



Northern Ireland
Assembly

COMMITTEE FOR
CULTURE, ARTS AND
LEISURE

OFFICIAL REPORT
(Hansard)

**Draft Programme for Government,
Investment Strategy and Economic
Strategy**

19 January 2012

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

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Economic Strategy**

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Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Miss Michelle McIlveen (Chairperson)
Mr William Irwin (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Dominic Bradley
Mrs Brenda Hale
Mr David Hilditch
Mr Michael McGimpsey
Mrs Karen McKeivitt
Mr Cathal Ó hOisín
Mr Robin Swann

Witnesses:

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

The Chairperson:

I welcome Cynthia Smith, deputy secretary; Deborah Brown, director of finance and corporate services; Mick Cory, director of the sports recreation and museums division; and Arthur Scott, director of the culture division. None of you is a stranger to the Committee; you are very welcome this morning. I ask you to make your opening statements on the strategies.

Ms Cynthia Smith (Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure):

Good morning, Chair and Committee members. Thank you for the opportunity to address the Committee this morning. We will cover a presentation on the draft Programme for Government (PFG), investment strategy and economic strategy. I will outline how we will approach the presentation. I will begin by saying a few words to set out the background to the draft Programme for Government, draft investment strategy and draft economic strategy. I will then detail the draft Programme for Government before handing over to Deborah, who will cover the draft investment strategy and draft economic strategy. I will round off with some concluding remarks, and we will be happy to answer any questions that Committee members have. I hope that the Committee will appreciate that there will be some overlap between the three strategies.

I will start by setting the context for the draft Programme for Government, investment strategy and economic strategy. Those are three interrelated strategic reform vehicles of the Executive that were launched in the context of Budget 2011-15. As the Committee is aware, all three strategies were launched on 17 November. They are out for public consultation, and the consultation period will end on 22 February. Clearly, they are set in the context of very difficult financial constraints, which, as I think we are all aware now, are due to continue for the next few years. It is in that context that rebuilding and rebalancing the economy is the top priority that has been set by the Executive.

I will look now at the background and structure of the draft Programme for Government. The programme is co-ordinated by the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM). It is a visible commitment by the Executive to provide the groundwork for economic and social recovery. It aims to highlight the actions that the Executive will take to deliver its number one priority, which is having a vibrant economy that can transform society while dealing with deprivation and poverty.

The draft programme contains a very clear set of commitments with strong emphasis on delivering results that everyone can see in their daily lives. It contains five strategic and interdependent priorities: first, growing a sustainable economy and investing in the future; secondly, creating opportunities, tackling disadvantage and improving health and well-being;

thirdly, protecting our people, the environment and creating safer communities; fourthly, building a shared and strong community; and, fifthly, delivering high quality and efficient public services. Those are the five key strategic priorities contained in the PFG, but they all fall within the number one priority, which is a vibrant economy.

Within that, there are 76 commitments underpinned by 107 building blocks. Each of the 76 commitments is allocated to a lead Department. The commitments represent targets, so there are 76 targets. The 107 building blocks are the strategies, programmes and policies that underpin those targets. It is noteworthy that this is a much more structured and focused PFG than its predecessor, the 2008-2011 PFG, which contained some 400 targets. So, 400 targets in the previous PFG have been brought down to 76 commitments or targets in the current draft PFG. Therefore, there is a much more structured and focused approach to target setting.

I will look now at the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure's (DCAL's) contribution to those commitments. We have been involved throughout the process and the development of the draft Programme for Government, from its early planning stages right through to its launch. We have sought to ensure that the important work and priorities of DCAL are recognised in the draft that is out for consultation. We faced a challenge in ensuring that the diverse range of DCAL's operations and the Minister's priorities are clearly reflected in the draft Programme for Government, given that we now have only 76 key commitments or targets that cover the work of 12 Departments.

We have responsibility for delivering three of the commitments under the draft Programme for Government: one under priority one, the economy, and two under priority four, the community. In addition, we have lead responsibility for nine of the building blocks referred to in the draft programme. Given the reduced number of commitments, 76 across 12 Departments, we have not been able to reflect all our work in those commitments. However, we feel that by taking the commitments and the underpinning building blocks together, we can reflect much but not all of what DCAL does. Every Department clearly cannot reflect everything that it does in the Programme for Government. I just wanted to make that point.

Let us look now at DCAL's commitments. As I said, there are three commitments: the

creative industries innovation fund; regional stadium development; and delivery of the World Police and Fire Games 2013. As the Committee is aware, the creative industries is a very diverse sector, encompassing crafts, design, fashion, performing arts, film, TV and software design. The sector as a whole — I know that the Committee is well seized of this fact — clearly has the potential to be a really important contributor to rebalancing and rebuilding the economy. Some parts of the sector, in turn, are particularly high value. We have been working with the creative industries innovation fund, which aims to support 200 projects in order to stimulate innovation, cross-sectoral collaboration and export-focused growth. In addition, it encourages businesses to harness the innovation and entrepreneurial potential of our region's culture, arts and leisure business. The fund will help local creative industries to develop the context, content, products, services and experiences that will enable us to compete on the world stage.

