be collectable.

**Mr Orr:**

We are planning to reduce the total debt by 5% of the current amount.

**Mr McNarry:**

I know that, but on the figures you gave me —

**Mr Orr:**

I was giving hypothetical figures to try to illustrate the point. For example; one starts off with £160 million of debt and then reduces individual debts during the year. I think I mentioned something like £80 million as an example. I was using that figure to illustrate the point that other debts then accrue to replace that reduction. The figure I gave in that example was hypothetical in order to illustrate the point.

**Mr McNarry:**

What I am trying to find out is — and David might help me understand —in relation to the LPS target of accurate assessments and regular revaluations, is it possible to hit on an approximate figure for the people who cannot pay?

**Mr Orr:**

We may be talking at cross purposes. The accurate assessments mentioned are the rateable values of properties. For example, if someone builds an extension, the rateable value of the property will change. Returning to your key point, which is how we know the point at which people cannot pay, or, as Adrian McQuillan said, will not pay? I suggest that that may be something that we could brief John Wilkinson to cover when he appears before the Committee on 14 April.

**Mr McNarry:**

Will you be kind enough to return with a note on that before John comes before the Committee, so that my memory is jogged? I need that figure in order to be able to work out in my mind how many people are really under stress due to the rates situation, and whether there is anything that can be done to alleviate that stress? I am setting aside those people that Adrian has mentioned — the ones who just will not pay.

**Mr Orr:**

We will. I think I recall — and the Committee Clerk can keep me right — that there was a fairly lengthy paper from the LPS on debt last autumn, which covered a lot of the arrangements.

**Mr McNarry:**

There are people who have those things paid for them. I am not talking about them. I am trying to find out whether there is a population that is just above the thresholds but is struggling and in great difficulty. In other words, is this a social issue that we may need to investigate further through that information, which might help us all?

**Mr Orr:**

We will provide the Committee with the information.

**The Chairperson:**

Thank you, David, Deborah and Colm.