



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure

OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

Inquiry into issues around emergency exiting plans,
including their impact on stadium capacity, for the
redeveloped Casement Park stadium:

Ms Carál Ní Chuilín MLA
(Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure)

3 March 2016

In the Minister's evidence to the Committee on 21 May '15, the Minister indicated that she was not aware that emergency exiting was an issue of concern. In his evidence to the Committee on 28 January '16, Mr Dominic Walsh, former chairperson of Sport NI, indicated that, at a meeting in mid 2012, he told the Minister of concerns around emergency exiting with respect to the proposed redeveloped Casement Park stadium and was assured that these were being dealt with.

The Committee also wishes to seek clarification from the Minister regarding whether or not she was aware of plans around the possibility of purchasing houses adjacent to the proposed redevelopment of Casement Park stadium. In his evidence to the Committee on 28 January, Mr Walsh stated or indicated that the purchase of houses as a solution to the emergency exiting issue was discussed at the meeting in 2012.

Could I highlight, then, that the Minister was notified in advance of the Committee's reasons for taking evidence under oath, of the potential implications of knowingly making a false statement whilst under oath and that they may wish to seek their own legal advice? The Minister was notified in advance of the evidence session of the matters on which evidence is to be sought. The Minister was provided in advance of the evidence session with relevant evidence received from other parties, i.e. Mr Walsh. The Minister will be provided with a reasonable opportunity to put forward the facts as she understands them or to correct or contradict other statements on relevant matters which have been made in evidence to the Committee. The questioning of the Minister should remain focused on the matters notified to the witness in advance of the meeting.

Could I now invite the Clerk to provide the wording of the oath and a Bible to the Minister?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I swear by almighty God that the evidence I shall give shall be truthful and honest and that I will give the Committee all such information and assistance as I can to enable it to discharge its responsibilities.

The Chairperson (Mr McCausland): Thank you. If you would like now to proceed with your opening statement, please.

Ms Ní Chuilín: OK. Thank you, everyone, and good morning.

Before I make my statement to the Committee, I would like to start by saying that, as members will be aware, no witness has given evidence on oath to the Committee during the course of this inquiry, and it is a matter of concern to me that there now should be an alteration in procedure, particularly at this late stage. I am happy to give evidence to the Committee and have indicated publicly, and I am very happy to give further evidence again today. I am very concerned that, at such a late stage in procedure may give rise to a well-founded concern about the fairness of the Committee's conduct. Not only is singling out a few witnesses to give evidence under oath intrinsically unfair and questions the integrity of some of the witnesses it also disrupts the effectiveness of the inquiry, not least because the Committee will also be placed in the impossible position of evaluating the value of some evidence under oath and weighing this against the evidence of other witnesses that has not been given under oath. I am mostly concerned that there is now, at the very least, an inescapable appearance of bias in the chairmanship of the Committee given, one, the active consideration being given to singling out the testimony of certain witnesses for evidence under oath and, two, the Chair's previous role and obvious conflicts of interest in relation to this inquiry arising from his role as Minister in the initiation of the regional stadia programme.

Good administration demands fairness and consistency of treatment, and I will invite the Committee to act fairly and consistently by choosing either that all witnesses be called or recalled to give evidence under oath or that no witnesses should be called or recalled to give evidence under oath. Now that I have commented on the proceedings, I will make my statement.

I very much welcome the opportunity to personally respond to the allegations made by the former chair of Sport NI, Mr Dominic Walsh, during his evidence to the Committee on 28 January 2016. I also welcome the opportunity to publicly state my commitment to successfully delivering the Executive's regional stadia programme and, within that programme, to completing the redevelopment of Casement Park.

I think it is worth pointing out what has already been achieved with regard to the programme to date. Kingspan Stadium has been completed and is operating successfully, praised by both home and abroad visiting rugby fans as a world-class rugby stadium. Windsor Park is moving very well and has

successfully already hosted international matches, despite some challenges along the way. I am confident that, with the rebuilding of the west stand, which will be complete before the end of this year, and last, and by no means least, the project development of Casement Park is making good progress and moving forward again. I, once again, welcome the opportunity to repeat that I am absolutely committed to delivering a safe stadium at Casement Park, and I once again repeat my earlier sentiment that safety is of paramount importance to me personally, to my Department and to the Ulster Council of the GAA.

I note from the recent media coverage that some members of the Committee say that the Committee is in a quandary as a result of some of the contradictory evidence that they have heard to date. I very much welcome, therefore, the opportunity to set the record straight on a number of factual matters and to very clearly and conclusively demonstrate that there is absolutely no evidence whatsoever to substantiate this Committee that I was made aware of any concerns regarding safety at Casement Park prior to 30 April 2015. The evidence I will present to the Committee will, once and for all, conclude rational debate on this matter and will also enable attention to be directed towards a realisation of all of the very real and substantial benefits that the regional stadia programme, and, within it, the Casement Park project, offer to all the people of the North of Ireland.

It is essential that everyone involved in the project is able to get on with the job in hand to ensure that we deliver on the promise of social and economic benefits that are available and achievable with a delivery of a safe and sustainable stadium at Casement Park. This project will undoubtedly help put the North on the map not just in terms of the contribution that it will make to putting forward a successful and very important Rugby World Cup bid but also to the longer-term benefits to be gained in terms of delivering social, economic, employment, increased visitor numbers and enhanced prosperity across west Belfast.

To date, the Committee has heard evidence that supports my stated position from a wide variety of witnesses from the GAA, the Casement Park project team, the Casement Park design team, Ulster Rugby, the Irish Football Association, the Department of Culture and Leisure also. I want to take this opportunity to remind the Committee of those who have appeared: Mr Tom Daly; Mr Páraic Duffy; Dr Danny Murphy; Mr Oran McCloskey; Mr Mike Trice; Mr Ciarán McGurk; Mr Carl Southern; Mr Peter May; Mr Rory Miskelly; Mr Andrew Dadley; Mr Edgar Jardine; Mrs Rosalie Flanagan; Mrs Cynthia Smith; Mr Noel Molloy; Sir Nigel Hamilton; Mr Jim Shaw; and myself on a couple of occasions. No less than 17 individual witnesses have given clear and unequivocal evidence to this Committee which directly supports my position. None of these people stated that or referred to evidence that significant concerns about safety had been highlighted prior to 30 April 2015. In addition to this, we have the project assessment review (PAR) report produced by an independent team led by the British Cabinet Office major reports authority and published on 7 August 2015 alongside a number of written responses and clarifications to various queries provided to the Committee from David Blackall, the independent British Cabinet Office chair of the PAR team. The evidence of these witnesses and the project assessment review team is unequivocal that Casement Park is achievable.

I am amazed and aghast that, despite the clear weight of evidence provided by such a broad range of individuals and organisations, an improper inference that witnesses may have misremembered or misrepresented the facts and misled the Committee in any way in relation to the Casement Park project is now being given any kind of credence. Are people really promoting some kind of bizarre conspiracy theory which stretches from the GAA to the British Cabinet Office?

I intend to present evidence today by firstly responding to the allegations made by Mr Dominic Walsh, the former chair of Sport NI in his evidence session to the Committee on 28 January 2016 — 2016. Then I will focus on the factual evidence I referred to earlier before refocusing on some important issues of assurance and project governance that I feel have been overlooked in recent months. I then propose to end by highlighting some items of contradictory evidence that have been previously presented to this Committee.

First of all, I want to address the evidence presented by Mr Walsh. The first allegation that he made was that, unlike other witnesses, he was not given access to relevant papers by the Department to support his presentation. At the outset, I would like to clarify that DCAL did not withhold any information from Mr Walsh prior to his appearance; indeed, the Department did not receive a request from Mr Walsh.

Following a request from the Committee Clerk, DCAL officials contacted Mr Walsh on 5 August 2015 to advise that members wished to call him to provide an oral briefing on his role in the Casement Park project during his time as chair of Sport NI. Mr Walsh subsequently contacted the Department seeking

a meeting with the permanent secretary to discuss the Committee's inquiry, what was being sought of him and to determine what support DCAL could provide to him. At no point — and I stress this — at no point did Mr Walsh ask for or request sight of documentation. In fact, only following Mr Walsh's evidence did he decide to write to DCAL on 23 February 2016 seeking specific information. Indeed, when Mr Walsh approached the Department, he stated that, given the time that had elapsed since he had held the position of chair of Sport NI, he felt he was not in a position to brief the Committee and wanted to meet with someone from the Department first. In effect, he was seeking DCAL advice about how to provide evidence. This is a strange position to take. On one hand, Mr Walsh felt able to make a series of claims at this Committee, but on the other hand wanted departmental officials to interpret what the Committee was seeking on his behalf. In response to this request for a meeting, it was made clear to Mr Walsh that such a meeting would not be appropriate. It is clearly not for departmental officials to second-guess the Committee's intentions with regard to the inquiry or to provide any clarification in relation to what the Committee might be seeking. It was important that the Department ensured that there would be no conflict of interest and also very important to avoid any actual or, indeed, perceived contamination of the inquiry process or witness evidence.

The decision not to meet Mr Walsh was communicated to Mr Walsh and to the Committee Clerk, and an email outlining the position was sent to the Committee Clerk on 5 August 2015. The Department did not receive any further correspondence from Mr Walsh, nor did he request any access to any papers or documentation until 23 February, as I have already stated. In terms of support, Mr Walsh, as a former chair of Sport NI, would and could at any time have contacted his former organisation to request any assistance he may have needed, including documentation, and I am not aware if he did so prior to his appearance.

With regard to the provision of papers to other witnesses, I am aware that approaches were made to the Department by former DCAL officials who explicitly sought sight of documentation they were familiar with and would have had access to in the course of their duties relating to the Casement Park project and in advance of their appearances before the Committee. These were facilitated by officials fully in line with normal practice both here and in other jurisdictions. However, DCAL officials did not meet with these former employees to interpret the needs of the Committee with regard to the inquiry, as has been requested by Mr Walsh.

The second allegation by Mr Walsh was that DCAL officials were aware of the issues around emergency exiting and the need to purchase and demolish houses as far back as the summer of 2012. This allegation is absolutely absurd. As I have stated before, there is nothing in all of the evidence I have referred to which supports the allegation that discussions involved the raising of concerns to officials which were then passed on to me — nothing whatsoever.