In addition, the Department is supporting a number of wider sectoral initiatives, including the implementation of the new music industry strategy, region-wide initiatives to promote science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) subjects, and the development of a creative industries collaborative framework to enable a joined-up approach across industry, government and academia. We also have a number of pilot initiatives to inspire commercial link-ups between culture organisations and businesses, and we are running our annual Creativity Month. Together, all those initiatives will help to establish the real creative industries, from which creative people, ideas and businesses will emerge.

I know that the Committee is very familiar with the background to regional stadium development. However, just as a brief reminder, £110 million was committed by the Executive in March 2011, and a funding package for stadium development was put forward. Windsor Park will be redeveloped to increase its capacity to accommodate some 18,000 spectators. That will involve significant refurbishment of the north and west stands and redevelopment of the east and south stands. With Gaelic games, there is a proposal to demolish the existing stadium at Casement Park and build a new one to accommodate up to 40,000 spectators. Finally, rugby at Ravenhill will benefit from the redevelopment of three sides of the stadium — it already has a new stand — potentially bringing spectator capacity up to some 18,000. Construction work is expected to start at Ravenhill in early 2013. Work on the remaining two remaining is scheduled to start later on, with completion in the current comprehensive spending review (CSR) period.

Clearly, stadium development will bring immediate benefits to the construction sector during the construction phase, and there will be real potential for regeneration opportunities in the local areas concerned. On completion of the work, economic benefits will also be derived from increased activity at the stadiums. There will be increased benefits to people's health from, for example, recreation and in respect of introducing and producing a more family-friendly experience at the stadiums. It will also encourage grass-roots development. I will not expand on those any further because I know that the Committee is familiar with them. However, they are really important advantages that will come from the regional stadium programme.

The third commitment is the delivery of the World Police and Fire Games 2013. Again, I know that the Committee is very familiar with the background to the games. It is a really exciting opportunity. The biennial sporting event for police officers, prison officers, fire officers and custom officers will be held in Belfast in August 2013. We estimate that it will attract participants from between 60 and 70 countries. It is clearly an opportunity to showcase how we can host a major and significant event. We will be welcoming up to 25,000 people here: 10,000 athletes and up to 15,000 spectators. Costs are estimated to be in the region of £10-95 million and benefits to be in the region of £15.5 million. There are not just monetary benefits to be derived from the games but a host of other benefits relating to positive image and our ability to showcase and to attract future international events and social cohesion. That covers the three commitments in the Programme for Government.

In addition to the building blocks relating to the World Police and Fire Games and the creative industries, we have a further seven building blocks, which makes nine in total. The other seven are salmon and eel management plans; annual support for organisations programme; strategies for sport and physical recreation; the arts and older people strategy; the strategy for the Irish language; the strategy for the Ulster-Scots language, heritage and culture; and modernisation of the public library service. Those building blocks are not necessarily tied in with specific commitments; rather, they tend to be more cross-cutting in nature and support a range of commitments. For example, the annual support for organisations programme, which is a funding programme for the arts, supports departmental commitments not just in the arts but in education, social inclusion, community cohesion, etc. Similarly, our strategy for sport and physical

recreation, Sport Matters, will underpin commitments in a number of areas, including health and well-being, social cohesion, and so on. So there is not an exact link and match there. The PFG does not set specific targets for the building blocks, but there are clearly enablers of the commitments.

Looking at the 107 building blocks mentioned in the PFG, in addition to the nine that are specific to DCAL, it is noteworthy that our work in the round is directly relevant to at least 40 of them. That gives the Committee a flavour of how we feel our work is important, not just to the nine that we are directly leading on but to a range of other commitments and building blocks.

The framework for the delivery of the Programme for Government was finalised just last week by OFMDFM and will be considered by the Executive shortly. Once the Executive have cleared the framework, Departments will proceed to draw up their delivery plans. Each of the 76 commitments will have its own delivery plan. For DCAL, that means that we will have three delivery plans. We will be responsible for having adequate programme and project management arrangements to ensure their delivery. Delivery plans, in turn, cover areas such as a summary of the commitment, the performance indicators, key actions for delivery of the commitment, management arrangements, risks and equality implications. There will be procedures in place, all subject of course to the Executive agreeing those arrangements, for monitoring on a quarterly basis.

We have been working up arrangements to ensure that we deliver on the Programme for Government commitments. We will obviously be giving them very high priority and cascading them down to our own corporate and business plans and ensuring that appropriate arrangements are in place to monitor them.

