



Committee for The Executive Office

OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

Brexit: Special EU Programmes Body

18 November 2020

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Committee for The Executive Office

Brexit: Special EU Programmes Body

18 November 2020

Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mr Colin McGrath (Chairperson)
Mr Doug Beattie (Deputy Chairperson)
Ms Martina Anderson
Mr Trevor Clarke
Mr Trevor Lunn
Mr George Robinson
Mr Pat Sheehan
Ms Emma Sheerin
Mr Christopher Stalford

Witnesses:

Mr Declan McGarrigle	Special EU Programmes Body
Ms Gina McIntrye	Special EU Programmes Body

The Chairperson (Mr McGrath): I welcome Gina McIntrye, the chief executive of the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB), and Declan McGarrigle, the body's programme manager. Hansard is reporting the meeting, and the transcript will be published on the Committee's web page. That almost sounds like a threat [*Laughter*] that anything that you say will be used against you, but it is just to advise you of that.

Mr Stalford: Anything that you say may be used against you in a court of law.

The Chairperson (Mr McGrath): It sounds a little threatening, but it is definitely not meant as such.

Mr Stalford: You have the right to remain silent, but it will not be much of a Committee meeting if you do [*Laughter*.]

The Chairperson (Mr McGrath): Anyway, you are welcome. Thank you very much. It is also good to have people in the room. We miss that because a lot of evidence is taken via StarLeaf. The normal procedure is to let you start off with a presentation, after which members will ask questions. If you are content with that, I will pass over to you.

Ms Gina McIntrye (Special EU Programmes Body): Thank you very much for the invitation to be here to talk about the work of the Special EU Programmes Body, particularly the Peace and INTERREG programmes. I have submitted a briefing paper, so I will not go through all of that. I intend to give you the key highlights on the current and future programmes, if that is OK.

The Chairperson (Mr McGrath): Lovely.

Ms McIntyre: The Peace programme has a value of €269 million, and the INTERREG programme has a value of €283 million. I am happy to report that both those programmes are overcommitted. The Peace programme is overcommitted to €277 million, and the INTERREG programme is overcommitted to €291 million. That is a management technique that is used for those programmes to ensure that we maximise expenditure in getting the EU receipts back by the end of the programmes. Invariably, projects will underspend during their lifetime. We will maintain that position, and, indeed, it will change. We will overcommit by certain amounts throughout the next couple of years. Our priorities are, obviously, to stay overcommitted and to ensure that the full expenditure is recouped.

COVID, obviously, has been a problem for our projects. However, as an organisation, we have been working remotely since March. We have worked on a case-by-case basis with each of those projects that we fund. As we fund in so many sectors across the two programmes, they have faced a variety of problems and challenges over the past six months. Where possible, we have offered flexibility to the projects. I commend them because they have been fantastic in coming up with innovative ways to deliver for and carry on looking after their beneficiaries, which is really important. We have been as flexible as we can be in relation to indicators. We put in an emergency payment right at the beginning. We knew that there would be problems with paperwork, so we established an emergency-type payment that would be verified later. Some of the projects took that up. It is our duty to ensure that projects stay viable so that they stay eligible for the funding. At this stage, given the overcommitment in the current programmes, we cannot offer any extra money to projects to deal with COVID; instead, we look at outputs and extending letters of offer and that type of thing.

In the Peace programme, we fund areas such as shared education and support for victims and survivors. There is a lot of support for children and young people, from nought to 24 and 14 to 24. Those projects, in particular, are not only innovative but absolutely hilarious in some of the ways in which they have been able to keep their beneficiaries involved in their work. It is all about building confidence and resilience. We recently launched a mental health project for young people. It is great to see that out in the public.

We have a shared spaces element. A lot of capital buildings are coming on stream this year. We also have regional-wide projects. All those are working successfully. Every council has a local action plan (LAG), and they are all working very well. Quite a few of them are completing, but, so far, everything is going well in that regard. We have a Peace platform project, which is wonderful. It is a repository of 25 years' worth of the Peace programmes. It is just coming to fruition now, and we hope to launch it in January. It has brought together all the case studies from projects, lessons learned, reports, evaluations and all that. That will be a fantastic learning tool so that other projects learn how to avoid mistakes, or, indeed, get ideas. As you know, a lot of foreign visitors come here to find out about the excellent work of the projects. That learning platform will enable them to do that online.