But let's dig a little deeper into what Mr Walsh is saying. He is saying that discussions around emergency exiting existed somehow constitute concerns being raised and ignored. Think about the implications of what this means not just for this project but for governance and projects right across government. Is Mr Walsh saying that it is inappropriate for a project to consider risks from the outset? Is Mr Walsh saying that no project should have a risk register or formal risk evaluation processes? Is Mr Walsh saying that project and programme teams should not discuss options to deal with risks? Or is Mr Walsh saying that any and every discussion about how to manage risks constitutes concerns being raised and ignored? This goes against all evidence and guidance and best practice about good programme and project management. It goes against all the principles of good communication, and, taken to its extreme, such an approach could, frankly, in my opinion, be dangerous. Turning risk management into something to fear because it will later be twisted into allegations discourages open and frank communications about options.

Importantly, the evidence just didn't stack up. Mr Walsh referred to discussions about the need to buy and demolish houses as far back as the summer of 2012. If this did happen, then those involved in these discussions are to be commended because they must have had a crystal ball. The design team for the project was not formally appointed until 3 September 2012, which is after the summer of 2012. There would not have been any design information or any detailed design sketches available for discussion prior to the appointment of the design team. I understand that designs were first considered by the safety technical group the following year on 11 February 2013, so, with no design team, no design and no opportunity for a rational, fact-based discussion, the allegation was that concerns were raised at that time. Any discussions could, at best, have been matters of uninformed speculation, which is not the basis for managing a major project.

As previously stated, I was not aware of allegations in relation to concerns around emergency exiting at Casement Park prior to Mr Scott's appearance at this Committee on 30 April 2015. I have made

this very clear in my evidence at the Committee meeting on 21 May 2015 and, indeed, on many other occasions since then. I stand by this statement, and I will come back to this point and prove further evidence which confirms these concerns were not raised with me before this time.

The third allegation made by Mr Walsh was that he had attended regular meetings with me during 2012 to discuss a range of issues, including issues about stadia programmes. He alleged that, at one of these meetings in the summer of 2012, the issue of emergency exiting for the proposed Casement Park stadium was discussed along with the purchase and demolition of houses to facilitate emergency exiting. Again, this is utterly absurd, not at least because I have stated that the design team for the project was not formally appointed until 3 September 2012, which is again after the summer. And therefore I repeat again: there would not have been any design information or detailed design sketches available for discussion about the purchase, demolition or any other aspect of exiting in absence of a design.

In a nine-month period from January to September 2012, Mr Walsh alleged that he had regular Friday meetings with myself and the permanent secretary. To quote Mr Walsh:

"As time progressed, the meetings became more frequent. In the absence of the chief executive, who was off ill at the time, it was absorbing more of my time. There was the Friday meeting — this is how I would describe it."

Mr Walsh went on to state that it became a regular Friday meeting with the Minister and permanent secretary — if not every week, it was more frequent. I can confirm to the Committee that, during this period, we had three meetings — Wednesday meetings, not Friday meetings — and these were on Wednesday 15 February 2012, which was a follow-up meeting to discuss Sport NI's 2012-13 business plan with myself, Dominic Walsh, Eamonn McCartan, Rosalie Flanagan and Mick Corry; again, on Wednesday 28 March 2012, which was a 15-minute pre-meeting attended by myself and Dominic Walsh ahead of a meeting with Sport NI board members; and again on Wednesday 2 May 2012, which was a 15-minute pre-meeting attended by myself, Dominic Walsh, Rosalie Flanagan and Colin Watson ahead of a meeting with Sport NI board members.

As Mr Walsh indicated in his evidence session, no minutes were taken at these meetings, and a search of the Department's records management system has revealed no records exist. Informal notes may have been taken by officials present, but, if so, these have not been retained within my Department. As chair of Sport NI, Mr Walsh will have attended events and functions during 2012 at which I may have been present; for example, events such as part of the build-up to the Olympic and Paralympic pre-games training camps. I do not, however, consider these to be regular meetings, and, in addition, none of these meetings occurred on a Friday, nor do I recall ever discussing issues around the regional stadia programme at these events or functions.

Now that I feel I have clarified this position regarding Mr Walsh's allegations, I would like to take members back to the inception of the regional stadia programme and, in particular, the facts surrounding the Casement Park project from its commencement in terms of the concept right up to date. I will do so in an effort to provide you with tangible evidence on a number of matters, something which has been sadly missing from some of the other witnesses' evidence to this inquiry to date. I will focus on the governance and assurance mechanisms which are built into each and every stage of the programme and projects later in my evidence. I welcome the opportunity to put the record straight on a number of issues about the Casement Park project and the processes associated with it to very clearly demonstrate that there is absolutely no evidence whatsoever to substantiate the claim that I was ever made aware of serious safety concerns at Casement Park prior to 30 April 2015 or, in fact, that such a claim was ever raised or elevated through the formal project and programme structures that are in place.

The proposal for a multisports stadium was first raised and supported by Sport NI in the early 1990s following publication of the Taylor report, which was commissioned following the Hillsborough disaster in 1989. This report made a series of recommendations for bringing public stadia here and in Britain up to modern safety standards. The Taylor report resulted in a new generation of safe and comfortable stadia being developed across Britain. The new facilities saw increased revenues and improved sustainability of grounds and clubs. It was the growth of these stadia, together with the shortcomings of the existing stadia in the North, that prompted the public debate as to the benefits of a multisports stadium suitable for hosting major fixtures of the main spectator sports, including soccer, rugby and Gaelic football.

In 1999, a pre-feasibility study on the sports stadia project was commissioned by Sport NI. This study concluded that there was potential for demand for a 30,000-seated stadium supporting up to 30 sporting and other events per annum. However, the report also concluded that such a stadium would be unlikely to generate sufficient revenues to contribute to the capital cost of its construction. Therefore, further consideration was given to alternative forms of financing and a project which could produce private-sector innovation and commercial acumen to the project.

In 2004, direct rule Ministers commissioned a feasibility study into the development of a multisports regional stadium for the North, playing host to major fixtures within all three major sports, as well as a range of other events, such as concerts and conferences. In November 2007, a business case was produced that identified a multisports stadium at the former Maze/Long Kesh prison site as its preferred option. This business case also considered the option to refurbish and enhance existing stadia, with a proposed capacity of 39,000 for the Casement Park stadium. There is a reference in appendix B of the document entitled 'Sport NI Existing Facilities Paper' which states that the report was updated and agreed by Mr Scott from Sport NI with absolutely no reference whatsoever to any safety concerns or, indeed, any issues regarding the 39,000 capacity proposed for the Casement Park project. I quote from the document:

"This paper is an update of a report prepared by Sport NI's facilities management manager reference SC03158 in April 2003, and it has been prepared with his assistance. It identifies potential improvement works which would typically be undertaken to each of the existing stadia in order to comply with health and safety in sports grounds legislation, bring them up to basic but a functional standard and make significant enhancements which would increase both the quality and capacity of the grounds."

The paper goes on to state that, in relation to Casement Park, the proposed works would increase the quality and capacity of the stadia to include 39,000 capacity.

In January 2009, the then Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, Mr Gregory Campbell, indicated that a multisports stadium would not be developed at the Maze/Long Kesh site. As a consequence of this decision, the three governing bodies of the sports involved — the IFA, the GAA and, indeed, Ulster Rugby — were asked to bring forward preferred alternatives on stadium provision. In order to provide appropriate strategic direction for taking forward regional stadia development, the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure established an oversight steering group comprised of senior representatives of the Department, Sport NI, the Strategic Investment Board and, latterly, the Department of Social Development and Belfast City Council. In March 2009, the governing bodies for football, Gaelic games and rugby presented proposals for the redevelopment of their respective stadia provision, namely Windsor Park, Casement Park and Ravenhill, which is now Kingspan.

I refer to the Casement Park multi-agency response plan, which was developed in April 2009 and refers to, within the GAA evidence to this Committee, that this document was developed in consultation with the PSNI, the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service, the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service, Belfast City Council and the GAA. This multi-agency response plan provides the generic framework for responding to a major incident at Casement Park, and Mr Scott was consulted on this document. The plan addresses joint coordination and communications provisions, whilst clarifying the roles and responsibilities of key agencies. "Potential incidents" looked at the following, and I quote:

"Collapse of buildings and stands, fire within stands, clubs and changing areas, crowd crushing and panic, chemical gas and incidents, terrorist incidents."

It is interesting to note that, in the event of an evacuation, it was agreed that the GAA stewards will marshal the crowd leaving the grounds in a countrywards direction on the Andersonstown Road and move them as far as possible towards the Andersonstown Leisure Centre.

In October 2009, Sport NI, on behalf of the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure, commissioned FGS McClure Watters to develop an outline business case (OBC) examining options for the development of regional stadia in the North of Ireland for soccer, rugby and Gaelic games. In February 2010, you, Chair, as the then Minister for Culture, Arts and Leisure, provided a briefing in relation to progress on regional stadia developments to the CAL Committee. You advised the Committee then, and I quote:

"It was the GAA's view that a major stadium is one that has the capacity of 40,000 to 60,000".

You further advised in your briefing that, and again I quote:

"It is anticipated that the proposal will address the physical inadequacies around health and safety requirements and also that the stadium could be used for other, non-GAA events, such as concerts, which would consequently add to the sustainability of the stadium".

In July 2010, Sport NI submitted the outline business case for the development of regional stadia to the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure for approval. The business case considered a number of options for delivery and identified a preferred option for each stadia, which included a 40,000-capacity stadium for Casement Park. In this cover letter, the then chief executive, Mr Eamonn McCartan, stated that he was, and I quote:

"content that the preferred options within the business case addresses the strategic needs of each of the three sports within both a viable and sustainable business model and was satisfied with the information contained within the business case and that it represents value for money."

He also gave assurance that, and I quote:

"The business case was prepared to HM Treasury green book standards with continual review by the oversight steering group, whose membership included Mr Harkness from Sport NI, and had received all requisite approvals from Sport NI staff, including Mr Scott."

It is worth stressing that Sport NI did not raise any concerns regarding the 40,000-capacity stadium proposed for Casement Park. It should also be noted that the purpose of an OBC is to assess the project and the site, the feasibility of the project and site and also to assess the risks and weigh the risks against the benefits to inform the investment decision.