With regard to the initial feedback from our arm's-length bodies (ALBs), as we know, the programme, along with the other two draft strategies, is out for consultation. We have been encouraging our ALBs to fully participate and respond to the consultation process. Overall, the feedback that we have been getting from our arm's-length bodies in general terms has been a broad endorsement of the broad structure of the PFG, its focus on delivery and, in particular, its focus on cross-departmental and cross-agency working and the partnership approach, which is

really important and comes out in the programme. I will now hand over to Deborah to cover the investment strategy and the economic strategy, and I will then say a few concluding remarks.

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

Thanks, Cynthia. The draft investment strategy is the policy document by which the Executive will meet its goal of having a modern and sustainable economic infrastructure. That fits in with the first strategy under the Programme for Government.

The draft investment strategy for 2011-2021 updates the investment strategy for 2008-2018. The current plan includes proposals for some £12.5 billion of expenditure and is concerned with capital investment and infrastructure. It is structured around seven investment pillars: networks; skills; health; social; environment; productivity; and justice. The draft investment strategy reflects the current economic difficulties, and its focus is on protecting jobs, fostering the economic recovery and protecting public services. It prioritises infrastructure programmes that will deliver the best return in the period ahead. These programmes will help to deliver the policy objectives and priorities that are in the Programme for Government.

I think it is fair to say that the bulk of the draft investment strategy covers areas of expenditure outside DCAL's remit. It looks at areas such as schools, hospitals, transport, housing and energy. However, the importance of DCAL's contribution has, nonetheless, been recognised in the strategy. It refers to the importance of increasing access to the cultural and leisure events, and investment in social activities such as culture, arts, leisure, libraries and sport all make an important contribution to the economy, improved health and well-being, education, lifelong learning, and to improved social inclusion. They also add to the underlying social fabric of our communities across the region.

For the period 2011-12 to 2014-15, we have investments in the strategy of £161 million. That comprises £12 million investment in libraries and £145 million in respect of culture, arts and sport. Specific investments in the draft investment strategy form part of the skills investment pillar and the social investment pillar. DCAL's Programme for Government commitment on the stadium development features in the investment strategy.

I will summarise the full list of DCAL investments. Under the skills investment pillar, the refurbishment of the Dungannon library is under way. During the 2011-15 period, we will be replacing the library's operating system, looking after essential maintenance in the library estate and replacing and putting in place new mobile libraries. Moving forward into 2016-2021, the strategy talks about the new regional library and renewed investment in other libraries. The Metropolitan Arts Centre project is also under way, which comes under the social investment pillar.

The 2011-15 period includes the construction of the 50 metre swimming pool, investment in the regional sports stadiums and continued support to our sports initiatives focusing on increased participation. Looking ahead to the 2016-2021 period, the major investment planned is at the Ulster American Folk Park, the Folk and Transport Museum, the Ulster Museum and sports stadium safety. It is also aimed at maintaining and improving the arts infrastructure, and investment in inland waterways, canals and fisheries.

DCAL will monitor its commitments in the investment strategy as it will do with the Programme for Government commitments. The Executive have launched an innovative online information website to help monitor programme delivery, and Departments are responsible for updating that information on a monthly basis.

The draft economic strategy fits with and supports the Programme for Government's priority to grow a sustainable economy. The Executive's key economic priorities are aimed at rebalancing the economy to improve wealth, employment and living standards of everyone here. Alongside that, a number of immediate and complementary actions are being aimed at rebuilding the economy to address the impact of the economic downturn, particularly employment.

The draft economic strategy has been developed by the Executive's subcommittee on the economy, and its overarching goal is to improve the economic competitiveness of Northern Ireland through a focus on export-led growth. The key drivers of that are innovation, research and development, and skills. The draft economic strategy lists five rebalancing initiatives: innovation, research and development and creativity; skills and employability; business growth; competing globally; and economic infrastructure. It also details various rebuilding measures

related to training and employment.

The strategy assumes a successful outcome to the current negotiations with the UK Government on granting the Executive powers to vary the rate of corporation tax. Attached to the economic strategy is a comprehensive action plan that details each of the objectives, actions, timescales and responsible organisations.

I will now look specifically at DCAL's contribution. The plan contains 47 objectives and 177 associated actions. DCAL features under three of the strategy's objectives: those related to the creative industries sector, tourism and infrastructure. Specifically, DCAL's actions under the strategy are aligned with those in the Programme for Government and are as follows: developing a creative industries framework; investing £4 million via the creative industries innovation fund; supporting 200 projects through the creative industries fund; hosting the World Police and Fire Games 2013; and developing regional sports stadium by 2015. Those have all already been covered under the Programme for Government commitments.