Our INTERREG programme funds in the areas of research and development, particularly health and life sciences. It is PhD research. There is also support for SMEs in research to bring products and services to the market. We have sustainable transport in the INTERREG programme. The programme includes western Scotland as a partner. We have the transport area, in which we have funded three greenways and the multimodal hub in the Waterside in Derry/Londonderry. We do a lot of cross-border healthcare; 50,000 patients will be treated throughout our projects in acute services and community interventions, particularly in rural areas, where a critical mass of patients will be brought together to deliver those. We have some services for disability, medical care and medicines. A lot of really excellent work is going on in all your constituencies.

The environment is a major part of the INTERREG programme. We fund in the areas of protecting habitats and species, and water quality. Unfortunately, at the weekend, there was a landslide in the Derg area, where one of our projects was testing water quality. That was very unfortunate for that project and the impact that it might have.

That is the position with the two current programmes. We are also the Northern Ireland contact point for transnational programmes; Declan does a lot of work in that area. Many of those are in the area of renewable energy and water and marine life. That has been a strong part of the overall programmes, although not our two direct ones. It has leveraged €16 million into the region.

The PEACE PLUS programme, as you are aware, has been committed to in the withdrawal agreement. We started consultation on that programme last August. We were very fortunate in that we were able to speak to all the permanent secretaries and the assistant secretary generals in the Irish

Departments in Dublin. We had a series of public events, which over 1,000 people attended in January and February this year. We went to every county, and, as I said, the citizens came and gave us their views. Some did not hold back in their criticisms, but that was fine. We got excellent input from them. Some 320 surveys were submitted, which outline what people see as the challenges for the region and what they would like to see.

The PEACE PLUS programme is based on the framework that the EU has ascribed to all programmes across Europe. We have selected the themes that we think are most beneficial for this region. That is based on a socio-economic study that was carried out in Northern Ireland and the border region of Ireland by economists here in the Department of Finance, and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in Dublin. They worked jointly on that study. It will be updated to reflect the impact of COVID.

Minister Murphy in the Department of Finance and Minister McGrath in the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in Dublin — our sponsor Departments — have given us great support in the projects. They have given us a clear vision of what they would like to see in the programme. It is very much about community interventions, rural interventions in the most-impacted areas and ensuring that we leave a lasting legacy. We have looked at all government priorities in Northern Ireland and the border counties of Ireland and taken on board all the information. We also have to take on board the green deal, which is a climate agenda from the European Commission. We are looking at the UN sustainable development goals and their impact on the programme. Luckily for us, everything aligns very well. We have developed six themes from that.

We are looking at ensuring that we are working with communities and for communities in the future programme. I am not sure whether you want me to go through the six themes for the PEACE PLUS programme or to give an overview.

The Chairperson (Mr McGrath): Give us a light overview.

Ms McIntyre: The first theme relates to building peaceful and thriving communities. It is very much focused on the type of activity that I mentioned and that we are funding in the Peace programme, although it has been brought up to date and changed, according to what we have heard from communities. There will, therefore, be local action plans in all councils, but we will make sure that they are co-designed with communities and address local needs within communities. We want to look at areas such as regeneration and transformation, building positive relations and celebrating identity, diversity and culture within that. We are also looking at empowering communities. We have put in place a small grant scheme for smaller projects, which, perhaps, would not go through the council schemes. The application for that grant should be less administratively burdensome, because the projects are smaller. They will look at building good relations and peacebuilding. In that area, we are looking at institutional capacity building. That will be at all levels of the community — from political level down to local level and through all the statutory agencies. An interesting aspect that we hope to bring into the programme is justice interventions in the community to help to build peace by establishing relationships and understanding.

The building positive relations aspect will be regional-wide projects that look at celebrating identity and diversity, and building on relationships and understanding among communities. They are a very successful part of the current programme.

We will look at re-imaging communities in the shared spaces and services element. We want to consider some of the impacts of COVID in community areas, villages, towns and some retail streets that will, perhaps, be left derelict. There will be an emphasis on the new shared spaces being a re-establishment of older buildings and not all brand new. We want to see regeneration in that area.

The second theme is about delivering economic regeneration and transformation and support for SMEs. We are looking at skills development, research and innovation and a regional skills programme. We are also looking at smart cities, towns and villages.

The third investment area relates to empowering and investing in our young people. The learning together education programme will be very much like the shared education programme. There will be a PEACE PLUS youth programme, which is about confidence building and resilience, and taking them forward to vocational training skills, and a youth mental health programme.

