



Northern Ireland
Assembly

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

OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

Programme for Government 2011-15
Delivery Plans: OFMDFM Briefing

19 September 2012

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

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Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mr Danny Kinahan (Acting Chairperson)
Mr Chris Lyttle (Deputy Chairperson)
Ms Megan Fearon
Mr Alex Maskey
Ms Bronwyn McGahan
Mr George Robinson

Witnesses:

Mr Tony Canavan	Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
Dr Paul Geddis	Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
Mr Noel Lavery	Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
Mr Tim Losty	Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

The Acting Chairperson: I welcome Noel Lavery, Tim Losty, Tony Canavan and Dr Paul Geddis. You know the normal form.

Mr Noel Lavery (Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister): Thank you for the Committee's time. I am aware that you had a session with Denis McMahon, Henry Johnston and the team, who have central oversight for Programme for Government (PFG) monitoring, and that you discussed the commitments on their side of the house.

Our role today is to talk about the five commitments that fall under my remit. There are three on Tim's side, which are to do with Maze/Long Kesh, the One Plan and the City of Culture. Paul's work is on the European side and the Executive's 20% target for drawdown of EU funds, and Tony's work relates to the post-2015 structure.

Chair, I did not want to get tied up the process. I presume that the Committee will want to ask questions on individual targets and, perhaps, on the departmental plan. I am happy to take questions on any of those.

The Acting Chairperson: OK. Does no one else want to give a brief before you do that?

Mr Lavery: I did not want to take up the Committee's time talking about it. We can talk about the individual plans if you wish. However, I thought that it was better if we reacted to what the Committee wanted to hit us with.

The Acting Chairperson: Any questions? If we do not have any questions, would you talk us through the key actions for the delivery of —

Mr Lavery: If you are happy, we will work our way through each one. Would that be helpful?

The Acting Chairperson: I think so.

Mr Lavery: Paul, do you want to start? We will just work our way across. We will look first at the PFG commitment to facilitate the delivery of the Executive's 20% target on the increased drawdown of competitive EU funding.

Dr Paul Geddis (Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister): The 20% target was agreed by the Executive Committee. On the Committee's recommendation, it was put forward as a Programme for Government target. The overall objective over the four-year period of the comprehensive spending review (CSR) is to raise £53 million by 2014-15, and a competitive EU funds baseline for 2010-11 of £11 million has been established. The target has got off to a very good start, and year 1 progress has been reported through Assembly questions. The drawdown in year 1 was £15.8 million, which is an uplift of £2.6 million over the required annual average drawdown of £13.2 million. Our observations of the target is that it is a developmental target over the four-year period, and Departments are now seeking to broaden the range of EU funding sources that they are targeting. I can speak further if the Committee wishes.

The Acting Chairperson: Do we have any benchmark of similar countries or places of the same size to judge it against?

Mr Lavery: I will let Paul come in on that. However, the one thing that I would add — Paul said that it was a very good start — is that we sought to get an objective measure. What is competitive EU funding and what can we claim credit for in terms of drawdown? We have achieved that and got agreement to that. That is how we achieve the benchmark as regards Northern Ireland drawdown being £11 million. I am very pleased with the progress in year 1.

There is a long lead time in the drawdown of EU funding. If Tim started a framework programme 7 (FP7) project application today, he could get drawdown of funding in two years' time. Tony Canavan probably knows as much about this process as I do, given his time in the EU. There is a long lead time and a lot of resource. We are not complacent about the progress that we have made, but there is a long lead time, and we are into a long-term activity. That is why we have put extra resource into the Brussels office as well.

Paul, do you want to talk about benchmarks elsewhere?

Dr Geddis: Yes. As regards the baseline year and year 1, basically, we are looking at absolute drawdown, and there is a need to begin to look at absolute drawdown in relation to relative performance. The deputy First Minister gave that commitment in his answer to Mr Robinson's question for oral answer in the Assembly, and that work will be taken forward over the course of this year. There is work in progress with the Departments to look at per capita drawdown targets in relation to the funding streams that they have identified as supporting the Executive's European priorities. That issue is especially live at this moment.

