



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure

OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

World Police and Fire Games 2013:
Post-project Evaluation

6 March 2014

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

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Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Miss Michelle McIlveen (Chairperson)
Mr David Hilditch
Mr William Humphrey
Ms Rosaleen McCorley
Mr Basil McCrea
Mr Michael McGimpsey
Mr Oliver McMullan

Witnesses:

Mr John Tully	2013 World Police and Fire Games Ltd
Ms Joanna McConway	Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

The Chairperson: I welcome Joanna McConway, head of the 2013 projects team in the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL); and John Tully, CEO of the 2013 World Police and Fire Games. Neither of you is a stranger to the Committee. John, the last time that you were here, I thought that it might be your final visit to the Committee, but we have had the opportunity to invite you back, and you are very welcome. If you would like to make an opening statement, members will follow up with some questions.

Mr John Tully (2013 World Police and Fire Games Ltd): Thank you. Chair, I would like to circulate a brochure, if you are happy with that.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to provide a final update on the World Police and Fire Games, which, as you know, were held in August and were hugely successful. I have just circulated the recently published overview report, which will provide you with a summary that captures some of the numbers and the spirit of the Belfast games. We have also produced a post-project evaluation (PPE) report, which provides a much more detailed story of the games from bid through to delivery, and I would like to use this opportunity to update you on the findings of that final report.

The post-project evaluation report was produced on our behalf by three independent organisations in close consultation with the economists from DCAL. Its main purpose was to assess how well the games delivered against our four strategic objectives: to deliver the friendliest and most successful games ever; to contribute positively to the wider social and community cohesion objectives; to enhance the image and profile of Northern Ireland nationally and internationally; and to deliver valuable economic benefits to Belfast and Northern Ireland. The final version of this post-project evaluation report will be formally submitted to DCAL following completion of our audit of accounts, which is ongoing.

You may remember from my previous briefing in October that the World Police and Fire Games Federation, which has been hosting the games since 1985, stated that the Belfast games were, in fact, the friendliest and best games ever. The post-project evaluation indicates that that was the overwhelming view of the visiting athletes and local spectators. From our survey of 2,700 people throughout the games, I can confirm that 99% said that the games met or exceeded their expectations, and 94% rated the friendliness of the games as very good. As you know, there was huge positivity from the media, spectators, and volunteers alike throughout the 10 days of the games, so it is clear from that information that we have met our first strategic objective.

I talked at previous Committee briefings about the emphasis on social and community cohesion and, in particular, our legacy programme and the focus on building relationships with the emergency services. It is worth noting that the original business case for the World Police and Fire Games stated that there should be two legacy objectives. We delivered much, much more than originally planned; in fact, we delivered 60 legacy initiatives in the course of the games, and I am pleased to say that there is evidence that they delivered real, tangible results.

Some examples of the legacy work are the recruitment of volunteers, including those from neighbourhood renewal areas; delivery of a schools' curriculum at Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3; and a schools roadshow and buddy system for schools and visiting teams. In addition, we built on the young ambassador programme that was launched for the London 2012 Olympics; we have the legacy of sports equipment donated to sports governing bodies; and one of our sponsors has donated 45 defibrillators to schools as part of its legacy for the World Police and Fire Games.

I am also pleased to say that there is clear evidence from the independent survey that we carried out before and after the games that they have improved the image of the services in Northern Ireland. This part of the survey shows a clear increase in how people perceive the image of the PSNI, Fire and Rescue, the Prison Service and Revenue and Customs. Given the scope of what has been achieved, I think it fair to say that we have gone above and beyond in this area and more than succeeded in our second strategic objective.

The third objective was to enhance the image and profile of Northern Ireland nationally and internationally. It is clear from the feedback received from visitors and local spectators that the games also met this strategic objective. Some 99% of all visitors said that they strongly agreed or agreed that the event made Northern Ireland worth a visit; 99% agreed that it would improve Northern Ireland's reputation as a destination that can hold major events successfully; and 98% of Northern Ireland residents said that the event made them feel more proud of their country.

We are still finalising our accounts, but I am pleased to confirm, subject to audit, that the company delivered the games with a budget surplus of approximately £300,000, which has been declared as an easement and goes back to DCAL. That financial performance is clear evidence of the dedication of my staff, who worked tirelessly to deliver the games on budget, despite huge uncertainty about the income that we would receive from athlete registrations. We also remain on track to wind up the activities of the company by 31 March, allowing the company to be dissolved thereafter. I can also confirm today that the direct economic boost during the 10 days of the games was £7.34 million. It is very important to understand how that figure was calculated. That is the direct boost for the 10-day period. It does not include the longer-term benefits to the tourist industry resulting from return visits; the positive PR coverage received for Northern Ireland internationally; or anything to do with future international events that will come as a result of the games.