The fourth area relates to healthy and inclusive communities. As I mentioned, the INTERREG programme funds a lot of medical health interventions on a cross-border basis. We will carry on doing

that work, because that has been extremely successful, but we also want to look at health and well-being in communities, 'and getting communities involved in what they can do in services. Communities can do a lot of work to enhance the medical services in their areas. There will be support for victims and survivors in that theme, and there will also be rural development and regeneration because there are many areas of isolation, and, for rural development, we really want to bring that on.

A fifth area is supporting a sustainable future. That theme contains biodiversity; recovery and resilience; marine and coastal management; water quality; and sustainable transport. Once again, we are able to bring communities in there to see how they can look at making their local areas more sustainable for the future.

The sixth theme is a mandatory theme in all INTERREG programmes in Europe: building and embedding partnerships and collaboration. That theme looks particularly at the legal and administrative challenges of a border and at what can be done to address those. That could include skills recognition on each side of the border, and I expect that the Administrations will work together on that area to address some challenges. Again, we are looking at a small project theme that is about maintaining and forging relationships for communities over the next few years. That is just a summary.

The Chairperson (Mr McGrath): Gina, thank you very much indeed for that. As you were talking, I was trying to think of a way to introduce this next session of questions. I have written down that you are the silent deliverers in Northern Ireland. Not everybody is aware of the work that you do, yet your work and the funding that you provide probably touches just about everybody's life. As you detailed, the level and scale of the programmes that you are involved with goes from people going out for a walk on a beach and there being some form of environmental programme that has been funded and delivers there right through to a refurbished building in a town centre and through to groups that people are part of or programmes in which young people participate. Right across the whole spectrum, just about everybody is probably engaging in some form. There is probably many's a Minister in the Executive who would love to have the funding that you have to be able to deliver programmes, because there is great scope. Well done to everybody on the work that you are doing and the impact that you are having, especially in the dual year that we are in with the COVID impact and of dealing with the uncertainty of Brexit and its implications.

I want to start by getting an understanding of that. You talked about hundreds of millions of pounds being delivered into everyday life in Northern Ireland. Can you update us on where you see things going forward? Yesterday, we received an update on the North/South Ministerial Council meeting, and I know that there has been a guarantee that the rest of this programme cycle will be funded and that that money is there. However, I get a sense that there is uncertainty at the other end as opposed to a guarantee about what will happen. What is your understanding of what might take place as a result of Brexit?

Ms McIntyre: You are right that there is a commitment that the current programmes will be seen right through to the end. We work with our projects very carefully to make sure that we know about any Brexit implications on them. As you will know, it is as yet quite unknown what the implications might be, and we are hopeful that much of what may come to pass will not happen in the next year or two so that the projects that are completing out will be able to do so in the same manner. We will keep on top of that as the situation unfolds next year and the following year.

There is a commitment in the withdrawal agreement for the PEACE PLUS programme. The EU put down €60 million, in addition to Ireland's contribution from the European regional development fund (ERDF) — funding that comes directly from the Commission — so Ireland put forward €60 million, and the UK had committed £300 million. All that then gets matched by government interventions from each of the Departments. We have worked with each of the Departments, and, again, I pay homage to the work that the officials have done in all those Departments. They have worked fantastically with us for the past year. They work jointly with their counterparts in Ireland, and they have put forward joint proposals for the priorities that they want. They have been deeply involved in the development of the programme. They will all put forward their match-funding elements to add to the programme. Currently, the programme sits at about €650 million, and that has been committed to. In the last six months, the EU has added a further €60 million to the €60 that it had already guaranteed, and the Irish Government have added a further €27 million. That means that, if the UK matches it in the proportions that you would expect, you would see a much larger programme. I expect that that will all be worked out between the UK and the EU in the negotiations. We were working on the basis that we have a firm commitment for that €650 million programme for PEACE PLUS.

The Chairperson (Mr McGrath): We should maybe keep an eye on that with you to make sure that that commitment is honoured or pursued. We can maximise our influence to try to ensure that money is matched and drawn down. As I say, I reiterate how it cuts across all of society.

I really welcome hearing you talk about youth mental health as one of your areas. It is increasingly becoming an issue. It is great that you are prioritising the funding of projects to tackle that. I like the flexibility that, if there are emerging needs, you are able to fund programmes to target them. There is a flexibility that sometimes does not exist in Departments. It is really good and reassuring to know that you are there to deliver them.

This is my final question. You mentioned the co-design process. Do you embed that in the groups that apply to you, or do you co-design at your level? Can you push out right across the sector?

