



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Justice

OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

Withdrawal of Funding for the RUC George
Cross Widows' Association:
RUC George Cross Widows' Association

2 July 2014

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Committee for Justice

Withdrawal of Funding for the RUC George Cross Widows' Association: RUC George Cross Widows' Association

2 July 2014

Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mr Paul Givan (Chairperson)
Mr Raymond McCartney (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Sydney Anderson
Mr Stewart Dickson
Mr Tom Elliott
Mr William Humphrey
Mr Seán Lynch
Mr Alban Maginness
Ms Rosaleen McCorley
Mr Patsy McGlone
Mr Jim Wells

Witnesses:

Ms Danna Cochrane	RUC George Cross Widows' Association
Ms Iona Meyer	RUC George Cross Widows' Association
Ms Janice Taylor	RUC George Cross Widows' Association

The Chairperson: I welcome representatives of the RUC George Cross Widows' Association.

Ms Janice Taylor (RUC George Cross Widows' Association): I am the chairperson of the association. Our treasurer is Danna Cochrane, and our secretary is Iona Meyer. Apologies that Alwyn Baird is not with us today.

The Chairperson: You are very welcome to the meeting. The session will be reported by Hansard, so a transcript will be published in due course. You can outline to the Committee the issues that you want to bring to our attention. We are aware through correspondence of some of them. Feel free to speak to the Committee, and then members will, I am sure, have questions.

Ms Taylor: The background to this goes back to April 2013, when the previous committee submitted an application for funding. The committee was promised funding of £38,000 for the year and that the April drawdown would go through, as usual, using bankers' automated clearing services (BACS). That would have been £19,000 paid in April and October. We were also promised four years' funding, probably at a reduced rate, of which we have had only two. We have been filling in forms, originally for funding for the widows' association, and then, midway through, the goalposts were moved, and we had to apply for funding for a consultant to teach us how to gain funding from other agencies. Danna is the best person to talk you through this.

Ms Danna Cochrane (RUC George Cross Widows' Association): I was the treasurer in the last year that Phyllis Carrothers was chair. On 22 April, we had a meeting with the Department of Justice (DOJ). The minutes of the meeting, under finance, show:

"A stewardship statement was received. It was agreed to use the same format as last year for the end of year accounts. The April drawdown would go ahead, as usual, using BACS."

We were also informed at that meeting that our status was under review. The minutes state that, following consideration, the committee:

"had determined its classification as being in the private sector."

They further state:

"this may have an impact on how their grant is assessed and awarded. An application for grant may have to be made which adheres to departmental objectives and criteria."

Finally, it stated that we would be informed, "when further detail available."

In May, we were summoned to a further meeting, and the gentleman who headed that meeting was Tim Logan. He told us that, under the new classification, the association was no longer entitled to any funding. We said that, in the four-year period for which we had been promised funding, responsibility had moved from the Northern Ireland Office (NIO) to the DOJ, and that appeared to be where the difficulties had arisen. Had justice not been devolved to Stormont, we would not be sitting here today. That is more or less how it stands. We told Mr Logan that our funding was part of Patten. His reply was, "Well, under Patten, anything can be changed". My thoughts on that are that the PSNI should be very careful, as the funding was a recommendation under Patten, too.

We have gone through the process. I have no minutes of our subsequent meetings with the DOJ because they were not provided to us. However, as Janice said, we have filled in forms. Initially, we were to fill them in as widows looking for funding directly for the organisation. Then, it was changed, and we were told that we had to get a consultant. We were allocated up to £10,000 to do that. Subsequently, the DOJ lost our application forms, which were emailed and sent in hard copy. We wrote to Mr Ford and asked for a meeting with him. Iona received a phone call from his aide, who said that it was too near Christmas to have a meeting and that we would have it in January. We have never had the meeting. We put in a freedom of information request to find out where our emails were, but we did not receive a reply to that either.

I have covered a lot of what happened in the papers that I handed out to you.

The Chairperson: I want to clarify that last bit. You asked for a meeting with the Minister.

Ms D Cochrane: Yes.