I will give you a couple of examples. Our survey indicates that almost 4,200 visitors plan to return to Northern Ireland, which will generate a further economic boost for the Province. Belfast City Airport recently announced that it had the busiest year in its 30-year history, with 2.5 million passengers and nearly 37,000 flights. The World Police and Fire Games were seen as a key part of that success.

Similarly, one of our sponsors announced that they will host an annual business conference in Belfast as a direct result of the games. Their competition included cities such as Madrid, Barcelona, Lisbon and Amsterdam, which were also bidding to hold that prestigious event. I have no doubt that there are many other stories like that and that the economic boost from the games will continue to contribute to Northern Ireland's economic well-being after the 10 days of the games. In fact, at the end of the games, a local economist said that the longer-term benefits from the World Police and Fire Games would rise to about £25 million. With that in mind, the games have also delivered on the fourth strategic objective.

I would like to quote briefly from the PPE report. I understand that you have not yet seen the report but will see it in due course. It states in closing:

"This was the first time the World Police and Fire Games had been held within the UK, and only the third time it had been held in Europe. The games have demonstrated 'NI PLC's' ability to deliver an international, high-profile, complex multi-sport event in a positive and inclusive manner.

The overwhelming message from those who competed, volunteered, spectated or were engaged in associated initiatives was that the games provided a very positive experience which benefited individuals and communities; the image and reputation of the police, fire and rescue, prisons, revenues and customs services; and the image and reputation of Northern Ireland itself both at home and abroad.

Therefore, while the value for money of the games was less than expected based on lower numbers of competitors and visitors from out of state, the bigger picture is that the games themselves were a success story of which Northern Ireland should be proud."

Finally, I would like to close by thanking you for your attention this morning. This is my final report to the Committee on the World Police and Fire Games, and I place on record my sincere thanks for the support that the Committee has given throughout their planning and delivery. Thank you.

The Chairperson: Thank you very much, John. When will the post-project evaluation be completed?

Mr Tully: We are going through our final audit with the Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO) this week, and we have only to update the report to reflect our final accounts. That will complete the report, which will then be submitted to DCAL, sent on to the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) and made available thereafter.

The Chairperson: You were able to say in your presentation that a £300,000 easement was going back to DCAL, but you were not able to give us the final cost of the games. Why is that?

Mr Tully: We had an overall budget of £13.8 million for the games. We lived within the budget and are declaring an easement of £300,000 from that back to DCAL.

The Chairperson: So, essentially, £13.5 million was the final cost.

Mr Tully: The total cash grant from DCAL was £6.8 million, so it will be a £300,000 easement against that figure.

The Chairperson: You were able to exceed your sponsorship target, which is commendable given the economic situation. When you spoke to those who contributed to the games, had they found it value for money from their perspective?

Mr Tully: Absolutely. We have a series of videos on our YouTube channel, one of which is a wrap-up by the sponsors in which they talk about what the games did for them. It is fair to say that the effect on the Northern Ireland brand, particularly for hotels and restaurants in the city, has been phenomenal. In that 10-day period, the restaurants in this part of the city were the busiest that they ever been.

As I said, one sponsor was able to attract a major international conference to Belfast as a result of the games. The games have been very good for the sponsors' brands, all of which were visible to a large number of visitors. The sponsors have been able to boost their profile and generate direct business. That was the case for our food and drink sponsors, for example.

The Chairperson: I have a question for both of you, and you may have different views on it. John, what lessons did you learn as the CEO of the project? Joanna, from the Department's perspective, what lessons were learned that will help you when bidding for future events?

Mr Tully: The first lesson is that, as a country, we are way better and have much more to offer than we think. Our sporting venues are world-class, and we have the infrastructure, skills and ability to launch and run major events of this type in future.

There were some practical lessons learned on the way through. Our business case was written in 2007, when the economic climate was very different. The fact that we were running the games in 2013, with a very different economic climate and a very different policing environment in the UK, was an important lesson in estimating and forecasting the number of athletes who would attend.

