



Northern Ireland
Assembly

**COMMITTEE FOR
CULTURE, ARTS AND LEISURE**

**OFFICIAL REPORT
(Hansard)**

**Progress against Public Service
Agreements in the Programme for
Government**

26 November 2009

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

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Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mr David McNarry (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr P J Bradley
Mr Dominic Bradley
Mr Francie Brolly
Lord Browne
Mr Trevor Clarke
Mr Kieran McCarthy
Miss Michelle McIlveen
Mr Ken Robinson

Witnesses:

Mrs Deborah Brown)
Mr Mick Cory) Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure
Mr Arthur Scott)

The Deputy Chairperson (Mr McNarry):

Good morning. You are very welcome. I invite to the Committee Mrs Deborah Brown, who is director of finance in the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL); Mr Arthur Scott, who is director of culture; and Mr Mick Cory, who is director of the sport, museums and recreation division. I ask you to brief the Committee, as you are well used to doing by now.

Mrs D Brown (Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure):

Good morning. We are grateful for the opportunity to provide an update on our progress towards the Department's Programme for Government (PFG) targets.

As we have outlined in our briefing paper, DCAL is the lead Department in the delivery of public service agreement (PSA) 9, which is to contribute to Northern Ireland's economic, health and educational goals by increasing participation and access to culture, arts and leisure activities. PSA 9 contains 16 targets. The Department also contributes to six other PSAs, five targets within those PSAs and three other key goals.

The Department is fully aware of its responsibilities under the Programme for Government and has designated its permanent secretary as the senior responsible owner of PSA 9. The departmental board is updated regularly on progress that is made towards PSA targets. The departmental board represents us as the PSA board.

The Department also provides updates on progress against PSA 9 to the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) and the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) on a quarterly basis. As a part of that reporting process, the Department assesses the likelihood of successful delivery against its Programme for Government responsibilities.

OFMDFM and DFP have requested that targets are rated as being red, amber, green-amber or green. At one end of the scale we have a red rating, which suggests that the measured rate of progress is highly unlikely to lead to the achievement of the targeted outcome. At the other end of the spectrum we have a green rating, which indicates that there is significant confidence, drawing on robust monitoring systems and data, about the prospects of delivering that targeted outcome on schedule.

DCAL has 16 targets under PSA 9: five are considered to have green status; seven are considered green-amber; three are considered amber; and only one is considered to have red status. The briefing paper contains details of the status of the targets.

I turn first to the five targets with green status. There is a satisfaction rate among library users of 88% against a target of 84%. We have exceeded the target of attracting 585,000 visitors to national museums, and, in light of that, we have revised the target for 2010 by setting it at

780,000 visitors. We have 7.2 public access workstations in the library network against a target of six. The Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI) is well on schedule to meet the target of producing six searchable databases: two databases went live in March 2009, three will be ready by the end of this year, and the final database will be prepared during 2010-11. We have also successfully achieved the target of creating the new Library Authority, which came into existence in April of this year.

We have only one red indicator, which is against indicator 13 in PSA 9. The target under indicator 13 is:

“By 2011 and subject to the normal approval processes to have an operationally viable and commercially sustainable Multi-Sports Stadium for Northern Ireland.”

In January 2009, the then Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, Gregory Campbell, announced to the Assembly that the multi-sports stadium at the Maze would not proceed. Therefore the target, as expressed, will not be achieved. Good progress, however, is being made with the three governing bodies in defining their strategic needs, and an outline business case is in preparation. Decisions are expected in late 2009/early 2010.

The first of the three amber targets under PSA 9 relates to indicator 4, which reads:

“By 2011 to increase by 2 percentage points the proportion of the NI population who participate in arts events.”

The baseline for that target was set at 27% and is measured annually using data from the continuous household survey. The data shows that there is a decrease in arts participation for 2008-09 of approximately 2%, with the figure sitting at approximately 25%. However, it is worth noting that the current economic climate may be having an adverse impact on the number of people participating in the arts. Findings from the May 2009 Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) omnibus survey indicated that 16% of respondents have stated that they participated in or attended fewer cultural or leisure activities or events due to the economic downturn.

In order to try to increase the arts participation rates, a number of key programmes are ongoing. They include the Arts Council’s annual support for organisations programme, Northern Ireland Screen’s funding towards creative learning centres, the community festivals fund, Re-imagining Communities and the creative industries innovation fund.

The two other targets under PSA 9, which are marked as amber, relate to participation in sport. Indicator 5 states:

“By 2011, halt the decline in adult participation in sport and physical recreation.”

Indicator 6 states:

“By 2011 to have 125,000 children in sport and physical recreation.”

Sport Northern Ireland has undertaken sports programmes and projects that seek to encourage participation in a wide variety of sports across all age ranges, either through the creation of new coaching posts through the Investment in Performance Sport programme, or by providing new sports facilities and playing services through the Building Sport programme and Places for Sport programme.

