



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure

OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

DCAL Business Plan 2014-15:
Ms Carál Ní Chuilín (Minister of Culture, Arts
and Leisure) and DCAL Officials

9 October 2014

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure

DCAL Business Plan 2014-15:
Ms Carál Ní Chuilín (Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure) and DCAL Officials

9 October 2014

Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mr Nelson McCausland (Chairperson)
Mr Gordon Dunne (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Dominic Bradley
Mr David Hilditch
Ms Rosaleen McCorley
Mr Basil McCrea
Mr Oliver McMullan
Mr Cathal Ó hOisín

Witnesses:

Ms Ní Chuilín	Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure
Mr Peter May	Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure
Mr Arthur Scott	Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

The Chairperson (Mr McCausland): I welcome the Minister and officials to the Committee. We have Peter May, the interim permanent secretary, and Arthur Scott, the director of culture. Do you want to proceed with your presentation, please?

Ms Ní Chuilín (The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure): Good morning and thank you for the opportunity to brief the Committee on departmental business plans for 2014-15, including the departmental priorities and progress against those priorities. Before I focus on the business plan and what it aims to achieve over the course of the year, with your indulgence it would be useful to step back a bit, reflect and take pride in what has already been achieved. Considering the size of DCAL in terms of budget and numbers of staff, I believe it has contributed well in excess of what it would be rationally expected to do.

As the members will be more than aware, the City of Culture was a major success, not just for the city itself but for the wider north-west area, and we are not done yet. It has provided an opportunity for the city to showcase itself on an international stage and prove that it can be a significant creative and cultural hub for many years to come. DCAL now has a presence in Derry to harness opportunities and maximise the benefits resulting from the City of Culture — again, not just for the city but for the north-west.

Ravenhill, now called the Kingspan Stadium, was officially opened. It is a magnificent, world-class stadium and provides a fitting home for Ulster Rugby. Work is progressing on other stadiums, including Casement Park and Windsor Park, and I am confident that they remain on track for completion of construction by 2016. Underpinning the stadium contracts as well as the major areas of

expenditure for the Department is a desire to ensure that public spending provides as much benefit to the wider community as possible. Social clauses have been included in various contracts to ensure, for example, the employment of the long-term unemployed and the creation of apprenticeships and student placements. Some 46 projects have been supported so far this year through the creative industries innovation fund, resulting in a total of 197 projects being supported by the fund.

Lóifa continues to go from strength to strength, with over 7,500 people now committed to becoming fluent in Irish. It recently celebrated its third birthday, and I am delighted that such a large number of people recognise the richness and vibrancy of the Irish language. Over the last three years, the ministerial advisory group on the Ulster-Scots Academy has committed financial support of over £2 million to almost 70 projects, such as the Ulster-Scots education project and a range of heritage tourism projects. Over the last year, the Department has continued its commitment to actively promote equality and tackle poverty and social exclusion through the delivery of culture, arts and leisure. That clearly links to the Executive's Programme for Government vision, which, amongst other things, seeks to address inequality and reduce poverty and disadvantage.

A number of roadshows were held across the North earlier this year to provide a high-profile platform to promote the services of DCAL and its arm's-length bodies (ALBs) in tackling social and economic challenges. That has encouraged a number of groups to engage with the DCAL family, and it is hoped that further roadshows will be rolled out later this year.

The message on poverty and social exclusion has been fully embedded in the Department and its ALBs, and even greater efforts have been made in targeting our resources towards areas that are experiencing inequalities and suffering from greatest needs. As an example, Sport NI, through its Activ8 programmes, has targeted schools in areas of greatest need to encourage children to participate in physical activity. Libraries NI, through the Health in Mind programme, has promoted positive mental health through reading and learning. Museums have provided free admission for 5,000 households in hard-to-reach areas. The Ulster Council of the GAA has recruited 11 long-term unemployed people to deliver an eight-week programme, which is involved in gaining qualifications and coaching opportunities.

Under the Executive's Together: Building a United Community (T:BUC) initiative, DCAL is responsible for delivering a cross-community sports programme, which is one of seven headline actions contained in T:BUC. Work is progressing on the implementation of the programme, and funding has been secured to run a pilot programme. All this activity demonstrates the major role that my Department plays not only in society but in helping to progress the work of the Executive and helping to fulfil its commitments.

In addition to progressing our Programme for Government commitments to promoting equality, tackling poverty and social exclusion, our business plan contains a focus on making culture, arts and leisure more accessible, promoting and supporting our cultural identity in lifelong learning, and excellence in service delivery.

While I am conscious of the potential impact that budget reductions can have on programmes, staff and services, I will continue to ensure that funding is matched to the departmental priorities, and my officials and I will work closely with stakeholders. I am mindful of the present challenges, but we can be proud of what has been achieved thus far. In my opinion, DCAL has enriched our cultural and sporting landscape and has had a positive impact on people from all communities, ages and backgrounds.