On 15 September 2010, you, Chair, as the then Minister for Culture, Arts and Leisure, wrote to Barry McElduff in his capacity as the then Chair of this Committee and provided a briefing paper regarding — regarding the regional stadia development. It is worth pointing out to you, Chair, that you confirmed to the Committee that the outline business case consultants, and I quote:

"considered the governing body proposals in relation to best practice in terms of health and safety at sporting venues."

In the briefing paper, you also advised the Committee that to provide appropriate strategic direction for taking forward regional stadia development, DCAL had established an oversight steering group comprised of senior representatives of the Department, Sport NI, SIB and, latterly, the Department of Social Development and Belfast council. Your paper concluded that, and again I quote:

"the regional stadia provision for each of the sports, which included the redevelopment of Casement Park to a maximum spectator capacity of 40,000, were judged to be the optimal options consistent with the need to ensure viability and long-term sustainability and having regard to the diverse needs of each of the sports."

You, nor anyone else, highlighted any concerns whatsoever about the Casement Park project or proposed capacity at that time. I should also point out that, for the avoidance of doubt, neither Sport NI nor anyone else from the organisation raised issues regarding safety of the proposed 40,000 capacity.

On 30 September 2010, Mr Nick Harkness from Sport NI, when giving evidence, advised the CAL Committee that Sport NI had been through a number of drafts of the OBC. The first draft of the OBC was submitted to Sport NI in November 2009, the second in December and the third in February 2010. In June 2010, a final draft was submitted to Sport NI. Therefore, the OBC had been through a number of iterations where it was sent to Sport NI, thus providing them with umpteen opportunities to raise any concerns, but none were raised. On submission of the OBC, further information was sought and the Department asked Sport NI to clarify some issues with the governing bodies, which they did. Since the final draft was submitted, responses to those queries were submitted to the Department. However, crucially at this very important junction, once again, I draw your attention to the fact that no issues about safety were raised by Sport NI at this crucial stage.

In October 2010, the OBC for the regional stadia development was submitted to DFP for approval. The permanent secretary of DCAL at that time, Mrs Rosalie Flanagan, sent a letter to DFP advising

you, Chair, as the then Minister, had approved the OBC for the regional stadia programme, which included the redevelopment of Casement Park with the capacity of 40,000. Once again, I remind everyone that the OBC that you, Chair, approved and signed off confirms that the site is capable of hosting 40,000 people. In March 2011, DFP formally approved the OBC, which identified the proposal to redevelop and upgrade Windsor Park with a capacity of 18,000; Ravenhill with a capacity of 15,000; and Casement Park with options for capacity of up to 42,000, with the preferred option of 40,000 identified as the most economically advantageous option for the stadia development.

Mr Walsh, in his recent evidence, indicated that there were no — there were no — there were capacity issues raised at OBC stage. However, there has been no mention of this contained in either Sport NI submission of the OBC or in your approval, Chair, of the OBC when you were the Minister responsible for the programme and its constituent projects, including Casement Park. The OBC proposed a 40,000-capacity stadium at Casement Park, and no issues were raised in relation to capacity or safety in this document. The document has a section which focuses on risks and, indeed, outlines a number of high-level risks. However and more importantly, no safety risks are mentioned.

During design development and community consultation, capacity was subsequently reduced to 38,000 by the GAA. On 16 June 2011, Mr Harkness from Sport NI stated at the CAL Committee meeting that Sport NI had delivered nine separate training workshops, including risk management, and had established draft risk registers for each project. He further advised that Sport NI had contributed to the DCAL stadium programme board risk register. Once again, I would like to draw your attention to the fact that no issues about safety were raised by Sport NI at this or any of the risk registers I have mentioned that Sport NI provided to or inputted to.

In October 2011, in line with good practice for capital investments on the scale of the regional stadia programme, my Department commissioned a gateway zero review aimed at ensuring that the programme and its constituent projects achieved the desired outcomes. The gateway review, which is an — which is an independent review by a team of OGC Cabinet Office-approved experts, led by Chris Dye, a respected and experienced review team leader. The review covered five main areas, including risk management, as part of the review process. The review team spoke with Sport NI representatives, including Mick — Mr Harkness and it is worthy to note that no concerns in terms of safety or emergency exiting were highlighted to the review team. The review resulted in a number of recommendations being made to ensure the successful delivery of the programme. One key aspect of the recommendations was the need to bring the projects together into a coherent project structure and recommended the appointment of a single programme director.

Following a recruitment process in conjunction with the Strategic Investment Board, in March 2012 Mr Noel Molloy was appointed as a programme director for the regional stadia programme. In 2012, the safety technical group was established by Sport NI at the request of DCAL. The safety technical group is a multi-agency body established to provide specialist advice — and I emphasise the term "advice" — to the stadium delivery team regarding health and safety aspects of the design for the stadia projects in Ravenhill, Windsor Park and Casement Park. In February 2012, following approval of the Ulster Council GAA business plan by the Sport NI programme board on 10 November 2011, Sport NI issued a development costs letter of offer to the GAA for £4.3 million to fund project development costs relating to the potential construction of a 40,000-capacity all-seater stadium — all-seater stadium at Casement Park project, subject to the normal terms and conditions associated with this grant funding. It should be noted, however, there were absolutely no terms and conditions whatsoever cited in relation to safety.

So let me ask members: why would Sport NI, an organisation chaired by Mr Walsh at the time, issue a letter of offer, if they had any concerns about spectator safety, without inclusion — including specific terms and conditions relating to this? The development costs letter of offer was signed by Mr Harkness, the director of participation in Sport NI. The technical and risk assurance role in the initial oversight group was performed by Mr Scott. The oversight group, with Mr Scott's technical input, had the opportunity to comment on all aspects of safety at sports grounds, including emergency exiting, at the early stage and during the due diligence technical review of the OBC. Any perceived risks — excuse me — at feasibility stage would have informed the OBC; in fact, it would have had a major impact on viability. Surely, therefore, had any concerns about safety been formally raised at that time by Mr Scott, Mr Harkness should have been made aware of them. Should this have been the case, why was the development costs letter of offer issued, and a letter of offer with no specific conditions relating to health and safety? The only rational conclusion it is no such — that no such concerns had been raised. I should also point out that Mr Harkness also attended 14 of the 20 sponsor board meetings held up to 30 April 2015, and never at any time did Mr Harkness or any other Sport NI representative who attended other sponsor board meetings ever express any concerns about

spectator safety relating to the Casement Park project, which I find frankly astonishing, if there were indeed any concerns expressed from within the team for which he is directly responsible.

In March 2012, in line with the recommendations of the gateway zero review and following a subsequent recruitment process in conjunction with SIB, Mr Noel Molloy was appointed as stadium programme director. In April 2012, in line with the recommendations of the gateway zero review, I examined alternative delivery arrangements for the regional stadia programme and concluded that new delivery arrangements for the stadia programme should be introduced. One key element of this involved bringing the stadia programme in-house into the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure. Responsibility for the delivery transferred to the Department in April 2012, with the DCAL stadium branch being established following formal transfer of Sport NI stadia team to the Department. In December 2014, the full business case for Casement Park was approved by DCAL.

On 30 April 2015, Mr Scott, chair of the safety technical group, made allegations about the Casement Park project. In June 2015, following evidence given by the chair of the safety technical group to the Committee and in line with good practice and programme management practices, I commissioned an independent project assessment review by the British Cabinet Office's Major Projects Authority and committed to implement any learning points and recommendations which may be made and also to publish the report.

On 7 August 2015, I established the independent project assess review report into the regional stadia programme. The report made 20 recommendations, and I am committed to ensuring that all recommendations will be implemented in full. I think that it is highly important and significant to remember that the project assessment review report concluded that the aim of constructing and operating a strategic regional stadium for the GAA in Ulster was achievable on the Casement Park site. The review also found that many aspects of the programme had gone very well, with the Kingspan Stadium successfully completed and the Windsor Park project making very good progress also. The team acknowledged that there were some general weaknesses and challenges within the programme but, importantly, concluded that a regional stadium at Casement Park was achievable.

I have very publicly committed to ensuring that all 20 recommendations contained within the PAR report would be fully implemented. An action plan has been developed to oversee and implement, with most of the recommendations expected to be implemented in full by 2016. I am pleased to report that, to date, given, 11 recommendations have been fully implemented, with significant progress being made against all the remaining actions. The key recommendations from the PAR report have already been implemented include a dedicated programme senior responsible owner has been appointed, and Ian Maye took up his post in September 2015. Danny McSorley has now been appointed as a new independent chair of the STG, with the first meeting of the newly constituted STG being held on 26 November 2015. Monthly meetings of the safety technical group have now been scheduled, and it has now met on three occasions and also held a workshop focused on the Casement Park project.

The Sports Grounds Safety Authority has joined the safety technical group in an advisory capacity. This is the same SGSA who gave evidence to this Committee on 3 December 2015, and I quote the following:

"We hope you will be involved — we hope to be involved — in the reformed safety technical group, and I wish to add value to the process as it moves on from this point, so it is not necessarily about looking at the history but more at the future."

And they also quoted they are:

"keen to work and engage and add whatever value and experience they have to help move the process on."

And also, there has, perhaps, been some misinterpretation of the wording because, having seen some of the reports of the CAL meetings, they said that they were conscious that differences in phrasing and differences and in different documents had caused some confusion amongst members.

The safety technical group has just returned from an extremely valuable visit to the midlands area of England. The trip encompassed non-match day visits to four major sporting arenas, all of which were distinct in terms of spectator movement. The trip included information sessions with the safety officers from the respective venues, who provided the group with tours of the stadia and briefed STG members on the operations of the venues, including normal ingress and egress, traffic management

around the venues and a series of risk-based scenarios, including time calculation, movement and the role and operation of the emergency services on match days.

In addition to this, the evening match experience was particularly useful because Villa Park is heavily dependent upon traffic regulation orders to manage the area outside the venue. The group were given the opportunity to view the system in operation as patrons arrived. The STG PSNI representative on the trip also had the opportunity to engage with the police at Villa Park, and other members were provided with opportunities to spend time in the control room at the venue and also at various other locations throughout the venue. Overall, the trip provided an extremely valuable learning experience which, I am sure, will assist the STG in their deliberations going forward and will particularly — and will be particularly relevant to the Casement Park project. The visit has also helped us with the implementation of PAR recommendations, particularly in relation to building experience and capacity, sharing knowledge and best practice and also learning how certifying authorities police forces and sports grounds owners have worked together to address challenges in sports around sports ground safety.