Sport NI is currently rolling out funding to sport governing bodies, which amounts to an investment of approximately £11 million over the four-year period 2009-2013. However, that funding is dependent on the outcome of the next comprehensive spending review (CSR). Sport NI has delivered a £16.3 million sport capital programme in 2008-09 and plans to deliver a £23 million programme of capital projects in 2009-2010.

Major projects completed under Sport Northern Ireland’s Building Sport programme include work on the Newry Olympic Hockey Club, Larne Bowling and Lawn Tennis Club and the Donaghmore and District Community Association indoor sports hall. Construction on further major projects is well under way and includes work on Tollymore Mountain Centre, Lavey Gaelic Athletic Association Club, Cookstown Hockey Club, the Riding for the Disabled Association in Coleraine and Donaghadee Sailing Club. Furthermore, Sport Northern Ireland’s funding has delivered new spectator stands at Ravenhill Rugby Ground as well as at football grounds, such as those belonging to Cliftonville Football Club, Portadown Football Club and Donegal Celtic Football and Sports Club.

‘Sport Matters: the Northern Ireland Strategy for Sport and Physical Recreation 2009-2019’ will be launched subject to Executive approval. The strategy comprises specific actions designed to increase participation in sport among adults and children across all sectors of society, and it requires cross-departmental engagement in a number of sectors to ensure success. The strategy will be underpinned by a significant increase in investment in sports facilities.

As with the target for arts participation, the current economic climate may be having an adverse impact on the number of people participating in sport, and I have already given the statistics from the NISRA omnibus survey. The Department continues to monitor its progress on

all its Programme for Government targets.

We have responsibilities under other PSAs, including PSAs 5, 10, 12 and 22. Of those targets not already captured under PSA 9, none is rated as red and only one is considered to be amber. The amber target is captured under PSA 5, which is led by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) and relates to tourism. The Department's target is to deliver £229 million of capital investment by March 2011 in Northern Ireland's culture, arts and leisure infrastructure through a programme of arts, sports, museums, libraries and PRONI capital projects.

Significant progress has been made on the Department's capital investment programme. As I said, various capital programmes have been undertaken in the sporting sector. In addition, a variety of projects has been initiated to strengthen Northern Ireland's cultural infrastructure. Projects are being taken forward in the arts sector, including the Lyric Theatre project, the Crescent Arts Centre project and the metropolitan arts centre proposal.

Modernisation has commenced on the library estate —

The Deputy Chairperson:

Can I interrupt you for a moment? Will you provide a breakdown of the £229 million for capital spend?

Mrs D Brown:

That figure is spread over the periods 2008-09, 2009-2010 and 2010-11.

The Deputy Chairperson:

Do all of those have amber status?

Mrs D Brown:

At this point, the target to deliver £229 million has amber status. That is because we did not spend all the money in the allocation for 2008-09. Some money was surrendered, such as £10 million from the stadium project, and that is part of the £229 million. We also surrendered money for a PRONI project in 2008-09, because the build did not commence as scheduled — we hope to pick up on that as we move forward. As members will be aware, we have already surrendered some more money this year from the stadium project.

The Deputy Chairperson:

When you say “some more money”, do you mean the £28 million?

Mrs D Brown:

No; we surrendered £1.9 million of the money allocated for the stadium in the June monitoring round. Previously, in 2008-09, we surrendered £10 million.

The Deputy Chairperson:

Are you going to spend the £28 million?

Mrs D Brown:

We have some plans on how to use that money. I will be back with the Committee next Thursday to outline the December monitoring round proposals and will be able to provide more detail then. We also surrendered money on libraries. Therefore, the target has amber status because some of the £229 million has been surrendered. Our ability to spend that money between now and the end of 2011 will depend on the progress of those projects and on the Department placing bids to get that money back. We do not know how likely that will be.

The Deputy Chairperson:

I wanted the figure broken down only to see how much was being spent on the individual elements, such as the arts and sports.

Mrs D Brown:

I do not have the complete breakdown of the figure with me. I think that £65 million is for 2008-09, £75 million is for 2009-2010 and £75 million is for 2010-11. However, I do not have the table that shows the breakdown of the allocation to the arts, sports and museums. I can bring that table with me next week or send it to the Committee.

The Deputy Chairperson:

Will you send it to the Committee before the next meeting? We could have a breakdown of the allocations in 2008-09, 2009-2010 and 2010-11 and the various elements that the money is going to, bearing in mind that those are still targets.

Sorry for interrupting you; you now have three minutes left.

Mrs D Brown:

I was outlining the progress that is being made on the library estate. Work has been completed on the Newtown Stewart Library. Work is also ongoing at libraries in Antrim, Dungiven, Whitehead and Carrickfergus, which we aim to have completed by 2010.

