



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Justice

OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

Justice Delivery Directorate:
Overview Briefing

23 January 2020

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

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Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mr Paul Givan (Chairperson)
Ms Linda Dillon (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Doug Beattie
Mr Gordon Dunne
Mr Paul Frew
Mr Raymond McCartney
Mr Patsy McGlone
Mr Pat Sheehan
Miss Rachel Woods

Witnesses:

Ms Deborah Brown	Department of Justice
Mr Stephen Martin	Department of Justice
Mr Ray Murray	Department of Justice
Ms Sinead Simpson	Department of Justice

The Chairperson (Mr Givan): OK, members. We will keep moving and go into the next item.

I welcome Deborah Brown, the director of the justice delivery directorate. Deborah, what was your role in Communities back in the day?

Ms Deborah Brown (Department of Justice): I was the director of finance, the director of housing and the deputy secretary in charge of engaged communities.

The Chairperson (Mr Givan): OK. I knew Deborah in a previous life. She was very competent in her role in that Department. I welcome Deborah to the Committee.

Ms Brown: Thank you.

The Chairperson (Mr Givan): We also have Stephen Martin, the deputy director of the enabling access to justice division; Sinead Simpson, the acting deputy director of corporate engagement and communications and compensation services division; and Ray Murray, the deputy director of the information services division. You are all very welcome to the meeting. As before, it will be recorded by Hansard.

Deborah, I will hand over to you so that you can outline the scope of your responsibilities.

Ms Brown: OK. Thank you very much, Chair, and I thank the Committee for this opportunity for us to provide you with an overview of the responsibilities of the justice delivery directorate. Our work includes a range of corporate functions across the Department and its agencies, with responsibility for ensuring good governance and financial management. It also includes enabling access to justice and the Legal Services Agency (LSA). There are five deputy directors and approximately 350 staff in the directorate.

This afternoon, I am joined by Ray Murray, who is the head of information services, which also includes Access NI. Also with me is Sinead Simpson, who is the head of corporate engagement and communications, which also includes compensation services, and Stephen Martin, who is the head of enabling access to justice. They will provide you with more detail on their areas in a moment.

Lisa Rocks is the Department's finance director, and she and I, with a few other colleagues, will be back in a couple of weeks to give you a separate briefing on the Department's finances. The financial services division provides the financial planning and support across the Department and its five agencies and supports the Department's sponsor branches in respect of the eight non-departmental public bodies. That area is responsible for the Department's annual report and accounts, agency and judicial pension scheme accounts. It provides procurement support, including collaborative procurement and contract management. It also provides economic advice, guidance and support, which includes the development of business cases. It also includes research, statistical and analytical services, which help to inform policy and support the Programme for Government.

Paul Andrews is the chief executive of the Legal Services Agency and director of legal aid casework. Legal aid remains a demand-led service. The agency has a current budget this year of £88 million. We are on schedule to deliver that, but there are a small number of large criminal cases that could impact on the future year budgets.

As you heard, over the last three years, LSA has been focusing on a new digital case management system known as LAMS — the legal aid management system. That has been an award-winning success. It won an internal departmental award, it was nominated for an NICS award and was a finalist at the 2019 UK IT awards for the best public-sector IT project. It went live in July 2019, and it should introduce greater efficiency and effectiveness in the delivery of legal aid. During that time, we worked very closely with the Law Society and the Bar to secure that successful go-live in July. We continue to work with them to inform the future developments of the system, and we express our thanks for their commitment to date.

Work is also continuing to provide more reliable estimates on fraud and error and on provisions on which the LSA accounts are currently qualified. As you heard, that has not impacted on the departmental accounts, but we keep that under review.

I am now going to pass you to Stephen Martin, who will give you some more information on the progress on legal aid reform and the wider issues on enabling access to justice.

Mr Stephen Martin (Department of Justice): Thank you. I lead a relatively new team called enabling access to justice, and we have two main roles: firstly, to continue the journey of legal aid reform; and, secondly, along with other colleagues, to look for opportunities to modernise civil and family justice, which Peter mentioned, for the benefit of citizens. Running through both areas is the core theme of ensuring access to justice while improving value for money. We are coming to the end of our first year, and, over that time, we have been building and skilling up the team. We have delivered a number of technical legal aid policy projects, and, in due course, you will receive six statutory rules to consider, which we made during that time. We have developed relationships with a range of stakeholders here and in other jurisdictions, and we have built options to talk to the Minister about for a future reform agenda. As you heard, we have also completed a scoping study on the potential to introduce contracting for legal aid services in Northern Ireland.

