



Northern Ireland
Assembly

COMMITTEE FOR JUSTICE

OFFICIAL REPORT
(Hansard)

**Overview Briefing on the Justice Delivery
Directorate and Related Non-
departmental Public Bodies**

29 April 2010

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

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Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Lord Morrow (Chairperson)
Mr Raymond McCartney (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Jonathan Bell
Mr Tom Elliott
Mrs Dolores Kelly
Mr Alastair Ross

Witnesses:

Mr Anthony Harbinson)
Ms Karen Pearson) Department for Justice
Mr Glyn Capper)
Mr Ray Murray)

The Chairperson (Lord Morrow):

In the hope that we get through the session before we lose our quorum, I welcome representatives from the justice delivery directorate. We are joined by the director of justice delivery, Mr Anthony Harbinson; Ms Karen Pearson, who is head of personnel and office services; Mr Glyn Capper, who is head of financial services; and Mr Ray Murray, who is head of information services. You are aware that the meeting is being recorded by Hansard. I invite Mr Harbinson to brief the Committee on the roles and responsibility of the justice delivery directorate and its key issues and priorities.

Mr Anthony Harbinson (Department of Justice):

Thank you, Chairman. Unlike most of my colleagues, I am not a career civil servant. I am a qualified accountant. I started my work with Northern Ireland Electricity, where I spent three years. Then, I moved into the health sector, where I worked for 15 years as either a director of finance or a deputy chief executive of a range of health bodies. I was responsible for leading the creation of the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service. In 2001, I was recruited to the Civil Service to take on responsibility for the creation and development of the Public Prosecution Service. Three years ago, I joined the NIO as director of resources. Hence, I am currently director of delivery in the Department of Justice (DOJ).

I invite my colleagues to introduce themselves to give you a flavour of their background.

Ms Karen Pearson (Department of Justice):

I am head of personnel and office services. In 1986, I joined the Civil Service in the Home Office. I moved to NIO in 1998. Most of my career has been in policing policy. In summer 2007, I took on the role of head of personnel of the NIO. I am now head of personnel in the Department of Justice.

Mr Glyn Capper (Department of Justice):

Good afternoon. I am head of financial services. Like Anthony, I am not a career civil servant. I qualified as an accountant in the private sector before joining the Civil Service in 2002. Since then, I have held a number of posts in the finance function in the Northern Ireland Office before transferring to the Department of Justice.

Mr Ray Murray (Department of Justice):

Good afternoon. I am a career civil servant. I joined the Civil Service in 1972, and I have worked in various Northern Ireland Civil Service Departments, including the social security side of the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development and the Department of Finance and Personnel. I joined IT in 1984, and I was recruited as head of IT for the Northern Ireland Prison Service in 2000. I became the head of information systems in the Northern Ireland Office in 2006, and I am currently head of information systems for the Department of Justice.

Mr Harbinson:

The justice delivery directorate supports the Department's strategic objectives and business delivery. The Committee has received a briefing note on what we do, and it may want to base any questions on that note. All our work is of fundamental importance to enable the rest of the Department to deliver its goals and functions. Our response times and support levels ensure the effective front line delivery of other services. We always aim to deliver to a high standard, with a focus on helping to improve front line public services. For example, we support prisoner records, prisoner visit systems, the Compensation Agency's payments systems and the Youth Justice Agency's youth conferencing system.

We also have a role in providing a constructive challenge in the Department. The creation of the DOJ gives us a real opportunity to examine how we deliver our services and to improve efficiency and effectiveness. Streamlined back office support is the chief priority for me, and we also have a pivotal role to play in resource management, best practice and ensuring greater value for money.

In preparing for devolution and to ensure the Department's efficiency and effectiveness, we have already aligned ourselves with the Northern Ireland Civil Service in many areas. Given that we now have power devolved, there are further opportunities for us to align and integrate with the NICS reform programme both with regard to shared services and the policies and procedures. As with all NICS Departments, we face major challenges in this financial climate, which makes it doubly important that we ensure effectiveness, efficiency and delivery of back office services to free resources to the front line. We are focused on ensuring that robust finance and governance arrangements are in place to ensure that we meet the strategic and policy priorities for the Minister, the Department and the Committee.

I will expand a little on the main priorities for the directorate as it moves forward, and I will begin by talking about the integration of the new Department within the Northern Ireland Civil Service family. The Department is aligning and integrating to the fullest possible extent. For example, the Department avails itself of common services and contracts, such as the Central Procurement Directorate, HR Connect, Network NI and NI Direct. We are also actively planning to integrate with the Centre for Applied Learning and IT Assist, and we will be aligning with Records NI and Account NI as soon as possible.

A principle challenge will be to ensure the effective management of the changes that are associated with aligning to the NICS reform programme, while maintaining our services and our essential support role and enabling justice delivery for the core Department and its agencies.