The GAA have now appointed Rory Miskelly as their project leader and also appointed two independent members to their board. The GAA are continuing to work with their project team to progress towards submitting a new planning application in the third quarter of 2016 and, in advance of this, to commence community cohesion this month. As I have said, the STG is now re-formed under a new chair, Danny McSorley, and is providing advice on the new proposals for the redevelopment of Casement Park. The safety technical group has been significantly strengthened by the addition of the Sports Grounds Safety Authority in their capacity as adviser to the group, and I very much welcome their involvement and undoubted expertise they bring to the group's work.

The GAA team has presented a general outline of its approaches to the new design to the STG group. The safety technical group has taken a proactive and innovative approach to identify the most effective format to address its assessment work. I understand that a workshop was held recently to consider some of the issues around Casement Park and proved to be extremely effective, with all parties cooperating well in an examination of key issues.

I am delighted to report that there has been excellent progress across a range of fronts in terms of implementing the PAR recommendations.

I wish to bring your attention to the project governance, assurance and risk management processes associated with the programme, as I feel it is important to highlight that throughout the programme, from April 2011 to April 2015, there was never any risk relative to safety at Casement Park highlighted at any level.

For a long time now, the Committee has been presented with personal opinion and often unsubstantiated comments. Important points have been skipped over; best practice and good work carried out on the regional stadia programme and its projects ignored; and the assurance approval and initial project viability processes conveniently forgotten.

Some of the technical experts employed to deliver the stadia programme by DCAL and the GAA in recent years have given evidence during the course of this inquiry. These people are acknowledged and recognised as some of the best in their respective professions, both here and in Britain and abroad. Indeed, this has been acknowledged by the Committee, and those individuals are bound by their respective professional codes of practice and professional ethics, and they have been meticulous in the common purpose of delivery of the regional stadia programme. Their evidence is crucial to this inquiry.

The Committee must remember that this programme and its constituent projects were deemed viable at every stage of scrutiny. Therefore, in this part of my evidence, I will endeavour to link some of the important parts of earlier evidence to the overarching governance, assurance, risk management and reporting mechanisms that have in the past and continue to support the viability and delivery of Casement Park.

To reinforce an important point, the stadia programme was set up in line with the Office of Government Commerce 'Achieving Excellence in Construction' guidance and the Cabinet Office's managing successful programmes and projects guidance. During the evidence, the GAA and DCAL stadia teams described this framework in detail: the various stage boundaries or gates that projects must undergo within the framework; how the consideration of safety technical matters was built in at every stage boundary; and how the DCAL funding agreement and the GAA contract documentation

provided robust mitigation and protection measures around safety technical issues. These facts remain and are undisputed.

I am not going to go over previous evidence to this in detail because I believe that it is clear and factual and sets out the scene very clearly. It is also a matter of public record in Hansard. However, it is important to review the various stages of the boundaries of the programme, particularly where it would have been not only appropriate but an imperative to raise any serious safety concerns, and the importance of this cannot be underestimated.

The reality is that no project in the programme could move from one stage to the next until it had satisfied all of the conditions pertaining to the particular stage. This follows the Cabinet Office's best practice for managing successful programmes and projects guidance. The purpose of each and every sign-off was to review and assure the continued viability of the project and to ensure the ability of the proposed facility to achieve safety certification. In other words, if a stage was signed off, the proposed project was deemed both safe and viable. So, there has been no evidence presented to the contrary.

I won't labour on the various stages of approvals that the project went through, as I evidenced them earlier. However, I will highlight that there has been a lack of safety risks raised at each of the key project approval stages.

No spectator safety or existing risks were identified by the 2009 oversight group or in 2010 at OBC stage. The purpose of an OBC is to establish the preferred option for any particular project. The OBC guidance describes the preferred option as the option that is best balanced in cost and in relation to the benefits and risks.

Earlier evidence to the Committee refers to the OBC guidance in which decision-makers must ask whether any of the options are "clearly too risky". This is clearly a fundamental question, and it must, therefore, be remembered that, at OBC stage, the proposal was still for a 40,000-seater. If deemed to be too risky, the 40,000-capacity option should have been ruled out at OBC stage. As you know, Chair, because you approved the OBC, this was not ruled out. It was approved and deemed feasible and signed off by you with no mention or reference to any concerns about safety by anyone.

After the OBC and as the development of the project progressed, project viability is examined again in more detail. This is the point at which risks should have been identified, addressed and eliminated or managed through advanced feasibility studies or mitigated by including appropriate conditions within the letters of offer. During this period, no risks or — no issues or risks were raised in relation to safety or emergency exiting by Sport NI or anyone else. The development costs letter was issued on 8 February 2012 by Sport NI with no conditions relating to safety whatsoever.

As the project was progressed through the design development and consultation stage, the proposed capacity for Casement Park was reduced to 38,000 by the GAA project team. Following nine months of design development, the project was ready for planning submission in June 2013. The integrated consultancy team signed off on the safety of the project for the planning submission and in doing so provided assurance that all safety requirements had been met. The STG signed off the planning drawings on 19 June 2013, and this was referred to in an email from the chair of the safety technical group of 19 June 2013 and the subsequent STG report on Casement Park. Indeed, the email I refer to here was from Mr Scott to the DCAL stadia architect, and I quote directly from it:

"The STG is awaiting some further information/revisions to the internal specifications/dimensions from the Design Team however these would appear to be of a minor nature and will be reviewed accordingly. In the interim the STG consider that there is the potential for a 'S-factor' of 1, and a 'P-factor' of 1 to be applied subject to any revisions to the proposals being agreed, and a suitable Management Plan for the venue being developed."

Again, no risks or issues were raised in relation to safety or emergency exiting at planning submission stage.

The GAA submitted a planning application on 19 June 2013, having received the relevant assurances from ICT and STG. Additionally, my funding agreement with the Ulster Council of the GAA for Casement Park also allows for protections, in that there are several conditions built into this agreement to protect the investment at each and every stage of the process in terms of the delivery of the project. Again, risks are again dealt with in greater detail at the full business case, stage 4. As mentioned earlier, the full business case was signed off by the DCAL programme board in December 2013. At this stage, the project was still going through the planning process, and the STG were

continuing to work in collaboration with the design team, having issued a further report in October 2013.

The issue of safety does not loom large in the decision of Mr Justice Horner, which quashed the granting of planning permissions on other grounds. Much has been evidenced regarding the international reputation of the appointed architectural practice, Populous. Again, the relevance of this appointment and added assurances it also provides both to the GAA and DCAL cannot and should not be underestimated. Populous has designed and delivered safe stadia all over the world. Their credentials have been evidenced and acknowledged by many, including the SGSA at the CAL Committee meeting on 3 December 2015. I quote:

"[The SGSA], as an organisation, have enormous respect for Populous architects. In fact, one of Mike's colleagues sits on the British Standards Institution Committee"

They acknowledge that their:

"track record is excellent; it is very, very good"

and:

"Populous is a very good architect. It has dealt with very innovative designs around the world; some very elaborate and futuristic types of design."

In addition to Populous, the economic operator Mott MacDonald was responsible for writing HM Treasury guidance around optimum bias and risks in relation to capital projects. This is, by any reckoning, a very strong combination of professionals to lead on the integrated consultancy team design stage. DCAL had no concerns regarding the assurance measures provided by the integrated consultancy team. Furthermore, the ministerial group for architecture and the built environment endorsed the exceptional level of engagement on the Casement Park project during the design development right through to planning submission. The Casement and Windsor Park projects were used as a pilot to inform the development of the DOE's planning future community consultation and engagement policy process.

Having reviewed the key assurance milestones within the project — there were no safety concerns raised at any stage of these key milestones — I will now highlight some of the governance and risk management processes that existed throughout the programme and project hierarchy.

The organisational structure established in support of the delivery of the regional stadia programme was set up using the Office of Government Commerce and Cabinet Office's best practice guidance. There was a formal hierarchy for programme and project governance developed for the three stadia projects, including a project steering group, in which each project has a steering group which meets, at a minimum, monthly and more frequently, if required. The purpose of the steering group is to oversee the successful delivery of the project. The Casement Park steering group is made up of representatives from the GAA, DCAL, the Department of Finance and Personnel's Central Procurement Directorate and the Antrim County board of the GAA. It is chaired by the GAA. The project risk registers are presented and discussed at every project steering group meeting.

Project board meetings: there are three individual projects under the regional stadia programme that had their own project boards. Within these boards, there were internal structures for decision-making, reporting and the escalation of risks and issues of importance. There were individual project risk registers prepared for each project which were presented to the respective programme or project boards.

The stadia programme board: there is a stadia programme board, which meets monthly. This board consists of the programme's senior responsible owner (SRO), the stadia programme director and the DCAL directors of sport, finance and capital, amongst others. There are two independent external members on this board to provide a challenge role in support of the SRO. The three sporting bodies' project sponsors are in attendance at the start of the meetings to provide individual project updates. They have also the opportunity to table particular items of concern at the start of each meeting. The purpose of this board is to provide assurance to the programme's SRO on the decisions appropriate to the programme board and to enable the programme senior responsible owner to make recommendations to the departmental accounting officer as required. There is a programme risk register presented and discussed at each programme board meeting.

The stadia sponsor board is chaired by me, as Minister. The sponsor board has an assurance function, is responsible for high-level strategic issues and provides both a support and challenge function to the programme SRO. The board consists of the Minister, the programme SRO, a representative from the GAA, a representative from the IFA and a representative from Ulster Rugby. Additional attendees of the board consist of senior DCAL officials, Sport NI senior representatives, the SIB chief executive and other representatives from sporting bodies as and when required. The programme SRO presents an update report covering each of the projects at these meetings. In addition to this board assurance, Sport NI and DCAL sports branch also hold quarterly assurance meetings, as well as biannual reviews. So far into the programme, there have been 20 sponsor board meetings, from December 2011 to March 2015. I have chaired 13 meetings, the DCAL permanent secretary has attended 15 meetings and Sport NI has attended 17 meetings — three by Dominic Walsh, 14 by Nick Harkness and two by Antoinette McKeown.