Some of the other measures mentioned in the strategy, although not led by DCAL, are certainly of relevance to the Department. Again, there are commitments to increase skills in STEM subjects, to increase visitor numbers and spend, and to promote quality jobs for inward investment. DCAL's role is to provide an attractive culture, arts and leisure offering. It is interesting to note that the strategy mentions the need to develop pupils' wider interpersonal and problem-solving skills to equip them for the workplace. That is definitely an area where the structured experience of culture, arts and leisure can, indeed, play an important role.

DCAL therefore has an important role in the economic strategy and the draft investment strategy in addition to its commitments under the Programme for Government. As those commitments have been covered, I will pass back to Cynthia to close.

Ms Smith:

In conclusion, I hope that this has given you a flavour of the important role that we feel DCAL has to play in the three strategies and that that has been appropriately recognised. We view the DCAL offering, if you like, as being directly economically beneficial and having wider relevance

in less direct ways. Over recent years, the Department has sought to align its business plans according to five departmental strategic pillars in order to maximise the benefits that we provide to the community. Those pillars are the economy, social inclusion and equality, health, education, and environment. We feel that those fit in really well with the sentiments in the Programme for Government, which recognise that the economy cannot be grown at the expense of disregarding wider societal and environmental issues and that a strong economy is built on a healthy, well-educated population, with high-quality public services underpinning that.

We fully support a collaborative approach. We will seek to deliver on that by producing a culture, arts and leisure product that will benefit DCAL's objectives and underpin other Departments' objectives. I am very happy to take questions.

The Chairperson:

Thank you very much. At the outset, you outlined the difficulties that DCAL had in getting its work and priorities recognised in what you described as a much more focused Programme for Government. You then went on to say that your work on delivering the commitments that you have been tasked to undertake are quite well advanced. Given that context, do you believe that the Department is being sufficiently challenged?

Ms Smith:

Absolutely. Take, for example, the three commitments. Delivery of the regional stadium programme is an enormous challenge for all of us in ensuring that that major capital investment is delivered on time and to budget. The World Police and Fire Games are a huge challenge that offer huge opportunity as well. The three commitments are underpinned by our nine strategic building blocks, and those will, of course, be underpinned by the other areas of departmental work. We will all have sufficiently challenging targets. Those will be reflected in our corporate and business plan. So we think that we have a very challenging programme of work ahead of us in the next period, and we are looking forward to engaging with the Committee to deliver that. I think that it is very challenging.

Compare this draft Programme for Government with the previous Programme for Government. Adding up the numbers is not indicative on its own, but we were down to deliver

21 of the 400 commitment targets of the last Programme for Government. If you take into account our commitments in the building blocks, there are actually more challenges in the current Programme for Government, particularly given the very constrained environment that all Departments face.

The Chairperson:

The creative industries innovation fund is of particular interest to the Committee given our ongoing inquiry. We have received responses from arm's-length bodies on the draft Programme for Government, which will be included in our response to the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister. Although the commitment to support the 200 projects is welcome, there has been a reduction of 40% in the budget for the creative industries innovation fund since the last phase. Does that reflect the shorter period of time for the fund and less money being committed to it? Does that show it to be a lesser commitment, or does it just reflect the budget that we face?

Ms Smith:

The total commitment to the fund and the wider structural approach is some £4 million over the next CSR period. That is a significant commitment to the creative industries and compares fairly well with what we achieved through the commitments in the previous Programme for Government. A programme offering to support 200 creative industries with a total fund of £4 million represents a fairly sizeable commitment to the industry.

Mr Swann:

Thanks for your presentation, folks. I will start on the same tack as the Chair. The Programme for Government will be measured on the targets; the building blocks are really the second layer. DCAL has responsibility for three of those 76 targets, which is less than 4%. Is that because of a lack of input from the Department or the Minister or a lack of recognition by OFMDFM of the importance or relevance of DCAL and what it brings to the table?

Ms Smith:

You are right: we have three of the 76 commitments, which represents about 4%. We have nine of the 107 building blocks, which is 8.4%. Our share of the total resource and capital budget is

some 1.27%.

Mr Swann:

The Programme for Government targets are what the Executive will be measured against. If DCAL has only 4% of those, it is not a big —

Ms Smith:

There are 76 targets to be distributed between 12 Departments. We started with a number of targets. The draft PFG was clearly attempting to seek a more focused approach than its predecessor to reduce the number of targets. The number one priority is to deliver a vibrant economy, so we ascertained the Department's top priorities that will contribute to that. We felt that our major capital programme, delivering the stadia, the major contribution of the World Police and Fire Games, and the creative industries innovation fund and what we can do on economic regeneration best reflects our priorities, given the reduced number of commitments across all Departments. That plus the building blocks plus the support that we provide throughout the programme is not everything that we want, but we had to be realistic and recognise that not everything that every Department did could be recognised in the Programme for Government.