I am happy to take questions. I am sure the Chair will realise that I cut a lot of that short because I am sure that he would much prefer to spend time on asking questions and getting answers.

The Chairperson (Mr McCausland): Thank you very much, Carál. Obviously, the big pressure on you is finance. Does the Department have an overarching strategy for prioritising things to deal with the cuts that you are faced with?

Ms Ní Chuilín: Thank you for the question. I do have an overarching strategy. As the Chair will know — I nearly said, "as the Minister will know" — even from his previous life, particularly given the financial situation that we are all currently facing but even just going through monitoring round processes, it is important to make sure that we prioritise certain aspects of work in the DCAL family to bring it forward, particularly given that, in the past, small amounts of money have made a huge impact.

As members will know, we are having an Executive meeting today, but from previous meetings and even from yesterday, I think the Executive are trying to take a can-do attitude and a collective approach to looking at our financial situation. From my end, it is really important that we look at groups and areas of work within the DCAL family that have, in recent times, received small amounts of money but have had a big impact. It is important, and it will have a long-term impact. It is not short term, and some of it is not even medium term, but it will have a longer-term impact. It is really important that we look at that with a view of trying to protect it as best possible. That has been cascaded to the ALBs as well.

The Chairperson (Mr McCausland): I appreciate the point that a small amount of money makes a difference, and you are getting value for money. Is there an overarching strategy with a set of criteria that will be applied for prioritisation?

Mr Peter May (Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure): When we are looking at the in-year position, it is very hard to make in-year cuts on a strategic basis because you end up making savings in the areas where it is easiest to make savings. At the moment, as you will know, there is no clarity about the final level of cut that is to be applied. The Executive have not yet reached a consensus on that, but we are doing work looking ahead to 2015-16 to try to understand what plans our arm's-length bodies would have in the event of various scenarios. We are looking at a scenario-based approach. On the basis of that, we will put something to the Minister to enable her to take decisions about how best to move that forward, but the key thing is that we will start with our Programme for Government commitments. The Minister has said that very clearly. Promoting equality and tackling poverty and social exclusion is a priority that applies to the Department and all its arm's-length bodies. Those are the areas that we will look to prioritise as we go forward.

Mr Dunne: Thanks, Minister, and your officials for coming today. In relation to the arm's-length bodies, which I understand will be subject to cuts, how can you ensure that the same level of cuts are applied across all the bodies?

Ms Ní Chuilín: As I said at the outset and Peter repeated, the percentage that we are expecting the ALBs to cut still has not been decided on, but the ALBs are very clear about honouring not just the Programme for Government commitments but the priorities around making sure that inclusion is realised as best possible.

As the Member is aware, DCAL is the smallest Department in the Executive, so a 5%, 1% or whatever per cent cut to my Department has a bigger-reaching impact than it would to a bigger spending Department. However, the ALBs, some of which receive more money than others, have been in the business of prioritising what work they know has a greater impact.

On the basis of that, I trust the judgement and the propositions that they will bring forward on the basis of not only honouring the Programme for Government commitments but making sure that they honour the commitments that they have made about the business that they need to do. It is not a case of applying cuts across the board to all the ALBs in the same fashion. They know that they have to make efficiencies, and members are aware that we are in very serious and challenging times. I have a good working relationship with all the ALBs, and I am looking forward to seeing what they bring forward, but, already, we have started that process. In fact, members will be aware that 2015-16 is zero-based, so, in preparation for that, they had to bring forward key areas of work that they knew needed to be funded. So, that process had already begun in DCAL well before we were in this financial situation and before this financial situation became more acute. We will just wait on the outcome of decisions around finances.

Mr Dunne: What about your priorities as Minister? Will they influence how the cuts will be subjected?

Ms Ní Chuilín: We need to make sure that people who are furthest removed from services are not more greatly impacted. I know that you have representatives from the libraries in later, but even with sports and arts ALBs, there is a lot in the media at the minute around cuts to arts funding, which is really events funding. When we spend small amounts of money on sports, particularly in working-class areas, and provide social inclusion opportunities, in the main for young men but not exclusively, it has proven to go a long way. It has helped to lever in other bits of money from other Departments, bodies and agencies. I will endeavour to work with the ALBs where examples like that are visible in the proposals that they bring forward.

Mr Dunne: Would the likes of sport, libraries –

The Chairperson (Mr McCausland): Gordon, I congratulate you on your ability to break the rule, but it was one question each.

Mr Dunne: Is that it?

The Chairperson (Mr McCausland): You may get a chance later on.