The Acting Chairperson: I know from my time with the Department for Regional Development (DRD) that there is also an element of funds suddenly becoming available because they were not been spent elsewhere. Is there an element of that in this, where you have to be ready and alert?

Mr Lavery: Not particularly. That is more so the case for mainstream departmental expenditure limits (DEL) through monitoring rounds. The EU declares how much is available in a programme over x number of years, and you then bid for that.

Dr Geddis: It is especially important to say that we are witnessing a complete change of scale for Departments. These are competitive funds. They are not funds that are allocated seven years in

advance, and the issue becomes about drawing down money in relation to the programme objectives and ensuring that it is spent wisely. There is no such pot of money, and Departments need to compete against the best in Europe. That means that, effectively, they need to begin networking if they are not already doing that. If they are networking, they need to build partnerships. They need to begin as junior partners and progress to becoming senior partners in relationships. They need to be outward and forward-looking players in consortia, which means working with other regions throughout Europe. That is a very demanding ask during the transition from structural funds to competitive funds. Although the £53 million might look small, it is, in fact, asking for a lot from Departments, and the developmental progression is to prepare the region to participate in the post-2014 financial environment in Europe, where the structural moneys have moved eastward or are well down the road towards doing that.

The Acting Chairperson: Is anyone similar to us in size and shape getting it by acting in a certain way? Are we learning that we need to do it the same way?

Dr Geddis: You can begin at a number of levels with relative performance comparisons. At a very crude level, you can start with Northern Ireland's population share as a percentage of the European Union's to give you the per capita target. What happens if you apply that per capita target to the funding streams that you are targeting? You can develop that further and look at how other devolved Administrations are doing it. You can develop various benchmarks with European regions that are the best in particular sectors and begin your comparison there. However, the key issue with relative performance is not necessarily about the drawdown targets but being able to ask questions about why your performance is different. Is it historical? Does it relate to differences in infrastructure? Does it relate simply to the fact that you are not putting sufficient resource in? Those comparisons in certain programmes have been well established over recent years and have provided some very interesting answers when we have looked at the reasons for this. That is the strength of the relative performance comparisons, and there is a lot of depth to that work.

The Acting Chairperson: I understand that, but you will be judged by the figure compared with that of others. We always want to get the most that we can.

Mr Lavery: Are you happy to move on?

The Acting Chairperson: Yes, move on, please.

Mr Lavery: Tim will start with the MLK.

Mr Tim Losty (Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister): As you know, the departmental plan links directly into the Programme for Government targets, and, underneath that, we have our divisional plan that details the Programme for Government commitments. From that, we have developed our delivery plans.

The Acting Chairperson: What are we talking about now?

Mr Lavery: The targets for Maze/Long Kesh. It is a regeneration site of national significance in the Programme for Government.

Mr Losty: The commitments have a direct link to the Programme for Government, and the delivery plan goes into more detail on what we have to achieve. A significant amount of work has taken place on the Maze/Long Kesh site in recent years, and it is now starting to take off. The delivery plan for the Programme for Government is very relevant.

We have five indicators that we need to deliver on to get some significant movement on the Maze/Long Kesh site. Overall, it is to be a regional site of economic, cultural and social benefit, and that message has come out frequently in recent months as we have received a lot of attention about what is happening on the site. We recently completed the recruitment of the MLK Development Corporation, which will take over ownership of the strategic direction of the site.

We have also recently secured the services of an internationally acclaimed architect to help with the building of what we call the peace-building and conflict resolution centre. We have also received some £18 million through the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB) for the development of that site.

The Royal Ulster Agricultural Show (RUAS) has also moved on to the site, so we are ahead with a lot of those targets. We are certainly on target for achieving a lot of those.

