



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Justice

OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

Northern Ireland Community Safety College:
Department of Justice; PSNI; Department of
Finance and Personnel

23 April 2015

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

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Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mr Alastair Ross (Chairperson)
Mr Raymond McCartney (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Paul Frew
Mr Alban Maginness
Mr Patsy McGlone
Mr Edwin Poots

Witnesses:

Mr Brendan Smyth	Department of Finance and Personnel
Ms Rosemary Crawford	Department of Justice
Deputy Chief Constable Drew Harris	Police Service of Northern Ireland

The Chairperson (Mr Ross): I welcome Deputy Chief Constable Drew Harris, chair of the programme board; Brendan Smyth, acting director at the Central Procurement Directorate (CPD); and Rosemary Crawford, the deputy director of policing policy and strategy division. The session is being recorded by Hansard and will appear on the Committee web page in due course. I invite the Deputy Chief Constable to brief us when he is ready, and then we will open up to questions.

Deputy Chief Constable Drew Harris (Police Service of Northern Ireland): Thank you very much. I will provide an update on the written briefing sent to you on 17 April. As you will be aware, on the recommendation of the programme board, the Northern Ireland Community Safety College steering group commission undertook a two-stage review to clarify the training needs of all three services in the financial climate that we found ourselves in last year. The terms of reference were shared with you in December 2014. At stage 1, we established the implications of the procurement process and defined the scope of stage 2. When stage 1 was completed, the findings were considered by the steering group on 25 November 2014. The purpose of stage 2 was to re-examine the training requirements of all three services and put forward options and recommendations on what would be appropriate, affordable and deliverable in the current budgetary climate. An interim report was provided to the steering group at the end of February, detailing the programme board's assessment of all training needs as estimated by the three services, and that report was considered and endorsed by the steering group on 2 March. On the basis of that report, the Minister of Justice and the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety jointly circulated a draft Executive paper seeking agreement on the programme board's recommendations and the way forward. The matter is now with the Executive for consideration.

The steering group, without prejudice to any decision that the Executive may take, has now asked the programme board to begin developing a revised business case. This will identify a range of options for the future delivery of service training, one of which assumes maximum delivery of sites and premises currently owned by the services and, of course, the Policing Board, including Desertcreat. In preparation, workshops will be held, objectives agreed and constraints identified to inform the options appraisal. The aim is to deliver a final business case by the end of the year, enabling funding to be sought in the 2016-17 spending review process.

I will now give some of the detail. A training needs assessment was carried out and concluded that the projected number of training days to be delivered at the college had reduced very significantly, by of the order of 48% against the requirement set out in the extant business case. The change was brought about in part by the financial environment and the constraints on all three services. Budgets have been reduced, impacting on the size of the services and, in turn, on recruitment levels and overall headcount. All three services feel this particularly acutely as they have no means of getting rid of staff other than through natural wastage. When headcount is reduced in financially straitened times, therefore, it is by reducing recruitment. Over the last four to five years, obviously, budgets have been constrained as well, and all the services have responded positively and proactively to that. There has been a focus on cost reduction, including the minimisation of travel, the minimisation of abstraction, and the backfill and overtime required by abstraction, and the optimisation of the use of current facilities. There have also been changes in how training is delivered. IT plays an increasing role through the use of podcasts and online training. Those technological developments have had an impact on the overall number of training days required. Also, it has to be said, in delivering those efficiencies and benefits, some of the projected efficiencies of a central college have been duplicated. Some of the efficiencies promised by developing the college have already been delivered just by all of us driving costs out of our processes.

The view shared by the accounting officers of all three services is that the project needs to be reframed to take account of the financial position and changes in the methodology of training delivery. It was, then, only right and proper that the accounting officers of the Departments and the three services take seriously their responsibility to safeguard public money and reflect this in their recommendations. The project continues, and it continues to be underpinned by the three pillars of affordability, value for money and procurement. These are fundamental to good governance and building a college. Development of the joint training college for the Police Service, Prison Service and Fire and Rescue Service remains a Programme for Government commitment, and the Minister of Justice and the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety have jointly put a paper seeking agreement on the way forward to Executive colleagues.