Ms Joanna McConway (Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure): From the Department's point of view, I endorse what John said. When it comes to structures, risks and challenges, a particular lesson from the World Police and Fire Games was that although there was quite early planning, risks still appeared during the process. However, the ability to plan from a very early stage helped to garner support across government and build solid foundations to deliver the games.

The expansion of what we call legacy work, although much of it happened during the games through engagement with communities and schools — sits very well with the Department's priorities. However, the games proved to us that that kind of work can have an impact and that DCAL's work can make a difference in communities when there is solid engagement so that people feel that they are part of something and can buy into it.

A less positive lesson learned is that we need to engage early with the media on major events in Northern Ireland. We had to learn that as the games went on. There were some parallel lessons learned from the City of Culture as well. Sometimes, we need to believe in ourselves a little more and not always assume that everything will go wrong. We have good people, and I want to reiterate what the Department said before: John and his team did a fantastic job and we got there in the end, but the media were dragging behind us throughout.

The Chairperson: The Committee has just had a presentation from the Assembly's Research and Information Service about opportunities for future international sporting events. Is the Department pursuing events other than the joint bid for the Rugby World Cup?

Ms McConway: We work very closely with the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI), which takes the lead in government for major events. We see our role as being much more in the provision of facilities, competitors, networks and so on to facilitate those events rather than necessarily always being the primary Department pursuing them. Work is ongoing on infrastructure and to build on the momentum from the games. A lot of young people, and people of all ages, are really enthusiastic about getting involved in sport. Some governing bodies are hungry to take things to the next level. It is about facilitating them and working with them to determine which events are right for them and what their next developmental stage is. Although we are not pursuing a major event to mirror the Giro d'Italia, that is not to say that we do not have longer-term plans to ensure that we have the right environment for such events.

The Chairperson: I appreciate the comments, but it is still disappointing that DCAL, as the lead Department for sport, is not pursuing opportunities to bring games to Northern Ireland, particularly given the work carried out by those involved in the World Police and Fire Games and the experience and capacity that Northern Ireland now has to host a major sporting event.

Ms McConway: Perhaps I should clarify our position. Although we are not in a bidding process, that does not mean that we are not looking at what sporting opportunities are available and thinking about the positioning and developmental work needed to get to the stage at which we could bid.

The Chairperson: That is more encouraging.

Mr McGimpsey: We conclude that the games were very successful, so congratulations to everybody. I must say that you look a lot more relaxed now than you did this time last year. *[Laughter.]* The final report identifies where the threats and weaknesses were and how we can learn from the experience. My observation is that we build up experience, capacity and wisdom and then decide to abolish them: for example, John, you and your company will disappear later this month. That is unfortunate, and the Department needs to talk that over with DETI because we will need that type of expertise again.

Your balance sheet came out on the plus side, but there were minuses that had to be overcome, and it is important that we look hard at those to see how we plan to deal with them in future. At one stage, the issue of whether there would be enough beds and bedrooms looked very challenging, and I understand that the number of competitors was lower than you anticipated.

What can we do to ensure that we hit the target? Were we overly optimistic or did factors beyond our control mean fewer competitors than we planned for? That said, it was probably not the worst thing that could have happened given the capacity issue. Being realistic and honest, I think that we all feel good about the games because of the huge challenges that we faced. Joanne mentioned the City of Culture and the Irish Open, and all these events happened in and around the same time. We do not do things by halves in Northern Ireland: instead of taking one at a time and year by year, we do everything in one year and are then inclined to walk away and forget about events for a few years. It would be unfortunate if that happened. When your final assessment comes through, you should have a realistic and critical look at where the threats were. There are always things that you could do better or differently.

Mr Tully: The main reason that we wanted three independent companies to construct our report was to get an honest appraisal of the good and the not so good from the games. The final report looks at the challenges on the way through, right from the point of bidding for the games back in 2006 and 2007 until they were delivered. We recognise that we did not get the numbers that we originally set out to get, but that did not detract from the overall value of the games. The games were a huge success, and those who came and enjoyed the games went away with a very positive story to tell about what we can offer here.

The main lesson from the report will be about the business case in 2007. The economic climate was much more upbeat then, and the numbers were appropriate for that time. However, in the delivery phase, in 2013, we were trying to attract people whose circumstances may have changed: perhaps their income had reduced; their partner was no longer working; or maybe some who had intended to bring friends and family were no longer able to do so. So we were delivering in a very different economic environment, and all of that is brought out in the report. I do not think that it detracted from the overall success of the games.