The Chairperson: Before Christmas last year.

Ms D Cochrane: Yes.

The Chairperson: You were told that you would get one in January.

Ms D Cochrane: Yes.

The Chairperson: Yet you still have not had a meeting. You tell me that application forms have been lost. Were they for the consultant?

Ms D Cochrane: Yes, including quotes.

The Chairperson: So, initially, you were told that £10,000 was available to employ a consultant to help the organisation to submit an application for core funding.

Ms D Cochrane: Yes, but, in the April meeting, we were also told that we would get the first half year of funding, which was £19,000. That most certainly has not happened, which breaks the contract with us.

Ms Taylor: They have been very helpful. It is not a personal vendetta, and I do not want to get personal about it. They said, "We will do our best to help you fill in the form. However, we cannot fill it in for you". They said something like, "This is a shock. It has been unexpected". They mentioned that we would get some funding for the interim year, but there would not have been an interim year : if we had got the funding that the Department said would come through last April, this would be our interim year.

The Chairperson: Where has this left the association? What have the real implications been?

Ms D Cochrane: We have managed to get along this year, but one of the ways that we could treat all our widows fairly was to give them a small financial gift at Christmas. We can no longer afford to do that. The DOJ does not approve of that. That is the difference between the NIO and the DOJ. When we ran events, we always sponsored them to some extent. Now, we cannot afford to do that, and people have to pay the full amount, including for our annual dinner etc.

Ms Taylor: The National Police Memorial Day, for example, is being held in Belfast this year, which is fine. However, when it is held in England, Scotland or Wales, it makes it difficult to send representatives, and we should be represented. Another example is Remembrance Day. We do not go to the remembrance festival at the Albert Hall, but, on a Thursday in November, we attend the Field of Remembrance at Westminster Abbey and Westminster Cathedral, where wreaths are laid. These acts of remembrance are extremely important to the association and its members, who are an ageing population. Having listened to the moneys being talked about in the previous session, it makes our funding look like nothing, but it is very important. There are less able-bodied members, and it enables us to go out and keep in touch with them. We can, for example, hold a coffee morning in their neck of the woods. Although they cannot make the journey, our funding means that they can get a local taxi. At the minute, the only thing that we take from the funding is mileage. Our association is for friendship and support, but it costs money to do some of these things.

The Chairperson: How much did you get annually?

Ms Taylor: We got £38,000, with a drawdown in April and in October.

The Chairperson: How many members do you have in the association?

Ms Taylor: One member died only this morning. We have 481 members.

Ms Iona Meyer (RUC George Cross Widows' Association): You have to remember as well that we, as office bearers, are volunteers. For years, we lived in a very close community because of where we are. Things have moved on, but a lot of these ladies, because of their age and so on, still like to keep together and keep meeting. I am 24 years' widowed, and the association was a lifeline for me. Therefore, it has to keep going, but, as Janice says, these things cost money nowadays, unfortunately.

The Chairperson: I have listened to the Minister talking about this in interviews, and he seems to indicate that all that needs to happen is that an application needs to be made. I detect a willingness to fund, and his view seems to be that the issue is a technical one to do with submitting an application. That is why I want to bottom this out. You said that applications had been emailed and hard copies sent but that they have been lost. Therefore, as an association, you were prepared to put in an application.

Ms Taylor: Yes. They were done.

Ms Meyer: It is now got to the point at which some members are saying, "Is it worth doing it?". There is an element of frustration.

May I say that we did not go to the press? The press came to us. I got the phone call.

Ms D Cochrane: We are very interested to know how this was made public.

Ms Meyer: It was obviously leaked to the press. When I took a phone call for Danna, who was away at the time, I was called all sorts of things because I would not disclose any information. I was told that I was obstructive and that I was this and that, but that is fine.

Ms Taylor: I was also phoned by a member of the press who said that the RUC GC Widows' Association was being accused of refusing to fill in a form. I said that I was very uncomfortable speaking to the press. I am not feeling too wonderful about being here today, even though I am glad that we have this opportunity. However, I could not let the accusation pass, because we had done our utmost to fill in the form and had presented it in two different formats.