The Chairperson (Mr Ross): Thank you very much. You mentioned that the view of the three accounting officers is that the project needs to be reframed: what exactly does that mean? Is it a way of saying that the project will not happen at all?

Deputy Chief Constable Harris: At this moment, the programme board has been tasked with developing a range of options. The business case as was has been undercut by the change in training days, so we will have to revise that business case to reflect the size of the services, new methods of delivery and the efficiency and effectiveness that we want for the delivery of training. We have been mandated a series of options, from the "do minimum" option to one that assumes maximum delivery of training at sites and premises that are currently owned by the services and the Policing Board, which as I said, includes Desertcreat.

Our immediate priority is to assess the condition and suitability of all the services' current training estate. From that, we will agree objectives and constraints to inform the option appraisal as we go forward. All this will form part of the revised business case. A lot of work has been done on training needs and on how training will develop in the future.

I will give one small example. We have been recruiting student officers over the past nine months, who, four weeks prior to arriving at the training centre, are given an online theoretical training package, which they complete in their own time. That has an impact on training days in comparison with what we were doing 10 years ago or, indeed, at the time of the publication of the Patten report.

Mr McGlone: Thank you for being with us here today. I am from and represent the area, and you reach a point with this issue of pondering the imponderable. Is this going ahead at all?

Deputy Chief Constable Harris: We are still a programme board for the delivery of a Northern Ireland Community Safety College. We have been asked to look at the business case and produce a revised one containing options. I cannot definitively say at this moment whether it is going ahead. We have to work through the business case, follow that process and see what options meet the requirements of affordability and so on.

Mr McGlone: I have to ask you this, because Mr McGuinness said, in response to a question from me at Question Time and in his capacity as deputy First Minister, that he had been aware from the very beginning of the project that there was opposition in the Police Service to its going to County Tyrone in the first place. He went on to say that the people who are opposed to it were trying to undermine a Programme for Government commitment. How do you reflect on that comment in the context of what you know to be the case in the PSNI?

Deputy Chief Constable Harris: I entirely refute the comments that are directed towards the Police Service. This is a joint project that involves all three services. The recommendations and the report that has been submitted to the Executive are the considered opinion of the three accounting officers for those services and the two accounting officers for the relevant Departments. It is very much a shared view.

I think that we have demonstrated our commitment to Desertcreat right from the start of the process whereby we purchased it and have held on to it. That illustrates that we wanted to be there. We have been through a process that has lasted for a number of years and has got us to this point, but, in our view, we are being asked to revisit the business case against these new facts. That is what we have been asked to do, and that is what we will deliver. There is no agenda other than the affordability, best value and delivery of training for the three services. That is the agenda at play.

Mr McGlone: From your point of view, you are clearly stating that there is no opposition within the PSNI to the project going ahead at Desertcreat.

Deputy Chief Constable Harris: No, there is not.

Mr McGlone: It is good to clarify that. Thank you.

I will address the £30 million end-year flexibility (EYF). That is probably your bailiwick, Mr Smyth. You are aware that I submitted a question for written answer on this.

Mr Brendan Smyth (Department of Finance and Personnel): It is probably not me; I am now in DFP. It is probably for my colleague, Rosemary —

Mr McGlone: I thought that you were Health.

Mr Smyth: I am from the health projects division in CPD, but I do not represent the Department of Health.

Mr McGlone: That is right: you have moved over. Maybe you could answer this, Rosemary. You are probably aware of a question for written answer on the matter and of the response to it, which is consistent with what is said in today's briefing papers. It states that:

"There is no agreement to EYF rollover into the 2015-16 financial year."

Can you clarify whether agreement has been sought on carrying it into 2015-16 for this project? I am not talking about other stuff.

Ms Rosemary Crawford (Department of Justice): Any decision on carrying forward or using EYF is a matter for DFP and the Treasury (HMT). DOJ officials have been talking to colleagues in DFP, and they are aware of the EYF of £30 million and that it had been provided by the Executive to cover the health element of the project. DFP officials will continue to engage with HMT to seek to reclaim that money for reallocation in 2015-16.