As Committee members are well aware, the Ulster Museum reopened on 22 October 2009 following a major refurbishment and design. Other capital work continues across our museums portfolio, including the museums capital maintenance programme, the new world development at the Ulster American Folk Park and the refurbishment of Cultra Manor. A major capital programme has also been undertaken as part of PRONI's move from Balmoral Avenue to its new purpose-built premises in the Titanic Quarter.

The Department monitors progress through its sponsor branches and a dedicated capital programme manager. A DCAL capital programme management board meets every two months to address any emerging risks around that programme. However, despite the significant progress, the Department considers it necessary to have capital spend as an amber target due to the delays in a number of capital projects, including the metropolitan arts centre and some of our library projects.

Under the Programme for Government, the Department also has a number of key goals and commitments. Of the three for which DCAL has responsibility, two are marked as amber. Those targets are to invest £110 million in our sports facilities by 2011, which will ensure a lasting legacy from the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games, and to invest £119 million in our cultural infrastructure by 2011 through a programme of capital projects. Those two goals combined relate directly to PSA target 5 to deliver £229 million of capital investment. I have already outlined that, so I will not go over it again.

That is an outline of our progress against our PSAs. We are happy to take any questions; if we are unable to answer any, we can come back to you with the information.

The Deputy Chairperson:

Thank you very much. That was a very comprehensive briefing, which I appreciate.

Mr McCarthy:

Thank you for your presentation. There was a lot to digest. First, though, I must express disappointment in all the things that you mentioned. I am a member of Ards Borough Council, and I am disappointed at the failure, or otherwise, of Northern Ireland Sport to help us with our plan through the Places for Sport project. You also mentioned libraries. We in Ards are in desperate need of a library, but although you mentioned a number of areas, you did not mention Ards. I will keep an eye on the situation to see when you come to Ards.

I will return to the issue of the PSA 9 targets.

The Deputy Chairperson:

Thank you, Kieran; that is very kind of you.

Mr McCarthy:

I know you also have an interest in Ards.

The Deputy Chairperson:

You cannot get to these stadiums because the roads are bad.

Mr McCarthy:

That is right.

The increased museums target of achieving 780,000 visitors is classified as green, which is very encouraging. Given the importance of maintaining that progress and that there is an additional target under PSA 10 regarding educational visits, how will the Department monitor the impact of Monday closures to ensure that progress towards those targets is not adversely affected?

Mr Mick Cory (Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure):

We are quite comfortable with the 780,000 target, and National Museums concurs that it can be comfortably met this year. In fact, I can report that the latest figure indicates that 100,000 people have visited the Ulster Museum in the first month since it reopened. National Museums had in place a series of outreach programmes to try to ensure that when the museum was closed for

refurbishment it was able to reach a number of people in communities and continue its good work.

The Committee will be aware that National Museums carried out a thorough research exercise into the rationale behind closing the museum on Mondays, and it found that many people felt that if the museum had to close one day a week, it should close on a Monday. That has facilitated the museum's ability to open on Saturdays and Sundays when children are off school, people are off work and families can attend. As a result of the new closure policy, the prospect of achieving the target this year is quite good.

Mr McCarthy asked about monitoring to ensure that the target is met. The Department has quarterly accountability and monitoring meetings with National Museums, and the museums must report on that key target at the quarterly monitoring meeting. They must also report regularly on that issue for provision of information to the centre. We will be monitoring that very carefully. We absolutely assure the Committee that we will stay on top of that to ensure that the museums deliver.

Mr McCarthy:

You are confident that that will be —

Mr Cory:

I am informed that they will be able to meet that target this year, and I have absolutely no reason to disagree.

Mr K Robinson:

Thank you very much for your presentation. The Department has a target to increase by 2% the proportion of the population who visit and participate in arts events. However, the figures you have provided show a 2% decrease. During our inquiry into the funding of the arts we learned that, in making awards, the Arts Council does not give a weighting based on the numbers of people participating. Is there a mismatch there somewhere?

We recommended that more funding be given to community arts, because that increases the number of people who are getting involved. We hope that, eventually, community arts groups will cease to look for more moneys from us and become more self-sustaining. What discussions

has the Department had with the Arts Council on targeting funding in such a way as to increase participation?

You seem to be merrily going along setting out targets, and arts organisations are reporting that they are having a wonderful time, yet the figures do not suggest that that is, in fact, the case. If there is a decrease of 2%, why are we losing people now? We have spoken about the economic situation, but surely in such a situation people will, unfortunately, have more time on their hands and more of an opportunity to get involved in the arts. This is the time to do it, but we are seeing a 2% decrease.

Mrs D Brown:

NISRA's survey showed that 16% of people are participating less in arts and cultural events, which substantiates the fact that there has been a drop in participation. As regards measuring progress, the target is very much owned by the Arts Council, and just as Mick said about the museums side, PSA targets are the clear focus of the accountability meetings. There is definitely a focus on PSAs, and all programmes or projects will have those targets clearly linked in.