Ms McIntyre: We will be pushing it out to local councils. It is very much in line with community planning as it is, but we will be asking councils to co-design the Peace action plans, because they get an allocation of funds directly and do not have to bid competitively for them. We will be able to tell them that they can start work to develop, with local communities, what they need. That co-design work will happen. We intend to provide support for that next year to get it up and running, and it may be that we provide some individuals to work with the councils to enable them to do that work, because, obviously, with COVID, everybody is very restricted in what they can do. We will provide some support to embed that process in the planning.

Mr Beattie: Gina, thank you for that. It is fascinating. I will ask one very brief question, and then I will ask about something else. On Peace IV, you talk about shared education and how you are supporting that. Do you do much with the integrated sector?

Ms McIntyre: Not directly in the current programme. We fund shared education, which is about two schools coming together — the signature-type projects — but the integrated education sector can apply, and there were other areas to which it could have applied. I talk to people from the integrated education sector and did so quite recently. There will be more explicit references to integrated education in the PEACE PLUS programme. It is specifically referenced in the learning together education programme that the integrated education sector can be involved.

Mr Beattie: Thanks, Gina. This is an interesting subject for me at the minute. In PEACE PLUS, you talk about building peaceful and thriving communities and building positive relationships. There was an article in the last couple of days that stated that, during the COVID pandemic, some areas in which paramilitaries have control are suffering more because of what is happening with COVID. It made me wonder: how much of a link do you have to the likes of the Executive action plans; the Department of Justice's action plan on paramilitarism, criminality and organised crime, which is in particular communities; and the paramilitaries task force, which is the hard-force piece to that? Do you then deliver stuff in communities? How do you deconflict what you are putting into communities with what the action plan is trying to achieve or what the police are trying to do through their task force?

Ms McIntyre: We make sure that we do not do the same, and we do that by working closely with officials. We will work closely with the Executive Office when we are designing the programme and putting out the calls to make sure that it is in line with Executive Office policy but does not overlap with other activity. Indeed, we are trying to complement its activity. We do not go in on the hard side of those schemes; we go in on the softer side and work on relationship building. However, each of the relevant Departments is involved in the design of those calls to make sure that the projects that we fund do not overlap theirs.

Mr Beattie: That is good. I fully get that you are the soft power piece; I never thought anything other than that. The action plan talks about communities and tradition in transition, and it has eight output areas in that regard. I just want to get a sense that you are doing something that is complementary and fully built into what the relevant Department is doing, rather than doing something completely different.

Ms McIntyre: Yes, we are.

Mr Beattie: Thank you.

Mr Declan McGarrigle (Special EU Programmes Body): It goes back to a point that Gina has already made. We have had extensive engagement this year with all Departments on a North/South basis. That process is really standing us in good stead in terms of where we have arrived now with the development of the six themes and the various investment areas. It is an ongoing and intensive process. At the moment, there is a process of review of the investment areas and thematic papers that we have supplied to the Departments. There is an extensive and ongoing process to ensure that what we are proposing as part of this is complementary.

Ms McIntyre: Back in November 2019, over 80 officials from all the Departments in Northern Ireland and Ireland that we are involved with, which is, in fact, all of them, came together in a room to talk about the programme and find areas of commonality between, for example, the Education Department and the Department for the Economy. There was a lot of overlap, and a lot of really useful and fruitful discussion came out of that.

Mr Beattie: That is really useful. I do not want this to be controversial, but I have another quick question. You are all about bringing communities together, building peace and all the rest of it. Have you had much kickback or any application for funding from anybody in regard to the Northern Ireland centenary, or have you stayed away from that hot potato?

Ms McIntyre: No. Those plans are in place already. That comes up in the next year, so it is not part of the current programme. It will be before the next programme starts, so we are not involved in that. Councils might be working on some of that, and they could be using the action plan. They do a lot of very micro-level work, so they could be using some of the Peace funds. We have not been involved in the larger projects.

Mr Beattie: That is OK. There was bit of an aside from you, Chris. What was that about?

Mr Stalford: "Hot potato".

Mr Beattie: It is for some. You know what I meant — stop it.

Mr Stalford: It is a hot potato only if you want to be offended.

The Chairperson (Mr McGrath): There is no better way to get your question heard than to start it with, "I do not mean this to be controversial" [Laughter.]

Ms Anderson: I would not think of being controversial [Laughter.] At your end of the table, Christopher, you will probably be glad to know that the Orange Order received £3·6 million of European funding from the SEUPB. It is an organisation that is talked about widely and very fondly in Europe because of its dedication to the —

The Chairperson (Mr McGrath): Can I clarify that you are not talking about the Orange Order? [Laughter.]