Mr Dunne: Thanks, Chair. Thanks, Minister.

The Chairperson (Mr McCausland): For those who were just a little bit late, we are trying to keep it to one question —

Mr Dunne: This is a terrible Committee.

The Chairperson (Mr McCausland): — and then we will go round a second time.

Ms Ní Chuilín: Oh, right. OK.

Mr D Bradley: Maidin mhaith.

Ms Ní Chuilín: Maidin mhaith.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh maith agat as an chur i láthair a rinne tú. Thank you very much, Minister, for the presentation. Can I ask you about the languages strategies? I see in the document that you have a commitment to the draft Irish language Act and bringing forward the two strategies — the Irish language and the Ulster-Scots strategy. Given the current financial situation, will there be resources to enact the strategies?

Ms Ní Chuilín: Thank you very much for the question, a Dhominic. I know that this is going to sound offensive, but I will not apologise for it. When we are in stringent financial times, there is a tendency to look at some functions in DCAL as it is seen as the easiest option. Language, arts, culture, sport, museums and libraries and all the rest should not be seen as something that you do in your spare time. It is a right rather than a luxury.

I am aware that all the other Departments are conscious of commitments that they are bringing forward. However, we are currently finalising the translation on the Irish language and the Ulster-Scots culture and heritage language strategies. We have already been round Executive colleagues. We will go back again, and I will certainly be a strong advocate to ensure that funding for those strategies is realised because there has been so much expectation built up in communities, and the feedback on the consultations has been very good. It has been very realistic. It is not just people feeding in because they think that it is what a certain political party wants them to say; it is based on their experience on the ground. It would be a great shame if people abdicated their duty — I believe that it is a duty — to fulfil their commitments to the language strategies.

Mr Ó hOisín: Go raibh maith agat, a Chathaoirligh. Gabhaim buíochas duit, a Aire, do do fhoireann agus do na hoifigigh sa Roinn as ucht na hoibre atá déanta agaibh go dtí an pointe seo. Thank you, Minister, for being here and for the work that you have done to date. There has been a lot of speculation in the past week in particular about funding around cultural events and what have you, and there is quite a bit of fear out there, particularly in my neck of the woods. Nearly all the great yearly events that have taken place up there are in some way being threatened or rumoured to be threatened. What stage are the Department's discussions at with the likes of DETI, NITB, Invest NI and others?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the member for his kind words and his question. I found out about the situation about funding from tourism to events on the news, which was regrettable. I was in the city of Derry on Saturday and passed a rally where I was actually getting blamed on the cuts, which was —

Mr Ó hOisín: News to you.

Ms Ní Chuilín: Absolutely, but I think that the question has been asked, and I am not in a position to answer it. Funding for events seems to have been threatened, if not withdrawn, and it seems to be for

smaller cultural events, which, going back to questions that have been asked, have a big impact. That is totally regrettable.

On Monday, Members asked me questions about it, and I heard the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment say that she regrets it. However, the question still remains about some of the bigger cultural and sporting events. I am not too sure what the position is with those, but it would be a great shame if big sporting events are protected and small cultural ones are not. I want to put that on the record. Once the October monitoring round has been completed, I will encourage discussions between Minister Foster and me about what steps we take and where we go next. I have no doubt that officials will do similar.

Ms McCorley: Go raibh maith agat, a Chathaoirligh. Go raibh maith agat, a Aire, agus go raibh maith ag do oifigigh as teacht anseo leis a chur i láthair seo a dhéanamh. Thank you, Minister, for coming here with your officials to give us a presentation this morning. I will follow on from Dominic's question. The Irish language, as you know, is a very vibrant, growing sector, but it has suffered greatly from underinvestment over decades. It also suffers from the failure of others to fulfil their commitments under various agreements, such as the Good Friday Agreement, St Andrews, Hillsborough and, particularly, the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages. We spoke yesterday to Lord Hall about the BBC's lack of commitment towards the language: particularly when you examine the investment in Scots Gaelic and Welsh, the investment in Irish is minimal. It is very stark, and he acknowledged that. Where do you see your power and your commitment to doing what you can do? I refer to Líofa and the support for the Gaeltacht quarter. How important is that?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the member for her question. I think it is very important — you are right; it is in response to the answer that I gave to Dominic — that people do not see language as the easy option, but, unfortunately, it has been the case. Although you did not ask it, I will refer to it because I was asked about it again on Monday. The Government's commitments to international agreements need to be honoured. That is the first thing. I am conscious of the fact that, even from your experience of Líofa, which is as cross-community, through the community, around the community, part of the community as you will get. I am working with it and meeting people from our constituency and your constituency — from the Shankill, north Belfast and east Belfast — who are involved in Líofa, and that is the way that it should be. It is good to see.