Mr Arthur Scott (Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure):

We are working with the Arts Council at a higher level to look at its major programmes and how they are being skewed or focused to ensure that they are compatible with PSA targets. We have agreed that, starting in April, we will carry out a major evaluation of the Arts Council's annual support for organisations programme. The evaluation will look at funding that has been provided historically, and it will critically examine what that funding has delivered across the range of areas in which the Arts Council has to deliver. The Arts Council has to strike a balance between supporting the professional arts and ensuring that it provides opportunities for learning so that people from across the community can experience the arts and benefit from exposure to them.

The evaluation will provide interesting information that can then be used to look at how the Arts Council moves forward. It may well result in the criteria for the annual support for organisations programme being adjusted or skewed in a different way so as to address the downturn in participation. Perhaps that downturn is largely due to economic reasons, but there may well be other factors.

Mr K Robinson:

That is an interesting observation. We think that there is a limit to how far the well-established and well-recognised sector in the arts can expand. However, through discussions with different bodies, we have found that there is an untapped wealth of talent out there that could generate quite a significant sum of money, and which could, given the right circumstances, become more self-sufficient. In other words, we would be getting more bang for our buck all round. Can you comment on that?

Mr Scott:

In addition to participation, the evaluation will examine a range of factors. It will consider what we are getting for the funding with regard to arts plus and what other funding is being levered in. We will look at fledgling groups that are perhaps just starting off or are not so well established. Such groups may be representative of areas of disadvantage and may require additional support to get to a level at which they can access more resources and funding.

The Department has, therefore, introduced a key measure by arranging, in agreement with the Arts Council, to undertake a critical examination of past funding. If we have been serially funding certain bodies for a number of years, the evaluation will ask what exactly we are getting for our money; is it arts or arts plus, which includes experience, access, learning, development, and better linkages with the Programme for Government?

Mr K Robinson:

I like your term “arts plus”; that is one that we will store away for future use.

The Deputy Chairperson:

As you know, on Tuesday, the Committee presented to the Assembly its report on the inquiry into the funding of the arts in which it made a number of recommendations. Are you in a position to come back and tell us what you make of those recommendations and how you will factor them into PSA targets?

Mr Scott:

We will be working with the Arts Council to provide a detailed response. However, given the discussion that we have just had, my initial reaction is that the recommendations are very welcome and helpful.

The Deputy Chairperson:

I understand that you work with the Arts Council, but I would like you to come back to the Committee with your feelings on the report.

Mr Scott:

The Department will be making a full response to the report.

The Deputy Chairperson:

Will you also consider how you will factor the report's recommendations into PSA targets? You were unable to include them in your targets because the report was not presented until Tuesday. Obviously, you will need to look at any nuances there might be in the report.

Mr Scott:

The PSA targets have been set for the CSR period. Therefore, it will perhaps be a question of adjusting activities and considering new PSA targets for the next CSR period that factor in the recommendations.

I would not preclude taking certain actions for quick wins; for example, some measures might need to be skewed in a different direction, while still keeping to the PSAs.

Mr Brolly:

I will tease out Ken's question a bit more. I assume that the 2% drop was measured by monitoring attendance at arts events, which is passive, rather than active, participation. Part of the Committee's report dwells on the capacity of the Arts Council to activate people to become involved. Clearly, active participation will lead to greater passive participation. For example, if a new drama group were set up in an area, more people would go to plays. Is there any possibility of separately measuring active participation?

Ken made the valid point that, in a recession, it might be expected that people would have more spare time, so active participation would rise, rather than drop. Therefore, one could balance the other out; a decrease in the number of people attending the arts might be balanced by an increase in the number of people participating. That could mean that there was not a drop of 2% in overall participation in the arts.

Mr Scott:

Part of the expertise that the Department intends to provide to the Arts Council for critical evaluation of the annual support for organisations programme will include the use of a statistician, who will work with the Arts Council to examine its data sets and consider how they could be improved. I am conscious of some of the recommendations in the Committee's report, and we will attempt to take them on board as part of that study to reflect changes in the data in order to give clear information and to consider the causal factors between participation and how the grant is being skewed; that is, how the bodies are being supported.

Mr D Bradley:

I have a further supplementary question to Ken's question. Several times, you explained that underperformance on targets for participation was a consequence of the economic downturn. Given that you clearly identify the economic downturn as a barrier to participation, have you asked any of the Department's arm's-length bodies to consider ways to remove, or at least reduce, that barrier?

Mrs D Brown:

Those statistics were collected only recently, and they formed part of our most recent return to DFP. Therefore, the opportunity to provide feedback to our arm's-length bodies has been limited, but that will be done through the accountability meetings. We are always asking the bodies to look at the barriers to achieving the targets, find a way around them, revisit the targets and set different milestones to ensure that they are achieved. We can certainly raise the specific issue of the economic downturn and consider how the arm's-length bodies might find a way of working around it.

