



Northern Ireland
Assembly

**COMMITTEE FOR
CULTURE, ARTS AND LEISURE**

**OFFICIAL REPORT
(Hansard)**

**Evidence Session with Departmental
Officials on DCAL Business Plan and
PSA Targets**

3 March 2011

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

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Plan and PSA Targets**

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Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mr Barry McElduff (Chairperson)
Mr Declan O'Loan (Deputy Chairperson)
Lord Browne
Mr Thomas Burns
Mr David Hilditch
Mr William Humphrey
Mr Kieran McCarthy
Mr David McClarty
Mr Ken Robinson

Witnesses:

Ms Deborah Brown)
Mr Mick Cory) Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure
Ms Joanna McConway)

The Chairperson (Mr McElduff):

Good morning. I formally welcome the team from the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL). I will hand over straight away to Deborah Brown, the director of finance and corporate services, who will introduce the team and make an opening statement.

Ms Deborah Brown (Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure):

With me this morning are Mick Cory, the director of sports, museums, libraries and fisheries, and Joanna McConway, who is here on behalf of Arthur Scott representing the culture division. We thank the Committee for asking us to provide an update on the Department's progress towards the Programme for Government targets.

As outlined in our briefing paper, DCAL is the lead Department for the delivery of public service agreement (PSA) 9. The aim of PSA 9 is to contribute to Northern Ireland's economic health and educational goals by increasing participation and access to culture, arts and leisure activities. The Department is fully aware of its responsibilities under the Programme for Government and has designated the permanent secretary as the senior responsible owner for PSA 9. However, the departmental board is regularly updated on progress that is made against the PSA targets. The Department also provides quarterly updates on progress that is made against PSA 9 to the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) and the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP). As part of that reporting, the Department assesses the likelihood of successful delivery against its Programme for Government responsibilities. OFMDFM and DFP requested that targets be rated as being red, amber, green-amber or green. A red rating suggests that the measured rate of progress is highly unlikely to lead to the achievement of the targeted outcome, and a green rating indicates that there is a significant confidence, drawing on robust monitoring systems and data, about the prospects of delivering the targeted outcome on schedule.

DCAL has 16 PSA 9 targets: 10 are considered green; four are considered green-amber; one is considered amber; and only one is considered red. The number of targets that are considered to be either green or green-amber pays testament to the high level of success that the Department has achieved during the current Programme for Government period. I do not propose to discuss each of those targets in detail. However, I want to highlight some of the significant achievements that DCAL has made during this Programme for Government period.

I turn first to the arts. To support the Department's Programme for Government commitment to increase attendance and participation in the arts, a major capital programme was undertaken to

develop Northern Ireland's arts infrastructure in the 2008-2011 period. That has had a number of positive impacts: the refurbishment and extension of the Grand Opera House resulted in an increase in attendance figures of 30,000 a year; in Londonderry, the refurbishment of the Waterside Theatre and the Playhouse Theatre, and the provision of the new language, arts and culture centre contributed to the successful City of Culture 2013 bid; the refurbishment of the Crescent Arts Centre in Belfast resulted in a 7% increase in visitor numbers since it reopened; and significant progress has been made on the Lyric Theatre, which is due to open in May, and the Metropolitan Arts Centre. Those actions have helped to contribute towards significant increases in the number of Northern Ireland citizens attending and participating in the arts.

The Department has also been involved in promoting sport throughout Northern Ireland. 'Sport Matters: The Northern Ireland Strategy for Sport and Physical Recreation 2009-2019' was approved by the Executive in December 2009. That is an ambitious strategy that sets out the case for ongoing and increased investment in sport and physical recreation to deliver a range of supporting outcomes and support the wider social agenda in areas such as education, health, the economy and the development of communities.

Focusing on people, places and participation in sport, the strategy establishes key targets and priorities for the future development of sport, as identified by the sports sector, the community at large and a range of other interests across central and local government, the voluntary sector and businesses. By the end of the current comprehensive spending review (CSR) period, the Department expects to have invested £53 million of capital funding, in addition to the £28 million of resource funding, in sport.