This governance structure, again in line with the Office of Government Commerce guidelines, has provided and continues to provide robust assurance to the regional stadia programme and its constituent projects. Most notably, it provides a structured approach for the recording, reporting and elevation of risks and issues, with formal routes for action upon elevation.

As you would expect, Sport NI has had an establishment process for risk management. The Sport NI risk register identifies risks, the controls being implemented and proposed actions to manage such risks. The risk register identifies controlled risks and key risks, and it identifies "areas requiring specific attention".

Sport NI have a risk policy whereby it is an obligation for internal managers, one of which is Mr Scott, to provide operational risk registers in respect of their areas of responsibility on a monthly basis, which then is fed up into Sport NI's corporate risk register via their line management channels. The corporate risk register is then reviewed and ratified by an internal audit and risk management committee. Sport NI has held risk management workshops to review risk management, and there appears to have been a concerted effort to improve the organisation's focus on risk management following the governance review in 2012. However, Mr Scott, through this very structured process, had ample opportunity to raise any concerns, yet this was not the case.

The approved risk register is then presented to the Sport NI board for — and I quote — "assurance" and to draw attention to high-priority risks. Risk review was a standing item on the Sport NI board agenda. Mr Harkness was then acting in the position of chief executive, and, latterly, Ms Antoinette McKeown, as a newly appointed chief executive, included a risk statement with every risk register presented to the Sport NI board since August 2012. The following are extracts from the risk statement:

"Risk management is the cornerstone of effective governance ... Sport NI recognises that effective risk management is an integral part of the organisation's activities to ensure the successful delivery of its services ... We will involve and empower all our staff in the identification and management of both risks and opportunity within the system Our risk management system will be driven by all staff and members, who will, in turn, provide the driving force to deliver our vision ... Sport NI will seek to ensure that DCAL and other key stakeholders are informed in a timely manner of key risks and the success of mitigating strategies."

It is very, very clear, and it sets the scene for how risk should be managed and reported within Sport NI. As part of this process, I asked DCAL officials to review all of the Sport NI risk registers from October 2011 to April 2015. Risks are grouped under the headings of "strategic risks", "operational risks", "reporting risks" and "complying risks", with intermittent management action plans noted. In addition, there was a section on "non-significant risks" and a section on "key risks to Sport NI", listed under a separate "controlled risks" section. There are risks mentioned, such as budget underspend, ineffective management of capital budgets, delivery on time, ineffective governance — all with appropriate ownership and actions. From October 2011 to April 2015, there was absolutely no reference whatsoever made in relation to emergency exiting or any other safety concerns pertaining to Casement Park on the Sport NI registers. As Sport NI were the overseeing body and had the chair of the STG as an employee within this organisation, if any risks were presented and highlighted, they should have surely been reported through the Sport NI risk registers. However, this was not the case. The only reference made about the Casement Park project was in January 2015 under the heading of "Strategic Risks":

"damage to relationships with key stakeholders".

Obviously, this risk is nothing to do with safety. This risk was removed from the register the following month at the request of the Sport NI board, chaired by Mr Brian Henning at the time, and stated that this was not considered to be a risk to Sport NI.

Throughout this time, we know that emergency exiting was being discussed at a technical level by the STG. That is evidenced by the STG's notes and the STG group reports that were being produced at the time. As I stated earlier, we would all expect this type of conversation to be happening at this stage of design development. These are the types of project issues that are debated and resolved throughout any design development by all of the relevant professional and technical experts involved. However, if there was a serious concern, it certainly was not formally elevated in or by Sport NI, as evidenced by the lack of any mention in subsequent risk registers or on the quarterly assurance statements. I do not believe that a serious concern ever existed.

The quarterly assurance that I have just mentioned is a very important management process and fundamental in this assurance review. Sport NI, as an arm's-length body of DCAL, must provide quarterly assurance statements to the Department for review as part of the quarterly accountability process. Quarterly assurance statements are — and I quote from the document itself:

"designed to document the system of internal control and governance to manage risk to a reasonable level within Sport NI".

The assurance statement is approved by Sport Northern Ireland's audit and risk management committee. It is signed off by the accounting officer as part of his or her responsibility for safeguarding public funds and approved by the Sport NI board before issuing to DCAL. Contained within the quarterly assurance statement, there is a section on risk management. Within this risk management section, managers are obliged to report on any issues or risks that they have within their areas of responsibility. The quarterly assurance statement would have provided Mr Scott with an ideal opportunity to record his concerns pertaining to safety. However, at no stage were any concerns regarding safety or emergency exiting included in the Sport NI quarterly assurance statements. In fact, there was a quarterly assurance statement prepared for the period of April to June 2013, which would have provided Mr Scott with the perfect opportunity to highlight safety concerns prior to the submission of planning permission.

My officials have reviewed the quarterly assurance statement for this time frame, signed off by the then accounting officer, Mr Harkness, and, again, there is no mention whatsoever of Mr Scott's safety concerns. For the same period, I had my officials re-examine the risks presented at the sponsor board meetings — the board which I chair and which was attended by the chief executive of Sport NI, the chief executive of SIB and the DCAL permanent secretary. Again, there were no risks in relation to emergency exiting reported in this forum.

In February 2014, the SRO for the programme noted that the safety technical group and the GAA were developing an emergency evacuation plan for Casement Park. It stated that:

"the constructive approach to resolving this issue is welcomed".

This work was collaborative and remained collaborative, as stated in the further SRO update reports to the sponsor board meetings throughout 2014 and 2015. In preparation of this emergency evacuation plan, it was not reported as a risk or concern in the meetings that followed. Indeed, this collaborative approach is reflected in the Sport NI letter of 17 February 2014. The letter contains suggested design changes to achieve the emergency exiting capacity as Sport NI continue to assist in seeking to find solutions. The letter again confirms that

"Sport NI offers its' ongoing support for the development of a new stadium at Casement Park".

So, if Mr Scott said there was a risk, who did he say it to? If he reported it up the line to his management in Sport NI, where did it go to? It was not on the operational risk register in Sport NI. It was not on the Sport NI corporate risk register. It was not reported at the regional stadia programme board. It was not reported at the regional stadia sponsor board by any of the Sport NI attendees or anyone else, for that matter. It was not reported at the quarterly assurance meetings between Sport NI and DCAL. It was not reflected in correspondence with Sport NI to DCAL. And it was not reported at any meeting between me and Sport NI officials.

So, to conclude on this element, we have had the assurance of a global management, engineering and development consultancy, Mott MacDonald. We have had the assurance from a world-class stadia designer, Mike Trice of Populous, who are a global collective of architects, designers, technical experts and industry veterans, and Mike Trice himself, who has an extensive expertise in a range of sports and leisure projects. We have had the technical assurance through the safety technical group. We have had the assurance of a feasibility programme supported by the 2009 steering group input in the document entitled "Sport NI Exiting Facilities Paper" and subsequently passed at OBC stage by the then Minister for DCAL. Again, absolutely no reference whatsoever to any safety concerns or any issues relating to the 39,000 capacity proposed for the Casement Park project. We had the assurance of the issue of a departmental costs letter of offer from Sport NI, signed by Mr Harkness, which had no mention of any safety-related conditions. We had the safety technical group and the integrated consultancy team design sign-off at subsequent planning stage. We had full business case approval.

We have had ongoing safety technical group reports. We have had ongoing senior responsible update reports to the sponsor board. We have had risk assessment and assurance mechanisms built in at every level throughout the project reporting hierarchy. We have had the SGSA's acknowledgement at the recent CAL Committee that:

"it is not necessarily about looking at the history but more at the future"

and that they are:

"keen to work, engage and add whatever value and experience [they] have to help to move the process on."

And finally, we have the Cabinet Office's Major Projects Authority led by the PAR team, which clearly states that Casement Park is achievable. In light of this, there was still no evidence of any red flag being raised on safety grounds for the Casement Park projects. This suggests that spectator safety and emergency exiting was not, in fact, registered as a risk. It is suggested that this was a normal but complicated project issue that was under control, being managed appropriately within the project by the professional and technical experts employed to do so.

Of course there were discussions and of course there were debates — that goes with the territory of developing and delivering a major project — but for that to be somehow twisted into ignoring concerns is misleading, it is inaccurate and, in the final analysis, damages our collective capacity to take forward major projects. I once again want to confirm for the record under oath that the first I was made aware of any alleged safety serious concerns was when they were raised by Mr Scott at the CAL Committee meeting on 30 April 2015.

And before I finish, I want to highlight just a specific — some specific instances where the Committee mentioned there has been some contradictory evidence given to this inquiry. I should point out that this appears to be, in the main, contradicting Mr Scott's evidence, and, indeed, his evidence statements have also been contradicted by some of his own colleagues.

During his evidence to the CAL Committee on 30 April 2015, Mr Scott made a reference to a Hillsborough-type disaster. To quote Mr Scott directly, he told the Committee that:

"Whilst I accept that the probability of an incident, together with a full capacity attendance at Casement Park is low, should such an incident occur, the potential consequences for spectators' safety is huge, and any [responsible] person with an open mind to the issue would see them. I say that in the light of the present Hillsborough inquiry."

This was contradicted in evidence provided by Ms Valerie Brown from Belfast City Council, Mr Mike Trice from Populous, Mr Oran McCloskey from Heron Buckingham Joint Venture, DCAL officials, the Cabinet Office PAR report and his own colleague from Sport NI, Mr Andrew Sloan.

In the evidence provided by Mr Sloan, he stated that:

"Essentially, you could build a stadium for 38,000 people, in this case, but, when it comes to Belfast City Council certifying that [the stadium is the safety and the capacity], that number could be much [much] lower. You could end up with a stadium — I use this just by way of example — with a 38,000 capacity but only 15,000 ... would ever be allowed to be in that stadium."

In other words, Mr Sloan was stating that Belfast City Council would not issue a safety certificate for 38,000 if the stadium was not safe.

The reference by Mr Walsh in his evidence to the Committee on 28 January 2016 that he had attended meetings with me and raised issues around exiting, along with the purchase and demolition of houses to facilitate emergency exiting, is utterly absurd, not least because, as I have stated, the design team for the project was not formally appointed until 3 September 2012. Therefore, I repeat: there would not have been any design information or detailed design sketches available for discussions about the purchase, demolition or any other aspect of exiting in the absence of any design.

