



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Public Accounts Committee

OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

Briefing by Dr Jayne Brady, Head of the
Northern Ireland Civil Service

9 December 2021

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

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Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mr William Humphrey (Chairperson)
Mr Roy Beggs (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Cathal Boylan
Ms Órlaithí Flynn
Ms Cara Hunter
Mr Maolíosa McHugh
Mr Andrew Muir

Witnesses:

Ms Jill Minne	Department of Finance
Mr Bill Pauley	Department of Finance
Dr Jayne Brady	Head of the Northern Ireland Civil Service
Mr Rodney Allen	Northern Ireland Audit Office
Mr Kieran Donnelly	Northern Ireland Audit Office
Mr Roger McCance	Northern Ireland Audit Office
Mr Brett Hannam	Strategic Investment Board

The Chairperson (Mr Humphrey): I welcome to the meeting Dr Jayne Brady, head of the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) and, remotely, Mr Bill Pauley from the Department of Finance, Jill Minne, head of Civil Service HR and Brett Hannam of the Strategic Investment Board (SIB). We are joined by Mr Kieran Donnelly CB, the Comptroller and Auditor General, Mr Rodney Allen and Mr Roger McCance.

Dr Brady, good afternoon. Thank you very much for agreeing to meet us and for attending in person. We have much to discuss with you on leadership, culture, joined-up government, transformation, and digitisation and skills. First, I would like you to make an opening statement, if you will, and then we will take questions from members. Thank you.

Dr Jayne Brady (Head of the Northern Ireland Civil Service): Thank you so much, Chair, and thank you for inviting me to be here with the Committee. I am still under my first 100 days in the role by just a day or so, so it is great that I can make it during that period.

This is my third Committee session since I took up the post. I attended meetings of the Committee for the Executive Office and the Committee for Finance in the last month. I am sure that we will all agree that it is clear that there are critical areas where we can work together. Perhaps most prominent is the work to strengthen our Civil Service and prepare it for the future.

I am keen to work in partnership with you in doing that. With a background in venture capital and finance, I understand the value that scrutiny and constructive challenge can bring. I want to make it really clear that I am here to listen, to hear about the work that we in the service can do better and to use that information as a board that I can come to and get input from as I progress through my role. For me, it is important to have a positive agenda. I came into the role with a very positive perspective, and I positively want to move our services and our people forward. That is the positivity that I will bring to the role, to the engagement that I have with colleagues in the service and to partners elsewhere.

I am secretary to the Executive and head of the Civil Service. In that regard, we have a genuine opportunity to take a fresh look at how we do business. You may have heard me say this before, but I am determined to bring new energies, ideas and innovation into each of those crucial functions.

For me, it feels like we are at an extraordinary moment in history. The decisions that we make now will determine how our communities rebuild after the pandemic. Although it can be a bit daunting, certainly for me, coming in a new role with many new colleagues, this moment of discontinuity that we are experiencing provides a platform where we can decide to take a step change and embrace those opportunities in order to improve our services and our economy.

You may be aware that, prior to taking up the post, I worked in engineering, finance and in large multinationals in venture capital. Most recently, I worked at Belfast City Council as digital innovation commissioner. It was during those last 20 months when I worked in that role, which was my first entry from the private sector into the public sector, that I really saw that the Civil Service was not only up for genuine partnership but innovation and new ways of doing things and a fundamental change in delivery.

I know that we all appreciate the resilience, determination and creativity that our civil servants have demonstrated during this period in order to keep our services open. My children were at school, and all our arm's-length bodies provided those services and the roll-out of the vaccination programme, as well as the ongoing booster programme. That gave me confidence and optimism that, through those new ways of working and agility, we can address many of the challenges that are ahead of us.

The agenda that I want to pursue will build on those strengths. It will learn from the new ways of working that we developed during the pandemic, developing and enhancing our strengths, but, at the same time, I am very conscious that we must also give serious attention to those areas where our performance has not always been what we or the public would wish.