Major projects that have been completed to date include Tollymore National Outdoor Centre and the projects under the Sport Northern Ireland Building Sport programme at Newry Olympic Hockey Club, Larne Bowling and Lawn Tennis Club, Donaghmore District Community Association, Lavey GAC, Cookstown Hockey Club, Riding for the Disabled Association (RDA) in Coleraine and Donaghadee Sailing Club. Furthermore, Sport NI funding has delivered new spectator stands at Ravenhill rugby ground as well as at the football grounds of clubs such as Cliftonville, Portadown and Donegal Celtic. In addition, 25 projects under phase 1 of the Sport NI Places for Sport programme have been completed, providing sports facilities at a grass-roots

level.

The Department is on schedule to deliver on the Northern Ireland 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games strategy in the key themes of business, education and skills. Key achievements include confirmation from the organising committee that the torch will visit Northern Ireland for four days in 2012. Over 200,000 people have engaged in the Cultural Olympiad activity alone. Thirty-two Inspire Mark projects are in place, which provide local people and communities with the opportunity to participate in and feel part of the celebrations in the lead-up to the games. Those projects include sports participation projects such as Activ8 and the 5 Star Disability Sports Challenge.

More than 30 companies, including Lagan Construction, have secured contracts in excess of £24 million, and work is progressing on getting international athletes to train in Northern Ireland venues at Olympics pre-qualification events as they prepare to compete in the world's largest sporting event. The legacy from 2012 will be maximised further in 2013 by the hosting of the World Police and Fire Games.

As part of the strategy to increase the number of visitors to our national museums, the Ulster Museum reopened in October 2009, following a £17.7 million refurbishment. In the first year after the reopening alone, the Ulster Museum welcomed 646,587 visitors through its doors. In addition, it was recognised with numerous awards, including the UK-wide Art Fund prize and the best permanent exhibition in the UK.

The new Library Authority was established on 1 April 2009. That has brought focus to, and created efficiency in, the public library service. There have been a series of investments in greatly improved library buildings. Bangor Carnegie Library was highly commended in the architecture meets practicality category of the Public Library Buildings Awards 2009.

The practical completion of the new state-of-the-art Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI) building in the Titanic Quarter, Belfast, was achieved on 30 April 2010, some seven weeks ahead of schedule. The accommodation was formally handed over to DCAL on 22 September 2010 and will open to the public on 30 March 2011. The overall project cost is

forecast to be £29.25 million, which is considerably below the originally approved budget figure of £30.5 million.

The Department has also undertaken a vital role in supporting creative industries in Northern Ireland. In 2008, a strategic action plan for the creative industries and the delivery of the creative industries innovation fund was developed by the Arts Council of Northern Ireland. The fund supports innovation in the key economic growth sector, which is recognised across the world for its potential for job and wealth creation. Awards totalling £3.6 million were made to 132 businesses and 22 sectoral bodies. Supported businesses include those in digital media, film and television, craft and music. Ongoing evaluation indicates significantly increased levels of innovation and international activity.

I will provide details specifically on the red and amber targets. The Department considers indicator 13 in PSA 9 a red target:

By 2011 and subject to the normal approval processes to have an operationally viable and commercially sustainable Multi-Sports Stadium for Northern Ireland. Minister Gregory Campbell announced to the Assembly in January 2009 — ”

Mr O’Loan:

On a point of order, Chairperson. The introduction is quite long. Are we to get a detailed analysis of all the red and green targets? I think that that would be the —

Ms D Brown:

That is what I am about to do.

Mr O’Loan:

Pardon?

Ms D Brown:

I have just said that I will now discuss the red and amber targets.

Mr O’Loan:

With respect, that may be better cleared up in the questions. It is up to you, Chairperson.

The Chairperson:

Thank you, Declan.

Ms D Brown:

Do you not want me to go through the red and amber targets?

The Chairperson:

I presume that it will take you another minute or two to conclude that.

Ms D Brown:

It was really just to explain to the Committee what the red and amber targets are and where we are with them.

The Chairperson:

No problem. Just carry on, on the understanding that you conclude in the next couple of minutes, because we favour a lengthier questioning session. Please carry on.

Ms D Brown:

On that target, Minister Campbell announced in January 2009 that the multi-sports stadium at the Maze would not proceed. Therefore, the target, as expressed, will not be achieved. However, good progress is being made with the three sports governing bodies in defining their strategic needs, and an outline business case is currently with DFP. Decisions are expected imminently.

