



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Finance and Personnel

OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

June Monitoring Round: DFP Briefing

29 May 2013

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Committee for Finance and Personnel

June Monitoring Round: DFP Briefing

29 May 2013

Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mr Daithí McKay (Chairperson)
Mr Dominic Bradley (Deputy Chairperson)
Mrs Judith Cochrane
Mr Leslie Cree
Ms Megan Fearon
Mr Paul Girvan
Mr John McCallister
Mr David McIlveen
Mr Mitchel McLaughlin
Mr Adrian McQuillan
Mr Peter Weir

Witnesses:

Ms Preeti Miller	Department of Finance and Personnel
Ms Brigitte Worth	Department of Finance and Personnel

The Chairperson: I refer members to the written briefing from the Department on the June monitoring round. I advise members that the Department has not submitted any additional bids or declared any reduced requirements in this monitoring round. Members may wish to consider whether any queries that they have could be addressed in writing. If they feel that an oral session is required, we certainly have that option.

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin: I have a question. Is the situation changed by the Minister's announcement yesterday in relation to Narrow Water, given that there is an additional sum of money there?

The Chairperson: We could call the officials forward; they are present.

You are very welcome, Brigitte and Preeti.

Ms Brigitte Worth (Department of Finance and Personnel): Effectively, the way in which European funding is dealt with is slightly different in that we do not necessarily need to bid for it. It is held at the centre in a specific pot of money and, once projects are accepted, it will be allocated to us, so the funding will be made available. Whether that is put into our budget as part of June monitoring or whether we will do it as part of October monitoring will be a technical issue. Effectively, the project can go ahead. If we are not able to get the money technically adjusted into our baseline in June monitoring, it will follow in October.

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin: That is the answer I wanted to hear.

The Chairperson: One other point that I was going to raise in writing was the Abdulla Group judgement. There is reference to the £2 million pressure. Can you outline what that will entail?

Ms Worth: I cannot give you too much detail on that.

The Chairperson: Why not? *[Laughter.]*

Ms Worth: The legal negotiations are ongoing. We are saying that, depending on the outcome, there may be a liability, so we in the Department have proactively looked for resources so that the funding would be available should it be required, but it is not at this stage. One thing I can say about the £2 million is that it is not the right number.

The Chairperson: Is it higher or lower?

Ms Worth: I do not know.

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin: Is it not described in the Department's briefing as being inescapable?

Ms Worth: Whatever the figure turns out to be will be inescapable. We are trying to put some money there so that the Department is ready to deal with whatever the inescapable figure turns out to be.

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin: Obviously, something has changed as a result of the Abdulla ruling. If you do not have the information today, could we be informed as to whether that represents a group of civil servants who had a grievance now being brought into the loop, and why; and how it affects those who, so far, have not had a response?

Ms Worth: I think you might have received some briefing on that from our colleagues in corporate HR but, certainly, if there is any further information that you require, we can provide it.

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin: Yes. Something has changed, and I think we would all be interested to know.

Ms Worth: Nothing has changed in the very recent past. We are really just looking at a sensible way to approach this issue in the 2013-14 year, but I am certainly happy to provide a written briefing.

The Chairperson: Are members content?

Members indicated assent.

The Chairperson: Brigitte and Preeta, thank you.