Mr McGlone: That was not my question, although I appreciate your answer. My question was this: has agreement been sought to allocate this £30 million EYF specifically to a policing college project? Has agreement been sought on that, or are you seeking disbursement of that £30 million elsewhere?

Ms Crawford: I am not privy to the conversations between DFP and Treasury, but my understanding is that we have made them aware of the £30 million related to this project, that it was money from the Executive and that we were keen to recoup it for allocation within the NI block. Where that would end up being spent is a matter for DFP and the Executive.

Mr McGlone: To be honest, I would be surprised if they were not aware that that was what the £30 million was for. So you are not aware whether DFP has sought agreement with the Treasury. I have been asking about this for four or five months. You are not aware whether DFP has sought agreement with the Treasury for the £30 million to be rolled over for a community safety college project.

Ms Crawford: I am not aware. My understanding is that they have sought to get that money back to the NI block grant. What would happen to it then, if they are successful — hopefully they will be — is a decision for DFP and the Executive.

Mr McGlone: It would be for expenditure elsewhere. It could be gone.

Ms Crawford: It could be. When the options appraisal exercise and the revised business case that the Deputy Chief Constable described has been worked through, there will be a need to find funding for the preferred option for the project, and that will be an Executive decision. They will be thinking about that with regard to the £30 million.

Mr McGlone: Essentially, when you, Mr Harris, come to put your project together, you could be another £30 million down, and the £30 million could be off to somewhere else in the Executive. That is what I am hearing.

Deputy Chief Constable Harris: That is possible, but, as I said, we do not know that for a fact.

Mr McGlone: Chair, can we establish from DFP, through whatever mechanism, what agreement it has sought for this £30 million, if, in fact, it has sought agreement for an extension into 2015-16 for this or a community safety project akin to this? I want to find out whether agreement has been sought, granted or is likely to be granted, or whether the money has gone elsewhere.

The Chairperson (Mr Ross): No problem.

Mr Poots: At the inception of this project, we heard a lot about training tourism. Is there any realistic prospect of training tourism being a considerable element of what you are looking at, or is that merely a pipe dream?

Deputy Chief Constable Harris: It is not a pipe dream but nor is it a considerable element. There are certainly people who are prepared to pay for the training that the Police Service and, undoubtedly, the other services could provide, but, in the overall scheme of running a college and given the overheads, only a small proportion of income could ever be generated. There is a lot of interest at the moment in, for instance, our command protocols and command training etc. That has been reported to the Policing Board, but, in the end, it would be a small portion.

Mr Poots: You are indicating at the outset that the number of officers that the police will be required to train has reduced significantly and that the training tourism element has changed considerably. Therefore, the entire nature of the project needs to change considerably. The project that was initially aspired to could not, irrespective of Programme for Government commitments, be fulfilled or supported by any accounting officer.

Deputy Chief Constable Harris: We have been required to revise the business case on the basis of the facts of our training need at this moment. You set out the reasons for that. Police training, and training for all the services, has changed, continues to evolve and has moved on considerably from where we were at the publication of the Patten report, for instance.

Mr Poots: What expressions has the Fire Service made on the matter?

Deputy Chief Constable Harris: In what respect?

Mr Poots: The Desertcreat project as it was when it went out to tender. Does the Fire Service still desire to be involved in that?

Deputy Chief Constable Harris: Yes, there is still a commitment from all three services to joint training. In fact, that imperative continues to grow because of cost reduction and cost savings. Further efficiencies can be made by sharing premises and sharing some training, and we have a requirement to do some joint command training with the Fire Service.

Mr Poots: I was asking less about the commitment to joint training and more about the project that was originally conceived. My understanding is that the Fire Service does not support proceeding with that type of project now because, first, it exceeds what it needs and, secondly, meeting that training requirement will cause it significant financial problems because the costs associated with it would lead to a reduction in the number of manned fire stations, which would be somewhat counterproductive. We have to be open and honest about these things, even for Mr McGlone's constituency. If we are not able to deliver this project, we need to say that we are not able to deliver it. I get a sense that you are looking at a Desertcreat 2 model, something that you could do at the existing training colleges or a do-nothing option, which is not really an option. Are you considering a fourth option of a scaled-down project on an alternative site?