The reference by Mr Scott in his evidence to the Committee on 9 July 2015 that he had been advised by a senior GAA official that the design team, the GAA and DCAL had access to high-ranking police officers and that they would be able to get the police report changed, referring to the PSNI report regarding emergency safety, was, indeed, refuted by Chief Inspector McNally of the PSNI, who was sitting beside Mr Scott at the CAL Committee meeting at the time.

Chief Inspector McNally advised the Committee that, during his conversations with the GAA:

"There was never any effort to put pressure on the police to change the report."

He confirmed that:

"There were meetings to clarify the purpose or understanding of the police role, but there was certainly no pressure for the police to change their report."

To close, I think it is worth reminding members that the regional stadia programme is a key capital programme for DCAL and an Executive priority and a key commitment in the Programme for Government. Indeed, it was you, Chair, who first brought the regional stadia programme to the Executive and gained Executive agreement to deliver the programme of the three stadia at Kingspan, Windsor Park and Casement Park. The OBC for the regional stadia programme was, in fact, approved by you, Chair, on 21 October 2010 for a 40,000-seater stadium at Casement Park. Also, all three stadia will have education and heritage centres that will provide opportunities for schools, visitors and everyone to learn about the history and background to each of the sports in a creative way that will stimulate young people's minds and promote the STEM agenda, while also increasing visitor numbers to venues across the North.

It is important to remember that the regional stadia programme has delivered a very successful project, with the completion of the Kingspan stadium, and it is close to doing so at Windsor Park, where the reconstruction of the west stand is due to be completed before the end of 2016. Both projects have both delivered and will continue to deliver social and economic benefits across the North. When the Executive, through my Department, invested in the redevelopment of the Kingspan Stadium, we were confident that it would be a place capable of hosting showcase and showpiece events. The decision to have the Pro12 final at Kingspan in May 2015 is an endorsement of that. Kingspan Stadium will also play a pivotal role in the Women's World Cup in 2017. As members will be aware, the Irish Rugby Football Union intend to bid to host the Rugby World Cup tournament in 2023, and the decision is fully supported by the Executive and the Irish Government. Both Casement Park and Kingspan Stadium are listed as potential venues. It is recognised that a fully redeveloped Casement Park has a critical role to play in the delivery of a successful bid by the IRFU for the 2023 Rugby World Cup. It is, therefore, essential that we all play our part to ensure that the potential can be realised and that the North is once again put on the map as a place capable of hosting such events.

I would like to take this opportunity to quote a number of very relevant pertinent points from the SGSA's evidence to the Committee on 3 December:

"there has perhaps been some misinterpretation of the wording, because it is seen in some of the reports of CAL meetings that they were conscious of differences in phrasing in different documents and this had caused some confusion ... the fact that the green guide, which is 220 pages long, cannot cover every eventuality. It was written in 2008, so the preparatory work for writing it was probably done around 2006, and things have moved on ... Every bit of evidence written in the green guide particularly in section 1.7 in the fifth edition, which says that there are alternative ways of compliance."

They talk about:

"modern construction methods and significant advances in the hardware and software ... available to safety management teams".

Karen Eyre-White agreed with her colleague Ken Scott, stating:

"as Ken says, we recognise that we cannot provide for every eventuality ... there will be some elements that can be done and should be done after the planning application ... it is about reasonableness. It is about understanding the likelihood of risk and whether the measures proposed are proportionate to the risk ... They have temporary traffic orders outside each of the matches in England between certain hours, to accommodate the start or the end. You have to understand what the issues are and work around them, it's about being flexible. "

I will now, finally — finally, finally — I'd like to quote previously from this, a quote that was raised previously at this Committee:

"We hear enough about bad news stories and some people have had the capacity to turn a good news story into a bad news story as we know only too well. We flag up the fact that, today, it is a good news story and the work is ongoing and we will see three good stadiums in place in Northern Ireland in due course."

I hope you, Chair, will stand by those comments that you made to this Committee in September 2010.

I will allow the Committee to make its own mind up on whether it is going to bring back all of the witnesses to question them under oath, rather than singling out individuals, and I would be happy to take questions in the future but only after the Committee has decided that all witnesses will be questioned on oath or that no witnesses will be questioned under those conditions. It is only then that I will return to this Committee to answer questions, as soon as clarity has been achieved. I look forward to hearing from the Committee. Thank you very much.

The Chairperson (Mr McCausland): Is the Minister not answering any questions?

Ms McCorley: Were you not listening?

Ms Ní Chuilín: Do you want me to read the statement out again, Chair?

The Chairperson (Mr McCausland): Sorry, sorry, Minister. Minister, could you please sit down and answer questions?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I think that I have made it clear. I am not coming back to this Committee to answer questions unless you have clarified the position regarding oaths. Thank you.

The Chairperson (Mr McCausland): Thank you. We will stop for a moment; we will suspend just for a few minutes.

The Committee suspended at 11.49 am and resumed at 12.00 noon.

On resuming —

The Chairperson (Mr McCausland): OK, thank you. We will resume business and —

Mr Ó hOisín: Chair.

The Chairperson (Mr McCausland): There are a number of people; I think it was — Well, OK.

Mr Ó hOisín: Just at the start of play there. There was an intervention at the end, before the last session closed there, from the Public Gallery. I want it on record just, that —

The Chairperson (Mr McCausland): I didn't hear it.

Mr Ó hOisín: Well, it was very obvious, Chair. I want to put it on record and would like to report it.

The Chairperson (Mr McCausland): It wouldn't be Hansarded, I'm sure.

The Committee Clerk: If it's audible.

Mr Ó hOisín: If it's audible, it'll be Hansarded. Thank you.

Mr Humphrey: Chairman, I sat for an hour and a half, as did colleagues, as did people in the Public Gallery, and listened with courtesy to what the Minister said. Much of what the Minister said, I had difficulty with, and I had a number of questions here — in fact, three pages of questions to ask the Minister — and then the Minister leaves this Committee and refuses to answer questions. Now, I think it's unprecedented, from what I understand. I think it's discourteous. It's the latest in a string of discourtesies extended to this Committee by the Minister and the Department. I think it is unsatisfactory. It is unprofessional. I don't think that she's done anything to help her cause, the Department's cause, the issue which we have in this Committee and, in fact, if I was a member of the GAA, I wouldn't be happy with it either, because we need clarity and certainty around these issues before we move forward. However, I do think — I want the opportunity now for members of this Committee to raise the issues and the concerns that they have had. It's unfortunate we can't put them to the Minister, but I came here this morning to do just that. I came here on time this morning to listen to the Minister to do just that. I listened to her statement in full. I took notes on what she was saying, because I wanted to ask questions, and she hasn't afforded me or anyone else the opportunity to do that.

So, I think what we should do, as long as this is being Hansarded, is that we should raise the issues, the questions that we have, and put them out there, because some of the notes I have here, some of the questions I have here, are completely contradictory to some of the evidence that the Minister gave. So, I propose that we do that.

The Chairperson (Mr McCausland): OK. It would also be open to us to send requests for information, on points she might have raised, to the permanent secretary, who would be obliged to respond to us. But, Mr Humphrey, if you wish to do that, please go ahead.

Mr Humphrey: OK, are you happy to —

The Chairperson (Mr McCausland): Yes, please.

Mr Humphrey: Chair, there were a number of issues which the Minister raised in relation to not being aware, and if the Minister has said under oath that she wasn't aware of these issues until Mr Scott came in front of this Committee in April last year, then that's the stated position of the Minister.

I do have to say, though, then that leaves me with serious concerns on exactly what's been happening in that Department if that's the case, because I want to know, then, what exactly the permanent secretaries of that Department have been doing, the deputy permanent secretaries, those who have been in charge of the sponsor board from the Department — what have they been doing? What has Sport NI been doing? Because there is a list of inconsistencies here in the evidence I have, both from Mr Scott's bundle and from evidence from other people who have come in front of this Committee. For example, if you look at the sponsor board minutes of December 2013, Antoinette McKeown raises the issue that there's a dispute over the interpretation of the green guide. So, that's December 2013. So, who was there from the Department and, whoever was there from the Department, did they feed that through to the Minister? If they didn't, why not? Was Sport NI meant to do that directly? Was there a conduit from the Department, and who was that person?

In April and June of that year, it refers to an ongoing problem, and I wanted to ask the Minister if she'd attended any of these meetings. And, if these things have not been forwarded through to the Minister, what disciplinary actions are being taken against those civil servants or public servants who failed to do so? Because if the Minister isn't aware of any of this stuff, as she's reaffirmed to this Committee under oath this morning, what exactly were these people doing?

In terms of the sports council minutes of June 2014, it states very clearly:

"Members noted that there are some challenges on the design aspect of Casement which centred on emergency exiting. Board members noted that DCAL have been made aware of the issues."

I have raised this before at this Committee. I have raised this before whenever DCAL officials have been here. I have raised it before whenever Sport NI officials have been here. So, I state again:

"DCAL have been made aware of the issues."

Then we have a Minister sitting here this morning telling us she wasn't aware of the issues. What have these people been doing if the Minister hasn't been made aware of the issues?

I then have a series of documents here where Mr Scott, who the Minister spent quite a bit of time trying to discredit this morning, as others have done in the past, where Mr Scott has made it very clear in writing in terms of what he has set out in terms of the position around these issues and in terms of exiting. Now, there are an ample amount of these things. I have 10 pages I can reference where Mr Scott has set it out, whether in letter form, in minutes or emails, where he, at various fora, has raised this issue. Again, I ask the question: what were senior people in Sport NI doing about it, and what were DCAL officials doing about it?

Actually, the Minister and those across the way who thought it was funny that the Minister took part in her stunt in walking out this morning — actually, the Minister has done a great disservice, because the Minister, by walking out of this Committee, has left more questions unanswered than she answered. And if she thinks that that in any way helps her position, her party's position, takes the issue forward in west Belfast, as she set out, or, indeed, helps the GAA — if I was a member of the GAA, I wouldn't be happy with that performance. As I said earlier, I think the GAA would be wanting clarity and certainty going forward. The Minister provided none of that this morning.

I have to say as well, the Minister also made reference to Valerie Brown from Belfast City Council. When Valerie Brown from Belfast City Council was in front of this Committee, if I recollect properly, Valerie Brown supported Mr Scott's position entirely, so I don't understand what the Minister's reference was to Valerie Brown at all. The town solicitor for Belfast, Mr Walsh, was sitting beside Valerie Brown and supported Valerie Brown's position in terms of Belfast City Council.