The indicator that the Department considers amber under PSA 9 is:

“By 2011, halt the decline in adult participation in sport and physical recreation.”

Sport Northern Ireland has undertaken sports programmes and projects to encourage participation across all ages in a wide variety of sport, through either the creation of new coaching posts via the Investing in Performance Sport programme or by providing new sports facilities and playing surfaces through the Building Sport and Places for Sport surfaces programme.

It should also be noted that the survey data indicated an upturn in participation in sport in quarter 3 of 2010-11. The current economic climate may also be having an adverse impact on the

number of people participating in sports. In the May 2009 Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) omnibus survey, 16% of respondents stated that they participated in or attended fewer cultural or leisure activities and events because of the economic downturn.

In addition to the indicators in PSA 9, DCAL also has responsibilities under PSAs 5, 10, 12 and 22. Of the PSA targets not captured under PSA 9, one is rated red and the other amber. The red target is captured under PSA 5, which relates to tourism and is led by DETI:

“Deliver £229m capital investment by 31 March 2011 in the Northern Ireland Culture, Arts and Leisure infrastructure through a programme of arts, sports, museums, libraries and PRONI capital projects.”

Significant progress has been made in relation to the Department’s capital investment programme. As previously stated, a wide variety of capital programmes have been undertaken in the arts and sporting sectors. In addition to the refurbishment and redesign of the Ulster Museum, there have been further refreshes across National Museum sites, including thatching programmes, upgrading paths and renewing perimeter fencing. The transport gallery is to be enhanced and Cultra Manor is closed pending a £2.9 million refurbishment. Progress has also been made on the New World development at the Ulster American Folk Park. Finally, modernisation of the libraries estate continues, including the completion of works in Antrim, Newtownstewart, Whitehead, Dungiven and Carrickfergus.

The Department monitors its progress against its capital projects through its sponsored branches and a dedicated capital programme manager. A capital programme management board meets every two months to address emerging risks. Despite the significant progress, the Department considers that target to be red. One of the major reasons for that shortfall is the decision not to build the multi-sports stadium. The stadium would have accounted for a projected spend of £69 million across the three years.

Under PSA 22, DCAL considers the target for achieving the objectives set out in the salmon and eel management plans by 2011 to be amber. Both eel and salmon management plans are part of the strategies that run from 2008 to 2012 and will continue within the principles for sustainable fisheries management beyond that date. Due to some minor delays, those strategic objectives may not be fully achieved within 2011. They are still on target to be completed by the broader strategic date of 2012.

Under the Programme for Government, the Department also has a number of key goals and commitments. Of the three for which DCAL has responsibility, two are considered to be red. Those targets are to invest £110 million in our sports facilities by 2011, thereby ensuring a lasting legacy from the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games, and to invest £119 million in our cultural infrastructure by 2011 through a programme of capital projects. Those goals combined relate directly to PSA 5, the target to invest £229 million in Northern Ireland's cultural infrastructure. As we have provided some detail on that target, I will not repeat it.

That is just an overview of the Department's achievements over the course of this Programme for Government and some explanations for the red and amber targets at this point. My colleagues and I are happy to answer any questions that members may have.

The Chairperson:

It would be helpful for us to have a copy of your opening statement. There is a lot in it that we would like to reflect on.

Your briefing paper states that the Department and its arm's-length bodies have made good progress towards delivering commitments as outlined in the Programme for Government and the public service agreements. Annex B tells us that, in 15 of a possible 25 projects, indicators have achieved green status. Is that still good progress? Some 40% of the targets have not been achieved.

Ms D Brown:

It is very good progress. There are specific reasons, and there is only one red target on PSA 9, which is the stadium. We are all very aware of the consequences of that. The other two red targets are the £229 million of capital to be invested over the three-year period. We know that there have been some delays, and the £69 million for the stadium is included in that. There are also the two sub-targets: the £119 million for culture and the £110 million for sport. The reason for not meeting the culture target is that there was some slow progress on library builds. The rationale for not meeting the sports target is the stadium. Those are the big ones. The Department made significant progress on those, and some of the red targets are outside the Department's control.

Mr McCarthy:

Thank you very much for your presentation, Deborah. My question concerns the Sport Matters strategy, which is indicator 5 in your briefing paper. I acknowledge the good work done throughout the community by the Places for Sport programme. The target was to:

“halt the decline in adult participation in sport and physical recreation.”

