



Northern Ireland
Assembly

**COMMITTEE FOR
FINANCE AND PERSONNEL**

**OFFICIAL REPORT
(Hansard)**

PSA and Business Targets Progress

15 December 2010

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

**COMMITTEE FOR
FINANCE AND PERSONNEL**

PSA and Business Targets Progress

15 December 2010

Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Ms Jennifer McCann (Chairperson)
Dr Stephen Farry
Mr Paul Frew
Mr Paul Girvan
Mr Adrian McQuillan
Mr Declan O'Loan
Ms Dawn Purvis

Witnesses:

Dr Norman Caven) Department of Finance and Personnel
Mr David Orr) Department of Finance and Personnel

The Chairperson (Ms J McCann):

I welcome Mr David Orr, the corporate services director in the corporate services group, and Dr Norman Caven, the chief executive and registrar general of the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA). Please make some brief comments, and then I will open it up to questions. We are really pushed for time today, as we have to finish by 11.00 am.

Mr David Orr (Department of Finance and Personnel):

Chairperson, we have no opening remarks. I think that you have our paper, and we are happy to answer questions as best we can.

Ms Purvis:

The fact that 15 of your targets have been met and that no further reporting is necessary is something of which to be proud. When do you expect the Programme for Government (PFG) end-year delivery programme for 2009-2010 and the delivery report for September of this year to be available?

Mr Orr:

The Programme for Government delivery report is managed by OFMDFM, which has put a paper to the Executive, as I understand it, in relation to 2009-2010. It will then be reporting throughout the 2010-11 year. We have reported on the Department of Finance and Personnel's actions in the Programme for Government. That is all before you in our papers.

Ms Purvis:

What about the September report? Is it similar?

Mr Orr:

As we understand it, DFP performance against our PSA targets is in line with the OFMDFM assessment.

Ms Purvis:

None of the business plan targets in your paper shows red, but some show amber/green and amber. How are targets in individual business areas monitored?

Mr Orr:

Targets are monitored by the departmental board on a quarterly basis, so we look at each quarter's report. We look at the progress update and assess it against the target. That is what has been reported to the Committee.

Ms Purvis:

Is there an opportunity before or during those quarterly meetings to identify what mechanisms are in place to identify any slippage?

Mr Orr:

Yes. Any slippage would be reported.

Ms Purvis:

Does that happen on a quarterly basis? What is the mechanism for it?

Mr Orr:

The mechanism is a quarterly report, similar to that which the Committee has received. That report is looked at by the board on a quarterly basis. The change would not be significant month on month; therefore we monitor it quarterly not monthly.

Ms Purvis:

What remedial action has been taken on the eight internal targets that remain amber/green or amber?

Mr Orr:

I would have to go through those individually, which I am happy to do.

Ms Purvis:

It does not say which colour NISRA target R4.5 is. Given the funding issues around that target, would it be classed as amber?

Dr Norman Caven (Department of Finance and Personnel):

Is that the census target?

Ms Purvis:

Yes.

Dr Norman Caven:

That target has gone to green. In the run-up to the December monitoring round we had a requirement for additional moneys, which was the reason that the target was amber. Those

moneys have been found from departmental resources, so that target is now at green.

Ms Purvis:

Therefore there is no concern at all about that target.

Dr Caven:

No.

Ms Purvis:

In your submission you mention that contingency plans are being developed. Given that the target is now green, are those plans still being developed?

Dr Caven:

Contingency plans are in place for the census and for the logistics attached to it; a risk register will be in place.

Ms Purvis:

What are the contingency plans now that you have your funding?

Dr Caven:

We have our funding. We are in the final preparations, and we are quite prepared to say something about those afterwards. We are recruiting staff in the run-up to the census, and we are at the final stages of recruiting the third tier of field staff, who will be the enumerators. Had we not been able to recruit enough enumerators in the initial tranche, we had left ourselves enough time to go out again. We had further contingency measures in place after that.