I reiterate what Iona is saying: we are a member of the police family, and we rely totally on volunteers. Iona works full time, and I work part time. That is roughly the way in which the whole association is run, except in the case of the very elderly members. We are not really geared up to fight bureaucracy like this. I do not even have a computer at home. We are a voluntary organisation for our members, and we are just trying to do our best. However, regardless of filling in the form, we have it in writing that, last year, we should have received our April drawdown, so where has that gone? We were also told that our funding would be there for another two years. Where has that gone?

The Chairperson: I do not know exactly how the press knew. However, one of my party's MLAs Gordon Dunne asked the Committee to look into it, and it was openly talked about at meetings. So they may have picked up from the coverage of Committee meetings that there was an issue.

I will bring in other members at this point.

Mr Humphrey: Thank you very much for being here. I appreciate that it is difficult for you, as you just said, although you are very welcome here. I will start by asking an obvious question. You are widows representing RUC officers who were murdered during the terrorist campaign.

Ms Meyer: Yes.

Mr Humphrey: I am alarmed to hear that the problems for these ladies and their organisation started during devolution. Questions need to be asked about that. It is appalling that the Minister has not managed to meet them, having said that he would do so after Christmas. It is now the start of July.

Serious questions need to be answered about why the drawdown that you were promised in writing has not been given. We as a Committee need to take that up as well. I know that Gordon Dunne raised the issue in the House yesterday.

You were promised four years' funding: £38,000 at a reduced rate. Did the Northern Ireland Office make that promise?

Ms D Cochrane: Yes.

Mr Humphrey: Two years into that came devolution.

Given what these ladies and their families have been through and that other organisations that I regard as hugely questionable are getting money from government, this is an absolute scandal.

You talk about a committee that referred to your organisation being classified as private sector. Which committee is that? Can you remind us?

Ms Taylor: We do not really know.

Ms D Cochrane: It was during the arm's-length bodies review that we were changed from public to private sector.

Ms Taylor: I would also like to say that we were not informed about it until later on, but they knew in February 2013. We should have been informed then, as well, rather than waiting until it got to this stage.

The Chairperson: Mr Humphrey, let me say something on the technical point that you raise. You may not have a copy of this yet, but the Committee got the response that it was the independent Office for National Statistics which looked at the classification of bodies and, through that, came this reclassification which is within a DFP classification assessment committee, although it goes on to say that it has no involvement in prescribing funding mechanisms that are used by DOJ.

Mr Humphrey: I am coming to that point. For me, this is the salient point. The £38,000 that you were awarded was by the Northern Ireland Office, which a national government Department, and yet, there is this correspondence which comes from the Office for National Statistics, which is a national organisation. So I think that there is a question around that whole issue. The national Government said it was fine for you to do what you were doing, but a devolved Government is challenged by the Office for National Statistics. It is bizarre.

How are your counterparts in other parts of the UK treated? How is your Scottish equivalent treated by the Scottish Government, your Welsh equivalent by the Welsh Government and English by the national Government?

Ms Meyer: Well, you have to realise immediately that, because of our history, the groups in England, Scotland and Wales are nowhere near as big as ours, but I am led to believe that they get core funding, no question.

Mr Humphrey: I accept that there was not a concerted campaign to murder police officers in England, as there was here. However, clearly they get direct funding.

Ms Meyer: As far as we are aware.

Ms Taylor: As far as we are aware.

Mr Humphrey: Given the service that was given by these ladies, their husbands and those others of the 482 members — until this morning — who have been placed in the same position through no fault of their own, in trying to protect this community, something needs to be done. This needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency by the Minister and the Department, and it is an absolute disgrace and scandal how they have been treated so far.