There are other issues I wanted to raise in terms of the evacuation. The Minister talked about the officials had just come back from a tour of the Midlands and stadia in the Midlands. Well, I understand they visited Coventry's ground; St Andrew's, which is Birmingham's ground; Villa Park, which is Aston Villa's ground; and The Hawthorns, which is West Bromwich Albion's ground. All of those grounds have exiting of around eight minutes. The Minister didn't say that.

And the other issue I want to turn to briefly as well, because the Minister and other people referred in terms of the timeline that the Minister set out and took great time, and I was pleased she did that, actually, in terms of setting it out, because we have had the Minister now directing criticism towards you, as we have had others, when you were Chair of this Committee, and it talked about Mr Scott and about Mr Scott and the 39,000 capacity or 40,000 capacity.

I wanted to ask the Minister, if I might start actually, in relation to Dominic Walsh. The Minister took some time about Mr Walsh and set out the position there. I wanted to ask the Minister what happened to the papers that were destroyed in the Department that Mr Walsh couldn't get access to. Why were papers destroyed? But we haven't had that opportunity to ask her that because of her stunt.

And then, Paul Scott, in terms of the design team. I think to be fair to Paul Scott, whenever an outline business case is set out, an outline business case is just that. And the Minister actually used the term: the outline business case is a guideline. Now, Paul Scott, effectively would have been involved in that, yes. And figures were being talked about, 39,000 or 40,000 or whatever. But it also said in the Minister's evidence, when she talked about you, the GAA's view was 40,000. It was not Nelson McCausland's view; it was the GAA's view. So, actually, by using that quote, she undermined her case.

The green book as well; the Minister talked about the green book. She didn't mention that the green book actually evolves. It is a living document; there are a number of editions. There were a number of editions before this stadium was being discussed and there have been, I'm sure, some since it had started to be discussed as well. And in terms of the DFP approval of the outline business case, it talked about options for Casement Park. It wasn't a fixed capacity; it talked about options.

You know, I do have to say, I have a whole raft of other questions. I know that I'm supposed to ask a question now, but there is no point in asking questions to people who actually have been interrogating these documents for close on a year, whenever the person we actually want to ask questions of hasn't afforded us the opportunity. But I make the point again: the Minister's performance here today has actually undermined what the Minister probably came in here to set out to achieve. This Committee will finish its work in a few weeks' time. Members across the way wanted this brought to a conclusion a number of weeks ago. It is very, very evident this will never be brought to a conclusion during the term of this Assembly, if ever, if people are not prepared to come here and give evidence, and give evidence here in a way that enables people to cross-examine what they've said. Because I have to say, in relation to how the Department has performed and senior officials within it, those currently and those before, and Sport NI, this has actually damaged both the Department and Sport NI even further. And the Minister's position actually undermines her own Department, ironically.

The Chairperson (Mr McCausland): OK. Could I just, before I come to Rosie McCorley — a couple of observations? I understand that the Minister is entitled legally not to answer any questions, but I think that everyone else is then entitled to draw their own conclusions from that.

Mr Humphrey: Yep.

The Chairperson (Mr McCausland): The fact that she wouldn't answer any questions on any matter or on any aspect of this issue will, I think, raise questions, further questions in many, many minds as to why she won't.

I'm interested in the fact that the core issue around which we were to bring her back under oath was the disclosure from Mr Walsh that he had met with herself and her permanent secretary, Rosalie Flanagan, at a certain point, and, at that meeting, there was some reference to the demolition of houses to enable additional access to be provided for emergencies. He also said at that point that the special adviser, Jarlath Kearney, had been in the room. Now, when I look at the record there for the media, Mr Kearney was appointed on or around 23 March 2012. My understanding is that Mr Walsh left his position as chair of Sport NI around September 2012, so there is a little window there between nearly the end of March and September 2012 during which that meeting would've taken place.

I think what we need is to see how we can get some more information. It may be that all records have been erased, scrubbed, shredded. Because I just find it very, very hard to believe — I don't think anybody would believe — that you would have meetings — Permanent secretaries tend to run around with large files in which they write things down. People do that; they take notes of meetings. You go to any politician's office, there'll be piles of paper, notes of this, that and the other. That's just the nature of things. There would've been notes taken as an aide-memoire, but it seems that all of this has, somehow or other, vanished. So, it's important, if the Minister isn't going to answer questions under oath, then we'll have to pursue Mr Kearney and Mrs Rosalie Flanagan. Mrs Flanagan is coming next week. We'll see whether she answers questions or not. We just don't know.

Finally, to say the core point was around this issue of the Minister's claim that, until 30 April 2015, she was unaware, until April '15, of issues around emergency exiting and the potential purchase and demolition of houses. Both issues were unknown to her before April '15. And yet, as has been noted previously, the then chief executive of Sport NI, after being in office for one year, did a newspaper interview on 14 June 2014 in which she said that there were concerns about emergency exiting — not exiting, but emergency exiting. It's not as if there's confusion between the two. On that occasion, when she gave the interview, she referred to the success of Ravenhill — virtually completed, I think, at that time — the ongoing good work around Windsor Park and then the one thing that she picked out — it was only a short paragraph, a sentence or two — in regard to Casement Park was issues about emergency exiting; nothing else. That was the top issue. But we have been denied the opportunity to ask the Minister questions.

Ms McCorley: Go raibh maith agat, a Chathaoirligh. Thanks, Chair. First of all, I just want to say that the member across the way made a couple of accusations there which I think are insulting. One, he said that the Minister had pulled a "stunt". That was his word. Then he said we played a part in the stunt. I don't know what he is talking about, but I think it is an insulting accusation, and I would like to have him withdraw that.

Mr Humphrey: You'll wait.

Ms McCorley: What I would like to say is, if everyone had been listening, the Minister made her case why she did not take questions. The Minister was brought here under oath. It was a vote taken by this Committee and which we opposed. In a case where you have difference of opinion, where you've got contradictions in statements, in those circumstances, both parties should be brought under oath. But this was an attempt to subject the Minister to a form of questioning which was unfair, unjust and it was not being — not allowing the other person with the contradictions to be dealt with in the same way. So, that was her decision, and I think she was quite right. She did say she is happy to come back and answer questions, but only when she is being treated fairly, which is absolutely right, in my view. I don't see why the Minister should accept being treated unfairly.

The other thing that I would say that I heard from the evidence this morning — and it might come out at some point — but Paul Scott's evidence talks about raising concerns about safety, but, from what I'm hearing, he never made it through an official formal route, which is by the risks register. That's, for me, the way you should have done it, if it was the red-light issue that it was — that he claims it to have been. But he didn't use the formal routes, and that's questionable.

The Chairperson (Mr McCausland): I could be wrong in this but I, first of all, would comment that I don't think Mr Scott is responsible for writing the risk register. When we look at the minutes of Sport NI, it was the board of Sport NI and another official that seemed to take the lead on that issue, not Mr Scott, so he can't be blamed for something that wasn't his responsibility.

As regards the point that you made, Mrs McCorley, in regard to the member opposite you, I think possibly in the context of something that has never happened before in this Assembly, of a Minister walking out and refusing to answer questions and thereby thwarting the democratic process and democratic scrutiny by elected representatives, and by treating the Committee in the contemptuous way and the shameful way that we were treated this morning, I think the word "stunt" is probably an understatement.

Who's next? Karen McKeivitt.

Ms McCorley: There was a context for, and she explained —

The Chairperson (Mr McCausland): Yeah, Karen McKeivitt.

Ms McCorley: — she explained why she —

The Chairperson (Mr McCausland): Sorry, I should add, by the way, Mr Walsh has already been invited, as you will know, members, to come back under oath. Of course, what we could end up with is he comes back under oath, makes a statement, goes out, then we bring her back under oath. We could be years at this. It has become a farce. Well, it's been turned into a farce this morning. Mrs McKeivitt.

Mrs McKeivitt: Thanks very much, Chair. If the Minister had have been here, I was going to raise about the June 2014 board meeting — Sport NI — in which Paul Scott and, I think, Nick Harkness at the time stated emergency exiting was raised to the board as a risk. I was going to ask: was this followed up to her by the chair of Sport NI — the current chair? I'm trying to remember some of the evidence as well. I think most of the evidence that we have heard to date was actually in his time as chair of Sport NI, so, you know, a lot of that — I was going to go around the current chair's — maybe inviting him up for to give evidence as well.

I also was going to ask her about the current survey, which, in fact, the Minister had called for, of staff of the Sport NI. In that survey, it showed that 33.5% of staff witnessed or experienced serious bullying and harassment. I was going to ask her through that, and that would've been on the back of Paul Scott's evidence and others.

There's a load — actually, I have a couple of pages maybe I was going to just for clarification, but, I mean, I think it's a waste of time, actually.

The Chairperson (Mr McCausland): OK. Thank you. David Hilditch.

Mr Hilditch: Thanks, Chair. I think it's been disappointing this morning. The Minister did say to us about it was all Programme for Government and whatnot, but certainly this morning's done a disservice as we try to move the whole of these projects forward and come to a conclusion.

I think the difficulty is for me it wasn't a "He says, she says" or whatever at this stage because we did want to ask about the Miss Flanagan letter, the press relations with Sport NI CEO, emails from Mr Sutherland, written documentation of evidence from the SGSA and, obviously, Belfast City Council, and, indeed, queries over the outline business case, which are — all stuff which is in writing, so it wasn't this sort of, you know, allegations. So, it was all fairly substantial evidence to ask the Minister on and seek clarity.

The reason why Paul Scott came here in April '15 was because no one was listening. That's the reason. People forget that Paul was so far down the food chain, as it were, that, you know, there's others above there, both probably Sport NI and departmental DCAL who should've been listening to Paul Scott and taking it on.

But the written evidence indicates that there were well-known difficulties, probably in '13, '14, but we can't get any further this morning. I just don't know whether she played a game or not, but those were the sort of questions we wanted around. Mr Humphrey summed most of it up, too, you know.

The Chairperson (Mr McCausland): Thank you. Cathal Ó hOisín.

