



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for the Office of the First Minister
and deputy First Minister

OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

Review of Victims and Survivors Groups:
OFMDFM/CRC Briefing

13 June 2012

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

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Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mr Mike Nesbitt (Chairperson)
Mr Chris Lyttle (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Trevor Clarke
Mr William Humphrey
Mr Danny Kinahan
Mr Francie Molloy

Witnesses:

Ms Jacqueline Irwin	Community Relations Council
Mr Tony McCusker	Community Relations Council
Mr Fergus Devitt	Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
Mr Frank Duffy	Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

The Chairperson: We welcome Frank Duffy and Fergus Devitt from the Department, and Tony McCusker and Jacqueline Irwin from the Community Relations Council (CRC). You are all very welcome. Thank you for your patience. Who will speak?

Mr Frank Duffy (Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister): I will.

The Chairperson: We are in public session. We will take your opening remarks, Frank, and then we will move into closed session for members' questions.

Mr Duffy: Thank you, Chairman. With your permission, I will read a short statement, and then we will move to questions.

As requested by the Committee in its letter of 19 April 2012, officials are here today with colleagues from the Community Relations Council to provide an oral briefing on the spot check assurance audit of victims and survivors groups undertaken in 2011. I will provide a short background briefing.

The Committee's request centred on three areas: the amount of funding corresponding to marks 1, 2 and 3 in the exposure column of the risk assessment; the outcome of the audits; and the rationale for the decision to audit five groups. On 15 September 2010, the CRC audit committee requested that a spot check be carried out to provide assurance on the victims and survivors sector. That followed two high-profile instances of alleged fraud and irregularity in the victims sector in 2010. The approach was endorsed by the Northern Ireland Audit Office.

A business case was completed by the Community Relations Council and approved by the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister on 31 January 2011. It was then approved by the Department of Finance and Personnel on 17 February 2011 and by Ministers on 18 February 2011. The Community Relations Council carried out a risk analysis, based on four areas, on all victims groups in receipt of funding. The first area was the scale of exposure, or the amount of funding from the Community Relations Council, which was broken down as follows: more than £100,000 per annum; between £50,000 and £100,000 per annum; and less than £50,000 per annum. The next area was financial control issues. After that, it was governance issues, and the final area was the number of, or whether there were, multiple funders.

The five groups — HELP NI; South East Fermanagh Foundation; Ely Centre; Omagh Support and Self Help Group and West Tyrone Voice — were selected for audit on the basis of the available budget and the total number of groups involved. That equated to a 10% sample size. A tendering exercise was carried out through the Department of Finance and Personnel's Central Procurement Directorate (CPD). The selection panel met on 8 March 2011, and FPM Accountants was selected as the successful bidder. A final report was issued on 22 August 2011. FPM indicated that it was satisfied overall with the results of the financial verification, forensic imaging and keyword searches, and that no systemic weaknesses or areas of concern had arisen. We are happy to provide more information as the Committee sees fit.

The Chairperson: Thank you very much. If everybody is content, we will now move into closed session.