In relation to family justice, we have begun some specific work with the Department of Health on helping separating parents to reach viable solutions without needing to go to court. Finally, with others, we have established a litigant-in-person reference group, which brings together a range of stakeholders alongside personal litigants to find ways of improving the experience of personal litigants in the court system in Northern Ireland.

Those are my initial comments, but I am happy to take questions later. I will hand over to Ray.

Mr Ray Murray (Department of Justice): Good afternoon, and thank you for the opportunity to present my division. Some of it has been mentioned. In my division is Access NI, which is the vetting and barring system for those wishing to take up employment with young people or vulnerable adults. It is a direct public service. There are about 140,000 transactions a year in the service. At the moment, we have moved all applications to being 100% online, and 50% of certificates are delivered digitally, so you can see I travel in hope of having a paperless office, but we are not quite there yet.

Information technology is one of the other big areas, and my division provides technology support to all the Department's business systems, with the exception of the PSNI. There is the legal aid management system — LAMS, which we mentioned — but there are a large number of other critical IT systems across the Department that enable its business delivery. Causeway is one you may be familiar with. It is one of the critical systems in the Department, with its feeder systems from the various agencies and criminal justice; absolutely critical to its delivery. Whether it is in enhancing, testing, security or contract negotiation and management or other technology issues, ICT professional staff from my division are outposted to provide the necessary support across the Department.

Another area that falls to my division is records and information management. That involves the policy and processes of records management, including their disposal — we work closely with PRONI, the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland — as well as the management of the corporate file plan for the Department. They all fall to my division. As part of that, we have a number of statutory roles, such as the data protection officer and the chief information/records manager for the Department. We also cover freedom of information and data protection monitoring and management.

In the big areas in my division — estates and sustainability — my division has a coordinating role and leadership role in managing the Department's estate and the sustainability agenda, which focuses on reducing our carbon footprint collaboratively through the asset management board, which is chaired by Deborah.

Lastly, my division provides representation to a number of NICS cross-departmental groups, including ones on sustainability, and manages small areas on behalf of the Department, such as the complaints officer function, health and safety function, programme and project support function etc, but the areas that I have highlighted are the main ones covered by my division. I will pass back to Sinead.

Ms Sinead Simpson (Department of Justice): Good afternoon. As Deborah said, I manage corporate engagement and communications division. It is akin to how Ray described what are commonly referred to as a number of corporate service-type functions. So I have responsibility for Peter's office — the perm sec's office — the Minister's private office; the departmental Assembly team and the Assembly liaison arrangements; the press office; a range of governance functions, including business planning and equality; and a range of people and organisational development work streams. As Peter said when he was here, we are a people-centric organisation, so we have a significant Valuing Our People programme, which comes under that work stream. I also have responsibility for internal communications, and, quite recently, I have taken on responsibility for compensation services. That is the only bit that is not a corporate service; it is an operational delivery part.

There are three key issues in my brief that I will draw out for members. First, we are making some structural changes in order to provide a more cohesive approach to how we do governance. Governance has been done in the Department across a number of business areas, so we are seeking to develop a corporate governance function or governance unit that will ensure that we are well placed for any challenges that emerge from the renewable heat incentive (RHI) inquiry. That function will also take on board public appointments responsibility, which is spread across a number of business areas. That point was mentioned in the earlier discussion.

The second issue that we have responsibility for that members might be interested in is the development of the Department's corporate and business plan. Over the coming months, we will obviously be in discussions with the Minister about her strategic priorities for the rest of the mandate, and we will be happy to come and share the draft plan with you in due course.

The third issue I would highlight is under the compensation services banner, and that is the plans to remove the same-household rule from the Northern Ireland criminal injuries compensation scheme. I will be happy to get more detail for the Committee, but that legislation will be coming for scrutiny in due course. I will give a potted history of what that is. From 1968 to 1988, you could not claim criminal injuries compensation for injuries inflicted by someone living in your household. That bar was then lifted in 1988, so, in subsequent cases, you could claim, but it was not made retrospective until there was a Court of Appeal decision in November 2018. In order to give effect to that, officials have been

preparing the necessary arrangements and getting legal advice on those. That legislation had a pretty smooth passage through Westminster. It was pretty much supported by all sides, and it came into effect in June last year. We look forward to bringing more detail on that to the Committee in due course and working with you to, hopefully, bring that through the Assembly. Those are the main issues that I would draw out.