In particular, we must address the recommendations of the Committee on Civil Service capability and capacity, and we similarly need to act on the findings of the renewable heat incentive (RHI) inquiry report and the further PAC reports. I am committed to doing that, but, equally, I do not want the process of growing and developing our Civil Service to be wholly defined by those things. Change, for me, cannot come just through reacting to the past; it must also come through positive action to face the future and the opportunities ahead.

We all want a modern, innovative Civil Service with diverse people and skills; one that is better equipped to meet the challenges of the future and to serve the Executive and our communities more effectively. Having met a range of colleagues from right across the system, it is clear to me that there is a real and very genuine appetite in the Civil Service for that.

Indeed, we have started to deliver. We have reconstituted the Northern Ireland Civil Service board — I know that there was a recommendation on that in the PAC report — under revised terms of reference in order to create a refreshed mission to lead and deliver change. I have commenced a process to recruit external non-executive members to that Northern Ireland Civil Service board in order to offer independent expert advice on commerciality, which was, again, a recommendation in the PAC report, and on challenge, focusing specifically on the critical areas where we need to improve.

We have launched a competition for new permanent secretary roles, with appointments planned for early in the new year. I am very pleased that that process resulted in a record number of applications, internally and externally, for those new roles. We are also developing schemes to increase diversity in the Civil Service, including a graduate training programme and apprenticeship programmes. Those will also increase the age breakdown of our service.

In addition, I am, with the Civil Service board, developing a strategic programme with ambitious service-wide objectives to strengthen our Civil Service. It proposes to prioritise a small number of areas where Departments work together to deliver far-reaching improvements. That programme will

develop around four themes. The first of those is delivery. For me, the most important aspect is delivery for our Executive, the Assembly and, most importantly, the citizens of Northern Ireland. It looks towards a COVID recovery plan, but it also hones in on a small number of cross-cutting issues where we can maximise the opportunities that are provided by multi-year Budgets to think more strategically.

The second theme is the capability and capacity of people. I know that that is a priority for the Committee. We want to strengthen our Northern Ireland Civil Service. We want to build new skills and capacity, increase diversity and manage performance more effectively while developing our talent and empowering our people to be more innovative.

The third theme is innovation. I make no apology for that as a former innovation commissioner and engineer. That theme is linked to people. Through innovation, we can look towards diversity in our workforce. From my experience in engineering and finance, I know about the power of innovation and intelligent risk-taking. We need to be more innovative in our approaches. We need to use data and analytics more effectively in policymaking. We need access to the best advice and information, and we need to be ready to seize the opportunities that emerge in the modern, digitised and technology-centred world.

The last of the areas that we are focusing on in our transformation plan is how we communicate and collaborate with our partners. I want to improve the way that we communicate with our partners and stakeholders. I want co-production to be at the core of how we do business. I also want to do more internally to share good ideas and practices and to ensure that all our people, no matter where they work, feel connected to the Programme for Government (PFG) and the business of the Executive.

I want the programme to be one of positive, far-reaching improvement and one that builds on our strengths and addresses our shortcomings. I am very pleased to say that the First Minister and deputy First Minister are highly supportive of the goals that I have identified, although they also fully recognise the challenges and difficulties that are inherent in a programme of work of that scale and ambition and of the need to ensure that the right resources are in place to deliver it. Key to our success will be partnerships. It is clear that, when the Civil Service works in partnership with others, it delivers very real benefits to our communities and supports the growth of our economy. Effective, inclusive partnerships give us access to the best ideas and thinking out there, and they help us to better connect with the communities that we serve.