It is marked amber. The Sport Matters strategy was launched 10 months ago, but there has been only a slight increase in participation levels. Do you reckon that the strategy has worked so far? Does it represent value for money?

Mr Mick Cory (Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure):

It is important to realise that there has been a slight misalignment between the strategy being signed off, which, as you point out, was only 10 months ago, and the aspiration set out in these targets, which were set three years ago. In an ideal set of circumstances, if we had had the strategy signed off three years ago, it would have aligned with the resources, and we would have been able to put in place the infrastructure, the groups who would monitor and drive out that strategy and, I hope, through that, see an improvement in the target. That did not happen, so only 10 months into the launch of the strategy, there has not been sufficient time to see the impact that the strategy is having on that target. We hope that it will have an impact. It is a 10-year strategy. It clearly includes actions and responsibilities beyond DCAL to try to impact on that figure. That target has a green-amber status because, although there has been a slight halt in that decline in the past couple of months, we are not yet sure that that is a sustainable statistic. Therefore, we are being cautious in claiming any real success yet. It is a 10-year strategy, and we are in it for the long term. It is important that, once the structures have bedded in on the delivery of the strategy, we keep an eye on that progress.

Mr McCarthy:

Although the strategy is only 10 months in, are you relatively confident that progress will be made to reach the target?

Mr Cory:

Progress has been made. The Minister set up an overarching monitoring group, under which Sport Northern Ireland established a series of implementation groups across the strategy's key themes. They are in place, although they are still developing their action plans. It is through

those action plans that we are starting to drive out the activity that will, I hope, begin to make a difference. That is purely an indicator on one important area, but we want to make that difference across a range of themes.

Mr O’Loan:

I have a supplementary question on that point. The target was to:

“halt the decline in adult participation in sport and physical recreation”.

Have you halted the decline in adult participation in sport and physical recreation? I do not think that you have any right to claim that target as having an amber status.

Mr Cory:

The statistics show that adult participation in sport and physical recreation has gone up from 43% to 45%. Those are factual, and there is no indication that that has declined. As I explained earlier, it is still early days, given that the strategy was signed off only a year or so ago. It is too early to say what the impact is. We rely on the continuous household survey for that statistic, and Sport NI undertook a much more detailed analysis and survey on participation rates. That gives a lot more detail, although the scope and scale of that survey is such that we cannot repeat it as regularly as we would like because of the cost. Subject to financial resources, we intend to allow Sport Northern Ireland to repeat that in a couple of years’ time. That gets under the surface of what is just a high level statistic indicator.

Mr O’Loan:

I have no difficulty with an explanation being offered if the target has not been met. Achieving some of those targets can be difficult, and there is a lot of learning for the future on how the targets are worded, defined, and so on. However, my big difficulty is that, when a target is specific and directly measurable and is not achieved, the proper designation is red. By all means, a contextual explanation can be given to show why it has not been achieved and what more will be done. The designation on that target should be altered to red.

Mr Burns:

I will talk about the capital investment on the sports stadium and what are described as our elite facilities. It seems that the Department has failed to meet its highest profile projects that would

have impacted on the most people and had the longest lasting impact. We talked about the sports stadium for so long, but nothing has been delivered. None of the stadiums has been delivered. Some of the elite facilities that were to be in place for the Olympics are not in place. Do you think that that is acceptable to the people of Northern Ireland?

Mr Cory:

It was an Executive decision not to proceed with the stadium, so it is not for me to comment on whether that is acceptable or not. The challenges with the elite facilities have been well discussed in previous Committee hearings, and the Minister was before the Committee on 27 January to provide that detail. Clearly, the funding is not there. However, there were also issues with the business cases for the elite facilities. The record over the past three years on the overall investment in sport and, indeed, in facilities that are of great value stands up, both at the community level and, more importantly, at the major end. So there has been investment in international standard facilities.

Mr Burns:

Where?

Mr Cory:

If you give me a moment, I will go through them. We have invested not only in the 50-metre pool, which involves £17 million of investment from the Department, but also in six other facilities at a gross cost of £10 million. We have a further £12 million for seven facilities that will meet the target by the end of 2011. Those that meet the international standards include the Riding for the Disabled Association's facility in Coleraine, Cookstown Hockey Club, Moyola Park AFC, Bready Cricket Club, Donaghadee Sailing Club and, of course, the Northern Ireland Civil Service Sports Association.