Ms Anderson: Definitely not; I would not say that. It is definitely the SEUPB. As an organisation, the SEUPB is recognised across the EU for what it has achieved thus far. I am a little concerned about the organisations that have, for years, secured funding from the European social fund (ESF) and the ERDF. I do not know whether you have picked that up from any of those organisations. I have heard many of them say, "Well, thankfully, we still have Peace". They feel that Peace IV may be an avenue for them. I imagine that you will be overwhelmed with applications. How comprehensive is the consultation process? Like the Chair, I was glad to hear you say that it is co-designed. This cannot be done without communities, so there should always be co-design. You are saying that it is a statutory consultation. Is there clarity about what the six themes will be so that it is not seen as a fund that will fill the gap of over €3 billion of European funding that will be lost, because you will not be able to do that?

Ms McIntyre: I think that it is clear, Martina. The Departments for the economy, which were responsible for this side of the programme, and the ESF have been working with us on the development of these themes. People who have been involved in the ESF programmes recognise that the Peace programme is different because we base it on the objectives of building positive relations and peace building. We will have training projects in the PEACE PLUS programme because you can do both. It will be about how projects can show that they can take the opportunities to do relationship

building, along with skills development, or, indeed, show that they can do that on a cross-border basis, with agencies in Northern Ireland and in the border counties working together on some of the training skills. So, we have addressed that. We are very wary of that because a lot of people have said that they will just go to the Peace programme. We are trying to modify it, but, obviously, as a Peace programme, we have to deliver the objectives of peace building, but we can also deliver on investment because with peace comes prosperity. So, we are taking the opportunities that we can to bring those areas into the programme.

Mr McGarrigle: As Gina outlined, we had a very extensive consultation process with communities and our key stakeholders at the start of this year. You will have seen our summary document, which is an extensive piece of work from our point of view. All that is fed into the development of those themes, in addition to the engagement that we are having with the Departments on a North/South basis, as well as the socio-economic profile and other key research. We will then proceed to a public consultation, so we will go back out with the information on the themes and the detail behind it to take people's views again in the next couple of months.

Ms Anderson: You talked about the multimodal hub in Derry. I express an interest as an MLA from the city. It received INTERREG funding of £27 million. We do not want it to be a white elephant, because the revenue is needed to take that forward. My understanding is that Peace and INTERREG are amalgamating.

Ms McIntyre: Yes, that is right.

Ms Anderson: How are you managing that amalgamation as an organisation? You collaborate anyway, but with the kind of skill sets that you need for both programmes, is there any way of ensuring that those skill sets are maintained and that there is no loss of personnel because of the scale of the work that will be done across those six programmes? People need to understand that amalgamation through engagement with the community. People are not aware that those two stand-alone individual programmes will be amalgamated and that there will be consequences of that.

Ms McIntyre: We think that it is good that the two programmes are being amalgamated, because the Peace programme was building on peace building and relationships, and INTERREG was very much focused on the economy and the territorial development aspect, and it was cross-border. Sometimes, projects did not quite meet the criteria for Peace but neither did they meet the criteria for INTERREG. You could see that a project would be beneficial to both, but it did not make it into either programme. So, bringing them together has allowed us to get communities involved, particularly in the area of sustainable futures, which is about climate change. Communities will be involved in the peace-building and relationship-building aspects. The integrity of the larger projects, such as sustainable transport, will be maintained through the INTERREG programme because they will be cross-border.

At the end of the day, the two complement each other very well because the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement is all about establishing links, North/South and east-west. That is the context in which we were developed, and that is what this programme will be able to carry on doing: bringing the two together. Internally, we have managed the two programmes. We might end up with a larger programme, and, yes, we might need additional experts to help with that.

We are also looking at what we can do to help communities and applicants. We are looking at simplifying the administrative processes, bringing in pre-development support and maybe running more workshops to try to help projects. We are trying to develop a quality programme with quality projects. It is not in our interest to have a project that needs help, so we will try to provide support to help them to understand a bit more. The smaller project funds in themes 1 and 6 will allow communities to work either cross-community or cross-border, so that should be a little clearer.

On the ESF side, throughout every one of these themes, we are trying to engender social and community innovation. That involves encouraging communities to deal with social challenges and to think big and think differently, whether that is about services, working with statutory agencies or working with the Civil Service.

We had a call re the current Peace programme, which closed just yesterday or the day before. It is almost the precursor to this programme because it has been about building capacity within communities for social innovation. That is the whole area of social entrepreneurship, social economy and social enterprises, as well as the support for those areas.