Mr O'Loan:

My question is about PSA 21.3.2, the 3% efficiency savings for Departments and the use of PEDU. Will the report on the 3% efficiency savings across the Civil Service for 2009-2010 be available shortly? When will the report for April to September 2010 be available? Can you tell us something about the progress of the efficiency reviews in the Health and Education Departments? Have any other Departments sought the involvement of PEDU? What role do you

anticipate for PEDU in the forthcoming four-year budgetary period?

To amplify that, I am very much in favour of the concept of efficiency and an exercise that would deliver it. However, just yesterday, a report said that NI Water could be 40% more efficient. This starts to get into serious talk about public-sector reform. PEDU does not strike me as having the capacity to deliver that kind of serious reform. Perhaps you can address my more technical points and that more general point.

Mr Orr:

To start with the reports, may I ask whether it is the Programme for Government delivery report to which you are referring?

Mr O'Loan:

That is correct.

Mr Orr:

As I said to Dawn, that is managed by OFMDFM. They have a paper with the Executive, and as soon as the Executive have considered that paper, it would be for OFMDFM to publish the delivery report.

Turning to PEDU, you asked about the progress of the studies in the Department of Health and the Department of Education. Those studies were agreed as part of the June monitoring round. The terms of reference were put to the respective Ministers. The Department of Education terms of reference were accepted, and the PEDU study commenced about a month ago. As I understand it, the DHSSPS terms of reference have not yet been agreed.

Mr O'Loan:

That strikes me as very slow progress. Those Departments were spared the cuts that other Departments suffered on the grounds that there would be an efficiency exercise. Will anything emerge in the next financial year? Will there be any outcomes from that?

Mr Orr:

As I said, the Department of Education study commenced about a month ago. The DHSSPS terms of reference have not yet been agreed. That is a question that you would have to put to the DHSSPS Minister.

Mr O'Loan:

It sounds as if there may be a problem there. What is the thinking about achieving efficiencies over the next four years?

Mr Orr:

The thinking is that PEDU will continue, and we will be seeking funding for it. Therefore that will continue, and a programme would have to be developed for the next four years.

Mr O'Loan:

Therefore you need funding for an enterprise of the same scale, type and definition.

Mr Orr:

My job is to provide the funding, but this is Richard Pengelly's area. However, whatever funding is required for PEDU, we will submit a bid and seek to provide it. Nevertheless, I cannot guarantee it because of the Budget.

Mr O'Loan:

OK, I know where we are. We will have a Budget statement later to-day.

Mr McQuillan:

I want to ask about the NISRA targets and the customer satisfaction survey. Is 75% the usual response rate?

Dr Caven:

The target is to get 96% of our customers satisfied with the services that NISRA provides. The reason for the amber/green this year is that we have set ourselves another hurdle by trying to get 75% of our customers very satisfied. The survey will take place early in the new year, and we

will have the results in our annual report and accounts just after the end of the financial year.

Mr McQuillan:

What measures have you implemented to address issues raised in the customer satisfaction survey?

Dr Caven:

We have been very fortunate over the past number of years in that we have been hitting the high nineties with 98%. If anyone identifies the reason why they are dissatisfied, that would be addressed. Over and above that, I do not have any letters on my desk from Departments or public bodies indicating that they are dissatisfied with the service. However, we are always looking to improve.

Mr McQuillan:

Why is the sub-target of 75% of customers being very satisfied described as unpredictable?

Dr Caven:

Because we have not done it before; this will be the first time that we have set ourselves that hurdle.

Mr McQuillan:

How confident are you about meeting that target? Have you any reservations?

Dr Caven:

I do not have reservations, but we will have to see what comes out.

Ms Purvis:

What was the previous figure for “very satisfied”?

Dr Caven:

We do not have it; this is the first time that we have that new category.

The Chairperson:

Those are all members' questions, Norman and David. Thank you very much.