Mr Anderson: Thank you, ladies, for coming along to present to us this afternoon. I have read up on this, and I have spoken to my colleague Mr Dunne, who was involved in this from the outset, when he spoke to me about it from being on the Justice Committee. I have to agree with my colleague Mr Humphrey. I believe that the way this has been dealt with — I do not understand the Department — is shameful to say the least, given the amount of moneys that we are talking about, public money and everything else. I read through the timeline. In February 2013, some of you said, you were not even informed of what was happening. And then it went to April 2013, and it was a bit of a bombshell to you, that you would no longer be treated in that way; you were going into the private sector for funding arrangements.

Can I just ask you again? I have the email and the hard copy. Looking through this timeline, I can see that is it something like five months in which we are trying to find a trace of an email or a hard copy that the Department says it knows nothing about? Would it be? Am I wrong in picking this up?

Ms D Cochrane: The new application was completed on 9 January.

Mr Anderson: Danna, what about the original application or email?

Ms Meyer: But then the goalposts changed. It is the latter ones we are looking at.

Ms D Cochrane: On the 13 February 2014, and the quotations were sent with it, and on 13 March, when I raised this with some MLAs, nothing had been heard. Subsequently, the DOJ informed us that they never received it, and I have emails from *[Inaudible.]*

Mr Anderson: Who did you send that to?

Ms D Cochrane: It went to Eamon Jones.

Mr Anderson: He is saying that he never got it.

Ms D Cochrane: Yes.

Mr Anderson: Who did the hard copy then go to?

Ms D Cochrane: It went to him as well.

Mr Anderson: And he said he never got it. There have to be questions asked in this case, because it is very manageable to find emails that were maybe emailed — but hard copies? Everything seems just to have gone missing.

You were then asked about filling in forms, and you said you gave all the details but were you then told that there were not enough details and you had to keep giving more details?

Ms D Cochrane: In the first forms, yes.

Ms Taylor: In the first forms, it was as if we were filling it in, as we thought, for direct funding for the activities for the association. After a few attempts at that, they decided that we were not going down that line. We were going to apply, fill in the form for a consultant to teach us how to get continuous funding.

Mr Anderson: Why do you think that was happening and they decided to change?

Ms Taylor: Whether it is to put a step between the DOJ and where the public money is going, I do not know. I would not be very politically minded but —

Mr Anderson: In the meantime, you were short of your funding?

Ms Taylor: Yes.

Mr Anderson: You had this shortfall of funding and were trying to keep the organisation going.

Ms Meyer: Yes. We have not had any drawdowns since October 2012.

Mr Anderson: Did you explain to the departmental officials how critical it was for you to get that funding?

Ms Meyer: Yes.

Mr Anderson: What was the response?

Ms Taylor: At the start, they were using terms like, "Put in your application; this has come as a shock to you, that we need some form of funding for this interim year." It was being worded that this was going to be the last year of our money but we needed something. Then it changed, that we were going for a consultant, and we had to get tenders for a consultant.

Ms D Cochrane: Three tenders.

Ms Taylor: Three tenders. It seemed to me to be a bigger waste of time employing a consultant —

Mr Anderson: At up to £10,000.

Ms Taylor: — than giving us the money that they were willing to pay him.

Mr Anderson: Money that you could have used.

Ms Meyer: Absolutely. The amount of money we are looking for is loose change.

Mr Anderson: Exactly. That is where I am coming from.

Ms Meyer: I am employed by the Department of the Environment, so I know that that is loose change in the Government's pocket.

Mr Anderson: But they were willing to spend up to £10,000 to allow you to employ a consultant, and they were quite free about giving that but not so free about giving your funding of £38,000, or depreciation of that over the past two years. How did you feel yourselves? Did you get a feeling that you were being palmed off in some way or set to one side?

Ms Taylor: I thought they were trying to airbrush us out of history. Our argument was that if they wait long enough, we will die off anyway.

Ms D Cochrane: Given the average age of our members, 20 years will see us off the face of the earth anyway.

Ms Meyer: It is just hugely frustrating because you are trying your best to keep the people together and the memory alive, and you have been told, for £38,000, to sling your hook.

Mr Anderson: You good people, as the officers and volunteers who carry out this work, I certainly have to say that I appreciate what you do. It is not easy. Do your 481 members know exactly what is going on? Have you relayed that to them, and how do they feel about this and what they have come through over the years?