Ms Anderson: Chair, I think that there is a process in place in the SEUPB that could be shared across Departments. Gina, you talked about how you overcommit. Time after time, we are faced with infrastructure projects that under-commit, which means that projects end up needing millions of pounds as they come to a close, or face the threat that they will not be completed. You, however, in programme after programme, have been overcommitting, always overshooting and then coming in under budget. Experience and expertise in your field could certainly be shared with officials in the Department.

The Chairperson (Mr McGrath): Is that similar to an airplane overbooking seats, in that 5% of projects might not fly and might not make it?

Ms McIntyre: It is, but I have to say that Departments take the risk of the overcommitment while we are overcommitted. We work with all Departments in all the different areas, so we have an agreement with the Departments of Finance, North and South, to overcommit the programme up to, say, 105%. Our experience shows that programmes will always underspend by 5% to 8%. We are trying to make sure that Northern Ireland plc and the Irish Government get back 100% of this fund. That is why we then bring the figure down. However, if we end up with a little bit of an overspend, the Departments pick up that risk for us.

Mr Lunn: Thanks for your presentation, Gina. The work that you do is fantastic.

Ms McIntyre: Thank you.

Mr Lunn: It really brings something to the party and has done so for a number of years. I hope that it can be continued as successfully.

While you were speaking, I took about half a dozen notes. While the first three members were asking questions, I crossed them all out because they had covered them, so I do not have a whole lot to ask. You mentioned the small grants scheme. How small or big are we talking about?

Ms McIntyre: We are doing a little bit of work at the minute to complete all of that. We have been out doing a bit of research to see the types of projects that we might fund and which would be wanted in communities. We are talking about, probably, under £100,000. In certain areas, and for a particular range of activity, there could be a very small grant of £5,000 to £10,000. Another range of activity, which is the work that we are completing, could be in the £30,000 to £50,000 range. The next level is up to £100,000.

There are options within the European regulations to provide simplified cost options. That reduces a lot of the bureaucracy involved in verification. It becomes almost like a service, in that, if you agree the outputs and budgets with the project, and the project can deliver and show you that it has delivered, you can hand it a cheque. You do not have to go through all the elaborate verification, which is a big help for smaller projects, and that is why we were keen to bring that in.

Mr Lunn: Yes, that would be a godsend because, with all small grant schemes, the difficulty of filling in forms and trying to fulfil all the criteria has been the problem, and a lot of applicants, I think, just gave up. That is a pity because their schemes could have been valid. Is the funding secure for PEACE PLUS from 2021 to 2027?

Ms McIntyre: Yes. There is a commitment on the table. It is therefore secure until I am told otherwise.

Mr Lunn: If the British Government and Europe really fall out, as appears possible, would that affect that funding, or is it not conditional on a deal?

Ms McIntyre: As I said, there is a commitment on the table. Until it is taken off the table, it is there. To be fair, last January, when the UK Government announced it, they said that the commitment was there regardless of whether there was a deal.

Mr Lunn: Up to 2027? I thought that they talked about existing schemes up to 2022.

Ms McIntyre: No, this was for the future PEACE PLUS programme. They have given that commitment. The money will be put into the programme. That is the commitment that has been given.

Mr Lunn: That is another promise, yes — faces the camera and sighs. It is a bit like fisheries. Thanks for that. That is grand.

Mr Stalford: I think that what you meant to say, Trevor, was that, if anyone is going to break it, it will not be the UK Government.

Mr Lunn: I think that what I said was [*Inaudible.*]

Mr Stalford: For the projects that you fund, what percentage of the budget generally goes on technical assistance?

Ms McIntyre: It is 6%.

Mr Stalford: That is excellent. In a previous life, I worked for an MEP. At one point, the budget was 12%. If it is 6%, that is very good.

Ms McIntyre: Yes, it is 6%. I think that, back during Peace I, 20-odd years ago, it might have been about 9%. However, it is 6% now.

Mr Stalford: We are moving to a post-Brexit era. You are the Special EU Programmes Body. One potential area of work for you is securing arrangements and investment for projects from the European Investment Bank. Has that been scoped out? Can you comment on that a wee bit?

Ms McIntyre: No, that has not been scoped out at all. Our statutory remit is the delivery of these programmes, so that has not been discussed. I am sure that —

Mr Stalford: What about going forward?

Ms McIntyre: — going forward, it could be for the Department of Finance to discuss and look at that.