Deputy Chief Constable Harris: No, there is no consideration of an alternative site. All our options will be based on the existing estate. I want to point out the rigour that we have applied to the governance of this. The facts have changed and, subsequently, we have reported those. As a result, without prejudice to the Executive decision, we are going through a revised business case process. In that process, we will work out what the options are, but the options are already constrained. We will not seek an alternative site. We are constrained within the estate that we have, and that includes Desertcreat. The revised business case process will, in the end, work through a number of options, and, in turn, we will present that to the steering group.

Mr Poots: But your training requirement is roughly half of what it was when you initially envisaged Desertcreat.

Deputy Chief Constable Harris: Yes, the training requirement for all three services is 48% less than was originally envisaged.

Mr Poots: Again, I think that it is in the public interest that we quickly identify an appropriately scaled project so that we can say to the public that this is what we are doing to ensure that we have the quality training for key emergency service personnel and get on with it, as opposed to treading very carefully so as not to upset people because of political considerations, and just get to the facts of what we can deliver.

Mr McCartney: Thank you for the presentation. My first question is maybe not really for today, but has there been any outcome from the investigation into the process that led to the first crisis in relation to the overshooting of the budget?

Mr Smyth: We reported previously on the poor performance of the design team, and that process is ongoing; we cannot say a whole lot about that at the moment, other than it is something that we are giving serious consideration to, and we are taking legal advice on how to pursue losses that may have accrued and on what may be recoverable in relation to that. Other than that, there is not a lot more that we can say about that process without prejudicing it.

Mr McCartney: OK. Is there a timeline?

Mr Smyth: We are actively pursuing that at the moment. We do not have a timeline for the end date of that but we are active on it at this time.

Mr McCartney: One of the initial problems that led you to the review is that, despite the fact that a large amount of money was left aside and ring-fenced, we overshot a budget.

Mr Smyth: That is absolutely correct.

Mr McCartney: If affordability is one of the pillars, then one of the ways to guarantee the failure of something is to make sure that you overshoot your budget. As we go forward, what are we putting in place to protect us? Again, in a large project such as this, you ask someone to build something for £100 million but the conclusion to date is that we cannot do it; we cannot afford it because the price is £120 million. You could ask, "What can you do for £100 million?"

Mr Smyth: Lessons have been learned from the process. We previously reported on the fact that the design team held its hands up and admitted that it was at fault and that it had poor cost management of the whole design process, which led directly to the difficulty with the initial tender process. We have looked at that to see how we can strengthen it. While we will always be reliant on the professionals to give us accurate professional advice, there are steps that we can take to scrutinise that more closely in future. That is something that we will take on board.

Mr McCartney: Would it be accepted that there was a failing in proper supervision not being there in the first instance to detect it?

Mr Smyth: Well, I think that we have learned lessons from it. I would not say that there was necessarily a failing. Without doubt, there has obviously been a failure of the process. There was a lot of good governance around this process, but the principal cause of it was that we were let down by a design team that failed to manage the production of the package within the cost constraints that we had given them. There is a stage where we can have checks on checks; clearly, with hindsight, that could have been interrogated further. However, that is measured against the pressures to advance the project as well and to meet programmes. There were issues around the availability of the funding in the current spending review, which was pushing us in one direction, but we have learned lessons in this particular process where it is unique, in a sense. In other areas, we have better base data on the cost of different elements. In this case, we probably did not have that because of the specialist nature of some of the elements of it, and that left us a little bit more vulnerable.

Mr McCartney: If people are suspicious or have fears or concerns that this was a project that people wanted to run into the sand, this is a good example of how you would do that.

Mr Smyth: There is no doubt that everyone associated with the project is hugely disappointed at how this has turned out. A lot of people have put a huge amount of effort in and are really disappointed that it has not succeeded. There has been good governance around the project — there was a review that supported that — but we can always learn from these sorts of episodes to ensure that we know how to mitigate those issues in the future.