As well as building new partnerships, we will work to develop our place in the world as part of a global community and an attractive place for investment. I will bring my experience of living and working in China, North America and Germany, combined with a background in securing investment cases, to amplify the opportunities with our international relations team in bringing forward strategic investment cases. I am sure that the Committee will agree that there is a great deal to do, but I am very clear that our plans must be more than just another set of abstract, long-term ambitions that are never realised. I want us to be agile and responsive, with a continuous focus on delivery in the short term and medium term, and, of course, on those long-reaching objectives while overcoming the challenges that we will encounter along the way. It is new territory for all of us. We face major societal, economic and environmental challenges. However, if we work together, we have a chance to make the coming decade about delivering better. That is why I look forward to working with the Committee as we drive forward that programme. I am in no doubt about how challenging that will be. However, if we look at what we have accomplished during the pandemic, we see that it is clear that we have very good reason to be optimistic.

The Chairperson (Mr Humphrey): Thank you very much. You said that you are secretary to the Executive and head of the Northern Ireland Civil Service. Will you expand on what your role is?

Dr Brady: As secretary to the Executive, I operate under the Executive Office, under the direction and control of the First Minister and deputy First Minister. Part of my engagement with them has also been about making sure that we have effective running of the Executive Office and that we engage with ministerial contacts in that context in the running and operation of that office.

Obviously, as head of the Northern Ireland Civil Service, my key role is on leadership in those areas. If we look at the frameworks in the Civil Service, we see that the policy dimension is owned and controlled by Ministers and the Executive. From an accounting officer perspective, our permanent secretaries report to their Ministers and operate under their direction and control. They are the accounting officers for those Departments.

I am not an accounting officer. We have an accounting officer who is the permanent secretary in the Executive Office. My role is leadership and governance overall.

The Chairperson (Mr Humphrey): Who is the accounting officer for the Northern Ireland Civil Service?

Dr Brady: The accounting officers for the overall Northern Ireland Civil Service are in each Department. The accounting officer of the Department of Finance is the permanent secretary of the Department of Finance. The accounting officer of the Executive Office is the permanent secretary of the Executive Office. There is no —

The Chairperson (Mr Humphrey): There is no accounting officer for the Civil Service as a body. They are all accounting officers for their separate, individual Departments.

Dr Brady: That is the legislative structure of the service. As a senior responsible owner (SRO), I, of course, have a role in governance overall from a leadership perspective and for the systems and places. I have responsibility under the PAC for leadership of those aspects, but I have no accounting officer responsibility.

The Chairperson (Mr Humphrey): Thanks for that. You will know that, in our report 'Capacity and Capability in the Northern Ireland Civil Service', we recommended that the role of head of the Northern Ireland Civil Service should be amended so that it could be more like that of the heads of the Scottish and Welsh Civil Services. They have greater authority and accountability over permanent secretaries.

I will go back to the evidence session of March 2020 on major capital projects. I questioned Mr Sterling, subsequently Sir David Sterling, who was then in your position, by saying:

"You are the head of the Civil Service. You have heads of the various Departments, and they are the accounting officer in those Departments. If there are issues in the Departments or across government, who is ultimately accountable?"

His response was:

"I suppose the constitutional position is that the permanent secretary in each Department is under the direction and control of the particular Minister there. People sometimes think that, as head of the Civil Service, I can tell the other permanent secretaries what to do. Sadly, that is not the case ... They are very much responsible to their Ministers."

My point to him then was that we had had three years when we did not have Ministers. He said:

"When there were no Ministers, again, people thought that I had some omnipotence, but, sadly, that was also not true ... Without being facetious, the important point is that there is a significant role for the Department of Finance in seeking to provide guidance to which all Departments adhere. Whilst I do not have powers of direction and control over other Departments, we have a NICS board that seeks to manage the Civil Service."

We are keen on the expansion of the Civil Service board, so I am pleased to hear what you say about that. That was a recommendation that we made: the power of accountability for the entirety of the Civil Service of Northern Ireland should reside with the head of the Civil Service. We feel that that is an opportunity missed. I speak for all my Committee colleagues when I say that. What is your view on that?

Dr Brady: Those are obviously policy decisions. I am really clear that, coming from a governance background, I look to understand what constitutional realities I operate in. Policy decisions are made at the direction of Ministers and the Executive. Obviously, I advise on policy, but it is not my role to make decisions on policy roles. As it stands, each Department is under the control and direction of its Minister. That is clear. The permanent secretary has an accounting officer role. Items that are significant or cross-cutting will come to the Executive for an Executive-level direction.