The next stage for the site is to produce the spatial framework, setting out what we think the various aspects of the site could be used for. We will then take that out to the private sector, industry and stakeholders to try to secure businesses and other organisations that want to locate on to the site. A lot of work needs to take place over the next three years.

We also intend to hold a number of community events on the site. We recently had the Festival of Speed there, which was very well attended. A lot of people from the surrounding communities and further afield came to have a look at the site, and to see the benefits not just of using it as a race track but the aviation museum, the buildings, and so on.

As I said, things are progressing well. The Maze/Long Kesh Development Corporation had its first meeting yesterday. It has gone through its training on governance and accountability issues, and we will meet regularly with the corporation as part of our management of our arm's-length bodies. We will also continue to have meetings with the senior staff who engage in the development of the site to ensure that we are on schedule to meet a lot of these targets so that we can report back to the Committee and to Ministers.

The Acting Chairperson: Thank you. I have two points. Can you tell us more about the scoping study of the Ulster Aviation Society? Does that open any doors in other directions? Does it lead us to other things? Are there other areas that we are looking at that we could know more about for the future use of the site?

Mr Losty: The scoping study for the spatial framework will look at a range of potential opportunities and at how the site could be used. We are also looking at the aviation museum that is on site at the moment. I do not know whether you have been to the site, but it is in one hangar. There is another hangar beside that, so we are looking at whether there is potential to expand that, or whether the other hangar could be used for other purposes that would be complementary to the aviation centre. Part of what we need to try to get across about the site is the history of what has gone on there. It had been an airfield and was used during the Second World War. There is a lot of history to the site.

We are also looking at the needs of the surrounding community as well as the region in considering what business clusters could be developed. We are looking at the potential for business clusters to be developed as a result of the Royal Ulster Agricultural Society moving there. We believe that there is a lot of potential there, and the framework will help us firm up a lot of those issues.

Mr Lavery: Tim and I gave evidence to the Public Accounts Committee on 25 April. One concern in the Audit Office report on the former military sites was about the slow pace of regeneration — that is the Audit Office's phrase. One of the points was that regeneration is a long-term activity. There has been substantial movement in the past couple of years. The site is now fully remediated. We have got the RUAS on site and we have the peace-building and conflict resolution centre. Now is a very good time for the board to be in place to look at this strategic direction of the site. We emphasise that it is a long-term activity. We also need to look at interim uses, so it is a pivotal moment.

The purpose of having the board is to set that direction and bring a mix of skills to it, and we look forward to that. I think we had an encouraging first session yesterday.

The Acting Chairperson: That is why I asked the question.

Mr G Robinson: Tim, from RUAS's point of view, can you see the show taking place there next year, or is that too premature?

Mr Losty: The society has been doing a lot of work to get the site ready for the show there next year, and, as far as we are all aware, it is on schedule. Hopefully, it will be another big success.

Mr Lyttle: I wish to ask about the development of the peace-building and conflict resolution centre. The performance indicators for 2013-14 state that post-conflict reconstruction services are to be developed. What is meant by "post-conflict reconstruction services"?

Mr Losty: It is terminology that I was familiar with when I was based in Washington DC. You have conflict resolution work, but, coinciding with that, you have to look at areas such as economic development, social cohesion, children's issues and health issues. As well as the direct services that we provide now to assist with conflict resolution, it is about looking at the long-term objectives of rebuilding a society that has been engaged in conflict. It goes much wider than that: into economic fields, health and physical regeneration.

Mr Lyttle: Have you had much feedback or has there been any controversy about the term "resolution" versus "transformation" or "management"?

Mr Losty: The terms that we use describe what the centre was. We are now in a position in which we have got the offer of funding from the European Union. We now have the Maze/Long Kesh Development Corporation, and the next stage will be to identify the appropriate vehicle to take forward the centre. It may be that that is where we get into discussions about the terminology that we use. I want to emphasise the fact that we see it as being international, so the terminology that we use will be something that all of us here can buy into, but also something that the international community can actually see and support. It will be able to identify that we will be providing a service that it will need.