Ms McConway: It is important to point out that, as John mentioned, over 4,000 people surveyed said that they wanted to come back. From our point of view, that is really important information. Getting people here gives them the opportunity to say that they want to come back and visit this place and spend more time here. Word of mouth referral is among the best publicity that we can get. That is why our focus is not solely on major events; it is about asking, when we get those people back, how we can get them to spend lots of money all over the place. We want people to see that there are lots of things happening all the time, rather than their coming for a specific period or event. We want people to see this place as culturally vibrant, a place not only for a visit but maybe somewhere to invest, work or live. That is what our longer-term planning is really about.

Ms McCorley: Go raibh maith agat, a Chathaoirleach. Thank you for your presentation. There is a big difference between the anticipated and actual visitor spend. Is there a correlation with the lower number of visitors, or was that down to something else?

Mr Tully: A good portion of the income from the games came from the athletes, who paid their own way. They registered and paid to participate. We had to scale our expenditure to match the income from athletes, sponsors and various other sources. We worked on the basis that we aimed to get 10,000 athletes but would work within our means. So we were able, at any stage, to rescale our expenditure to match the income, and we did so throughout our planning. That is why we were able to deliver within budget and, in fact, give back £300,000 at the end.

Ms McConway: There was an issue with visitor spend. An inflationary element was added to the figures used in the business case to account for the time between it being written in 2007 and the games taking place in 2013. It was a reasonable assumption to take the figure for daily visitor spend at that time and increase it. However, when we looked at the Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB) figures in about 2012, we found that the actual figure had not risen with inflation.

In line with best practice, we worked with DFP throughout the process. There was an original business case and an addendum. In early 2013, we again wrote to DFP to say that we had more information and were in the planning process. So it was not a surprise, and we were able to work with the figures as the changing information became available.

Ms McCorley: Did you get the expected number of visitors from other parts of Ireland? Have you a breakdown of where visitors came from?

Mr Tully: We have breakdowns by region. The numbers from the Republic of Ireland were strong: about 460 athletes. The one that sticks out as a disappointment is GB. A number of factors contributed to that. Policing in GB is going through significant changes, and sport is not high on their agenda. Eligibility to compete in the games also impacted on the number who could attend. Also, given that we are in a recession, forces have made police staff redundant and introduced compulsory retirement for police officers. All of that made for an environment in which the numbers from GB were lower than we had anticipated.

Mr McMullan: Thank you for the presentation. We are looking at what the games have done for Belfast. What have they done for the rural community?

Mr Tully: Quite a lot. The benefits of the games stretched well beyond Belfast. The mountain biking took place in Kilbroney. There was a hub in south Down, where a number of venues were used. The area got the benefit of athletes and spectators coming along and of people spending money on accommodation, in restaurants, and so on. Although the games were centred on Belfast — it was the city of Belfast that bid for the games and won — the benefits spread right across Northern Ireland. Fishing competitions took place in Eglinton. We had various different things outside Belfast. There were, of course, stresses and strains on accommodation. People naturally wanted to stay as close to Belfast as possible, but a large number of people stayed further afield because they wanted to do other things after the 10 days of the games.

Mr McMullan: Were there any black spots in the whole thing? Were areas not involved that could have been, through providing accommodation, for example?

Mr Tully: The response from accommodation providers was fantastic. Everybody who had accommodation to offer worked very closely with the Belfast visitor centre to make that accommodation available. The response was fantastic. I do not think that there was any sense of a black spot at all. Everybody saw the benefit of the games coming to Northern Ireland and responded to that.

Mr McMullan: You need to get that message out. People still have the idea that it was a Belfast games and that the benefit to the rural community —

Mr Tully: It is important to note that it was the city of Belfast that bid for the games, so they were the Belfast games. However, the benefit was felt much, much wider.

Mr McMullan: You need to get out the message that benefits were there.

Mr Tully: Absolutely. Some of our sporting venues across Northern Ireland are world class. That message needs to continue to go out so that people can make use of them.

Mr McMullan: You have done very well. Well done. You have done a good job.

Mr Tully: Thank you.

Mr Humphrey: Thank you very much for your presentation. Congratulations, particularly on the bottom line, which is very impressive and should be commended by everyone.