Mr Stalford: Yes. You could be a special European programmes body rather than the Special European Union Programmes Body.

Ms McIntyre: I do not know.

Mr Stalford: I think that, as a peripheral region of the European Union, we can access money from that route.

Ms McIntyre: Yes. That is correct.

Mr Stalford: OK. The figures that you gave were that £60 million was committed by Europe, and was it £28 million from ROI?

Ms McIntyre: No, that is the additional money on the table.

Mr Stalford: The additional money, yes.

Ms McIntyre: That would be a total of £120 million and £87 million.

Mr Stalford: You said that the UK proportion of that has not been committed yet. What should it be?

Ms McIntyre: The current commitment is £60 million from the EU, £60 million from Ireland and £300 million from the UK. That is matched when all the Departments add their element. The additional money on the table is £120 million from the EU and £87 million from the Irish Government.

Mr Stalford: You do not know what the corresponding figure would be.

Ms McIntyre: That is the bit that is under discussion between the UK and EU.

Mr Stalford: One of the areas that is important — I think that Martina touched on it — it is not a criticism — is an issue that I have had with a lot of Government projects. When people can see something with their own eyes — the bricks and mortar from capital investment — it shows them the benefit of organisations like the SEUPB, whereas that is less true of revenue. What do you envisage the relative balance being between capital investment and revenue investment in the next stage?

Ms McIntyre: We do not really know what the balance will be. We have written the programme in such a way as to keep it quite flexible — as flexible as it can be — because we have to show the European Commission and, indeed, the Northern Ireland Executive and the Irish Government that it this is based on the evidence of need and the data that we have gathered, as well as being in line with government priorities. We have written it in such a way as to be flexible enough to deal with the aftermath and the socio-economic problems that will result from COVID and, indeed, Brexit. We will wait to see what comes forward in the project schemes and, as it unfurls, what might be required from the Ireland/Northern Ireland protocol. I believe that there are opportunities there to protect those that we have, to build on them and to address some of the challenges. Those projects will come forward. In certain areas, say, in smart towns, cities and villages, we do not yet know how much of that will be capital. We have still to do a bit of research next year, and there is also the fact that these are so wide-ranging. What we do not want is everybody coming in and saying, "We are looking for a smart town or village". So, we will work on three specific areas. The first involves areas that are worst affected by COVID, such as tourism. The second is the social economy. The third is rural smart towns, cities and villages. This is so that we, hopefully by the end of next year, will have a pathway to show what investments would make the biggest impact in the region — in Northern Ireland and in the six border counties. What element of this will be capital will come out of that. However, you can be sure that the shared spaces and the transport projects will be capital, and there will be capital elements within all of the environmental protection. There will probably be less on the healthcare side, but there could be some capital in there because, as I said, we want to bring communities in, and we particularly want to look at the well-being of communities. We might be looking at —.

Mr Stalford: Community hubs and stuff like that.

Ms McIntyre: Yes, or drug rehabilitation centres or something that is done on a cross-border and cross-community basis, and that type of thing. Sorry, Christopher, we just do not yet know the exact proportion

Mr Stalford: That is OK. My favourite EU project is the House of Orange, which Martina referred to. Single-identity work is important: for communities to be able to reach out to each other, they have to be confident in themselves. I appreciate and understand that, given your focus, empowering communities to reach out will not make up the majority of what you are driving towards, but what elements of single-identity work do you envisage in the projects going forward?

Ms McIntyre: I totally agree with you that it is very important. It is in that empowering communities area where there is provision for single-identity work that will lead on to cross-community work, so it will be a little bit like pilot work. In that area, and potentially in theme 6 with regard to challenges and maintaining and forging relationships, we see and build positive relations. We see a necessity for some single-identity work, but, of course, only if it is leading on to cross-community work. I totally agree that it is important, and I think that there are a lot of people who would like to do some work but might not know how to go about it.

Mr Stalford: Yes.

Ms McIntyre: That is another piece of work that we want to do next year. We are just looking at how best to deliver that: how best to do some of that capacity building and single-identity work.

Mr Stalford: That is particularly an issue in the community that I come from. Community capacity, skills and all of that infrastructure are so important in strengthening people so that they can then reach out. I am glad to hear that. Thank you.

The Chairperson (Mr McGrath): I could hark way back to my youth work days in the 1980s and 1990s, when doing that single-identity work was always a critical building block in moving forward.

Trevor, do you want to come in on the back of something that was said?

Mr Lunn: It is a very quick one, Chair, thank you. Gina, you mentioned the regeneration of town centres and the particular emphasis on trying to preserve rather than demolish. Do you do any work alongside the Heritage Lottery Fund?