Mr D Bradley:

One of your targets is to halt the decline in adult participation in sport and physical activity. In your briefing, that target is categorised as amber. The strategy for sport and physical recreation is supposed to address the issue of participation in physical activity, but that strategy has still not been cleared by the Executive. Are you aware of what is delaying the clearance of that strategy? In the absence of the strategy, what actions are you taking to address the issue of adult participation?

Mr Cory:

Executive clearance of the strategy is entirely a matter for the Executive; I am not in a position to explain that delay. I am sure that the reason has to do with priorities and so on. We constantly put the strategy forward for consideration, and I have no idea why it has not reached the Executive's agenda. We are looking actively at the consequences of its not being cleared and what further actions we might take.

That target is predicated entirely on substantial implementation infrastructure being put in place on the back of clearance. The intention of the strategy is to create cross-departmental infrastructure to ensure that there is collaboration among a number of sectors, such as health and education, to benefit their agendas as well as the culture and sports agenda.

We have been able to focus on sports activities. Much of the investment from Sport Northern Ireland over the past two years, and probably for the remainder of this CSR period, is predicated on putting in place interventions to develop the concept of the strategy, but only in as far as sport relates. Therefore, our contribution to other Departments' progress against their PSAs and Programme for Government targets is somewhat limited and is slightly under threat because of that lack of ability for joined-up working.

There are things that we have been doing and can do to halt the decline. Deborah already highlighted some external factors that have changed since the draft strategy was first prepared and presented to the Executive. For example, there has been a decline in participation numbers, which may be partially to do with the economic climate. We have also noted a drop in participation in sport among 16- to 24-year-olds. Up to the end of March 2008, 24% of that age group were not interested in participating in sport, and up to the end of March 2009, 36% were not interested. We are concerned about how we can intervene to turn that around. Sport Northern Ireland is focused on addressing that through its programmes and interventions.

Mr D Bradley:

To what extent is the strategy not being in place a barrier to addressing that alarming statistic of 36% of 16- to 24-year-olds not being interested in participating in sport?

Mr Cory:

The intention is that the strategy will help us to deliver on it. We want to look at ways in which

we can work bilaterally with the relevant sectors to improve that situation. That is a challenge; I cannot pretend otherwise, but an opportunity exists that is there to be taken.

Mr D Bradley:

The Department has done surveys and so has statistics at its disposal. Has it done any work to discover what would change the minds of the 36% of 16- to 24-year-olds who do not participate in sport?

Mr Cory:

I do not have that information to hand, but I can come back to the Committee with that if you wish. We primarily source such information from Sport Northern Ireland, which is the expert in that area.

The Deputy Chairperson:

Dominic, do you want that information to be sourced and referred to the Committee?

Mr D Bradley:

I think that that would be useful.

The Deputy Chairperson:

Are we agreed to request that information?

Members indicated assent.

Lord Browne:

Thank you for your presentation. Following on from the last question regarding adult participation, it is equally important that young children are encouraged to take part in sports and physical activity. I know that one of the Department's targets is to have 125,000 children involved in sport and physical recreation by 2011. However, I am a bit concerned about the absence of a baseline or current data. How does the Department know how it is performing in that area? In the absence of a baseline, how did the Department decide that 125,000 is a suitable target? When those figures are obtained, who will monitor the situation and how will it be recorded?

Mr Cory:

The baseline was set in 2007 under the ‘Young Persons Behaviour and Attitude’ survey. That survey was carried out using a representative sample of 62 post-primary schools across Northern Ireland. A total of 3,463 pupils from year 8 to year 12 inclusive took part in the sports module of that survey. Prior to its analysis, the data was weighted by year group and gender to ensure that it achieved a sample that reflected the composition of pupils in post-primary education. That data is regularly revisited. There has been an absence of information in the interim, yet there is a requirement to consider how the trend is developing.

Whether that target is achieved is also dependent on the total population of young people in that age bracket, which is declining in Northern Ireland. That is why we have come up with a figure of 125,000. A percentage may have been better because, as population numbers drop, 125,000 may become an unrealistic ambition. That situation is being monitored. We can examine where that trend is going and, if the Committee is interested, we can come back.

Lord Browne:

What will be the consequences of not reaching the target of 125,000?

Mr Cory:

The target has been set as an indicator of how we might improve, and there is a whole range of improvement outcomes that it will contribute to. Overall, it could be argued that a consequence of the target not being met will be more children ending up not motivated, not enthused and not healthy. There is potential for children to be distracted into socially inappropriate activity. That is a crude way to measure impact. I cannot say that, if we do not meet that target, more children will do that. Similarly, I cannot say that, if we meet the target, fewer children will do that. However, the evidence suggests that focusing on young people has a wider impact, by contributing to an overall improvement in the well-being of society. One cannot say that such an intervention will have a definite impact, but it will certainly help. It would be beneficial for that target to be met, as it would be an indicator that we are going in the right direction.

Lord Browne:

What is the exact definition of a physical recreation?