I have a few questions. I was involved in establishing Taiwan NI. The Taipei police were here, and some of the Taiwanese students in Northern Ireland who are involved in Taiwan NI were volunteers. The students and the police had a tremendous time. They, and I hope everyone else who came here from outside of Northern Ireland, were going back to be persuaders for Northern Ireland and encourage people to come here, so congratulations on that.

You touched on the media. For me, the BBC in particular is a problem, and not just with your events but for golf and other events. Northern Ireland deals with a perceptual and reputational problem because of the years of the Troubles. To address that, we all need to put our shoulder to the wheel to talk the place up rather than be negative about it. What practical things have you learnt that could help not just your Department but others? I heard many interviews with the Minister about the number of participants that were going to come, the number of spectators that there would be and the number of beds that would be sold. There was a continuing negativity around the thing.

Ms McConway: It is not just perception. We think of the perceptions of people who are not from Northern Ireland of the place. It is important to have major events to attract those people so that they get a taste of the place and perhaps come back.

However, through the games, the City of Culture and other things that DCAL does, we have been very focused on making people who live here have great pride in the place where they live. For us, a key element is changing the internal perceptions so that, when we talk to relatives, or whoever is not here or has not been here, we give a really positive impression and all feel that it is somewhere that we can shout about. The games certainly did that. We heard anecdotally that, during the games, many competitors had local people coming up to them on the street to give them directions when they did not even need them. That kind of feedback has certainly shown that having major civic events really does increase pride. That is really important.

Mr Tully: From our discussions with the Glasgow Commonwealth Games teams, London 2012, and so on, there does seem to be a bit of a cycle with those things. The media tend to focus on the negatives in the run-up and then, once the event kicks in and people get a sense of how good it is, that changes. By its nature, that cycle will take place for an event.

For us, it was always about accentuating the positive and being positive about what we could offer. We knew from some of the familiarisation visits that took place well in advance of August that the people who were going to come here were going to have a really good time. The World Police and Fire games Federation had been and looked at all our sporting venues and approved them. We got athletes from a range of different countries to come across on advance visits. They stayed in our hotels and ate in our restaurants, and they all went away with a very positive story to tell. The key is always to be positive, because I think that we undersell ourselves as a country.

Mr Humphrey: I agree entirely, but my point is this: is there a corpus of knowledge now to deal with the negativity that we seem to sometimes surround ourselves with? On the point that Michael made, do you have people who have the ability to deal with that? The Northern Ireland people are persuaded, but the difficulty is that, if there is a perpetual feed of negativity, that drags things down. I do not think that it did for your events and other events that have been held locally. However, remember, for example, the whole debacle that there was the last time that the Tall Ships came here. It was one day, and transportation got off to a bad start. That was sorted out in a few hours, but the negative media coverage kept running and running. The frustration must be particularly acute for you guys when you are working to an end, which is not just the event itself but the reputation of Northern Ireland internationally. To have people picking away at things must be hugely frustrating.

Mr Tully: It goes with the territory a little bit.

Mr Humphrey: How did the figure of 170,000 compare with your projected numbers?

Mr Tully: Spectator numbers are always difficult to gauge. The example that I always look at is ice hockey. Over 50,000 people turned up to watch the ice hockey. The representative from the federation who is responsible for ice hockey said to me that many of the players competing in our games had never played in front of such large crowds in their entire career. The response was hugely positive, and I put that down to a lot of the work that we did with young people in advance of the games, particularly through buddy system for schools. The children got caught up in the spirit of the games. They came along to spectate and brought their parents with them. They dragged their parents along to watch the games. That is what caught the wave, as it were.

Different cities have had different levels of spectators turn up for the games. In New York, attendance was low because the games there were a small event in a big city, but for us it was a much bigger deal when the games dropped into Belfast.

Mr Humphrey: I know that figures of around 10,000 athletes were talked about and that you managed to get 7,000 here. Leave aside the projected figures — I do not know whether those were official or not — how does that compare with other host cities, particularly those in Europe?

Mr Tully: The one that sticks in my mind is Stockholm, which had 6,600. Last year was the third time that the games were held in Europe and the first time in the UK. In hindsight, I think that we would have been better going with a range of numbers rather than hanging our hat on the figure of 10,000 that was set in 2007.

Mr Humphrey: Yes, because there was the economic downturn in 2008. There is the cultural thing in America where the numbers and sizes of police forces are on a different scale, so you cannot really make a comparison. I mentioned European cities because you cannot really compare Belfast with a Canadian or American city. In America and Canada, there are so many police forces, but there is also the culture of participation in these things that there is not necessarily in Europe to the same extent.