I have spoken and intend to speak to members of the British Government. I have met Minister Vaizey on the extension of broadcasting funds, for example, and have spoken about the fact that, when it comes to the Irish language and Ulster-Scots broadcast funds, there needs to be longer sustainability. Training and employment opportunities for the local television and production sector within the broadcast funds is an example, but the BBC, in my opinion, still has some way to go.

I also had a positive meeting with Lord Hall yesterday, and I can see that we are working with someone who gets what we are trying to do here. I also see the vibrancy in the Gaeltacht quarter. While it is based in west Belfast, it is not a west Belfast project. There is no other place like it on this island. The potential for lifelong learning, education and employment is thriving in the quarter and looking at hubs across the North, both for the Irish language and for Ulster Scots. Again, it all depends on money. Will I be a strong advocate and a champion? I absolutely will. I am determined, where possible, to ensure that people who have not received the investment that they are entitled to are not further disadvantaged by our current financial situation.

Mr McMullan: Thank you, Minister, for your presentation. I am sure that you will agree that the major sporting events here such as the forthcoming golf open are vital not only to our economy but as a selling item for tourism to encourage more people from outside to come here. Do you agree that it is vital that we keep those things going and encourage them and be more involved in them?

Ms Ní Chuilín: Certainly. People are using the golf opens as an example to make a point. The money that is going into the golf opens and that has gone in previously highlights what we do well here, which is provide a world-class stage and world-class opportunities around sport and culture.

There are also the North West 200 and the Cookstown 100 — you can name a few of the sporting events. The World Police and Fire Games; the Giro; the Olympic and Paralympic Games torch relays. There was certainly a big impact on our tourism product. We need to ensure that that is built upon and increased.

I heard something on the radio this morning. I was at culture night in Belfast, and it was a brilliant success. For local traders in that vicinity and in the city centre of Belfast, as an example, one contributor this morning said that the money that was spent in one night was what their father's business would have received over a week and a half. So even from a local economy point of view, we need to try to protect events, whether they be big, medium or small, as best as possible, because not only do they help tourism but they help a struggling small business sector.

In respect of aspiration and inspiration, when we have big events, they inspire budding sporting athletes and young people, as well as people who are not so young, to become involved and become active. When we have opportunities missed, it is really difficult to reinstate and recapture those opportunities and that aspiration. I know that we are under huge financial challenges, but it is important that we bear in mind that if we cut one aspect, it will have a ripple impact on many others.

Mr Hilditch: Chair, I have two or three questions, but I will not test your patience. Minister, you are aware of the argument being put forward on a number of occasions, both here and in the Chamber, in relation to community sports hubs. Everybody has identified it as a way forward from basic social inclusion for the young, the elderly, the disabled, the disadvantaged and whatnot. Has the Department carried out any work in relation to trying to move forward towards the Scottish model? We had the opportunity to go and look at the advantages of that. Has anything been done at this stage in relation to that?

Ms Ní Chuilín: Thank you for your question. I met the Scottish Minister and received some paperwork and some background information. We have an understanding that that work will be continued. I had meetings as part of the Commonwealth Games and had some first-hand experience of what those hubs look like. I talked to some volunteers and people like you, who coach the under-12 soccer team. They were the Clyde-siders, and they were involved in the Commonwealth Games.

So there is a lot of talk and a lot of support for the Scottish model. We are exploring that, and I know that Sport NI is doing the same. There are challenges around whether you do a couple of big hubs, and, if you do that, what funding do you have left for the smaller community-based developmental work that will lead on to that? I think that discussion is still ongoing. I would like to see a complexion of both.

I have had discussions with the Education Minister around using schools to contribute towards community and sports hubs. There are guidelines around the usage of schools in that. Rather than waiting to see what money we have or what money we are going to get, there are things that we can do in the meantime. While they may be interim projects, it is not to say that they will not be part of a bigger group of a community hub programme in the future.

So I have seen some of the community hubs. I have spoken about it, I have met the Scottish Government, and I intend to continue those meetings in the future. I know that Sport NI has done the same and will continue to do so. It is something that we need to conclude on before we settle on what the next CSR will look like, but it is important that Departments and bodies talk to each other about what we can do collectively as well.

Mr Hilditch: And funders as well. Some people will fund community projects, but they will not fund sport or the arts.

Ms Ní Chuilín: Absolutely.

Mr Hilditch: If you bring all those things together under the one roof and bring people out of their silos, it will start bringing money together.

Ms Ní Chuilín: Chair, with your indulgence, we have spoken about this issue before, particularly with regard to opportunities with the new super-councils, DSD, the Department of Health, and Sport NI and DCAL. It is important that the small investments that we can bring collectively if we put our heads together mean that some projects will work.