Ms Taylor: We had our AGM in May, and just over 100 members attended. We talked briefly about the funding issue. People are hurt as much as anything. Let's face it, if it had not been for the RUC, we would not be sitting where we are today. People are very frustrated. Some of the older members just say, "Let it go". We certainly never intended for this to be a slinging match. We never intended to offend the Minister, and we certainly never intended for the name of the RUC to be trailed through the papers. We would just like it settled. As I said, when you have something in writing, you think that it is going to happen. This would have been our interim year, and discussions could have gone on. We could have had things further down the pipeline and been more organised.

Mr Anderson: You feel totally let down on this.

Ms Meyer: Absolutely.

Ms Taylor: Totally let down.

Mr Anderson: I am trying to get to the feelings of the officers and the membership, because, as has already been stated, it is OK to throw out £10,000, but it is not for the sake of the pittance that we are talking about here.

I appreciate the work that you do, and I think that there has to be a solution to this. Thank you for coming along today and giving us your presentation. It has been good to hear it from you. I hope that you can continue to give that support to your members, and I have no doubt that you will.

Ms D Cochrane: Thank you.

Ms Meyer: Thank you.

Ms Taylor: Thank you.

Mr Dickson: Thank you very much for coming along today. I am sure that we would all agree that this is a situation that no one wants to be in at all and that, in recognition of who you are, the process of how funds are allocated to your organisation should be resolved. However, neither you nor the members of this Committee have any control over what government does by way of its national accounting processes. Even the Northern Ireland Assembly is subject to that. Therefore, when it hands down a particular methodology, and, in this case the particular methodology has affected the way in which you are funded, the Department of Finance and Personnel here in Northern Ireland has to abide by those rules and regulations.

It has told us here, by way of a letter, that the Department of Justice advised that its relationship with the RUC George Cross Widows' Association has changed as a result of the Department of Finance and Personnel's classification assessment and that you are now determined as being a private sector organisation. It was not the Department of Justice that said that.

Ms D Cochrane: No, we are well aware of that. I spoke to Mr Wilson, and he informed me that he had asked Mr Ford to make a case for our funding to continue in the old form and he did not do so.

Mr Dickson: So, this letter is saying to us that the only mechanism available to the DOJ is to provide funding through a grant application. What concerns me is that there seems to be, at best, a misunderstanding about how that process should have been undertaken. I am sure that the DOJ deals with many organisations that it delivers grant to, and it should not be very difficult for it to devise an appropriate application form for you to complete to set out your business case and to access those funds. For me, that should have been a seamless process for you, and I am concerned and disturbed that it was not and still is not. Let us hope that today will allow an opportunity for officials to meet you sympathetically and take you through these processes in a businesslike manner and get you to the point where your funding is appropriately paid into your back account.

I have a few questions. You said to Mr Humphrey, and I just wanted to get absolute clarity, that, as the RUC George Cross Widows' Association, you only provide services to widows of RUC officers who were murdered or affected as a result—

Ms Taylor: No —

Mr Dickson: Sorry, I am just trying to get absolute clarity. Is it all RUC widows regardless of who died in service?

Ms D Cochrane: Who died in service.

Mr Dickson: In other words, perhaps those who may have been involved in tragic accidents and things like that as well?

Ms Taylor: Yes.

Mr Dickson: I could not for one second think that you would exclude some people —

Ms Taylor: No. My husband was not murdered, but he went to work and did not come home.

Mr Dickson: Yes, I understand that. So, it is all widows.

Ms Taylor: Yes and PSNI.

Mr Dickson: That was my next question: do you cover PSNI widows as well?

Ms D Cochrane: Yes. We do not have them in our title, but we have —

Mr Dickson: You offer the same service.

Ms Taylor: We have changed our constitution twice to include them. It was originally only for PSNI widows whose husbands had previous RUC service, now that has been done away with, and we are very pleased, well, not pleased —

Mr Dickson: I know what you mean.