Mr Swann:

The World Police and Fire Games and developing the sports stadia are for another body to deliver; it is not DCAL's direct responsibility to deliver those.

Ms Smith:

You are right in that we have a delivery agency, but the Department is responsible for it, works and sets the policy for —

Mr Swann:

If these targets are not met, can the Department claim that the GAA or the IFA did not do something, and that it is not the Department's fault that the delivery bodies —

Ms Smith:

ALBs are set up as delivery agencies of the Department. As the Committee is aware, 85% of the

Department's work is delivered through its delivery bodies. In the case of the World Police and Fire Games, for example, we set up a separate company for the very purpose to provide the structure and focus to deliver on it. Overall, the Department's role is to ensure that the systems, processes, policies and funding are in place, but the delivery agents are tasked with actually delivering the particular programmes for which they are accountable. That is the way the relationship should work: the delivery agency is responsible for delivering within the priorities set by the Programme for Government and by the Minister. It is responsible for doing that to manage the risks and to do that with an accountability —

Mr Swann:

So will the agency be responsible if the target is not met?

Ms Smith:

It will be responsible and accountable for delivery. The Department is responsible for ensuring that that takes place and that the appropriate systems and processes are in place to allow that to happen.

Mr Swann:

The feedback concerns me as well, and it is not even mentioned in the building blocks. When the strategic investment fund was launched, one of the shining examples of the success of Northern Ireland was always NI Screen. I think OFMDFM spoke about it, the Enterprise, Trade and Investment Minister spoke about it and the Culture, Arts and Leisure Minister realised it. However, there is no mention of NI Screen or its contribution through television production across any of the three strategies. Is it a failing of the Department to get that into those papers and to recognise the contribution that it is making to Northern Ireland?

Ms Smith:

That is seen as part of the role of the creative industries sector, and that has been really well recognised in the Programme for Government and in the other strategies. It is clearly an important part of that. The film industry is an important part of the creative industries sector, and the role of the creative industries in general has been seen to play a really important part in creating an innovative economy that is export-led and looking at dynamism and creativity. I

think that is well recognised. The work of all bodies has not been recognised, but we see creativity in the work of the film industry as an example of one of the creative industries that has a really strong potential.

Mr Swann:

My last point, then, is about grass-roots sports and participation. That had a high profile in the 2008-2011 Programme for Government, and has now been dropped completely with no mention across the Department. What is the rationale for that? I know that you could not fit everything in, but we talked at one stage about the importance of grass-roots sports and health and well-being.

Ms Smith:

Sport is mentioned specifically as one of the building blocks. Sport Matters is our strategy for delivering on sport, and includes the three planks of participation, performance and places. That is a really important area. The importance of community sport is recognised through its contribution to a number of commitments and the other strategic pillars including well-being, community cohesion and a whole range. Many of those are cross-cutting and will contribute to a significant number of the building blocks and the commitments without being too specific. However, sport is specifically recognised, as is the importance of its development. We have recognised that and sought to give it a high profile.

Mr D Bradley:

Sport Matters is only mentioned under priority 4, which is about building a strong and shared Community. Surely it should also come under at least four of the five priorities: investing in the future; tackling disadvantage; improving health and well-being; and creating safer communities. Why is it confined to priority 4?

Ms Smith:

We could not generally mention every strategy under every commitment. If we sought to mention every strategy in relation to every area in which it makes a contribution, the document would become unwieldy. The Sport Matters strategy is a really important one. It is our policy document for the development of sport. The strategy itself is very clear about the significant role

of sport in a whole range of wider societal objectives; not just physical and mental well-being but community groups and the areas that you mentioned. So, it is not specifically referred to as each strategy cannot be referred to in each of the 107 building blocks. It would not be possible because it would make the document so unwieldy.

Mr D Bradley:

If that is the case and it is as important as you say it is, why is there no capital budget for sport in year 4 of the CSR period?

Ms Smith:

Our capital budget for sport is focused on the stadium development. Clearly, there is also an obligation to community sport.

Mrs Brown:

There is still an allocation for the community sport programme of £750,000 in year 4.

Mr D Bradley:

Is that capital?

Mrs Brown:

Yes.

Mr D Bradley:

Your arm's-length body charged with delivering the strategy did not seem to be aware of that in its response to the Committee. I quote from a letter from its chief executive:

“you will be aware Sport NI has no capital budget for Year 4 of the current CSR period ... we believe further investments should be made to continue to support, for example, the Active Communities Programme, Investing in Performance Sport and the Sport Matter Community Capital Programme.”

He seems to be at variance with you on that issue.

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

The budget is certainly not as big as it has been, and that is a fair point. However, there is an allocation.

Mr D Bradley:

He says that it has “no capital budget”. That means nothing.

Ms Smith:

That is not our understanding. I suggest that we clarify the position and write to you.