Mr B McCrea: What view do you take on pension reform and whether that will have an impact on the voluntary sector or on your arm's-length bodies?

Ms Ní Chuilín: Do you have a specific question?

Mr B McCrea: When we were down at Waterways Ireland, it was mentioned that it had to make considerable provision, which was eating into its capital. I think that it went up by about €1 million a year. So am I right in saying that that will have an impact on its budget?

People in voluntary organisations, whom you seem to rely on a lot in your sector, will now have to take their pension on the balance sheet. Many trustees will not accept that because there is personal liability.

Ms Ní Chuilín: Arthur, do you want to talk about Waterways Ireland?

Mr Arthur Scott (Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure): The North/South pension arrangements for Waterways Ireland are the same as they are for every body. The pension profile has shifted in Waterways Ireland. The two sponsor Departments are working with Waterways Ireland to see how best to manage the pressure on its finances. The Minister referred to where the priorities lie with regard to where funding is allocated. Over the past two financial years, the level of efficiencies sought from Waterways Ireland by the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (DAHG) exceeded the minimum efficiency levels that were set out in the finance guidance agreed by both Finance Ministers, so that has put an added pressure on Waterways Ireland. In addition, Waterways Ireland has, over its lifetime, considerably expanded the inland waterway network. So it is a combination of those pressures. The chief executive and her team are working through the options as to how those pressures can be managed with the available resources. The Minister continues to make her position clear on the imposition of efficiencies of the minimum that is set out in the guidance, which brings added pressure to the body.

Mr B McCrea: Her position is untenable.

I have a follow-up question, because that was a Civil Service answer, if Arthur does not mind my saying so. I am telling you that the information is that pension provision in Waterways Ireland goes up €1 million, €2 million and €3 million. It is unsustainable. It is not about efficiencies. It is a really large number. I want to know what concrete proposals the Department has for dealing with that.

Mr Scott: At the start of my answer, I outlined that the pension arrangements for the North/South bodies are that the pension liabilities are to be met by the bodies from their resource budgeting. Therefore, if your pension costs are going up for whatever reason — in Waterways Ireland, there are particular reasons to do with the age profile why that has increased — it is on the management team to come up with options as to how to make the best use of available resources. The two sponsor Departments are aware of this and have been working with Waterways Ireland to find a solution.

The Chairperson (Mr McCausland): We are doing well for time, so I will give people a second chance. If anyone has asked a question and wants to ask another, please indicate. We will start going round again now.

Mr Dunne: Minister, even in today's discussions where priorities are concerned, there has been quite a strong emphasis on languages. As a new member, I see a risk that language bodies may get a higher priority than other arm's-length bodies. The cuts may hit areas other than languages, where you seem to have a strong emphasis.

Ms Ní Chuilín: Previous discussions have been varied. This morning, maybe there has been focus on languages because of the nature of the questions that were asked. That is not to say that it is my main focus.

I want to make this totally clear: my concern, particularly with Foras na Gaeilge and the Ulster-Scots Agency, is that the proposed efficiencies that Peter explained very clearly mean that we were asked to go above and beyond what had already been agreed by both Finance Departments. From my point of view, that would have a greater and more lasting impact on the Ulster-Scots Agency in particular. It would mean that parts of its work would not be viable at all, which would have a detrimental impact on it. That is not to say that I am taking different approaches to the language bodies and the ALBs; it is simply that there are different pressures, requests and demands. You cannot compare the all-Ireland bodies to the situation up here. The approach that we were asked to take was completely different. I will continue to argue that the efficiencies agreed by both Ministers and both Finance Departments should stand.

As I said, the ALBs have been working for some time almost on a zero-based budgeting approach, so they are already aware of the amount of money they had to spend annually and of the Programme for Government commitments and departmental priorities. They embraced and welcomed those opportunities not only to do what they do best but to do things differently, which would bring more people across their thresholds. It is regrettable that they now have to look at what they prioritise, but that responsibility comes with huge public investment, and they are best placed to bring forward proposals that will not only steer them through the current financial times but set out the direction in the new CSR, certainly for 2015-16, which, as I said, is zero-based budgeting for all of them.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh maith agat arís. The information from Libraries NI is that, when all cuts, efficiencies and so on come together, there could be a budget reduction of between 10% and 14%. Is the window for bids totally closed now for the October monitoring round, or is there still an opportunity to make a bid? If so, will you consider making a bid that could enable libraries to operate without the reduction in hours that they are facing?

As a follow-up to Gordon's point, if there is a reduction from this Administration to the Foras na Gaeilge budget, would that not have a knock-on effect?

The Chairperson (Mr McCausland): It is interesting how that relates to libraries. *[Laughter.]*

Mr D Bradley: It is all about funding. Would that have a knock-on effect on the funding provided by the Government in Dublin?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I am going to ask Peter to answer the question on libraries.