How did your spend compare with the projected figures?

Mr Tully: There were minor variances in specific areas, but the way in which we approached projected spend throughout was always to run with different scenarios, such as different numbers of athletes turning up and paying, and different numbers of friends and family attending. We were always working with different scenarios. We maintained three throughout our planning: the best case; the worst case; and the baseline in the middle.

We were always able to respond. We relentlessly tracked the numbers every day to make sure that we understood where we were. We kept on top of the numbers all the time, which allowed us to hand £300,000 back. We kept on top of our expenditure. We always scaled things. For example, we worked closely with Belfast City Council on the opening ceremony to make sure that we were able to flex the spend on the opening ceremony depending on how much income we got.

That approach worked really well. I also had the benefit of having a really good finance director on the team, who was able to get into the detail every single day in the run-up to the games. I would put it down to that relentless focus on numbers throughout.

Mr Humphrey: Other than the reputational thing, good PR and the fact that it was a fantastic event that many people — competitors and spectators — benefited from, was any tangible facility or resource left as a legacy from the World Police and Fire Games for the city or Northern Ireland?

Mr Tully: There are lots of tangibles, but they are difficult to measure. I know that that sounds like a contradiction, but they are.

Mr Humphrey: What about infrastructure?

Mr Tully: The Mary Peters Track was upgraded, and the catalyst for doing that —

Mr Humphrey: Yes, but the council paid for that.

Mr Tully: It did indeed.

Mr Humphrey: Yes.

Mr Tully: This was not an infrastructure programme. We simply did not have the budget to build any new sports facilities.

Mr Humphrey: OK. Thank you, and congratulations again.

Mr B McCrea: Yes, congratulations. I was one of those who went to the ice hockey. In fact, I went to about three or four games, and it was absolutely fantastic.

Mr Tully: Yes, it was indeed.

Mr B McCrea: It was not exactly as friendly in the final, because there were loads of fights on the ice.

Mr Tully: Yes, that is the nature of the sport, unfortunately.

Mr B McCrea: Anyway, everything seemed to go down very well. It is all very good and positive, but there was an incident — the riot. Was there any feedback on that?

Mr Tully: The good work had been done by that time. That happened on 9 August, which was the Friday night.

Let us be clear: we wish that it had not happened, but it did, and we had plans in place to deal with it. Every single contingency had been rehearsed on paper with the PSNI. We had a joint command structure, with our command centre for the games literally next door to the PSNI's command centre. There was close cooperation throughout. The incident took place in close proximity to our social hub, which was the athletes' village at Custom House Square. We worked very closely with the PSNI.

Mr B McCrea: I want to talk about the feedback. I suspect that anybody who was here did not fizzle, because they were having a good time. However, negative images appeared in other areas. Was the riot covered in places such as Canada?

Mr Tully: I did not get a sense that there was huge international coverage. There was national coverage, with the two contrasting pictures of Belfast being covered extensively at a national level.

It is worth remembering that those who visited here are law enforcement officers and their friends and families. They deal with that type of situation as part of their job. When we briefed the federation on the likelihood of it happening, it was very content that the situation was being managed well and that there would be no adverse reaction from the visitors, because of the nature of their work.

Mr B McCrea: One other tricky issue that you sort of got through but that may be a learning exercise for others was the opening ceremony. First, it was not quite as full as we might have hoped. There were empty seats. Secondly, there was a problem concerning the flag that people would parade under — the Northern Ireland flag, the PSNI flag or whatever. Everybody else was flying flags left, right and centre. There is an issue when you have a big event. How do you deal with flags at sporting events? Did you come up with a protocol?

Mr Tully: I will deal with the first question about the crowd at the opening ceremony. The nature of the event — the federation spoke to us at length about this — is that the athletes turn up, do the athletes' parade, stay for some of the entertainments and go. Many of them had travelled long distances and were competing in sports the next day. Sitting around at an opening ceremony is not everybody's cup of tea. In fact, at the Winter Olympics, one of the Russian athletes refused to attend the opening ceremony and carry the flag, as he wanted to be ready for a competition the next day. That was also the mindset of the competitors here, albeit they are amateur athletes.

Mr B McCrea: I was talking more about those in the stands.

Mr Tully: There is always a delicate balance to be struck between having a purpose-built arena for such an event and making sure that you have the capacity for everybody who might turn up. I think that we got it as close to being right as we possibly could have. It only became noticeable because it was a purpose-built arena. If an arena had already been built and was available to us, the crowd would have been what it would have been.