Mr Lyttle: It is important that it has integrity as a term on all those grounds and that it is accurate. For what it is worth, we have had Colombian visitors and visitors from País Vasco to the Assembly recently, and I definitely think that, notwithstanding some of the controversies around that particular centre, it is looked to as an opportunity to organise and record some of the progress that we have made so as to be able to share that with people when they come to visit us. At the moment, I get the impression that people from other conflict zones around the world are looking to Northern Ireland to share some of its learning. It is a fairly piecemeal response that they are receiving at the moment, so I hope that the centre — although some people look at it in a controversial way — is a genuine opportunity to organise some of that learning that we have undertaken. However, I hope that it also reflects the fact that we still have quite some way to go.

Mr Losty: Very much so. We have received an awful lot of international attention, and a lot of groups have come to visit us from around the world. I have met people from four or five different regions over the past couple of months. They have come over to see and hear our experience. They have met a number of people at different levels. We have memorandums of understanding signed with a number of our community organisations and conflict resolution organisations. Some of our eminent MLAs are also involved in a lot of that, working internationally with parliamentary bodies, state Departments, the National Democratic Institute and other organisations, so we want to try to use the centre to harness a lot of that. It will create a very positive image of the work that we are doing in Northern Ireland. It will also help to create jobs in the community and other sectors.

The Acting Chairperson: Are you looking at other things that we can do for countries, whether it be learning how to do better government or better mediation? There are a whole lot of things that all link in. Is that the sort of thing that we are looking at?

Mr Losty: Yes, very much so. It is a total package.

Mr Maskey: I just want to savour the positivity that came from Chris on the development so far. Well done. That will be used against you later. *[Laughter.]* I am sorry that I missed the earlier part of your presentation, but I was called out by one of the people who was in the Public Gallery earlier. Dealing with another part of the Programme for Government, which is on EU funds. The commitment is to:

"Facilitate delivery of the Executive's 20% target for increased drawdown of competitive EU funds."

That relates to Departments, arm's-length bodies and specified third parties. I am interested because some of us have a view that a lot of those arm's-length bodies are not terribly efficient; some are not even accountable. Can you give me a wee bit of an update on how you see that progressing? It is a very welcome objective, of course.

Mr Lavery: Is that in relation to the 20% EU target?

Mr Maskey: Yes.

Mr Lavery: Paul mentioned it while you were out; we talked a bit about it. We are very pleased with progress, and we exceeded our target for progress significantly in year 1. As for the point behind your question, we have a long way to go. Paul made the point earlier that we will have less structural funds going forward. That funding was a lot easier to access. We are now doing the groundwork so that we will be able to access funding. We have a long way to go. Some Departments are further on than others. The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) and the Department for Employment and Learning are doing some work on FP7. The Department of Justice has just succeeded in getting money for one particular programme. DRD has been quite successful as well in the past, but there is a long way to go.

It will apply to Departments and arm's-length bodies, so I absolutely take your point. We have made good progress; we should not miss that fact. It is a long-term game.

The Acting Chairperson: We will keep asking you.

Mr Lavery: Ministers decided to put it in their Programme for Government for that reason.

Mr Lyttle: There are ongoing negotiations about trying to have Northern Ireland designated as a transition country to avail itself of as many structural funds as possible. Is that still ongoing through the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP)?

Mr Lavery: Yes, I think that that is through DFP. Are there any more questions on Maze/Long Kesh?

Mr Lyttle: I am tempted to ask how one attains the status of an eminent MLA, but I will ask you that offline.

Mr Losty: You are.

Mr Maskey: In your own household?