Mr Cory:

The strategy for sport and physical recreation is being broadened. There is an accepted European definition of sport; I do not have it to hand, but it is in the document. Physical recreation, as a definition, encompasses broader activities that are not necessarily sporting or competitive in nature. For example, hillwalking is not a sporting activity, but it is a physical and recreational activity.

The Deputy Chairperson:

Is that a recommendation to Wallace? *[Laughter.]*

Mr K Robinson:

Have you factored in the impact of the new transfer arrangements, whereby children will not be available on Saturdays from now on? *[Laughter.]*

Miss McIlveen:

Have any countries declared an interest in coming to Northern Ireland for pre-training for the 2012 Olympics?

Mr Cory:

Some bigger countries tend to be more organised. About 50% of countries that will participate in the 2012 Olympics will take a team of fewer than 10 athletes, and many will tend to make plans by 2011 or thereabouts. Therefore, it is still a bit early to say that countries are definitely interested. Having said that, the bigger countries have been proactive. We have not been successful with bigger countries, and we have been considering the smaller ones. A number of conversations have taken place with two countries that I can think of. However, I do not want to make the details of that public or say that the talks are likely to result in success.

Sport Northern Ireland leads on that activity, and it set up a subgroup that includes local authorities and others who are interested in hosting training camps. We have provided a little bit of funding to governing bodies to enable them to do some work with countries whose teams could potentially base themselves here. We are also putting out feelers with people who have well-established relationships with other countries to try to attract them to Northern Ireland, but it is still early days.

Miss McIlveen:

Annex B of your paper refers to the development of a modest funding programme to support governing bodies and pre-games training camp venue owners. Will you elaborate on the extent of the budget for that?

Mr Cory:

There are two forms of funding. The one that I just mentioned is to help the collective promotion of Northern Ireland as a venue internationally. The other form of funding comes from the London Organising Committee of the Olympic and Paralympic Games. It has set out a programme whereby it provides up to £50,000 to a sport or country that wishes to have a UK base, chosen from the bases logged in the pre-games training camp guide. The money will help in the recovery of accommodation costs and so on. That funding programme is targeted predominantly at the smaller countries, because the bigger countries tend to be the richer countries. We are working closely with Lord Coe to ensure that we are included in that.

The Deputy Chairperson:

You may need to review the fanfare surrounding that issue. Lord Coe came over and raised expectations. I hope that those aspirations will not fall flat, but it looks as though they might. Have you set a cut-off point for announcing what nations will, or will not, be coming here?

Mr Cory:

We expect to have better knowledge towards the end of next year, but many countries will not make a commitment until 2011. Obviously, the games are a cut-off point; we will definitely know by then. However, it is premature for me to commit to a cut-off date at this stage.

I assure the Committee that we are working collectively. Although DCAL has the lead role, we are working with a number of sectors to try to ensure that we maximise the opportunities that the Olympic Games present. Pre-games training camps are an important element of that, although there are mixed views about their level of importance. We are making excellent progress on other elements, such as education and volunteering. We are also making extremely good progress in attracting torch runs to Northern Ireland and may be slightly ahead of some other regions in that regard. The story is generally positive.

The Deputy Chairperson:

Let us hope that it continues to be positive.

Mr P J Bradley:

Annex B of your paper also refers to the target of having a minimum of 10 new or upgraded facilities in place by 2011. What is the likelihood of Northern Ireland having a suitable, state-of-the-art equestrian centre in place in time for the pre-games preparations? At the beginning of the meeting, I asked the Committee Clerk to make enquiries about a specific application, but a general answer from you may be sufficient.

Mr Cory:

I cannot comment on any specific application, but, generally, there are three key elements. The Committee will be aware of the agreement on phase one of development of the 50-metre pool. Department of Finance and Personnel approval of the full business case was achieved in August 2009. A European journal procurement process is under way and has reached the invitation-to-tender stage. The appointment of a contractor and the commencement of site work are expected early next year. North Down Borough Council is confident that that project will be delivered on time.

As members will probably be aware, stage 2 of phase 2 of the elite facilities programme has been subject to a judicial review as a result of consultants not responding by the required deadline. The judicial review has concluded and, consequently, one application was withdrawn. The other applications are being considered. The application that triggered the judicial review is subject to an appeal process, which is unlikely to conclude until early December. The judicial review meant that the programme was held up for nine or 10 months.

Although there can be no guarantee that other applications will proceed until we have seen the outcome of Sport Northern Ireland's assessments of them, a wide range of other factors, such as the planning process, business case approvals and budgetary considerations, must be addressed before final approvals are secured and we will be able to definitely say that things will be built.

It is important to focus on the legacy that is left. The Olympics affords us an opportunity to address the deficit in Northern Ireland's elite facilities, and we are doing that. However, the new facilities need not necessarily be just for the 2012 games. Ensuring that the best possible

facilities are available for Northern Ireland's performance athletes will provide a long-term legacy and will help to fulfil the aims of the sports strategy. Similarly, when looked at in the round, the Building Sport and the Places for Sport programmes are beginning to address the aims of that strategy.