The overwhelming feedback from the visitors and local people who turned up to watch the opening ceremony was that it was a really good event. It set the tone for the games, and getting that right almost carried us through the 10 days through capturing the imagination of local spectators and the athletes.

Flags will always be a delicate issue in Northern Ireland. We worked very closely with the local services to agree a protocol for what flags would be officially used. The protocol was agreed unanimously with the local services and carried out on the day.

Ms McConway: Only country flags were flown during the opening ceremony.

Mr Tully: The official flags that were flown were paraded at the start by the volunteers and placed on display, and the athletes paraded in after that.

Mr B McCrea: Everybody was there with a flag. There was a Quebec flag. I have a photo of it. I was there.

Ms McConway: Yes, the teams had, but the official flag —

Mr B McCrea: They were all walking around and had their flags. That is what they all wanted to do.

I am just saying that it is sensitive. I am not saying that anything went wrong, but it is sensitive. If we are to have more sporting events, a protocol will be required. If I recall correctly, you were trying to work out whether you were going to have flags or not during the final 12 hours.

Mr Tully: In fairness, the protocol was worked out well in advance. I had discussions with the services and the captains of the service teams. The protocol was agreed, and I think that it worked well.

Mr B McCrea: I do not want to be negative. I thought that the games were really successful. It is just that you learn some things. The games were very good and positive, but I did not get the feeling that we really knew what was going on with flags. International competitors wanted to walk around with their flags, and there were other difficulties elsewhere. I think that we should confront such things and decide what we are going to do. Even if it is a neutral flag — I do not care what flag it is — there is an issue, and it was obvious that those from Northern Ireland were the only ones who were walking around without a flag.

Mr Tully: The protocol was agreed with the services, which bought into it unanimously. That is what they chose to do on the day, and I think that it worked well.

Mr Hilditch: Well done. You must want to get your life back after 31 March and have some semblance of normality. Thank you, John and Joanna, for regularly coming along to keep the Committee informed. That has been useful. We ironed out any issues as we went along, which was beneficial.

The Assembly Research and Information Service (RaISe) presentation gave us some ideas on developing venues and facilities, and you provided some research on that, Joanna. You highlighted the fact that the Department has an eye on the landscape for future events. I took the opportunity to highlight sailing, which I do not think was part of the World Police and Fire Games —

Mr Tully: It was, yes.

Mr Hilditch: Belfast lough has some of the best waters for sailing in Europe, and here was the camp for a number of teams for the Olympics and the Paralympics.

There are four councils involved: North Down; Belfast; Newtownabbey; and Carrickfergus. With, in my opinion, minimal investment, there is a great potential for sailing in Belfast lough. Is that a potential benefit from major events that the Department could look at? Experts tell us that the lough is an absolutely fantastic venue for sailing. We had the Optimist World Championships in 1997, which was an excellent event, but, owing to the governing body changing modifications and the like, the slips are no longer up to speed in north Down, Carrick and Newtownabbey, as it was then. Is sailing something that could be looked at?

Ms McConway: I am not aware of whether something is happening at the minute, but I can certainly take what you say back to the Department.

Mr Hilditch: I know that a few of those councils have dabbled in the INTERREG funding from Europe, but not much has come from it so far. I was just wondering —

Ms McConway: I am not sure whether there are proposals or developments around sailing, but I can certainly find out. We obviously have a fisheries conservation interest in Belfast lough, so the Department would need to consider all the opportunities and potential risks that may be involved in increasing the traffic on the lough.

Mr Hilditch: Yes. There are sailing clubs there already and a fantastic facility for the disabled.

Ms McConway: We are certainly seeing from the World Police and Fire Games that local organisations, from governing bodies to smaller clubs, have definitely built capacity that they now want to use to expand. We really want to tap into that and support it. Yes, I will take that back.

Mr Hilditch: OK. Thanks very much.

The Chairperson: Finally, I congratulate you on a successful games. John, in particular, kept a calm head in the face of some trying issues and challenges, even some from the Committee. I wish you well as you move forward in your career outside the 2013 World Police and Fire Games Ltd. I hope that we meet again and that the talent and capacity that you have built up during this period will be utilised again by the Department. I thank you both and wish you well.

Mr Tully: Thank you very much.

Mr Humphrey: Hear, hear.