Ms Taylor: Nobody is happy that they are in the widows' association, but we have PSNI members.

Mr Dickson: You are all part of the one family.

Ms Taylor: Yes, of course we are.

Mr Dickson: It is very helpful to know and understand that. I have just done a crude sum there: £38,000 divided by 481 members. I take it that everybody is a member regardless of whether they want to join or not, in that sense. Do you count every widow?

Ms D Cochrane: No, we join, and we pay. After 34 years, the membership has gone up to £10 because we need the funds.

Mr Dickson: I know. On that basis, it is roughly between £70 and £80 a head. Do you have administration costs?

Ms D Cochrane: No, we do not —

Ms Taylor: Well, over the last couple of years we have put out a newsletter twice a year that puts a calendar in, just to keep some members who are housebound up to date with what is going on. For example, this will be put in.

Mr Dickson: And in all that you provide the cost of an annual dinner?

Ms Taylor: We have an annual dinner, and we try to have representatives at the Field of Remembrance and on National Police Memorial Day and where there are church services.

Mr Dickson: Presumably, that would take up the bulk of the resources that you have.

Ms Taylor: We have three main functions in the year. We have a tea dance, for want of a better phrase, in Gough Barracks in October, we have an annual dinner in February, and we try to have another function in March. For years we did a barn dance, but people are getting older, so this year we had afternoon tea at Dobbie's, which was the biggest afternoon tea that Dobbie's in the United Kingdom has ever held.

Ms D Cochrane: They had some of their managers over from England at that time, and they were thrilled.

Mr Dickson: And you pay towards some of the costs of that?

Ms Meyer: Yes, we do.

Mr Dickson: I understand that many organisations will do those sorts of things. It is important that we hear from the Department as to how this matter should be resolved, because it clearly needs to be resolved. Your organisation is not exclusive to RUC widows, as was perhaps suggested earlier, but I am heartened to know that it is open to all those, sadly, who find themselves in those circumstances. In those circumstances, then, it is important that the matter is resolved in a way in which you and the Department of Justice can have a good working relationship. You get your money; you let them know what you are doing with it; and the people to whom the small amount of money is made available deliver a service.

Mr A Maginness: I wish you well in your work. This is a very unfortunate situation, and it seems to me that bureaucracy has gone a little bit mad. I am not sure how you resolve it, but it seems to me to be a straightforward matter of getting the application in for your consultant, first, and then using that consultant to get the forms in. It also strikes me that the work you do is clearly very important for your members, but it is not rocket science or anything like that; it is straightforward stuff. It does not seem to me that you would require a very elaborate application for funding. Would that be correct?

Ms Taylor: We thought there would be a general application form for everybody.

Ms D Cochrane: We have sent this in —

Mr A Maginness: I know you have.

Ms D Cochrane: I would love to know where it went to.

Mr A Maginness: It seems to me to be something that should be solved very easily. There should not be this big deal over it. It is unfortunate that you have to come to the Committee to highlight it. I wish you well, but it seems extraordinary in the circumstances. The only thing I can say in defence of the Department of Justice is that the change in classification was imposed upon it. It is not something that the Department invented. I wish you well, and I hope that it is resolved very quickly.

Ms Meyer: Thank you.

Ms D Cochrane: Thank you.

Ms Taylor: Thank you.

Mr Elliott: You are very welcome. I have a question around the relationship with officials in the past. It appears that communications and relationships have broken down somewhat, given the loss of information. Prior to that, there were never any problems with set-ups at the NIO.

Ms Taylor: To be honest, Iona was the only one who dealt with them —

Ms Meyer: I was chairperson of the association when we were awarded the funding under Patten. There was never any difficulty with the NIO. You met its representatives once or twice a year; you produced your accounts; the money came through. It was very good. There is no question about that. Obviously, I was not chairperson when things were devolved, but I understand that, again, it was a fairly simple process. Then the classification issue arose. I am at a loss as to why we were singled out. I emphasise that I am led to believe that we are possibly the only group that was reclassified. That is a big question for me. Why us? As I said, it is a drop in the ocean. What we do, we do voluntarily. We get a bit of mileage, but, to be honest, I would forgo that if it meant that an elderly member could get out to something rather than being confined to the house.