Mr Losty: The other Programme for Government delivery plan that we have to talk about is the development of the One Plan for the regeneration of Derry/Londonderry, which incorporates the quayside at Ebrington and Fort George. If you look at the Programme for Government and the departmental plan, you have the higher-level objectives, including our role, not just of our direct delivery responsibility with the Ebrington site and its redevelopment and regeneration but as a co-ordinating Department across government. One of our key tasks was to establish the interdepartmental working group and agree terms of reference that would enable us to work with the strategy group that exists in the city to help to deliver the One Plan. The One Plan is an unashamedly ambitious document. It enjoys the support of practically all the stakeholders in the city. It has identified five key themes across Departments, and there are 11 different programmes that have to be delivered as a result of it. It is also looking at short-, medium- and long-term work in the city. Our role in the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) is to chair the interdepartmental group; liaise with the strategy group in the city; work on the terms of reference to ensure that Departments focus on what work they should do to help to achieve targets against the 11 programmes in the city; monitor progress; identify any obstacles that may prevent progress; and, importantly, ensure that there is ongoing liaison and communication, not only between our group and the strategic group in the city but between the many other stakeholder groups. It is not a programme that can be delivered by the Government on their own: it is one that has to be delivered with the community, the business sector and others in the city.

We have had three meetings of the interdepartmental group so far. We have had one meeting with the strategy group in the city. Another one is planned for next week. We have agreed on a monitoring framework with the strategic group in the city. Departments have contributed to that monitoring framework. We and the people in the city are testing it out now to ensure that it is robust and tells people whether progress is being made. We hope that we will be able to get information back from the various Departments and be able to report that to the Executive and Committees when it is fully live. Our meeting next week with the strategy group will concentrate on communication to ensure that everyone gets regular updates of the work that is taking place on the ground.

Mr Lavery: A similar point was made about the Maze/Long Kesh. In the past 12 to 18 months, there has been significant movement on the Ebrington site. Anyone who has been up and had a look at the former parade ground there has seen that it has really been transformed. That is an achievement of

which to be proud. It provides the basis for quite a number of the events that will take place during 2013, which we will discuss. The Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO) made a criticism about the slow pace of regeneration, which we can absolutely accept. However, in the past 18 months, there has been significant progress. I ask the Committee to recognise that. The targets include the completion of a development framework and opportunities for the development of the Ebrington site. We absolutely take that as a priority. We are working with Ilex on that. We need to work to and push on the timescales.

The Acting Chairperson: We will keep the pressure on you. It is government — or rather public — money.

Mr Lyttle: On that note, I see that some of the outcomes and targets include the north-west regional science park at the Fort George site. Progress has been made by the Northern Ireland Science Park in East Belfast, which has generated innovation and start-ups. Is there any update on progress on the north-west regional science park?

Mr Losty: Yes, there is. We expect decisions and announcements to be made soon. Fort George is managed by Ilex and owned by the Department for Social Development (DSD). Recently, there have been a number of significant developments. The science park has also been in negotiation with the Special EU Programmes Body for funding towards its development. There will also be a partnership with the universities and technical colleges up there. Hopefully, we will hear about progress in the next couple of weeks.

Mr Maskey: Can I ask a general question? I am Chair of the Committee for Social Development. Obviously, some of this relates to DSD, OFMDFM and, in some cases, Ilex, Derry City Council and Invest NI. Is there any way in which we can simplify the ongoing monitoring and reporting? Sometimes, there is a wee bit of a time lag. These Committees are a postbox to other Committees. Therefore, you could be waiting for a fortnight, if you know what I mean. I am wondering whether there is a simplified way in which to do that.

Mr Losty: You are right. When we first started to look at this, we had 11 catalyst programmes, 86 different aspects of that, 11 Departments and all the organisations. If everybody reported on what they were doing, we would not know where we were. Therefore, we are testing the monitoring framework that has been produced by Ilex and some of its partners. All Departments are contributing to that. We want to test it to make sure that the information that we can pass to Ministers and Committees is meaningful so that everyone can see as a snapshot exactly what progress is being made against the various programmes.