Ms McIntyre: No, we do not. Up to now, we have not really done much with the Heritage Lottery Fund.

Mr McGarrigle: We did a little bit in the past, but probably not so much in this programme period.

Ms McIntyre: There were just one or two pieces of work, not much. However, maybe that will be something going forward.

Mr Lunn: It could be. It is one of the quirks of this country that certain organisations will not take money from the Heritage Lottery Fund.

Ms McIntyre: Yes, I know that.

Mr Lunn: Like churches: some churches will; some will not.

Ms McIntyre: That is right.

Mr Lunn: Maybe they would quite happily take yours.

Ms McIntyre: Yes, maybe they would.

Mr Lunn: Even lottery money that was channelled through you.

Ms McIntyre: Yes, and the area, which I mentioned earlier, of empowering communities and institutional capacity building includes politicians, churches, political groups and community groups. We really believe that single-identity work is required here.

Mr Lunn: OK, thank you.

The Chairperson (Mr McGrath): It was remiss of me not to mention that we have members on StarLeaf. Therefore, it is not that our number is depleted. Also, we have Trevor here. Sometimes, I do not get round everyone. Members, can I bring you in on anything or are you happy enough? I will just check StarLeaf in the order that I saw people join. Pat, is there anything that you would like to ask?

Mr Sheehan: No, I am OK, Chair. Thank you.

The Chairperson (Mr McGrath): George, is there anything that you want to ask? I am lip-reading, but I think that he said no.

Emma, is there anything that you want to check?

Ms Sheerin: Yes. My question follows on from Trevor's about the guarantee on PEACE PLUS. We have been working on the basis that PEACE PLUS will get another run from, I think, 2021 to 2027. As I understand it, that was a commitment in the cohesion policy, as it was called, and it was accounted for in the withdrawal agreement. You answered the question very carefully. We do not have concrete confirmation of that. It can still be reneged on, can it not?

Ms McIntyre: As I said, it is a commitment that we have at the minute. The Department of Finance is working closely with the Northern Ireland Office to get that confirmed, as well as the quantum.

Ms Sheerin: I am not trying to challenge you guys. I know that you are working on the programme and can deal only with the information that is in front of you. From your perspective, it is probably challenging to try to account for a programme on which we do not have cast-iron guarantees. At any point, the rug could be pulled from under us. There is correspondence from the Finance Minister in members' packs. We still do not have any update on the shared prosperity funding from the British Government — the replacement for the EU structural funding that we have had up to this point.

Ms McIntyre: We do not deal with that, but I know that the Department of Finance is dealing with it.

Ms Sheerin: It is worth highlighting the fact that all of this is up in the air. It can seem quite abstract when we talk in Committee about all the different acronyms and the names of all the different funding programmes. However, I sit on the rural development programme (RDP) board in my community in Mid Ulster, so I know that a number of community groups have benefited from the funding, be they GAA clubs, Orange halls, different community association groups or playschools — the list goes on and on. This will therefore have real-life implications on the ground. Your paper touches on conversations about the border infrastructure and people's fears about that. Obviously, at one time, the funding was seen as a sweetener to try to ease division in relation to some of the infrastructure that was there, so there is a very real fear that we are going backwards. Thank you very much for the presentation and for the information that you have provided.

The Chairperson (Mr McGrath): OK. Emma has nicely — thank you, Emma — brought us full circle. Her comments go right back to the beginning, when we said that the funding cuts across every facet of community life in Northern Ireland and is therefore so important.

This point is more for you to note than to comment on. Over the last two weeks, we have met the 11 councils on the issue of Brexit. If there was a recurring theme from each one of them, it was that they really fear for the future of the projects that they deliver in association with you. It is fair to say that there is a palpable sense of fear in the local government sector that, if it were to simply lose the ability to deliver those projects, that would have a major ramification for people's lives and the delivery of community life.

Ms McIntyre: It would.

The Chairperson (Mr McGrath): The number of jobs provided via EU funding is massive. We have heard commitments from various sources that the money will be replaced and that the tap will not be turned off, but it is critical that we, the Executive Office and our Ministers keep the pressure on to get clarity so that people know exactly what will happen going forward.

I thank both of you for your attendance here today. It is interesting work. As I say, you do great work on the ground, and we really support and endorse all that you do. Thank you for making yourselves available today to present to us.

Ms McIntyre: Thank you very much.

Mr McGarrigle: Thanks very much.