Mr May: The figures that you quoted for libraries are not the figures for the in-year 2014-15 position. As accounting officer, I have asked Libraries NI to prepare to make 4-4% savings and to set out how it will make savings of up to 6%, subject to what the Executive might decide. The 10% to 14% figure is the planning assumption for which I have asked it to develop scenarios for 2015-16. The principle is that, when the Executive have decided that an area is not to be protected — DCAL is not protected — we cannot simply bid to have the cuts reversed, otherwise everybody would be in that place, and you would end up never being able to make a decision. So, any bids that will be made will be for specific things that are outside the scope of the normal budgetary process.

Ms Ní Chuilín: As for the funding for Foras na Gaeilge and the rest — I admire your ingenuity — I repeat that I am trying to honour the pot of money that we received for Foras na Gaeilge and the Ulster-Scots Agency as best and respectfully as I possibly can. I have no control over what the Irish Government have not done. It is disappointing that they have decided to cut back on languages as opposed to taking the efficiency from Waterways Ireland. That is their business. The commitment and the portfolio that I received for funding for Foras and for the Ulster-Scots Agency remain the same.

The Chairperson (Mr McCausland): Some commitments are described as inescapable. What is the definition of "inescapable"? What constitutes that?

Ms Ní Chuilín: You will know that the official definition of inescapable refers to things that you are contractually obligated to. The grading goes from "inescapable" to "high priority" to "priority" to "essential" to "desirable". There are certainly things that are inescapable now but that will not necessarily be inescapable in the new CSR. For me, it is about what we are contractually obliged to do.

The Chairperson (Mr McCausland): That is the definition that is being used.

Ms Ní Chuilín: That is the definition that most of us, if not all —

Mr May: It is also to do with whether there is a statutory obligation on us.

Ms Ní Chuilín: Sorry, or where there is a statutory obligation — for example, disability under the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) or, I would argue, section 75.

The Chairperson (Mr McCausland): So it would be matters that are contractual or statutory.

Mr May: Nearly all our arm's-length bodies have a statutory duty under the Act that sets them up to provide a library service, a museum service —

Ms Ní Chuilín: — or sports or arts.

Mr May: It is also set out clearly that the Department is behoved to do a range of things in health and safety and a raft of issues. Those are all considered inescapable.

The Chairperson (Mr McCausland): You also mentioned section 75 issues. It would be interesting to look at what is inescapable and to see which heading it would come under.

Mr Hilditch: Given the financial situation and our local difficulties, how is the Department's structure best placed to take advantage of European funding? Do you feel that we are best structured for that? Are we missing out, or should we be doing something better?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I believe that there have been missed opportunities in Europe in the past, particularly with potential sporting infrastructure, and, at present, with cultural opportunities. We have met people in Belfast City Council, who have been quite successful in securing structural funds from Europe. We need to try to exploit that better and exploit better opportunities to lever European funds. If we could identify programmes, we could say that we need to set aside a percentage of the budget for match funding. I want better opportunities to come out of Europe.

Mr Hilditch: With the onset of the super-councils in April, could there be better linkages for European funding?

Ms Ní Chuilín: Absolutely. I do not think that any of us has the luxury of sitting back and waiting for opportunities to fall in our lap. We need to reach the point of almost being aggressive in going out and looking for potential investment.

Council areas other than Belfast — Belfast has been very successful — have complained to me in the past about Belfast's success and said that they did not have the wherewithal or the staff to lever in those investments. Hopefully, that will be corrected come April, and everyone will have an opportunity to tap into resources that they did not even know existed. I am taking the same attitude. I am asking in the arts, sports and maybe even other areas that people look to see what other opportunities we could avail ourselves of in Europe.

Ms McCorley: Go raibh maith agat arís. Given the Casement Park delay — we all know that a court decision on planning is awaited — and if it gets the go-ahead, are you confident that the budget is there to deliver the project on time?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I will be cautious about what I say about the ongoing court case. I cannot discuss the detail of it, but I think that you appreciate that. I do not want to be in contempt of any court proceedings. If there is a judgement that upholds the planning approval, I have no indication that the funds for Casement will not be there. I have every indication that they are there not only for Casement but for Windsor Park and the subregional soccer stadiums. Casement, in particular, will bring vast opportunities not only during pre-construction but during construction and post-construction. We have already entered into relationships not only with Belfast City Council but with local community and voluntary sectors and some small business sectors about how, along with DEL, we can make sure that the long-term unemployed in those areas are not looking at a great infrastructural investment but not seeing themselves as being part of it. It is really important that we are in a position to go ahead as planned very quickly. We are still within the time frame — it is tight — to have Windsor and Casement delivered by 2016.