Mr D Bradley:

I would appreciate that.

Foras na Gaeilge, in its comments, said that the strategy for the Irish language should have been given a higher priority in the Programme for Government. It said that the strategy should be a key commitment in the building of a strong and shared community and not just a building block. What is your reaction to that?

Ms Smith:

We are aware that Foras na Gaeilge said that.

Mr D Bradley:

Presumably, supporters of Ulster Scots would say the same thing about the Ulster-Scots plan.

Ms Smith:

Yes, similarly, the Ulster-Scots Agency also said that it would be beneficial to include a key commitment under priority 4. Obviously, the agencies have not formalised their responses, but initial indications are that they would like to have a key commitment under priority 4.

Mr D Bradley:

On that issue, the Minister told the Committee that she will be bringing forward an Irish language Bill. Why has that not been reflected in the Programme for Government?

Ms Smith:

Clearly, the Minister has a priority, as she has indicated to the Committee. The building blocks in

the Programme for Government reflect the development of the two strategies. The Minister has separately indicated that she will be taking forward an Irish language Bill.

Mr D Bradley:

Surely, if it was a ministerial priority, there would be some indication of it in the Programme for Government.

Ms Smith:

As you know, the development of the two strategies is in the Programme for Government, and the Minister has said that she will be bringing forward a separate Irish language Bill.

Mr D Bradley:

I know that, but you still have not answered my question. If it was a high priority of the Minister, surely it would be reflected in the Programme for Government.

Ms Smith:

As I said, it was not possible to reflect everything in the Programme for Government.

Mr D Bradley:

Not even high priorities?

Ms Smith:

We have not been able to cover everything that the Department does, as I said. We have sought to focus on the areas that are making the maximum contribution to the economy, which underpins the document, and have sought to achieve as wide coverage as we can. The Minister made it clear that that is one of her priorities. It will certainly be fully reflected in the Department's corporate and business plan.

Mr D Bradley:

Thank you.

The Chairperson:

Dominic, I think that it may be a ministerial priority but not an Executive priority.

Mr D Bradley:

That may be the case. We do not know as yet.

Mr Hilditch:

I want to return to the discussion on structures and the dependency on delivery, again, using sport as an example. There are a number of strands involved in sport: the Department, the arm's-length body, being Sport NI, and the governing bodies. Although the public perception is that all is well with those bodies — one body in particular has been ticking the boxes recently — those involved in the sport at grass-roots level know that the situation is somewhat different. There is a concern about how we move forward. I have been privileged to sit in on some low-level management-type meetings, and I know that there is tension and uneasiness between arm's-length bodies and certain governing or sporting agencies. What pressure can the Department bring to bear on those at governing level to make changes?

Ms Smith:

Do you mean, specifically, the regional stadium programme?

Mr Hilditch:

I am talking in general, but there are certainly issues with the safety of the public and sports grounds.

Ms Smith:

In terms of safety at sports grounds?

Mr Hilditch:

Sorry; there are issues about the relationship between the structures and the bodies. I am not content that there are good relations between Sport NI and a particular sporting organisation at the minute.

Ms Smith:

It is clearly important to have appropriate structures in place so that roles and responsibilities are very clear and that there is a strong commitment to work together towards the outcome. Sport NI is the delivery agent for the regional stadium programme, but within that, the governing bodies for each of the sports are obviously delivering through projects relevant to their sporting area. It is really important that the appropriate structures and processes are in place to ensure that that works effectively and efficiently. An earlier gateway review suggested certain changes to those structures, and we have been implementing those. We are seeking to do all we can to ensure that the appropriate arrangements are in place in order to deliver what is really important. It is important that everyone is very clear on what those arrangements are and that the appropriate skills and support are there for us to deliver what is a hugely challenging programme.

Mr Hilditch:

There is a safety programme for the delivery of stewarding, for instance. It is alleged the governing body concerned has drawn down money for that. However, as yet — halfway through the programme — a particular football club has not delivered on that. There is a frustration at grass-roots level because, although the perception is that everybody is now ticking the boxes and singing off the same hymn sheet, it does not believe that to be the case.

Mr Cory:

Safety at sports grounds is clearly a really important aspect. Apart from anything else, it is backed up by legislation. There is a requirement for grounds to be designated and licensed if they hold above a certain number of spectators. The Department has an overseeing function on Sport Northern Ireland, which essentially monitors the arrangements put in place by the grounds and the licensing carried out by local authorities. It does that in a number of ways, namely through audits and interaction with the grounds. We are probably about two years into this, and it will take time to bed in to ensure that not only are the right licensing and monitoring arrangements in place but they are being used. So, I think that there is a piece of work to be done to ensure that they are embedded in the grounds themselves.

Mr Hilditch:

When you see that not happening at certain levels, you worry that the strategy will gather dust.