The Chairperson (Mr Givan): Thank you. On the eight other arm's-length bodies that fall within the Department, how do you manage the risks associated with that relationship, particularly when it comes to the financial aspects and governance?

Ms Brown: Seven of those arm's-length bodies sit under another directorate: safer communities. The largest of those is the PSNI. The finance side of the house provides a business partnering model. We provide the support to those sponsor branches and all of their finances. Given the size of the PSNI budget, we, as finance colleagues, meet monthly with finance colleagues in PSNI to make sure that we have sufficient oversight of what is going on there and that we understand the pressures. We also work very closely on the development of any business cases. There are some very large ones, obviously, from the police, so we provide that level of support.

From a governance point of view, as Sinead has just said, we are in the process of setting up a governance unit. All of the sponsorship arrangements, as I say, rest solely in one other directorate. A new partnership agreement is coming into play that replaces the old MSFM, and the Department is looking at how that might change the dynamic of the relationship with our arm's-length bodies. It is fair to say that, in the 10 months that I have been in the Department, there has been quite a mature relationship with our arm's-length bodies, and that sponsorship arrangement works well. It will be interesting to see the outworkings of the new partnership arrangement.

The Chairperson (Mr Givan): Just for my own assistance, what is MSFM?

Ms Brown: Management statement and financial memorandum.

The Chairperson (Mr Givan): OK, thank you.

Ms Brown: It is the one that sets out what all the parameters are. *[Laughter.]* I am sorry; I have to stop using acronyms.

The Chairperson (Mr Givan): I am sure all the members understood completely what it meant. I did not. *[Laughter.]* In terms of how those arm's-length bodies operate — well, they are not arm's-length bodies. The PSNI, for example, has its own board. How do you respect their independence but, at the same time, acknowledge that you are the Department that gives them the money?

Ms Brown: Obviously, they are operationally independent. We just make sure that we have a very mature relationship with them and make sure that we fully understand where their pressures are. Of course, we have a scrutiny and challenge role when it comes to business cases to make sure that the need is clearly demonstrated. We work very much in partnership with them, and the new arrangements that are coming into place will very much reflect the existing relationship that we have with the PSNI.

The Chairperson (Mr Givan): On the legal aid issue and the £88 million, do you know offhand what the budget was over the past number of years? What is the trajectory of spend?

Ms Brown: With the legal aid reforms that have happened over the years, the legal aid budget has come down from about £105 million, and, over the past couple of years, it has stayed static at around £84 million or £85 million. This year, it has gone up a little bit to £88 million, and we think that is because the system is now helping to get payments out faster. Where people might have been concerned about the time lag around their payments, we are now playing catch-up. We are watching that very carefully, and we have secured the additional funding in-year to make sure that we can manage that little bit of extra pressure to meet the £88 million. The system will obviously give us some better management information that will help us then to look at future projections and any pressures that there might be.

There are, however, a couple of large criminal cases at the moment with about 30 defendants, and those obviously have the potential to tip the balance of the normal projections that we would have.

Again, we are keeping a close eye on that. You were talking about the £55 million of pressures for next year. Legal aid is in there, because we think a couple of those cases will start to pull down some payments.

The Chairperson (Mr Givan): If we had parity and equality across the United Kingdom on this and want to keep within the scope of legal aid, has there been any cost analysis carried out as to what the legal aid budget would be if we operated on the same basis as GB?

Ms Brown: OK, I will let Stephen answer that one.

Mr Martin: The short answer is that we have not got that. There is some old work done by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development from 2014, but the legal aid bill has come down since then. It is fair to say that, even accounting for differences in scope and so on, our legal aid system is, per head of population, more expensive than the legal aid systems of our neighbouring jurisdictions. That absolutely is the case, but we have not yet got to the point where we have a detailed analysis of where those differentials are.

As you rightly said, in England and Wales, there is a much narrower scope. The comparison with Scotland is a little bit fairer, because they have a similar scope to ours. We are probably something in the region of a quarter to a third more expensive than Scotland, but there are quite a lot of murmurings in Scotland about the legal aid rates being fairly low, and a number of practitioners in Scotland have withdrawn from the legal aid market. There are some issues in Scotland, but it is difficult to get a fair benchmark.

The Chairperson (Mr Givan): Finally on this aspect, the fraud and error element of the accounts is still being qualified. Can you elaborate as to why there is concern around fraud and error? What does that relate to?