Mr McCartney: In the process going forward, there seems to have been a surprisingly high reduction in training days in a short period. In the number of briefings that we have had on this in the past year, there was never a sense, from the inception of the project, that you were facing such a dramatic reduction in training days.

Deputy Chief Constable Harris: That has been driven in part by the financial position that we find ourselves in. That has demanded that, first, we do less training. We have weeded and winnowed out a lot of our courses and we have taken it down to what is essential. Secondly, the reduction in recruitment has had an impact. A lot of our training days involved training officers as they arrived. There was a block of 22 weeks of training, which is considerable. Once you start multiplying that up by factors of 100, you see that there are a considerable number of training days tied up in that training. Consequently, when you start trimming that back, your days fall away literally by the thousands.

Also, with a lot of the mandatory training that we have to do for officers including safety training, health and safety, and some refresher training, we have found it better and more cost-effective to send the trainers out to stations. In effect, they then have a captive audience rather than having other staff travelling around to get training, incurring extra costs. So, very practical things have driven down costs, which, in turn, has driven down the number of training days.

There has also been the arrival of technology, and there has been a drift where there has been encouragement throughout all the services and across the world to address theoretical elements that can be learned before joining. In effect, people pre-qualify for lots of services; not just the police, fire and prison services.

Mr McCartney: I accept that, but you could have predicted that. When you were making the first model on the scale and size of this, you could have predicted some of that reduction. There was an overshoot of a £100 million budget: that type of figure today, less than two years on, means that what was nearly a debacle at one time now looks increasingly bad because you could have taken some of the measures that you say could have been taken as you made your first projection for this project.

Deputy Chief Constable Harris: Well, two years ago, even one year ago, we were fixed at a number of 6,963. That number had been submitted and accepted both by the Policing Board and the DOJ as the number of officers required to meet our operational commitments. The change in financial position has moved us away from that number, and that is the practical reality of where we are. We have fewer officers than that through natural wastage and the slowing down of recruitment. We did not anticipate that. Also, we had not recruited anybody since 2011. When we restarted the recruitment process, we re-invigorated it; we moved to a new training process, which was redesigned. In doing that, we looked to what was happening elsewhere and we saw the difference of, in effect, preloading officers before they arrive. That has made a difference.

There is also the issue of winnowing out the training courses and changing their delivery, and, finally, there is technology. At the time the Patten report was published, I did not even have a computer on my desk. Now, training is delivered by podcast and e-learning. That has taken out a lot of the training days that would otherwise have been anticipated.

Mr McCartney: I accept that it goes as far back as Patten, but Patten's thing was that there should be a centralised training facility. I do not think that Patten had any blueprint of the size and scale, but the people who sat down to design it were given £100 million and we are now told that measures could have been put in place, such as pre-loading and doing some of the training offsite etc. None of us could predict the austerity situation and what effect it would have, but to add up to 48% seems fairly dramatic. That is half of your training days. That adds to my argument. The people who were setting out the design should have had three or four options in place. If you have £100 million to build something, somebody should have an idea of what you can get for £100 million, £80 million and £60 million, never mind overshooting. Somebody should have thought, "If we have only £100 million, we might have to preload some of the training or farm some of it back into the divisions rather than doing it in the college". We are sitting here today managing what is descending into something that is not going to work or happen.

Deputy Chief Constable Harris: As I have already outlined, the main reduction is around the recruitment of officers. We could not have anticipated that. The other elements are more marginal. It is the change in the recruitment profile that is the major driver of this. That is not something that we had anticipated or planned for. As you highlighted yourself, it is driven by the finances. Some of the elements of the college were very fixed. The practical training facilities are the practical training facilities. They are difficult to scale down in that, whether you are pushing through 200 officers or 400 officers, the facility has to be fit for purpose for the officers who are being trained. That is the same for all the services. If you create a facility, it needs to be fit for those who are going to go through it to be trained. It is the volume that has changed, not the nature of the practical training.

Mr McCartney: Again this might not be for today, but is there a breakdown of the percentage, say, of the downturn in recruitment and the impact of —

Deputy Chief Constable Harris: There is quite a lot of detail. Perhaps the best way to deal with it would be for me to write to the Committee and set out the specific detail, because each of the services is in a different position.