Mr Cory:

I take the point entirely. I would not say that everything is perfect yet, but we are moving in that direction. The Department meets Sport NI on a six-monthly basis to get assurances on that progress against the legislation and to ensure that those arrangements are being put in place properly. Indeed, Sport Northern Ireland then meets the relevant partners out on the ground to do that. Since public safety is involved, we are keen to be absolutely clear that this is a must-do. It is legislatively-based, and there is no choice; we want to see the new arrangements put in place and being effective on the ground.

Mr Ó hOisín:

I am a bit concerned. Of the 400 targets in the 2008-11 PFG, 56% — just over 220 — were substantially achieved. I think that the target of 76 is potentially somewhat low, and deliberately so, perhaps so that they can be attainable. However, I am concerned about a number of those within that. I am worried about the rural-proofing and inequality issues that the three key commitments will probably throw up. The World Police and Fire Games is very welcome, and you gave a guesstimate of some 25,000 visitors for that. I contend that the City of Culture, which goes on longer than a year, is one event that could attract maybe 10 times as many people and would bring in a substantial amount of revenue to the economy. Why would that not have been a consideration as such?

Likewise, although the stadia strategy is welcome, it is almost exclusively Belfastcentric, notwithstanding the subregional stadia that are being proposed. However the three major stadiums are there, and there are other projects that could have been considered. We are not sure what the creative industries inquiry will deliver for us, but I see an imbalance. Like Mr Bradley, I am concerned that the ministerial priority of the Irish language Bill is not included.

Ms Smith:

You mentioned the previous Programme for Government and what was achieved there. As I said earlier, DCAL had 21 of its 400 targets. Although I would have liked all of them to be met, only three were not met: delivery of the multi-sports stadium; delivering fully on capital spend; and a target in relation to participation. The multi-sports stadium did not progress, for reasons, I think,

we are all familiar with. In turn, those factors affected our ability to deliver on the spend.

Your next point related to a Belfastcentric approach. You are right that the three stadia are Belfast-centred, as is the games. That is for sound reasons. The benefits of those, in the short term and the long term, will stretch beyond Belfast. They are investments that should benefit the whole of the country. For example, the workforce involved in the construction phase will be drawn from all areas, and there will be opportunities for suppliers. Hopefully, the finished product — the stadia — will draw spectators on a regional basis and from outside.

Similarly, the benefits of the World Police and Fire Games will not be constrained by geography. The number of visitors will mean that it will be necessary to accommodate some of them outside the Belfast area. We are anticipating that all areas will benefit from the delivery of the games. Our hosting of the music awards showed that we have the ability to host, and we saw the benefits that that delivered. This is also going to be a significant event. Although the projects are based in Belfast, the benefits will extend much broader than that. We are conscious that rural communities and the rest of the Province will also benefit from those.

Mr Ó hOisín:

Over the next couple of years, the major events will be the Irish Open, potentially the British Open, the all-Ireland Fleadh, the City of Culture, and so on, all of which are happening outside Belfast.

Ms Smith:

Similarly, the creative industries innovation fund is open throughout the North and entrepreneurs are eligible to apply from all areas. DCAL has no geographical limits on building blocks either.

The Chairperson:

All of the events that you mentioned will take place regardless of whether they are in the Programme for Government.

Mrs Brown:

The City of Culture is included.

Mr Ó hOisín:

The World Police and Fire Games will also take place whether or not it is in the Programme for Government, and the stadia development will probably take place whether or not it is included.

The Chairperson:

Again, there are probably risks attached to each of those projects that may not be attached to the events that you outlined, but that is not for us to debate.

Mr Ó hOisín:

I made my point.

Mr McGimpsey:

You have a lot on your plate when you think of the World Police and Fire Games, the Irish Open, the City of Culture, the Titanic centenary, and so on. As you said, you are dependent on a number of non-governmental bodies to deliver all of that, so you are not doing it directly. I am thinking about the vacant site for Helm Housing, and, although the concentration on the issue of Helm was on the board, operatives and all the rest of it, no one really looked at the Department's role in accountability and that of the accounting officer. That is where they should have been looking.

With so much going on, are you satisfied that controls are in place so that there will not be a situation similar to that of Helm Housing with some of your next-step bodies? Once upon a time, departmental representatives went to the Arts Council, the Sports Council and other such bodies on a regular monthly basis. Are you still doing that, given that a lot of money is flowing through them? As Robin said, when it goes well, you can claim the credit, but, when it goes badly, it is all their fault. That would not be my approach. One of the Department's key roles, apart from policy and support to the Minister, is financial accountability. That is what the accounting officer is for. Are you absolutely satisfied that you have those measures in place and that we are not going to get another Helm Housing?

My colleague just slipped me a note to remind me of the Northern Ireland Events Company,

and I should say that it was all right when I left.