Ms Brown: It is very similar to the situation we had in DFC around benefits. In the LSA, we are a wee bit further behind in being able to estimate what we think the levels of fraud and error are. As a consequence, that is why the Audit Office is qualifying us, because we cannot give a reliable estimate. At the moment, we are engaging with our colleagues in DFC to learn the lessons that they have learnt around this in trying to build that up. The last set of accounts, of course — 2018-19 — were qualified, and the Audit Office did comment that although it felt that the Department was making progress in this area, it recognised that the scale of the issue was still not fully understood and that it could take a number of years before it could remove the qualification, albeit that I think it was content that we were making sufficient progress.

The Chairperson (Mr Givan): What is the balance of error versus fraud?

Ms Brown: That is a very technical issue, because you have to prove that it actually is a fraud. In the first instance, it could be an error, and then we have to get into the whole issue of proving that it is fraud. The Audit Office has a methodology whereby, if you cannot prove that it was right, they will deem it an error. So, there are an awful lot of complexities within how that is estimated.

The Chairperson (Mr Givan): OK. I am sure that we will look at that one again.

Ray, remind me: how many Access NI applications are you processing a year?

Mr Murray: About 140,000 transactions are completed a year.

The Chairperson (Mr Givan): How many people who apply for approval through Access NI get refused?

Mr Murray: Very few. The number refused the potential to work with young people and vulnerable adults is approximately in single figures. There are very few.

The Chairperson (Mr Givan): The system, just remind me, was changed that you applied once and that was applicable, or do you still need clearance for every organisation?

Mr Murray: Unfortunately, Chair, you still need clearance for every organisation. The portability of clearances was never successfully dealt with, for two reasons. A previous Justice Minister decided that the best, most effective and efficient way to do it was to go with the England and Wales barring system, which was developing a new system that would have included the portability to transfer one clearance, instead of multiple clearances. Unfortunately, we went on that because it would have been passed to us without costs. That project collapsed after about two years and left us with no way forward other than — well, there was always going to be legislation required to change the approach, but also it would mean the procurement of a new system, because the suppliers of our current system in Northern Ireland cannot enhance the system. It is quite old now, and they cannot enhance it to cover that. So a two-step process is required to move to that. It is still a desirable objective, but the two-step process is legislation and a new system.

The Chairperson (Mr Givan): It just seems strange if we are in single figures for refusal, and you have the numbers that have to apply, that there is not yet a system devised that, when you are approved, it then can be carried across organisations.

Mr Murray: Also to give employers access to the system that would allow them to look up when approvals were dated and make the judgement themselves as to how long ago it was. Obviously, in some ways, it is a bit like an MOT certificate: it is valid on the day it was issued, but not necessarily two years later. All those topics are still in discussion, and I think our new Minister will have to make a call on where we go forward on that.

Mr McGlone: Just to pick up on that theme: of those 140,000, have you any indication how many are repeat applications?

Mr Murray: I do not. To be absolutely honest, I do not have the figure at this point, but I can tell you that a significant number will be repeats.

Mr McGlone: I know, because if a person even applies for multiple jobs, it is just back in again. Often, as you are aware, that can delay their getting a position or a job.

Mr Murray: Absolutely, but that is the legislation as we stand.

Mr McGlone: I understand that. Is there any methodology of —. I understand that somebody can have a certificate now, but could be appearing before the court in a month or two. What is the link-up between the courts, the police and yourselves for the immediate transfer of information? In other words, if somebody receives a conviction in court for whatever it might be, what methodology is there to transfer that information to you?

Mr Murray: I mentioned earlier the Causeway system. As part of the Causeway system, there is a criminal record viewer that records all criminal convictions. There is a look-up capability to the criminal record viewer that allows us to look up criminal convictions, but, very often, cases are in progress with the PSNI that we do not know about because they have not been through the courts and resulted in a conviction. So, there is a two-tier approach to that: one is to look up the criminal record viewer, but the second one is to contact the PSNI to see whether there are cases in train. That is a difficult one because, until they go through, a person is innocent until proven guilty.

Mr McGlone: I know that.

Mr Murray: We do take a view as to the police perception of where the cases are as well, and we link with the police and we have a number of police resources working on dealing with enhanced checks.

Mr McGlone: Is that making any headway?

Mr Murray: It allows us to identify quicker — the point that you are making — whether there are cases where we should refuse a certificate. That is all.