Mr Burns:

Those groups could be described as council oriented. They are not regional facilities by any manner or means, apart, perhaps, from the RDA facility in Coleraine. The problem is that they do not have a greater impact as high-profile sports facilities that everyone uses. That is why I feel that the public are being let down. I describe those as council facilities rather than major regional

facilities.

Mr Cory:

It is true to say that many of those sports facilities are in council areas. Much of the driving force behind such bids comes from councils, and rightly so, because the council areas — members will know better than I do — play a lead role. The trick is to ensure that the facilities are not only at the elite end but also at the community end. Part of the investment strategy over the past three years has been to ensure that the facilities do not feature only for a few athletes at the elite end but are also available for those in the community who wish to access and use them.

The Chairperson:

A mobile phone may be switched on. Members should check, because it is interfering with the technical side of the meeting. Ken Robinson is next.

Mr K Robinson:

You caught me by surprise there, Chair; I was checking my mobile. Indicator 6 states:

“By 2011 to have 125,000 children in sport and physical recreation.”

The term “in sport and physical recreation” strikes me as very strange. Could you define that exactly? It is marked as green, and it is good to organise opportunities for children to take up sport. However, the success of that target should surely be measured by how many children take up sport, physical education and recreation and maintain that interest. Do you have any plans to reassess that in the years to come, or will it degenerate into a box-ticking exercise? We are sitting right next door to a primary school today, and I wonder how many of the 125,000 children in that target already engage in sport through their educational experiences in primary, secondary and third-level education? I have some difficulty with that; it is a very nebulous target. I cannot see the difference that it will make to what is probably a pre-existing situation vis-à-vis the experiences of children with physical activity, recreation and sport. Can you expand on that a little bit?

Mr Cory:

Mr Robinson makes a fair point about the phraseology of the targets, and we have much discussion in the Department about appropriate targets and how we should couch and phrase

them. The phrase “in sport and physical recreation” could be more helpfully worded as “participating in sport and physical recreation”. The other point about the breakdown of that participation, what it looks like and how it will be sustained is a very good one. Certainly, that level of detail is part of the sports strategy and its implementation and monitoring.

It is a high-level target. We have set it to provide an indicator at the highest level, although you are absolutely right that it needs to have a much more detailed breakdown. However, we have to set something at the higher level. Part of the whole activity that I spoke about earlier around the Sport Matters strategy is about trying to break that detail down further. We are having ongoing dialogue as to how to phrase the targets better.

Mr K Robinson:

You take the point that I am making, Mick. We are sitting here beside a primary school with three or four classes with 30 children each. Does that mean that 120 children are “in sport and physical education”? Are we taking them in as an extra when it is part of their day and daily routine in the school next door?

Mr Cory:

That is a good point. The Department of Education plays a role in the Sport Matters implementation groups, because schools play a key role not only in curricular activities but in extra-curricular activities. School facilities can provide important ways for children to extend their activity and participation.

We are nervous about pinning down numbers and percentages, because, as ever, if we say that 125,000 children are involved in sport and physical recreation and the population of children is declining, a higher bar is being set for the future. As I said, we will have much more extensive discussions about how to set more detailed targets.

Mr K Robinson:

You will accept the point that it is my desire, and that of the Committee’s, for more young people to be actively engaged in sport and seeking sporting experiences instead of simply being fed a diet that has been prepared for them under the educational heading, in which they have to take

part. Many children who go through the educational experience of sport say “never again” and walk away from sport. I am concerned that we should be lifting involvement in sport to a higher level, and I am not totally convinced that we have.

Mr Cory:

I do not disagree with that and take your point.

Mr Humphrey:

I empathise with the frustration that members, particularly Tommy, expressed about facilities. In an ideal world, we would have wanted more progress on many of the projects. It is disappointing that the only project of national significance on which there has been progress, which was Tommy’s point, is the 50-metre pool at Bangor.

It is unfortunate that the velodrome in Newcastle, the racket sports club in Lisburn and the Ballyholme centre for sailing are not progressing, because they would have been hugely beneficial resources, not just for the Olympics and the lead-up to them but as a legacy after the Olympics. That is something that needs to be taken into consideration.