Mr T Clarke:

P J Bradley stole my question. I must be careful with what I am going to say, because a member of North Down Borough Council, which is holding the whole process back, is sitting very close to me. The application process to stage 2 of the elite facilities programme closed in November 2008, but the Department has only just sought legal advice in order to proceed with the other applications. Has the Department been dragging its feet? Could it not have proceeded with the other applications after the November closing date and allowed the legal case to proceed on its own merits? Given that the business case approvals and planning permissions are already a full year behind the closing date for the first applications to stage 2, by not permitting the assessment of the other applications has the Department not created new barriers to completing the programme on time?

Mr Cory:

Whether the Department has dragged its feet or not, we must recognise that the process is being managed and led by Sport NI within a competitive programme that is based on well-established processes and procedures, which ensure that every applicant has an equal opportunity. We have worked with Sport NI to find ways in which, for example, we might be able to parallel some of the thinking on business case approvals. Nevertheless, everyone expects to be, and must be, treated the same way, which is why we have a defined process.

Of course, the judicial review was unfortunate, but things must be handled extremely carefully, which is why, following the judicial review, we took legal advice about proceeding with the other applications. We had to wait because the outcome of the judicial review was uncertain. I assure the Committee that it was not a matter of the Department dragging its feet.

The Deputy Chairperson:

Can we wind up now? By that I mean finish up.

PSA 9, indicator 13, which has gone from amber to red, refers to £110 million that includes a

stadium. Has that £110 million been ring-fenced for stadium development?

Mrs D Brown:

Indicator 13 is to have an operationally viable multi-sports stadium by 2011.

The Deputy Chairperson:

I was referring to one of the keys goals at Annex D, which states: “see PSA 9 - Indicator 13.”

Mrs D Brown:

That includes the money for the stadium within the CSR period. I think that you are referring to a different £110 million, which is a figure that is talked about over a five-year period. It covers the current CSR period and two further years. Those are the indicative figures in the investment strategy, but they will be subject to the next comprehensive spending review.

The Deputy Chairperson:

I am just asking whether it has been ring-fenced.

Mrs D Brown:

No.

Mr Cory:

As part of the second investment strategy for Northern Ireland, there are indicative lines against certain elements, including the stadium. That includes an indicative line of £110 million. It is true to say that any movement between that line and any other — for example, sport or museums — requires a process to be steered through the monitoring round to seek those transfers. That project has not gone forward, so the Department could endeavour to accelerate others.

The Deputy Chairperson:

Let me go back to you again. The paper states that a key goal is to:

“Invest £110 million in our sports facilities”.

Our opinion and understanding is that £110 million will be invested in stadia development. Is that ring-fenced?

Mrs D Brown:

No, sorry; that £110 million for sports facilities includes £60 million for the stadium. There is £10 million, £29 million and £29 million for the CSR period, which are included in that £110 million. That £110 million is for all sports.

The Deputy Chairperson:

I know all that. Has a figure of £110 million been ring-fenced for your Department to spend on stadia development?

Mr Cory:

The CSR period with which we are dealing finishes in March 2011. The £110 million for the stadium in the investment strategy goes beyond that. In the CSR period, however, only £50 million or £60 million is identified for stadium.

The Deputy Chairperson:

I will put the question again, but slightly differently. Is it true that the Executive have ring-fenced £110 million for your Department for stadia development?

Mrs D Brown:

The Department has an envelope of funding of £110 million across the CSR period and into the investment strategy over a five-year period. That is subject to the outcome of the next comprehensive spending review.

The Deputy Chairperson:

Is it ring-fenced or not?

Mr Cory:

No, next year it is definitely not ring-fenced.

The Deputy Chairperson:

This is being recorded by Hansard. Are you telling me that it is not ring-fenced?

Mr Cory:

As far as I am aware, it is not.

The Deputy Chairperson:

Let us look at the expectations of sports fans regarding the provision of stadia following the demise of the Maze project. I understand, and you allude to it in your paper, that the three major sporting bodies were invited to submit their preferred options and your Department is currently in consultative mode, looking at their business cases. I understand that there is £100 million in the business case for the GAA, £25 million for soccer and £15 million for rugby. That adds up to £140 million.

If you are working on figures that you tell me are not ring-fenced, how is the Department to analyse those bids or options from the three sports within a budget? I do not ask that because the GAA figure seems extremely large; it is entirely different to that of the other sports. The GAA's needs may be different. However, there is £110 million, which you say is not ring-fenced but is floating about for possible use and which is not just for stadia. Given the figure of £140 million, if you were working within the £110 million, does the GAA bid get reduced to £70 million or do the figures for the other sports get uplifted?

Committee members need to know where they are, in view of the expectation of the sporting fan, be he a fan of GAA, rugby or soccer. He happens to believe, from the Department's press releases, that there is £110 million for stadia development and that it will be cleared as soon as the consultative documents have been examined by other consultants. The fan believes that that is a short trip and that, hip hip hooray, we will have stadia in which to watch sport.