The Chairperson (Mr McCausland): The issue was raised the other week. Has there been an update, or can we have an update, on where the court case is? Are there many more submissions to be made?

Ms Ní Chuilín: My understanding, Chair, is that we are into our final days of court. The court case has lasted longer than anyone anticipated, and I am almost afraid to say that we are in our last two days; I thought that last week, and we are still here. It appears that we are in our last days of the hearing, and I hope that it will be concluded by this time next week.

The Chairperson (Mr McCausland): Does that mean that a decision will be made?

Ms Ní Chuilín: A decision will be made in the middle to the end of November.

Mr May: Obviously, it is not for us to say when the judge will produce the outcome, but we hope that it will be done quickly.

Ms Ní Chuilín: I imagine that, because the court case lasted longer than we expected, that may have an impact on the time that the judge needs to reach a conclusion.

Mr B McCrea: Are you aware of any financial issues that threaten the continued existence of the Ulster Orchestra?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I am aware of the Ulster Orchestra's financial position, even from what I read in the media. Without going into the details — this is not disrespectful to you or the Committee — I will have a meeting with the Ulster Orchestra soon. I have been aware that it has been facing financial difficulties for some time. Going by some of the recent media reports, the position goes from scary to scarier.

Mr B McCrea: Maybe you can help me a wee bit on it. I have heard from reliable sources that, if the issue is not resolved by 15 November, the Ulster Orchestra will cease to exist. Is that your understanding?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I have read the speculation in the papers, and rather than speculating about what the Ulster Orchestra is going to talk to me about, I would rather approach the meeting to hear what the Ulster Orchestra has to say. In turn, it can listen to what we have to say, on the basis of the proposals it may make. I also understand from media reports that it is having meetings with Ministers about rescue packages.

Mr B McCrea: I have one last question, Chair. It will be very short.

The Chairperson (Mr McCausland): This is a three-part question.

Mr B McCrea: I am being very efficient in my questioning. As the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, you ought to have a pivotal role. This should be your lead. I pick up what you are saying that it is unfortunate that you are reading things in the papers and suchlike. I really urge you to take what I think is your rightful position of taking command of the situation to see what can be done. After you have had meetings, you might let us know how you are getting on.

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank you for your questions and for your opinion. You are right: I am the Minister with responsibility for culture, arts and leisure. However, as for taking my rightful place, the Member needs to be aware that the issue for me is — it is curious that he talks about big yachts and big orchestras, so you just wonder who he talks to —

Mr B McCrea: It was the same reception at the BBC as you were at.

Ms Ní Chuilín: I read lots of things in the papers, and when I meet the groups that are linked with certain comments, more often than not they are not responsible for those comments at all. To be fair to the orchestra, I understand that it is in a financial situation that is concerning for it, but I also want to wait and hear what its representatives have to say rather than relying on what I read in the paper. No disrespect to you, but I would rather rely on that than on what your very well-placed sources have to say.

Mr B McCrea: On a point of order, Chair. Is it in order for me as a member to ask questions about the Ulster Orchestra? The Minister seems to have taken some exception to the fact that I am asking about the Ulster Orchestra. Someone spoke to me about this yesterday, and I thought that it would be appropriate to raise the issue today, given that there is a date of 15 November.

The Chairperson (Mr McCausland): Indeed, representatives of the Ulster Orchestra spoke to a number of people yesterday.

Mr B McCrea: Indeed.

Mr Ó hOisín: I know that our next presentation is from Libraries NI, and a number of us have been lobbied by management, staff, unions and others. This is a general question. Notwithstanding inescapability, commitments or priorities, how best can the proportionality of any funding for ALBs be wheeled out in the time to come?

Ms Ní Chuilín: You are due to receive a delegation from Libraries NI, and it is really up to the libraries. They know what they need to do, and it is up to them to come forward with proposals on how they are going to meet their core business with their funding portfolio. I am very sympathetic to the libraries' work, which I appreciate and value, certainly their work with other Departments. However, in the first instance, the libraries need to answer those questions. I will meet Libraries NI and its staff site representatives in due course. I have met them and will continue to meet them.

Mr Ó hOisín: What about other ALBs?

Ms Ní Chuilín: It is the same for other ALBs. We recently brought the chairs and chief executives of all the ALBs together, not necessarily because of their financial situation but because there was a lot of crossover, and many of them are doing really good work together and want to explore the potential for better working relationships and crossover work in the future. All the other ALBs have been given a funding portfolio and have been asked to prioritise the efficiencies that have been proposed.

Chair, if you do not mind — sorry, I will keep it to the end.

The Chairperson (Mr McCausland): OK.

Mr McMullan: I have a very light-hearted question.