Mr McGlone: What I mean is: you had 140,000 there. I am sure that you know off the top of your head how many there were in the previous year and what the turnaround times were like.

Mr Murray: Our turnaround targets are different for basic and enhanced checks. Our targets are 96%, and we are meeting those targets consistently. The only area where we are not meeting targets is where we have to pass them to PSNI.

Mr McGlone: Forgive my ignorance; 96% of what?

Mr Murray: Of the total applications, 96% meet a turnaround time of days.

Mr McGlone: How many days? That is the bit that I am trying to get at.

Mr Murray: It is three days, I think.

Mr McGlone: Oh, right.

Mr Murray: I could stand corrected on that because it is different for basic and enhanced checks, but the one that we cannot do is enhanced checks, because they go to PSNI.

Mr McGlone: So you are saying that most of them are turned round within three or four days, or whatever it is.

Mr Murray: Yes, absolutely.

Mr McGlone: Right, OK. Thank you for that.

Mr Murray: The targets are published as well.

Mr McGlone: There was another issue: the Courts and Tribunals Service. Is that you, Mr Martin?

Mr Martin: No. The Courts and Tribunals Service is not part of the justice delivery directorate.

Mr McGlone: No. It was a kind of a policy issue. Maybe I had better reserve it for them. Can I relay what it is to you?

Ms Brown: Yes, absolutely. Relay it to us and we can feed it back.

Mr McGlone: Just to explain, I see that it says there:

"Tribunals ... disposed of approximately 12,000 cases".

I have seen a pattern of a lot more social security appeal tribunals being referred to courts. I do not know why there is that pattern. For people who have vulnerabilities, are mentally frail or are anxious, a court setting is not the best place for them, because instinctively, rightly or wrongly, with that comes the perception that you are up in court for something or that somebody might see you in court for something. It is an issue that I have noticed increasingly in my area. I will just park that there, because maybe it is something that I would be as well to raise with the Courts and Tribunals Service.

I have another issue for the Youth Justice Agency, but it is a wider policy issue, too. Suicide among young people has been very much in the news recently. It is an awful situation for a lot of families. There are instances among young people who are institutionalised and older people who are in prison for a period. I am just thinking of the link-up between the Youth Justice Agency, the Probation Board and the Prison Service with the health service and the likes. I do not know whether you are able to tell me now, but I would appreciate it if we could have some sort of insight. Perhaps they could write to the Committee to give us an insight on how, or if, that is moving along, please.

Ms Simpson: I think that Ronnie Armour and his team, the head of the Youth Justice Agency and the Probation Board are with the Committee next week. I think that it will be their intention to cover those issues.

Mr McGlone: Good. We can speak to them about that then. OK. Thanks very much.

Ms Dillon: Thank you for all your presentations. Excuse my ignorance: I am a new member of the Committee. I have just a quick question on the reform of legal aid. Is it driven by savings or actually making it a better service? That is really what I want to know, because there are things that may appear to add cost. For example, a lot of people in domestic violence situations fall outside entitlement to benefits but are on very low incomes and are unable to get assistance with things like non-molestation orders. There is a very small cost involved, but they do not have that £300 or £400 and they need something to be put in place urgently. You then have the knock-on effect whereby the police are being called out continually but cannot arrest the person because there is no non-molestation order in place. They are having to build up a case. That then has a different cost, which is probably much more than the £300 or £400 that you would pay for the non-molestation order in the first place, which would allow the PSNI to come straight out and arrest the person for breaking the order.

You do not have to give me all the information now, but I would like something, even in written form, as to whether it is savings-driven or about reform to actually make things better. I am thinking even along the lines of Justice Gillen's recommendations. Obviously, some of these things will fall within that, particularly around the family courts and things like that. There are some things that might, on the face of it, appear to cost more, but the PSNI budget comes out of Justice as well so, in the long term, there will be savings. Short-term savings do not always equate to real savings.

Ms Brown: I will let Stephen cover that.

Mr Martin: I can say what the purpose of legal aid reform was before. Obviously, we have not yet had a chance to talk fully to the Minister about her intentions but, before, it was about achieving value for money. There are two aspects of that. One is cost: is the cost of legal aid delivering the right outcomes at the right amount of money? The second is quality. There was also a PAC report driving that. The purpose of my division is broader than legal aid, and it is a new division. What we have been looking for as well are opportunities to look at it in a more holistic way than perhaps has been the way before. We are looking for opportunities to enable access to justice for citizens, while still being very clear about value for money.