I want to be clear that I am not abdicating my role in leadership of the Northern Ireland Civil Service. That is the role that I came to deliver. Whilst significant functions on policies and procedures are owned by the Department of Finance, much of that is in delivering the culture and accountability in

which the Northern Ireland Civil Service board will have a role and which I, as chair of that board, will deliver.

The Chairperson (Mr Humphrey): You make mention of the word "culture". The Committee has heard that in evidence before. We have had former permanent secretaries talking about culture. We have heard people talk about silos in the Civil Service. The Committee does not believe that those silos should operate or that there should be that culture. Northern Ireland is a small place. In our opinion and in our reports, and the report that we are considering will say the same thing, we say there is not enough cross-cutting across Departments, therefore, you are not able to drive those economies of scale and effectiveness that you would perhaps otherwise be able to.

You applied for a job, and you did not set the specification for the job, but do you think that it is an opportunity missed through your day-to-day job to get rid of that culture, if that culture exists — we have heard that it does exist — and address the issues of "siloesation", if that, indeed, is a word?

Dr Brady: I applied for the role not to be the head of anything. I applied because I saw a positive appetite for change in the Civil Service. When I was in the private sector, which I was for 25 years, I used to look up the hill and say, "How is this not all worked out? Why have we not solved this?". In the 20 months that I worked at Belfast City Council, I saw that it was the Department for the Economy that was up for change and delivering grants and funding. It was also the Department that delivered a fundamentally new and ambitious strategy called 10X Economy - an economic vision for a decade of innovation. The Department partnered through that piece.

Whilst I am really clear of the legislative environment that I am coming into, and I was clear about it when I came in, that does not stop me having a central role in defining and breaking down those silos and building those cross-cutting objectives. In fact, that is the first thing that I did. I will apologise in advance, but the first thing that I did was not to look at the recommendations in the PAC report; it was to think, "How do we get this system to work?", and the first thing that I said was, "Of course, the Northern Ireland Civil Service board is core", and, in the first five weeks, we got some terms of reference that strengthened and called out those aspects. I said, "It's really key and important that we get some really strong, independent non-executives on this board to drive that forward."

It is key that we identify a small number of things that will make a very big impact and that actually can be delivered cross-departmentally in order to drive that new culture and new way of doing things. We have developed a programme of activity that we are working with the next board and the Executive on defining. When I reflected on the PAC report and all the information that is in it, which was maybe in my third week, I found that it lines up with all the aspects that you have defined in the reports on capability and capacity and on the major projects.

Breaking down silos is not an end in itself; the issue is about the outcome that we want to get in 10 years' time, and then to ask what system-level operations, structural pieces and cultural pieces we need to embed in order to deliver the outcome. That outcome is better outcomes for our systems. Some of that is about having a strong core, and that is what I am intent on building, with specific skills in that core in innovation and investment, which I talked about. Part of that is about breaking down those silos through delivering cross-cutting programmes and projects that we can all get behind.

It is very clear to me that, even with or without them, there is hard power and soft power, and much can be achieved with soft power. There is, obviously, hard power in my role as well. My objectives are to strengthen that central leadership perspective and to build those key capabilities and resources in technology, innovation, contract management and investment so that we can not only have those as a central resource for the next board but use them to deliver those big cross-cutting programmes that we know that we need to deliver.

You cannot solve green growth in DAERA; it needs to be cross-cutting. You cannot solve the economy in the Department for the Economy; it needs to involve schools and communities. In order to deliver the big things for society, you need to do it across many Departments. I am very committed to delivering on those ambitions and objectives. We have a significant opportunity in the next 10 years to deliver something different.