Mr McCartney: Thank you.

Mr Frew: Just remind me, where do we go from here? What is the next step for all three agencies and, indeed, the steering group?

Deputy Chief Constable Harris: The next step is to revise the business case based on the information that we have learned through the present governance arrangement and the new facts that we have in front of us. As I have said, all three services are committed to joint training and see the benefits of that. That is an imperative going forward to save money and around the issue of affordability. We are committed to that. There have already been benefits from working together, finding commonalities and thinking about where else we can collaborate and share services. Our job

through the programme board is to look at options, revise the business case, and report to the steering group. We also await the Executive's decision and direction.

Mr Frew: The Minister stated when he was here in November that the next steps for him at that stage were that, within two weeks, they would establish the position regarding the then procurement process and firm up the scope of the second stage. The second stage was to look at the training requirements in detail in regard to affordability, value for money and ability to procure. Is that all complete?

Deputy Chief Constable Harris: It was the findings of stage 2 that were so stark. We expected some reduction, but it was when we had a close analysis of what that reduction was that the figures became so stark and we found that the reduction was in the order of 48%. That scale of reduction had not been anticipated.

Mr Frew: We are seeking reassurance. This has been a shambles of a process from day one. The cogs in government turn slowly, and I am sure that the cogs in multi-agency programmes, teams and steering groups turn even slower and at different paces. However, what has not moved slowly is business and the dangers for businesses out there in the private sector. There is no doubt that this shambles of a process has put good, decent businesses, some of which are in my constituency, at severe risk. They have spent a lot on tendering, and they are going to be left with nothing but a failed legacy of a tendering process. What crumb of reassurance can you give us that, whatever happens in the near future, whatever is designed, wherever it may be, whether at one or separate locations, procurement processes will allow the private sector to tender without massive risk, even when they are awarded a contract, and that something can be delivered that will be fit for purpose?

Mr Smyth: Paul, I will take the procurement side of your question. We feel the points you make acutely. We fully appreciate the effort and the costs associated with tendering for these major projects and the commercial hit, not to mention the disappointment when nothing materialises. It is quite right to say that, from a reputational point of view, it is damaging for us, as well as damaging for the industry, and it is something that we certainly do not want to be a part of. I would not say that it is down to the process itself. There were a number of factors, and we have gone over those at previous hearings. The principal reason, I repeat, for the failure of the tendering process was the mismanagement of cost control in the process by the design team, and we are addressing that. We will certainly put in further checks and balances to assure ourselves that any pre-tender estimate created by a design team is more thoroughly validated and checked.

Mr Frew: What will that look like? It is a nice fluffy phrase, with respect, but what will those checks and balances look like?

Mr Smyth: Initially, we did a spot check on elements of the tender package before it was complete. That spot check gave reassurance, but subject to some caveats. Going forward, we need to do a more thorough, forensic check and not go to tender on issues that are caveated to some extent by lack of information. I think we need more robust procedures around those elements.

Mr Frew: Will you have the personnel and capacity to enforce and police more robust procedures?

Mr Smyth: Yes, I believe that we have. A project team in the Strategic Investment Board deliver this on a daily basis, and our role as the centre of procurement expertise is to set the procurement strategy. We have merged with CPD, giving us more options, strength and depth, and even at a time of possible reductions in staff, collectively our strength is greater. We are confident, therefore, that we will retain the expertise and strength to deliver.

Mr Frew: Are you confident that we will get training facilities for the three services that are fit for purpose, bearing in mind, of course, that something does not take very long to become out of date after it has been built?

Deputy Chief Constable Harris: We are focused on our present estate and its condition and suitability in the first place. Despite reductions, all three services still require a lot of training for members and officers. That is ongoing. All three services, as I said, see the benefits of joint training, and that is something that we are all committed to and that we will further develop. So, the revised business case is to explore that and the evidence base for what we need to go forward.

Mr Frew: In a practical sense, what does joint training really mean? Is it sharing a classroom, whereby the police will have it in the morning and Ambulance Service in the afternoon? Are there actual scenes and role-playing that you have to do together? What does it look like? What does the practical training look like?