I will now turn to the key strategic challenges for finance, HR and IT in the next 12 months. The Committee will be aware that the Executive agreed a financial package for the devolution of policing and justice that addressed a number of key financial issues. The challenges will include steering the Department through the next spending review process, as well as ongoing monitoring and control of the Department's budget. Achieving value for money and a reduction in operating costs is critical in guaranteeing continued effective service delivery in the current economic climate. Our business performance team will deliver further savings across the Department, its agencies and its arm's-length bodies.

As part of the comprehensive spending review 2007 settlement, the Department was already committed to delivering extensive value for money savings. We were set a target of £125 million, and as of December 2009, we had already achieved savings of £89 million. We are, therefore, on target to deliver the balance by the end of March 2011. The Department is working with the DFP spending team to ensure that its planning for the next spending review is in line with other Northern Ireland Departments.

In the HR area, assimilation with the Northern Ireland Civil Service's terms and conditions is a major project that will be taken forward during the summer and early autumn. Equal pay is an issue for the Department's staff and it is in discussions with the Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance. The Department's staff are not subject to the Northern Ireland Civil Service's equal pay settlement. That is a contentious area, and I have no doubt that the Committee will be interested in progress as we move forward.

As part of the Department's work on integration and alignment, some of the key changes will occur in the areas of support of IT services and records management. Major changes in the structures of the services that are provided by the information systems division are inevitable, but there is an equally distinct challenge in maintaining key support services during the transition.

So far, I have concentrated on internal services and the support provided, but there are also

some public-facing areas on which the directorate leads, for example, on corporate social responsibility and the prompt payment of invoices to suppliers. That is essential in the current financial climate, and the Department routinely pays more than 95% of suppliers within 10 working days.

The main strategic challenge for the justice delivery directorate during the next 12 months will be to balance ongoing service delivery with continuous improvement and alignment with the NICS in a difficult financial climate. I hope that I have provided a helpful overview for the Committee on the work of the directorate, and I am happy to respond to any questions that members may have.

The Chairperson:

Thank you, Mr Harbinson.

Mr Bell:

The Committee knows that £800 million has been ring-fenced, but what is the next spending review?

Mr Harbinson:

It will depend on when the next Westminster Government decides to set the next spending review programme. It will be in 2010 or 2011.

The Chairperson:

No other members have indicated that they wish to ask a question, but you will not be getting away that easily.

Mr Elliott:

The Department has a broad budget for resource and staff numbers. Can you give the Committee a further breakdown for the overall budget? I do not want that now, but it would be useful if the Committee could have them at some stage.

The Chairperson:

I suspect that it may not be possible to make those figures available today, but perhaps the Committee could have it at a later date.

Mr Harbinson:

I can quickly run through the Department's budget now or I could write to the Committee later.

The Chairperson:

Just run through it now.

Mr Harbinson:

The justice delivery directorate has a resource budget of £15 million; the justice policy directorate has £21.2 million; and the policing and community safety directorate has £23.5 million. The budgets for the non-departmental public bodies are as follows: the Police Service of Northern Ireland has £854.6 million; the Policing Board has £8.8 million; the Police Ombudsman has £9.4 million; the Probation Board for Northern Ireland has £20.8 million; Criminal Justice Inspection has £1.5 million; and the Legal Services Commission has £84.2 million. The resource budgets for the Department's five executive agencies are as follows: the Prison Service has £131.7 million; the Compensation Agency has £29.9 million; Forensics Science Northern Ireland has £1.5 million; the Youth Justice Agency has £21.5 million; and the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service has £58.5 million. The overall resource budget is £1.282 billion.

The Chairperson:

What was the resource budget for community safety?

Mr Harbinson:

The resource budget for the policing and community safety directorate is £23.5 million.

The Chairperson:

I am unsure whether you have heard the criticism that I hear every day on the perceived overlap between community safety partnerships (CSPs) and district policing partnerships (DPPs), and the feeling that they should be integrated. Does that figure include the cost of running the district policing partnerships?

Mr Capper:

To the best of my knowledge, the budget for district policing partnerships is part of the Policing Board budget, so it is separate from the figure that Anthony quoted for the policing and community safety budget.

Mr Harbinson:

Yes, it is part of the £8.8 million budget for the Policing Board.

The Chairperson:

There is a view abroad that the CSPs and DPPs are, perhaps, a bit bureaucratic, even among people who serve on those organisations and bodies. Is that worth looking at to rationalise things and to bring more efficiency?

Mr Harbinson:

Going forward, everything will be subject to review and inspection. We will not be able to leave things as they sit.

Mr McCartney:

Your presentation states that 98% of the former NIO budget was transferred to the Executive. How many personnel transferred and how many remained?

Mr Harbinson:

Total staff amounts to 4,5000, of which 471 are in the core.

The Chairperson:

Mr Harbinson, do you think it would be possible to have a briefing session before the summer recess to discuss the budget and other pressures on the budget?

Mr Harbinson:

I am sure that we could provide a briefing to the Committee.

The Chairperson:

I think that that would be useful, because I suspect that there will be pressures on the budget. As a Committee, we will want to be in early on that, rather than read about it some day in the press.

No other member has a question, so you have got away lightly. Thank you for your presentation.