If we find that it is too cumbersome and complicated, we have agreed with all parties that we will revisit it. We also have to make sure that any of the figures or measurements included are robust enough to be challenged; that they are authentic and are being achieved. We believe that we have a process there. We are not saying that it is 100% accurate, but we will test it and will do so in consultation with Committees. If the Committee says that it cannot see what is happening, we will go back and try to change it accordingly to make it more positive.

As to the communication aspect, although to some extent we are all geared up to look for the information about targets and achievements, it is also important that the ordinary person in the street who does not come across this information day and daily can see where there have been improvements and where progress has been made against some of the objectives. It is very much a work in progress.

Mr Maskey: OK, Tim. Thank you.

Mr G Robinson: When do you envisage the completion of the Ebrington project? Is that like asking how long a piece of string is?

Mr Losty: No. We have plans to take us up to the end of the CSR period in 2025, and we expect to have some 46% to 50% of the site utilised. A development framework will be produced, hopefully by the end of this year, which will identify what parts of the site could be used for other purposes. The next stage after this CSR period will be to engage much more closely with the private sector and other stakeholders in the city to attract investment, or if it is about housing or other needs, how they go on to the site.

We have an opportunity with the City of Culture and the creative hub that is being developed there at the moment. We are starting to get a lot of interest from creative-type organisations that want to come on to the site. We are quite positive that there is sufficient interest for what we can plan now. What we do not want to do is get people geared up to come on to the site and then not have that part of the site ready for them in time. It is about getting the balance right.

Mr G Robinson: Thank you.

Mr Lavery: The next point relates to the City of Culture.

The target is to provide financial and other support across government to ensure the success of the Derry/Londonderry City of Culture. I chair the departmental oversight group, and it is important to set out the roles. Our role is to ensure that there is access to appropriate government funding and to provide as much support as possible. The City of Culture as a project, if we can call it that, is driven by Derry City Council, with the programme being delivered by the Culture Company.

Mr Losty: Again, significant progress has been made in recent months. Previously, we had an agreement that the city would be the City of Culture, and there were ideas and aspirations in the programmes. It is then about making that happen, which is where the challenges really come in. Significant progress has been made in developing the City of Culture, which will have over 100 different programmed events. It is geared to meet the needs of many cross sections of society. It is also geared to attract people into the city and the region — into Northern Ireland and Ireland — from America, Europe and elsewhere so that it will have an impact on the local economy through the creation of jobs and wealth that will remain in the city.

We work closely with the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL), as well as with the Strategic Investment Board (SIB), on the projects. When the programme is agreed, there has to be a project behind it to deliver it, so we worked with our colleagues in Departments and the SIB to make sure that there is proper programme management in place so that we can see whether we are on target, whether that target will be achieved and what the problems are. If there are problems with challenges, we ensure that they come back to the Committee so that we can try to face them as an interdepartmental group.

Mr Lavery: I will just make a couple of points. I take on board Mr Maskey's earlier point about working your way through these structures and Committees.

Just to be clear, DCAL has made an offer of funding to assist the cultural programme. Ilex has the responsibility for delivering infrastructure and, where appropriate, make sure that the events happen. The council would have to apply to DETI and the Northern Ireland Tourist Board for any marketing support that is required.

Our role is a co-ordinating role. The SIB has helped the council and the Culture Company with some resource and has helped Ilex with delivery. It is important to note that those bricks are in place. It is all about having clear lines of responsibility. The Executive committed £12.6 million in funding towards the programme, which will go through DCAL.

Mr G Robinson: You mentioned jobs there. How many jobs do you envisage, and will they be sustainable?

Mr Losty: There will be jobs that will exist for the duration of the programme. However, we believe that there will be a substantial number of sustainable jobs after that, because the programme will create jobs in the creative industries sector, and a creative hub will be established on the Ebrington site at Building 80-81. In the short term, it will be used to host the Turner Prize, but, in the long term, it will become a creative hub that will help to spawn businesses as a result of bringing the City of Culture to the city.