Deputy Chief Constable Harris: The skills required of the staff in each organisation are very different, so there is no pretending that there is a huge crossover in the practical skills required on the ground. The skills required of a fire and rescue officer, police officer and prison officer are different. However, there is joint training around major and critical incidents. As you highlighted, there is also the sharing of infrastructure so that you get maximum value and efficiency from the infrastructure that you possess. That is where some of the economies of scale are to be found; it saves infrastructure from lying redundant. That is what I mean by joint training.

Mr McGlone: Just for a wee bit of clarity, in the paper of recommendations submitted to the Executive for discussion, how many recommendations were there?

Deputy Chief Constable Harris: The draft Executive paper?

Mr McGlone: Yes.

Deputy Chief Constable Harris: I do not have the paper in front of me. I do not know.

Ms Crawford: I could give some information about that. Clearly, it is a draft Executive paper and is the property of the Executive, so it would not be appropriate for us to go into detail on it. It has not yet been accepted by the Executive for discussion, so it is still subject to change at any point. However, it is fair to say that the paper outlined the current position on the project and, in that, it is similar to the update that we gave to the Committee. It sought approval to proceed with work on a revised business case and for funding from the block grant in the event that the preferred option that emerges from that business case is for a cross-service college. There were a couple of other smaller, technical recommendations in it that were of a commercial nature and that it would not be appropriate to go into.

Mr McGlone: In the light of what you said earlier, Mr Harris, maybe I picked you up wrong, but you were committing to training facilities within the police estate which included Desertcreat. Do all those recommendations commit to a project going ahead at Desertcreat?

Deputy Chief Constable Harris: That depends on the business case that we have to revise. We are producing a revised business case within the constraint that we use the existing estate, which includes Desertcreat. So there are no new sites.

Mr McGlone: Sorry, that is not what I am asking.

Deputy Chief Constable Harris: If you are asking whether one of the outcomes could be that Desertcreat is not a site, the answer is that I do not know yet, because we have to work through the options.

Mr McGlone: That clarifies it for me. I just wanted to establish whether you had, in fact, committed entirely to progress and construction on the site at Desertcreat or whether, as you have just outlined, that is subject to the decision of others and it may be ruled out. It is a bit of a concern if that is even being considered as a viable option at the Department.

Deputy Chief Constable Harris: That decision depends on the integrity of the business case process that we enter into. I have talked about the constraints within which we have to work. I have set that out, and that is the single constraint that we have. However, we have to produce options that meet the needs of affordability etc.

Mr McGlone: Have you a time frame for that?

Deputy Chief Constable Harris: The time frame is for this calendar year, looking towards 2016-17 for funding.

Mr McGlone: OK. Thank you for that. Paul referred to this earlier: I realise that a good part of it was outside your control, but one of the worst things ever done was the stakeholder event, held in the Glenavon House Hotel, when all those businesses were brought in. There was hype and expectation around the project at the start and then, within five or six days — bang — the whole thing was torpedoed. Credibility around the project is probably at an all-time low. However, I have read the report this morning from the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS), which refers to a worrying decline in capital projects and public sector expenditure on infrastructure. When will we have a decision for all those qualified, skilled tradespeople and engineers who are heading off in boats and planes overseas to bring their expertise to bear in other countries? When will we have something productive for them to do? That is the big concern. I am sure that we all share that. We are reflecting what people in the construction industry are saying to us.

Deputy Chief Constable Harris: The overall point to make is that each public service has a reducing financial position. That impacts on our estate, the maintenance and, indeed, new capital works. That is an inescapable fact. Our police estate has reduced very considerably, and I am sure that it is the same for the other services. We have been asked to deliver a revised business case, and that will be done within the calendar year. Whatever the outcome of that is, it will, hopefully, provide some clarity around what might be required in terms of capital work.

Mr McGlone: On reflection, if you get the business case and all that stuff agreed, you are back into the procurement stuff, and round and round the mulberry bush we go. You can forgive my scepticism about the project and what has happened up until now. People are saying, "Can we have a decision?".

Deputy Chief Constable Harris: We await direction from the Executive.