Just to come back, Chair, to your perspective on culture, I made it my business each Friday to go out and meet members of the service. Of course, that is restricted now with the recent guidelines. I am sure that you, in your roles, have met some brilliant civil servants. I am very proud to work alongside the civil servants whom I meet. Do we have the right culture to deliver what we need in the next 10 years and to embrace risk and innovation? I have talked to Kieran about how we need to create an

environment that allows us to take calculated risks. There is a need for renewal in order to build new skills and to look towards the culture that we need so that we can deliver opportunities for the next 10 years.

I am up for that, and the Civil Service is up for that. Part of it will be about bringing in diversity of thinking around different tables, bringing new and refreshed input into the centre and understanding the areas that we need to focus on to drive and deliver that change.

The Chairperson (Mr Humphrey): We welcome the response in our memoranda of reply. You talked in your answer about change and positive action, which is encouraging, but a major issue for us is accountability, or, rather, lack of it. We continue to be concerned about the fact that there is no accounting officer role for the head of the Civil Service. As you can see, the Committee highlighted that over a year and a half ago, not long after we started work after the suspension. I will put the scenario to you. I think that the issue is particularly acute when we have a suspension, and permanent secretaries are de facto Ministers, travelling around the country, opening things and speaking at them or whatever. That is when accountability is a particular problem. I make the point again that it was an opportunity missed to not extend the powers that reside with the head of the Civil Service in Scotland and in Wales to the head of the Civil Service in Northern Ireland.

I will pause there to bring others in, and maybe I will come back to you at the end.

Mr McHugh: It is nice to meet you again. Is deas bualadh libh arís. I met you in the Finance Committee, Jayne.

You made a comment about ideas for the institution and that. I know that you have almost completed your first 100 days. How have you improved recruitment policies since you took over? How can we make sure that our Civil Service is representative of society, with opportunities for people, particularly those from an ethnic minority background?

Dr Brady: Thank you, Mr McHugh. That is really important for us. We talked about culture, and the fish rots from the head, so I have a big role in setting the direction for the culture of the Civil Service. What I do and where I put my light and tone are important. Equally, the Civil Service, as such a major employer, has a strong role in setting the direction of what we should be doing in employment elsewhere, and trialling new developments is part of that.

We are working through a year of very comprehensive developments, but I will identify a couple of things as part of that. The permanent secretary recruitment process, which I have led and for which we are just about to interview next week, can be used as an example of our making sure that we attract the best people, be they internal or external, for positions. We worked with our partners in Northern Ireland to promote and advertise that. We have seen a diverse internal/external and gender background mix through that. It is about promoting that positioning elsewhere.

We have also led on apprenticeship programmes for people with disabilities. Perhaps Jill can come in on that. I am looking specifically at the role of those groups that have been under-represented and those that have been adversely affected by the pandemic. We have commissioned work with the Department for Communities and the Department for the Economy that has identified that the under-25s, women and people with disabilities are those who are most adversely affected by the pandemic. There is a very strong risk of further economic scarring for that sector if we do not take action to deal with that. We talked about those cross-cutting priorities that we are highlighting, and how we prevent those long-term economic issues is one of those.

We are also looking at taking views from our partners. You may be aware of the Assured Skills programme, which we led with industry. Through that, we looked, mostly internationally, towards opportunities to invest in Northern Ireland. We did a retraining programme. We are trialling that from the Civil Service perspective and are reskilling our young people and grads into defined roles, some of which are in technology and data. That is being trialled in two Departments in order to see how we can find more innovative ways to bring in skills and other aspects as part of that.

A key part of my thinking, which I know is also in the PAC reports, is how we build some of those key intelligent client skills and have diversity of professionalism. I am an engineer, and I wrote the business case to support one of the digital pillars of innovation for the Belfast region city deal. I was very much aware that, within the service, we would have to outsource the review and consultancy of that. I want the service to be strong and to have strong core technical, professional and commercial

roles so that we do not outsource our strategic thinking to consultancies or arm's-length bodies. There are very strong reasons to do that in peak areas and at times of peak demand. We very much need to build a strong Civil Service that has the professional and technical skills to not only make those informed judgements but to be outward-looking and able to see where opportunities land so that we can capitalise on them.