It is hoped that other jobs will be created in the hospitality, tourism and leisure sectors as more people discover the city and want to come back. We have been looking at the actual numbers of jobs, and if it is OK, Chairperson, we will perhaps write to the Committee and provide more definitive figures on that.

Mr Lavery: There is some detail on that in the DCAL business case. We will write to you about that.

The Acting Chairperson: That is probably what a lot of us want to know. We want to have a bit more depth and detail about what is going on. It is not your role, as such, but if we can get some information from DCAL and others about where things are leading, that is how we will end up judging whether it is a success.

Mr Tony Canavan (Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister): The one that I have is listed as commitment No 77 in the papers that I have.

Mr Canavan: It is unusual. It is about agreeing any changes to the post-2015 structures of government in 2012. Going back to the St Andrews Agreement in 2006, it was always envisaged that there would be various efforts to review the devolved institutional structures, particularly those in strand 1 of the Good Friday Agreement or Parts III and IV of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 — which are effectively the same thing — in advance of 2015.

The Assembly and Executive Review Committee (AERC) was established statutorily specifically to carry out that review, although, in fact, most of its work in its early years was tied up with the devolution of justice rather than reviewing the institutional structures. However, in autumn of last year, it embarked on a review of the size of the Assembly and the number of Departments.

Furthermore, the First Minister and the deputy First Minister have given a commitment that, in the context of the work with Executive party leaders, they will endeavour to reach conclusions in 2012 on the shape of structures post-2015.

It is unusual because, if you look at the indicators and the steps that are being taken, so much is dependent on political-level decisions. I would not attempt to pre-empt them or make any predictions —

The Acting Chairperson: Shame.

Mr Canavan: Should they lead to a need for legislative or organisational change, there will be a lot of work for this Department subsequently. The work is largely backloaded when it comes to legislation, which would be required in 2013 or 2014 in the Assembly, if, for example, a Departments Bill is needed. After that, if there were to be a departmental reorganisation, a considerable amount of work would be involved in preparing for that.

We need to remember that when the current structure was established for Departments, there was a lead-in time of exactly a year between the announcement in 1998 by the First Minister (Designate) and the deputy First Minister (Designate) and devolution occurring. In that period, a lot of work was done to generate 11 Departments out of six. If there were to be any sort of departmental reorganisation — I will not pre-empt that, because there are differences between parties on whether there ought to be or its scale — there would be at least a year's hard work to be done, comparable to that done in advance of the devolution of justice.

The Acting Chairperson: Has the Department liaised with the new Secretary of State?

Mr Canavan: That would be on a political level for the First Minister and the deputy First Minister. As you know, since the delivery plan was created in its first version, a number of things happened in the summer, so there is a lot of momentum in this area, including an Northern Ireland Office (NIO) consultation on 15 August, which is ongoing in advance of legislation next year that the NIO is proposing. On 18 July, there was also a statement by the First Minister and the deputy First Minister that reiterated their intention to come to their views, in collaboration with Executive party leaders, before the end of 2012. Finally, AERC reported in June 2012, and there was a debate in the Assembly on that on 26 June. Therefore, momentum is being maintained.

The Acting Chairperson: Keep it going.

Mr Lyttle: Is there any indication as to when the efficiency review panel (ERP) that is to consider and review the number and organisation of Departments will be appointed? By when do you believe it needs to be appointed to meet those May 2013 deadlines?

Mr Canavan: I cannot indicate when that may be appointed. It does not need to be appointed; it is not statutory. That is the difference between the ERP and AERC. AERC is statutory and was created when the 2007 Assembly was created, but the ERP has existed only as a paragraph in the St Andrews Agreement.

The Acting Chairperson: There being no other questions, I thank you for your time.