Mr McGlone: That is grand.

Mr Poots: Brendan has put on record twice today that you have been let down by the design team.

Mr Smyth: That is correct.

Mr Poots: What were your checks and balances to identify that what the design team put to you was right before it went out to tender?

Mr Smyth: Do you mean the facilities that were provided or the design?

Mr Poots: The lowest tender came in at roughly £40 million over what was anticipated. Did you anticipate the tenders coming in at the price that the project team had identified?

Mr Smyth: When the tender package was put together, a pre-tender estimate was prepared. That was in the order of £101 million — I do not know the exact figure — and, in a series of reports from the design team in the preceding year, the pre-tender estimate fluctuated between roughly £98 million and £103 million. There was real anxiety at the start of the process about the quality of the cost management, and we attempted to address that on a number of occasions. We asked for support for that design team and more local input into that design team to make sure that it was reflecting accurately the current market environment in which it was working. There were something in the order of seven or eight reports on a monthly or bimonthly basis in which there was a reasonable degree of consistency around that figure, and, because of that, we went to tender expecting the tenders to come in at around £102 million. It came as a complete surprise to us that, during that tender process, a number of tenderers approached us and said, "It is not possible to deliver this within the cap that you have put on it". It was only at that stage, in order to keep the project progressing, that we, in agreement with all the tenderers, removed the cap and said, "Submit your tenders and we will work on a bill of reductions".

Mr Poots: You said that you got more local input on the design team.

Mr Smyth: Yes.

Mr Poots: What was that?

Mr Smyth: Support from a number of local firms. We brought in two local firms in support of the team that was appointed. One issue was making sure that materials were properly specified and that the local market understood them. The other aspect was on the engineering side.

Mr Poots: Did they cross-check the bill of costs that had been developed by the design team against the anticipated tender cap?

Mr Smyth: Yes. That was part of the remit of the consultants that we appointed —

Mr Poots: So, it coincided with the design team? Did it think that the design team's costs were —

Mr Smyth: After looking at the information, they said that there were elements of the information. We subsequently determined that, during that process, there was further design creep through the tender preparation period that they and we were unsighted on.

Mr Poots: Was there £40 million-worth of creep?

Mr Smyth: I think that the lowest tender was approximately £32 million above our initial pre-tender estimate.

Mr Poots: Who were the two local companies involved?

Mr Smyth: The two local consultants?

Mr Poots: Yes.

Mr Smyth: One was an architectural firm called Ostick and Williams, and the other was White Young Green.

Mr Poots: I have one final question for Mr Harris. Why are we absolutely fixed at this time on lands that are currently owned by, or are within the control of, the services? Why, at this stage, are we not looking at putting out a tender to companies to design, build and hand over appropriate facilities wherever those companies might consider to be best? That may well be Desertcreat, Garnerville or elsewhere. Why are we attaching ourselves so fixedly to those existing sites when, potentially, you could get a better outcome and deal and a more fit-for-purpose facility at a lower cost by leaving it more open at a tender process?

Deputy Chief Constable Harris: Given the extent of services' estates and what we own and have control of without having to purchase additional land or real estate, it makes good sense to look at what we have. We have to review the condition and suitability of our existing estate. That is part of revising the business case. In respect of affordability, given the extent of what we hold already, it seems foolish to look outside that.

Mr Poots: If what you say is correct, somewhere in the estate will come out on top in that instance. However, if you allow the process to go outside of the existing estate and something else comes in at a lower cost, you have not actually lost anything.

Deputy Chief Constable Harris: That is the constraint within which we operate as a programme board.

Mr Poots: I understand that, but I do not accept the logic.

Deputy Chief Constable Harris: This is provisional. It is all subject to subsequent decisions by the Executive, but this seems to be a good sensible way to proceed and try to develop something in this calendar year.

Mr Poots: I suggest that the project board would be best looking at developing fit-for-purpose facilities that can develop the appropriate training at the best possible cost. Therefore, the more open that is left, the better the opportunity there is to reduce the cost to the public purse, which has already suffered quite badly as a result of all this.

The Chairperson (Mr Ross): Thank you very much.