However, you tell me that the money is not ring-fenced and that whatever you are talking about is caught up in some five-year CSR plan, which I understand. That means, ultimately, that the sporting fan cannot look forward to a decision on the stadia early next year, which you indicate there may be, because there will not be the money to do it. Some £140 million is required by the three sports. Can you tell me how we are going to do it?

Mr Cory:

I have to admit that I have not seen the business cases and the figures that you have mentioned. We are in the process —

The Deputy Chairperson:

Surely you have read your own Department's press releases?

Mr Cory:

The Department is in the process, as the Minister has clearly indicated, and it will culminate in appropriate consideration. It would be wrong of the Department to speculate publicly as to the amount that will be provided for a business case or otherwise, particularly if that process is still under way. Therefore, you will have to forgive me for not being able to answer your questions.

The Deputy Chairperson:

I can forgive you that. However, I find it hard to appreciate that you may or may not want to venture into your own Department's press releases. They say that there is £110 million ring-fenced for stadia development, but you say that there is not and you are the people who handle these affairs.

Mr Cory:

There is an allocation on the budgets of £110 million for stadia, absolutely.

The Deputy Chairperson:

There is not an allocation on budget. You tell me where that is.

Mr Cory:

As with many public expenditure budgets, as I am sure the Committee is aware, that expenditure can only be expended once we have been through a business-case appraisal process and achieved the right proposals. Even though there is an allocation on the budget, we have still to go through a proper process of economic evaluation.

The Deputy Chairperson:

Where is the allocation on budget, Mick? I have not seen it. Are you going to show us where it is in any of the figures that you presented to us?

Mrs D Brown:

They are indicative figures in ISNI II —

The Deputy Chairperson:

They are indicative figures?

Mrs D Brown:

Yes. As in any other Department, no one knows what the actual allocations will be for the next CSR. We do not know what will come out of the next election or when that process will —

The Deputy Chairperson:

I appreciate all that. What you might wish to consider is the expectation of the sporting fan.

Mrs D Brown:

Absolutely, and the Department will have —

The Deputy Chairperson:

I do not think that you appreciate that one bit, to judge by your press releases and the way that you bandy about figures, indicative or not. You are either going to build these stadia or you are not. That is the crux of the matter for the sporting fan and the constituents whom we represent. That is what they are looking for. You need to address that.

Mr McCarthy:

To back up what the Deputy Chairperson said, not that long ago, I clearly saw our Minister in front of the television cameras saying that there was £110 million for stadia development. You are now saying that that may not be the case.

Mr Cory:

No, we are not.

Mr McCarthy:

That is what you are saying, really.

Mrs D Brown:

In ISNI, over a five-year period — three years of which are in the current CSR — there is an allocation of £110 million. The last two years of that fall into a new CSR period. Therefore, we cannot say definitively that that money is there. It will be subject to the normal process

surrounding a comprehensive spending review.

Having said that, we know that stadia development is a priority and that, in any allocations made in the new CSR settlement, stadia development and any commitments that the Department will have made by that stage under any letters of offer for stadia development will be considered. However, we are in the same position as every other Department; decisions will have to be made that have budget implications that feed into the next CSR period. We have to be assured that, with whatever CSR settlement the Department receives, we can deliver on the projects on which we have already made commitments.

Mr McCarthy:

As the Deputy Chairperson said, the expectation of the fans as a result of the Minister's statement was that that £110 million would be delivered. You are now telling the Committee that it may well not be delivered and that the chances are that it probably will not be delivered.

Mr Cory:

I would not like the Committee to get that message.

The Deputy Chairperson:

Like you, we will read the Hansard report. You have been very specific in your responses, and we will digest the Hansard report and compare your comments with what your Department's press office has said and what has been said in public.

We are here to act on behalf of the sporting fan, whose expectation seems to be that early next year there will be green lights on your sheets and that we will be appointing contractors and going ahead. There is some agreement that we are all talking about a figure of £110 million. I understand your reluctance not to get into who has put forward a business case. However, our job is to know those things. If you are reluctant to confirm them, that is fine, but those figures stack up to £140 million. My question is: where do we go from here?

Mr Cory:

The Department is in a process of evaluating business cases relating to the stadia. When we come out of the end of that process, we will be in a better position to be able to indicate where we go and to answer that question.

The Deputy Chairperson:

This particular bit on your briefing paper is very dark for me, so I need to put my glasses on to read it. It states that:

“Decisions are expected late 2009/ early 2010.”

How late do you want to get into 2009 before you can tell me when those decisions are expected to be made and how close you are to making decisions? You are, effectively, just trying to bump the issue down the road. I am going only by what you say in your briefing paper that decisions are expected in late 2009. The Assembly goes into recess in two weeks' time.

Are there any other questions?

Thank you very much for your assistance.