A couple of people mentioned the national stadium. Obviously, there was huge political disagreement and, if we are honest, disagreement within parties about that. I declare an interest as a member of Belfast City Council, where five of the six parties represented took the view that Belfast should have the stadium. Representatives of parties on other councils might have taken a different view. While that was going on, the Ulster branch of the IRFU was submitting planning applications for three new stands at Ravenhill. So there was an indication that the Ulster branch of the IRFU was not going to leave Ravenhill.

There was discussion within the GAA about whether Belfast should be the centre for the GAA stadium or whether Tyrone is best suited because it is more central in a Northern Ireland or Ulster context. We have to factor everything in: whether to upgrade Windsor Park; whether there should be a move to a stadium in Belfast; and whether there should be a stadium at the Maze at all. Those are the clear elements of why there has not been as much progress as we would all have liked.

I am a member of the green-and-white army and go to all the Northern Ireland games. I want an upgraded stadium. The people who go to the matches across the three codes want better facilities. However, politicians and political parties have to share some of the responsibility. I am very clearly batting for Liverpool — sorry — Belfast. I do not know where that came from except that I am a Liverpool supporter, although I do not declare that very often nowadays. I very clearly want the facilities to come to Belfast. I make no apology for that, because I am an elected representative for Belfast. Other members do the same for their areas, which is understandable and correct.

Some of the facilities that have been mentioned can be semi-regional centres of excellence. David McClarty will know much more than me about the riding school in Coleraine, but I can tell you about a couple of projects that I have been working on in my area. For example, Sport Northern Ireland made a £142,000 investment in the Shankill Leisure Centre, which has allowed an indoor cricket league to take place. Unfortunately, Woodvale Cricket Club did not win that league. There is a cricket centre of excellence in Belfast that did not previously exist. The Ireland youth cricket teams come to Belfast to play and train at indoor facilities. There is a new floor that allows mats to be put down. We have machines that enable a more true delivery of the ball, improved lighting, nets and scoreboards. There are indoor cricket matches, and an indoor league has already started.

The Chairperson:

Are you claiming credit for yesterday's victory?

Mr Humphrey:

No, but maybe I will claim credit for a World Cup victory in 10 years' time. We should put on record yesterday's tremendous and amazing result and pay tribute to the players.

That Sport Northern Ireland investment is an example of how modest investment in a leisure centre can make a difference. The cricket facilities at the Shankill Leisure Centre will not be up to the standard of Bready Cricket Club, for example, but it will serve the eastern part of Northern Ireland. Cricket clubs already book it and use it.

There has also been an investment at Woodvale Cricket Club, where there will be a new drainage system, side screens and all that. All the primary and secondary schools in the area will also use that facility. In the prevailing economic situation, we have to move away from thinking of facilities as either government facilities, local government facilities, school facilities, private facilities or club facilities where there is a management agreement between clubs and councils.

It is ridiculous that perfectly good pitches are locked up at weekends. That does not happen in other countries. We need to move to a position in which sport and leisure facilities are shared by local government, education and library boards, clubs and people across the spectrum in Northern Ireland. That would mean that investment could be made. Schools could use the facilities during the day and, if the facilities have lights, they could become club and community facilities in the evening.

We do not have the money at the moment. I am not point scoring, but the way that the books were left by the previous national Administration has meant that the new Government have had to enforce cuts. That is why investment in the other facilities is not happening. We have to be realistic. None of this has been the responsibility of Northern Ireland politicians, but we are suffering the consequences.

The Chairperson:

And your question is, William?

Mr Humphrey:

Basically, members have to be realistic.

The Chairperson:

Do you want to reply to that comment, Mick?

Mr Cory:

I have only one point, and it is with regard to the cricket result. Last night, I was at the Sports Institute Northern Ireland (SINI), which is a high-performance, high-end training facility, and I

understand that several of the cricket players who were successful against England did an awful lot of preparation using that facility. There is a very clear link between investment and a facility such as SINI. It is not only about the physical infrastructure; it is also about the coaching and expertise that is needed to bring people up to that score. Then there is success. That is something that is to be commended in the investment over the last three years.

The Chairperson:

I agree with you there.