Ms Smith:

You are absolutely right to point out the importance of accountability, particularly in DCAL, where so much of what we do is delivered directly through our arm's-length bodies. It is really important that a strong and appropriate governance is there and, in DCAL, we are particularly well seized of that for a number of reasons. We still have a strong governance framework in place. Recently, we have been reviewing that framework and have been looking at our sponsorship manual, which sets out clearly how we go about carrying out that role. I assure you that we still have our regular accountability meetings with all our arm's-length bodies, when they are held to account and report their statements of internal control. They are rigorously examined not only on the delivery of their business plan but on risk management and a range of governance and accountability issues. We have maintained that strong governance framework. We cannot completely eliminate risk; it is just not possible, but we are seeking to strongly manage that risk.

Mr McGimpsey:

Things can go wrong, and it was a whistle-blower who brought the issue of Helm Housing to light, not the Department's system and structure. Otherwise, it could still have been sailing merrily along. Things do go wrong, for example, the Bangor swimming pool that was to be ready for the Olympic Games. It is not going to quite make it now, is it?

Ms Smith:

No, there will be slippage in the delivery of the programme, and that is due to a particular incident where the structural beams that were coming across from Scandinavia were damaged in transit.

Mr McGimpsey:

It will be ready for the next Olympics.

Ms Smith:

That incident had an impact on the delivery timetable. It is now expected to be delivered during the last quarter of 2012-13. That also had an impact, as the Committee will be aware, in that we

had to make provision for it in our January monitoring return; we declared an easement to cover it.

The Chairperson:

On your previous point — and I thank my very efficient Assistant Committee Clerk for this — it falls to OFMDFM to provide the financial and other support across government to ensure the success of the UK City of Culture 2013. Therefore, it is in the Programme for Government, but it is under OFMDFM as opposed to DCAL.

Mr Ó hOisín:

But it is a cross-cutting theme.

The Chairperson:

There is mention of investment in inland waterways for 2016-2021. You will be aware that the Committee has been lobbied on various projects, including the Ulster canal and the Newry to Portadown canal, and by the Lagan Canal Restoration Trust. Representatives of the Newry and Portadown branch are coming this afternoon to discuss a project that they would like included in inland waterways. At this very early stage, can you give any indication of where that investment is headed and whether progress would be subject to funding coming from the Irish Republic?

Mrs Brown:

We will have to wait to see what the business case says etc. It would then be subject to determining which jurisdiction would pay for what and whether there is an opportunity to bid for funds in the monitoring round.

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

Work on the Lagan canal is ongoing through the Lagan Canal Restoration Trust. The business case will look at it from Belfast right through to Ellis's Gut where it enters Lough Neagh, which is a 27-mile stretch, and should be ready in early summer. The Department is looking at what is the next stage. The Committee will be aware that we bid for resources in the last budget round and were unsuccessful. We now have a business case that will have to be examined to see whether it stacks up. We will have to see how we will take the strategy forward without the

capital resources being allocated to it. We have been approached by the Blackwater Regional Partnership and various groups along the length of the Ulster canal. We have engaged with the Strategic Investment Board to look at other potential funding options.

We have to see the canals in a different light. It is not just about canal restoration; these are massive regeneration projects. It is about looking at the corridor on either side of the canal to see how we can harness the sporting activity, the cultural activity, the tourist trail and everything in the area. We have to try to bring that together to provide a focus for coming generations. It is at a very early stage, but we are included in the second phase of the draft investment strategy, so there is hope.

Another area that we want to look at is the funding experience in other jurisdictions during lean times. What is the right approach? It comes back to the delivery model that we talked about earlier this morning. The current model is that we fund the other interested parties through the Lagan Canal Restoration Trust. However, is that the right model to take it forward? This is not just about restoring canals for boaters. It is a massive regeneration project that could bring much wider benefits, particularly to many rural communities in the terrain that the canals wind their way through. In the meantime, we tend to use them as nice places for people to walk and cycle. We need to promote those recreational events while trying to preserve the heritage asset for times when investment will be available.

The Chairperson:

That comment is relevant. If you have the time, it would be welcome if you could stay for the presentation on the Newry to Portadown canal. That is exactly the sort of comment that will be relayed to the Committee: that this is very much a rural area in which there has been underinvestment but that there is an opportunity with an intact water course.

Thank you for your time this morning. You are not really prepared for this, Deborah, but there was an announcement earlier this week about additional moneys going to libraries. We will write to you to find out where that money has come from and what impact it may have on another service. I do not know whether you are in a position to tell us at this stage.

Mrs Brown:

We have made some proposals to the Ministers on how that funding might be found. Of course, if it is all to be found from within DCAL, that will have implications for some of the other areas in the Department. The Minister is considering a series of proposals. When we have more information, we will supply it to you.

The Chairperson:

OK. Thank you very much.