Ms Ní Chuilín: Perish the thought.

Mr McMullan: The success of the Giro d'Italia and the upsurge in cycling adds to the better health of young people. All around the country, you can see that it gives them a really good focus. Are we pointing towards the Tour de France? That is the big question out there.

Ms Ní Chuilín: It is a big question, and, in fairness to you, you need to ask the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment that question. The image of the horses galloping along the beach parallel to the cyclists in the member's constituency has circulated worldwide. Certainly, as a colleague of the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, I am keen to ensure that some of those big world-class events are here on our shores. I believe that it helps the tourism product and local businesses. I also believe that it helps people who are involved in sport, culture and the arts to find new ways to get involved in events. Therefore, they do have a huge impact across the board.

The Chairperson (Mr McCausland): I will pick up on a point that you made earlier about free admission to museums for people from disadvantaged areas. I was not aware of that. Obviously, it is not the Ulster Museum because it is free anyway, but it includes the Ulster American Folk Park and the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum. Will you give me some detail on the extent of that and over what period it happened, or even give me an outline or send some information?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I can certainly send you information. We asked the museums — we asked all the ALBs, but you asked about museums — to look at ways of trying to ensure that we give opportunities to people who normally may never have thought about going to a museum or went to them on a school trip, when it rained or whatever, to start to use museums a bit more.

Museums provide opportunities for free admission for 2,500 households from the top 20% of areas of multiple deprivation. The member will know that that includes rural areas and areas outside the top 10% Looked-after children and children in care, for example, were offered an opportunity to experience a night at the museum. That was free, and it was important that, when I was looking at bids, particularly in monitoring rounds, I asked the ALBs, "If you had an opportunity to do something completely different in addition to what you are doing already, what would it look like?" In fairness to the museums, they made proposals such as that. Proposals like that will ensure not only that people come back to a museum but that those who would never have thought about going to a museum in

the first instance will definitely return. It is important that museums are given support and continue to do that.

The Chairperson (Mr McCausland): Thank you. I gathered that there was something else that you wanted to say as your final comment.

Ms Ní Chuilín: Yes. Are there no other questions?

The Chairperson (Mr McCausland): No, I think that we have —

Mr Dunne: We are not allowed.

The Chairperson (Mr McCausland): No, we have gone through the list completely.

Ms Ní Chuilín: I think that one of your colleagues said that they were not allowed, so I do not want to cause anarchy in your Committee on my first appearance here with you in the Chair. That would be just too much.

The Chairperson (Mr McCausland): We have the time so we could, of course, get some more questions.

Ms Ní Chuilín: Yes, surely. *[Laughter.]* Well, I —

The Chairperson (Mr McCausland): I think that there was something that you were —

Ms Ní Chuilín: First, in response to Basil McCrea: I am not avoiding questions, but I will not answer questions based on speculation. I have been a member of Committee. I am aware of your powers to call people and papers, and I am included in that. I do not want to be disrespectful, but, equally, I think that it is disrespectful to the organisation that you asked about to comment on speculation. I want to give them their place and be fair to them, and that goes for everything else. There are things in the media about all sorts of stuff that people ask me to comment on. When I do not give the answer that they would like, they probably feel as if I am avoiding the question or ducking out. That is not the case. To be respectful to the member, that is not the case at all.

I am equally conscious that there are unhelpful things in the media about cuts, particularly to the arts and to cultural and sporting events. However, I will do all that I can, because I firmly believe in the power of arts and of sports in particular. I have seen and experienced small amounts of money going a long way. I want to do my best to ensure that that happens, but it is important that we get into conversations that have outcomes, so that it is not all about process but about having outcomes. It is regrettable that you sometimes see things in the media that leave people with added uncertainty.

Finally, with the indulgence of the member and the Chair, when we conclude all the discussions on the October monitoring round, we are happy to provide details to the Committee. Indeed, if there are questions about the issues that were raised today on which members want further information, I will do my best to deliver them. If the Committee wants to ask me in writing, I am happy to do my best to answer those as well.

The Chairperson (Mr McCausland): I spoke to you the other day about getting a briefing on some issues, and you mentioned the strategy. Do you want to comment on that today or keep it for another time?

Ms Ní Chuilín: You could keep it for another time, but, if within the next fortnight we feel that there is further follow-up information regarding some of the issues raised today, we are certainly happy to provide it. Are you talking about the language strategies?

The Chairperson (Mr McCausland): No, the arts.

Ms Ní Chuilín: Yes, the arts and cultural strategy. I am happy to bring forward to the Committee details of the terms of reference, the consultation dates and, hopefully, what form those consultations will take. Is that fair enough?

The Chairperson (Mr McCausland): That is fine at this stage. Thank you.

Ms Ní Chuilín: Thank you.