Mr O'Loan:

Just before I come to my main question, I will finish my earlier point. I was challenging your designation in relation to an indicator. Are you prepared to reconsider that and come back to the Committee on that matter?

Ms D Brown:

We will be looking at those again for quarter 4. That will be an opportunity to revisit the ratings that we have given each of our targets.

Mr O'Loan:

I hope that you take my point. Otherwise it makes a mockery of the PSA reporting system, which is an important issue.

I want to ask about the very last target with a red status in your briefing paper. It is on a key goal. It is about investing £119 million in our cultural infrastructure, but only £83 million has been spent. I notice that part of the explanation for that is in the libraries programme and the shift from education and library boards to Libraries NI, and so on. What causes me particular concern is that Libraries NI is considering the closure of a number of rural libraries. One of the significant criteria that it is looking at is the current state of the buildings. However, there was a lag in upgrading the buildings and money was not spent. That raises concern for the quality of our long-term strategic thinking. We could end up making major decisions on libraries on the basis of a failure to follow through an original target. Do you share that concern?

Mr Cory:

By way of explanation of the red indicator status, let me first say that the original target was set as a part of the investment strategy for Northern Ireland at a time when, to be fair to Libraries Northern Ireland, it did not exist. The target was set in consultation with the education and library boards. That ambition in the education and library boards had to be reassessed in creating Libraries Northern Ireland as a part of the review of public administration. That was visionary, but it was not developed sufficiently to allow the new body, particularly as that body was established only in 2009, to take it up and do that spend in the timescale available. That is the explanation as to why that target is red.

Part of the decision in establishing Libraries Northern Ireland is that the programme for greater Belfast is phase 1, and phase 2 is the rural libraries scheme, which is still subject to public consultation. Clearly, the outcome of the current Budget 2010 process will be material to the decisions to be taken. Until we know that outcome, in both consultation and Budget settlement, it would be premature of me to suggest that something will happen there. I am not in a position to say.

Mr O'Loan:

When the Department considers the consultation results and sees Libraries NI's proposals, it should reflect on that point.

I want to ask about the departmental efficiencies achieved by various Departments. We have figures for departmental efficiencies from the Finance Committee that show that, at the six-month stage of this year, DCAL was achieving 55.7% of the required efficiencies, which is one of the lowest of all the Departments. It is fourth lowest and is much lower than the departmental average. I understand that that is only at the six-month stage. Are you confident of making the 100% by the end of the year? Why should so many other Departments be making greater progress at the six-month stage?

Ms D Brown:

I do not have any of those details with me, but I will take your point away and provide you with a full explanation.

Mr O’Loan:

Thank you.

Mr McCarthy:

To follow up on Declan’s point, indicator 1, on libraries, states that your aim is:

“to maintain the proportion of library users in Northern Ireland”.

You mentioned consultation, and I was at a consultation in Killyleagh last week. I am sure that such events will be repeated throughout the 10 areas in which closures are proposed, but people are adamant that their library facilities should be maintained. Surely such a massive reduction in libraries will reduce the number of library users in Northern Ireland, in contradiction to what we are trying to do, yet that is a green status indicator in your briefing paper.

Mr Cory:

Absolutely; that is a fair point. There is a danger that going too far will adversely impact on satisfaction ratings. Equally, however, an unsatisfactory provision — if the facility is poor or there not books in there — may have the same impact. Therefore, the balance is quite fine. Libraries NI, through its criteria and consultation, is trying hard to strike that balance and to avoid the danger of the impact that you describe.

The Chairperson:

I welcome the achievement of PSA 10 — exceeding 98,000 visitors to organised educational visits at national museums by 2009. That is one of many positives. William mentioned that he represents Belfast. As a rural representative, I am conscious that the list of projects is urban-based. How does the Department answer the charge that it is focused on building up the arts infrastructure in urban settings but not in rural areas?

Ms Joanna McConway (Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure):

We focus equally on rural areas. Urban projects appear misaligned because the Arts Council has achieved its target of arts provision within 30 miles of every person in Northern Ireland. There is currently an arts centre or an arts facility within that radius for every person in Northern Ireland. Therefore, those are landmark projects in our two major cities that the Department continues to

take forward.

The Chairperson:

We will leave it like that. I thank Mick, Deborah and Joanna for coming along this morning.