If you look at the age profile of the Civil Service, you will see that we have a very significant job of work to do on that. I think that we have 243 staff who are under 25. That is very low, and we must do better, but it has increased by 100% in the past 12 months. Programmes are being delivered to do that, but we are not there yet. We must do more, and we must do it harder. You talked about transformation externally, but we need to look at our resources internally as well. We cannot hope to achieve better outcomes for our citizens if we do not tackle getting a strong Civil Service with capability and capacity. I will bring in Jill, who can give a broader view of the programmes that are being run.

Ms Jill Minne (Department of Finance): That is no problem. Can you hear me, Chair?

The Chairperson (Mr Humphrey): Yes.

Ms Minne: Thank you. As Jayne said, there is a significant programme of work on that area in the Civil Service through a diversity and inclusion plan. It has focused particularly on those who are furthest removed from the labour market and on those areas in which the Civil Service is under-represented. The Committee will be aware that there was an embargo on recruitment for nearly two years and on the long-standing practice of using internal promotion boards. That has had an impact on how quickly you can change the make-up of a workforce. Over recent times, for the most part, we have simply externally recruited large-volume competitions at middle manager level from administrative officer (AO) grade up to and including the executive officer (EO) grades, EO1 and EO2, as well as staff officer (SO) and deputy principal (DP) grades. Five live external competitions are on the go at the minute. Those will, hopefully, significantly change our make-up and our vacancy rate.

As Jayne mentioned, alongside that sort of move and fundamental shift, there is a review of our recruitment policy in order to make it open and external. One of the recommendations was about opening up the Civil Service, and we are very keen to do that. As well as that, there are specific interventions. Jayne talked about the apprenticeship expansion scheme. We doubled the number of student placements, and we want to continue to double them. We are working with DFC on the Job Start scheme, which is for 16- to 24-year-olds with disabilities. From January, we are implementing a guaranteed interview scheme for those with disabilities. We have worked with universities and colleges to try to attract people to the Civil Service [*Inaudible owing to poor sound quality*] people, and we are launching a graduate trainee scheme in the spring.

That is a huge programme of work, and we are starting to see the impact of it. As Jayne said, however, there is much more work to do.

Mr McHugh: On the same theme, according to the RHI inquiry, one of the critical failures of that scheme in particular was the absence of commercial awareness in middle and senior management. Have you attempted to address that issue through recruiting to the Civil Service or by developing the commercial awareness skills of those in the Civil Service?

Dr Brady: Thank you, Mr McHugh. I will bring in Jill to talk about specific training programmes.

That was probably one of my priority areas of focus when I came into the service. We talked about strengthening the core, which is central to my role, but I am struck by the fact that we want to make a step change between now and the next decade on where the opportunities lie. We have everything in Northern Ireland to play for and, I believe, the fundamental building blocks to allow us to do so, but we need to be able to take risks. Unless we are skilled in those specific skill sets — commercial, technical and all the other areas — we will never be able to embrace that level of risk. It is therefore a fundamental piece of how we will transform.

I talked about innovation and strengthening the core, and we have identified a number of strong and significant roles in the technology piece and in data and investment offices. We will go through a recruitment process. I am not saying that there will not be internal applications, but we will build that complement of core skill sets. You talked earlier, Chair, about how we break down silos. For me, breaking down silos is not an end in itself. That has to be done for a reason, so it is about having

those core skill sets internally. Those will then be used as a convening factor in services. We look to the excellent green growth strategy that DAERA has developed. It is cross-cutting in all areas, so we need to deliver those strategic approaches and have the core functions centrally, and we need to have expertise in the sectors.