Non-molestation orders and the policy around those do not sit with me, but we work with colleagues who work in that kind of area in the Department to see if, as they are working on a new area of policy, changes in legal aid policy are needed alongside that to make the policy effective. For example, on committal reform — the legislation on which the Committee will consider in due course — we are working very closely with our policy colleagues who are working on that to make sure that there are legal aid arrangements that ensure access to justice while delivering value. We do not lead on the policy around non-molestation but, if there was a change in policy, we would work alongside colleagues, while always being mindful to make sure that whatever arrangements are in place represent value for money.

Mr Beattie: Deborah, I am looking at the piece about speeding up justice. You talk about cases taking from 167 days down to 155 days — very specific — but then you say that the Crown Court cases are taking "significantly longer". If I flick across to the statistics for Maghaberry, Magilligan and Hydebank Wood, we see that there are huge numbers on remand. I imagine that most of those on remand are waiting for Crown Court cases. Do we have an idea of what we are talking about when we say "significantly longer"?

Ms Brown: This is not my area; Glynn Capper looks after this area. What they are looking at is the whole journey. It is taking a particular person through to try to look at where the bottlenecks are and whether there are opportunities to speed that up for them. I can take it away and get you some more information on it.

Mr Beattie: Yes, if you can, please. It is really to find out what we are doing to speed up justice. What are we doing practically to try to speed this up? I know we talked in the last Justice Committee about a few ways that they were trying to do it. I am just wondering where we have gone in regards to that.

Secondly, Sinead, can I just ask you something? Apologies, because you said something and it pricked my ears, but I did not quite get it. You were talking about the criminal injuries compensation scheme and the same-household rule.

Ms Simpson: Do you want me to explain a bit more?

Mr Beattie: Well, I kind of get it. Are we going to bring ourselves into line with the rest of the United Kingdom?

Ms Simpson: Yes. There was a Court of Appeal decision in November 2018 that requires us to make the change but, in effect, it will be to bring us into line with the legislation across the water.

Mr Beattie: What date is the GB legislation backdated to?

Ms Simpson: We have a gap. If you were assaulted by someone within the same household and there was a prosecution post-1988, you would be eligible for criminal injuries compensation, but, if that happened between 1968 and 1988, the current legislation does not allow us to pay out compensation. The effect of this change would be to allow us to pay compensation in any cases between 1968 and 1988.

Mr Beattie: Sorry, this is a little pedantic, but what happens pre-1968? Nothing?

Ms Simpson: I would need to check. I am not sure.

Mr Beattie: I am just trying to figure out what happens if something historical comes out.

Ms Simpson: What the significance of 1968 is, yes.

Mr Beattie: Yes. I think 1968 is significant. Sinead, thank you for that.

The Chairperson (Mr Givan): Have you quantified how many people would be between 1968 and 1988?

Ms Simpson: Some work has been done on it. I do not have the exact figures to hand. I know that applications will have been made that had to be refused. There are numbers; I think it is a few hundred. I need to check, and I will come back to the Committee. I suppose there is the unknown: the people who did not apply because they knew the legislation did not allow it. It is a long period of time. I suppose there will have been people who could have been eligible but will have passed on. I can get a bit more detail for you on that, if that would be helpful.

The Chairperson (Mr Givan): Please do.

Ms Brown: Again, that will create another budget pressure.

Mr Frew: On that point, is that a set amount of compensation, or is it done case by case?

Ms Simpson: It would be on a case-by-case basis, but there are tariffs for the criminal injuries compensation scheme, so an assessment will be made. The issue is that, with the passage of time and particularly because of the type of injuries you are talking about, it would be an assessment of the emotional and mental health impact, so that would vary from case to case, but there are tariffs.

Mr Frew: Would you then have to take account of the emotional aspect with regard to the time delay?

Ms Simpson: All of that would have to be considered and, obviously, that would not be done by administrative staff; medical experts would be giving opinions on that.

Mr Frew: I have another point. It is more an observation than a question to the panel. On Patsy's point about experience around tribunals and courts, can I just say that, in Ballymena, the courthouse is actually the best place to have appeals. It is private, it is courtroom 3, and it is more like a classroom than a courthouse. The other venue we use in Ballymena is a boardroom, and it is much more off-putting for people.

The Chairperson (Mr Givan): When the relevant officials are up, we will elaborate, I am sure.

I thank Deborah and her team for coming to the Committee today. We appreciate it.

Ms Brown: Thank you.