Mr Elliott: In broad terms, the relationship was good; there were never any difficulties; cooperation was good. It is only in more recent times that there has been a breakdown in communication and cooperation.

Ms Taylor: It is also a mindset. You are asked to put in tenders for something. We think of ourselves more as a social group, almost. Obviously, putting in tenders is not beyond us, because we did it, but that is because we were applying for a consultant. I still think that it is a strange way for an organisation like us to go. It is just a completely different approach.

Mr Elliott: I appreciate that.

Mr McGlone: Thank you, ladies, for being with us today and for the work that you do for many people who find themselves in sad and difficult situations. I am going through the sequence of events. You have had administrative disasters with the Department trying to arrange things. The Patten report contains political commitment. Recommendation 88 states that:

"The Widows Association should be given an office in police premises, free of charge, and a regular source of finance adequate to run their organisation."

That is a commitment that was given, clearly because of the unfortunate and difficult need that there was at the time, and to recognise the work that was being done to support people and their families. Then we move on to when devolution took place and the DOJ undertook a review of its arm's-length bodies, of which you were one, even though, apparently, according to this, the association had never been formally classified. It went through the classification exercise, which was conducted by the Department of Finance and Personnel's classification assessment committee. It made the recommendation and notified the Department of Justice that the RUC George Cross Widows' Association had been classified as being in the private sector. That is bizarre, because you were providing an unfortunate but necessary service at that time.

Given the political commitment that there was, and which we certainly signed up for, it is not huge money. The 10 grand that they were giving you was given with the best will in the world — it was somebody trying to be helpful — but it was 10 grand that could have been part of the £38,000. Another £28,000 and you would have been there yourselves without that. It is a political question, but it is really for DOJ and DFP to revisit the situation. We will hear what the officials have to say about it,

but for £38,000 and given the role and responsibilities that have been foisted on you because of the difficult circumstances we have had, I really think that the two Ministers should have a quiet chat about in the corridor somewhere and sort it out. It should not have had to come to the Committee, but unfortunately it has. We are where we are, but I really think that colleagues in the room need to have a chat with their party colleagues elsewhere and sort it out.

The Chairperson: I know that we have. We got a 100% reassurance that the funding is nothing whatsoever to do with DFP. In fact, the letter says that. The reclassification should not have any adverse impact on the provision of funding to the body. It is entirely a matter of DOJ.

Mr McGlone: We will hear from the Department of Justice how that reclassification impacted the decision that was taken by DFP. All that I am doing is stating the facts. I am not playing politics with it.

The Chairperson: I do not think that the representatives here want to get caught up in the technical procedures.

I am thinking about that £38,000, and we have just had a briefing about £160 million.

Ms D Cochrane: Absolutely.

The Chairperson: I feel sorry for the association in that you are almost at the point of begging for something when the state should be bending over backwards to provide you with the support that is needed, rather than you having to come here and tell us about something that is so minor and that should not even be on our radar. However, it is clearly of huge significance, symbolically if nothing else, to your association and your members.

The last member who wants to ask a question is Mr McCartney.

Mr McCartney: Thank you very much for coming. I apologise for missing the beginning of your presentation. Your commitment to your work is very obvious, and you should be commended for it. It is easy to see your confusion, concerns and hurt about the process.

I think that the Chair and Patsy said it. To me, it seems nearly to be down to a lack of communication. You have raised enough questions so that, when the officials come in, we should be able to ask them the appropriate questions. It seems to me that it is — I do not want to say a technical matter, as that might sound insensitive. It is certainly about moving from a process in which there was no application to one in which there is one. We will see what the answer is to that.

The Chairperson: OK. I thank you. The officials from the Department are here, and that will allow us to ask questions. You are welcome to stay to hear the responses.

Ms Baird: Thank you very much.

Ms Taylor: Thank you very much.

Ms Meyer: Thank you very much.

Ms D Cochrane: Thank you very much.