Mr Ó hOisín: Thanks, Chair. Chair, just for the record, Mr Humphrey said he was here for the entirety of the statement: he was not. He was missing, and I'm sure the record will show that. I'm glad — Whatever questions the Minister did or didn't answer this morning, I think she answered quite a number of questions. She's answered more than you have —

The Chairperson (Mr McCausland): It's hard to put questions when she walks out.

Mr Ó hOisín: — and you've been asked repeatedly. In terms of what she did say at the end, she said she was quite happy to answer questions when others had been afforded the same opportunity that she was afforded there this morning. So, that's where it's at.

I'm glad she did clear up some issues around the OBC in terms of your involvement and the numbers therein, the involvement of the oversight steering group and that of the DFP. And the approval of the OBC is not about different options; it's the approval of a preferred option, and that, of course, was set by DFP at 40,000. So, there are a number of things there that just need to be put on the record, and I think the Minister will appear in front of this Committee again when others have been taken in the same circumstances.

The Chairperson (Mr McCausland): I would suggest respectfully that, with two weeks to go, a flurry of solicitors' letters, a reluctance to get people or on the part of some people to come and the amount of time and business, and we have to take the last Tuesday before St Patrick's Day to produce our legacy report, I assume that this will be one of the main items in the legacy report because —

Mr Ó hOisín: Chair, I —

The Chairperson (Mr McCausland): Sorry, if you could just let me finish. I will chair the meeting, and I will just finish what I have to say. It is going to be very difficult to get much — I think it would be very difficult. It is impossible now, to complete the procedure and to bring the Minister and the others back in time to fully consider what they have to say. It's a day that has been, in some ways, lost and wasted. On the other hand, the decision by the Minister to get up, walk out, refuse to answer any questions may well say more about culpability than anything that could have been said in answer to questions.

Mr Ó hOisín: As might your obfuscation too, Chair.

The Chairperson (Mr McCausland): Basil McCrea.

Mr B McCrea: So, the one point that I really wanted to ask the Minister about was this — she quoted it herself — but it was whenever Mr Walsh said in reply to a question from me, he says:

"It became a regular Friday meeting with the Minister and permanent secretary. If not every week, it was frequent."

That — either there was a meeting, or there wasn't a meeting, and we really need to get to the bottom of that. I will say only one other thing about the general progress of the meeting. The key issue here was that emergency exiting should have been considered. All of the evidence that I have heard tells me you do need to make special provision for Casement Park. And it's not actually about pointing the finger about who knew what; it is "Why was such an eventuality not discussed?", if it wasn't discussed. And if it was discussed, who was it discussed with and at what time?

The Chairperson (Mr McCausland): Thank you. Leslie Cree.

Mr Cree: Just, to get back to, sort of to where two issues stand out for me. There's a lot of time spent denying that any issue of risk was raised, but I would remind the Committee that we have had evidence which, in fact, shows that safety issues on exiting would be dealt with by the blue light services and the city council.

Mr Humphrey: That's right.

Mr Cree: This may well have been a pervading understanding in Sport Northern Ireland. You know, I'd like to have queried that. Was that not reported up, then?

And the second one — more recent, Chair — we know that Sport Northern Ireland high command perhaps was autocratic, dictatorial, distant, and, indeed, many grievances were reported and are still, I believe, ongoing. We tried to get to the bottom of those recently. They also had a recent survey carried out, which, in fact, suggested the same thing — that there were people there who were having trouble with the senior management because of the style or whatever, and that a survey, you know, showed that still to be the case and that, interesting enough, this survey was compared with one that had been done in DCAL, which I thought interesting as well, you know, because, why would that be? But it certainly looks like there's a prima facie case, that there were problems with the high command at Sport Northern Ireland, and would that have been the logjam? We don't know. I certainly would like to follow that one up.

The Chairperson (Mr McCausland): Mr McMullan, and then back to Mr Humphrey.

Mr McMullan: Yes, just a few items there on. Mr Hilditch talked about Mr Scott being far down the food chain: he's pretty well up the food chain. For somebody who's well up in the food chain, he never — the thing that's coming at, at every level, he never raised a red flag issue on any —

Mr Hilditch: You've a bundle of stuff that says he did.

Mr McMullan: Hold on, hold on — I take it you're chairing the meeting, Chair?

The Chairperson (Mr McCausland): Yes. Go ahead, Mr McMullan.

Mr McMullan: And the other thing Mr McCrea did say, whether there were meetings or not meetings, it was clearly read out in the report this morning, the number of meetings that were held and who was at them. But the thing is, not once, not once — I know it came up in a report today again, as it did from every other body that came before here — that there was no red flag issue raised.

Mr B McCrea: There should have been.

Mr McMullan: Whether it should have been or not, that's — you know, you can talk about that all day, but the fact is it wasn't. That's the main thing that came through, you know, because people have come here and made the statements of the issue of exiting etc. Why was that not brought up at the start?

It brings back to yourself, Chair, when you were in the position of Minister. Did you — you didn't raise any issues off it. It brings back to what I said before: you were the last piece of the jigsaw, but you yourself refused to come before the Committee. So, in that sense there, I think you do have something to talk to the Committee about. You were there. You were part of the whole scene. Everybody else who was part of it has been to the Committee, on oath or not on oath. You are the

only one that's part of it have refused steadfastly either to come under oath or voluntary come before the Committee. You have refused. I think that's a damning indictment, and so, therefore, I'll ask you again today: will you come before the Committee yourself?

The Chairperson (Mr McCausland): I'll let Mr Humphrey back then. He may well make a point, but, if he doesn't, I'll make it myself after that. Mr Humphrey.

Mr Humphrey: Yes, Chair. I just wanted to make the point that we have devolution and this is a legislative Assembly. This is part of the Programme for Government of the Northern Ireland Government, and this Committee is charged — there's a considerable amount of public expenditure going into this project — this Committee is charged with scrutinising the Department, and that includes the Minister, because the Minister is the political head of the Department, and, my goodness, does this Minister lead it politically. Now, it is outrageous for members to say that the Minister was treated in an unfair or unjust way. It is entirely appropriate that the Minister was brought in front of this Committee and questioned, except she won't answer them.

Now, I want to deal with the issue of your appearance. I personally have no difficulty with your appearance here, but this Committee has voted on that issue. And why did we vote on that issue? First of all, the outline business case for this particular project goes back to when you were the Minister, and it looked at options and it looked at guidelines — the Minister's own word: "guidelines". Now, the sign-off came from DFP at that time, but the work — the serious work — on this Committee — sorry, on this project doesn't start until we have a design team and we have an application going into the Department of the Environment for planning. Now, you know, you ceased — to the best of my knowledge, but we'll put it on the record so there's no doubt — you ceased being Minister in the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure at the last election, prior to the last election, in 2011, so effectively you had no role after that. The Minister set out this morning, for those that maybe missed it, the design team was appointed in September 2012. It started its work seriously in February '13. Sorry, the safety technical group was appointed in 2012. Mr Molloy was appointed in March 2012. The stadium programme was moved in-house, which was another question I wanted to ask the Minister, in April 2012, and the business case in December '14. How on earth can you answer questions on any of that stuff? That's why this Committee voted that you not be brought as a witness because all of this stuff happened subsequent to you being the Minister.

In terms of Mr Scott's appearance and if Mr Scott raised any red flags or blue lights, I think his two appearances here show clearly that he did that. The bundle that Mr Hilditch referred to shows clearly that he did that. The fact that Belfast City Council were here and gave evidence to this Committee confirmed he did that, and the fact that the Sports Grounds Safety Authority came here and supported what he said shows that the man was doing his job. And I would put on record as well, when the Minister talks about the new chairman being independent in terms of the safety technical group, so, too, was Mr Scott. He was an independent specialist used not only in this part of the kingdom but in other parts of this island as well. So let's be clear: Mr Scott is an expert. Mr Scott raised this issue on an ongoing basis, as both Mr Hilditch and I have mentioned before in previous contributions to this Committee. So let's not have people say that Mr Scott never raised this issue. There is a bundle there that proves it absolutely, categorically that he did just that.

The Chairperson (Mr McCausland): Just before Basil, just to broaden out that point from Mr Humphrey and say, on two occasions, the Committee took the decision as to who are the *[Inaudible.]* invite or not invite. That issue was put on two occasions and voted down on two occasions.

Could I just set the record straight? The Minister referred to the date of 21 October 2010 and said — her words were that, "I approved" something on that date. In actual fact, on 21 October 2010, what happened was the permanent secretary, Rosalie Flanagan, who will be with us, hopefully, next week, sent the outline business case to Jack Layberry in the Department of Finance and Personnel with a cover letter. That is what happened in October 2010 — on 21 October — and the DFP formally approved the outline business case on 7 March 2011. So that is correcting the misinformation that came from the Minister. So, Basil McCrea.

Mr B McCrea: So, just the issue in response to Mr McMullan, through you, Chair. Emergency exiting should have been a red-line issue. The risks were identified in the outline business case — something to be managed. People should have been aware of it. In my opinion, Casement Park cannot be redeveloped to the size that the developers wanted to or the proposers wanted to unless emergency exiting is satisfactorily resolved. It is a red-line issue.

I wanted to ask only these questions. The long submission that the Minister made I thought was unnecessary. Had she stuck to just the issues of contention — did she have the meetings that Dominic Walsh said she had, or did she not? — we would have had time to explore those issues. We could have dealt with other issues at another time. All we were trying to do was establish the facts, and, had the Minister been on top of that particular issue, she should have focused on the issue and resolved the matter. I am disappointed she did not take the opportunity to do so.

The Chairperson (Mr McCausland): And, finally, Cathal Ó hOisín.

Mr Ó hOisín: Chair, just to clear up the thing about the DFP. The DFP approved the stadium of 40,000. The design team were then duty-bound to design a stadium for 40,000.

The Chairperson (Mr McCausland): Sorry, can you speak up?

Mr Ó hOisín: That is where it is at. It is just Mr Humphrey is throwing in all sorts of red herrings there.

Mr Humphrey: No.

Mr Ó hOisín: Yes.

The Chairperson (Mr McCausland): We have got the main issue today — the Minister's departure, sudden departure. I am sure that we will all want to reflect on that and will also want maybe to get external advice on the best way to handle that to make the best of the use of the remaining couple of weeks with the remaining witnesses and the Minister. It may mean that we have to have an extra meeting at some point over the next two weeks. So, we will leave the matter there for today on that.