On the Northern Ireland Civil Service board, we are identifying reference panels with strong commercial skills externally, but those non-exec positions will not be generic appointments. They will be appointments for which we will ask ourselves, "For this programme of work, which may be three months, six months or a year, if it is a long-term objective, what types of skill sets do we need around us at a non-executive level that will support us and give us the correct challenge to do that?". There is a variety of different levels involved. It needs to be done very much as a high-level strategic piece, and you cannot just drop people in. It needs to be done in a context in which I have First Minister, deputy First Minister and Executive sign-off if that is to be the direction of travel for building a strong and capable core, because that will set the direction, tone and culture change that we will need.

We also have a programme of reskilling for contract and professional skills, and I am working with our permanent secretaries through their development plan. Some of them have already attended programmes that I recommended to them to increase those skill sets. That is at permanent secretary level, and we are working through how that will filter down.

Jill, perhaps you can comment on some of the other programmes that we have in the professional, reskilling and training environments.

Ms Minne: Absolutely. Further to the capacity and capability report, there was a recommendation that the Civil Service should develop a learning and development plan. Although we covered a significant number of the issues, if not all of them, in the 'NICS People Strategy 2018-21', we have, on foot of the recommendation, developed a specific learning and development plan. At the minute, we are working with Departments to undertake a learning needs analysis. Specifically, we have developed a number of new training programmes right across the Civil Service on programme and project management skills, policy skills, commercial skills, digital skills, and financial management and public expenditure skills.

Your question was about recruitment. There is still the ability, and increasingly so, to recruit to individual professional, technical or specialist posts. Again, one of the findings of both the RHI inquiry and the Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO) was about not recruiting to the general service role and taking on board specialist roles instead. That is very much the direction of travel. We are moving away from totally generalist-type roles to having much more specialist roles, or at least job families in the general service, and we are looking at the specific criteria for the job as opposed to generic criteria or, indeed, Northern Ireland Civil Service competencies. All that work is under way.

Mr McHugh: Jayne, in your presentation, you mentioned the fact the Civil Service is part of the global community, and you talked about civil servants being in China and America. I had an opportunity to represent Derry City and Strabane District Council in China. How do you hope to commit to being involved in the global community and to embracing it, and how do you hope to develop the role of Civil Service officers and the like in doing that?

Dr Brady: The first piece is about looking at what our core focus is and our investment proposition, rather than engaging without a rationale to engage. We talked about identifying some key areas that will be transformative for the economy and society. We are working through a process to identify those areas, one of which is green growth. There are other significant economic areas in which we can deliver as well. We are looking, through the Barnett formula, at the opportunities for devolved areas and, through the UK Budget, at significant areas that are retained, such as innovation and research.

I was involved in that aspect prior to taking up this post. We looked at how to get investment for those areas from central funding, either from a UK, EU or international perspective. To give you an idea of the magnitude, the UK Government invest £20 billion a year in innovation. That is a totally retained area. You bid for it through a competitive process. Two years ago, the figure was £14 billion. When analysis was done at £14 billion, it was estimated that Northern Ireland was missing out by in the order of £250 million pro rata across that perspective. To bid for that, you need to have investment cases. You cannot just say, "Give us more money", because that is the nature of it. It is therefore about convening in those areas, bringing together a small number of significant investment cases and saying, "These are the areas in which we need to invest to get us to a fundamentally different position in 10 years' time". I am taking a 10-year trajectory. For example, we need to reduce emissions from

where we are at now to 48% by 2030. That is where we need to be in order to be on track to deliver towards the net zero carbon targets. To do that, we need a joined-up approach.

I fundamentally believe that we can lead globally on green growth and green technologies, because we have, on our doorstep, almost a Silicon Valley. In agriculture, we have the capabilities and skills. We will need to solve the problems involved in moving towards net zero carbon, but those are global problems. Look at what we did in engineering at Harland and Wolff: a dry dock was built for a boat that had never been imagined before. We have the engineering and entrepreneurial skills. We therefore have the opportunity to grow fundamentally new sectors and have almost a renaissance in some of the areas beyond that. We need a joined-up approach, however. It is a case of problem meets solution. We need to say, "I'm going to target three things in the next 10 years. In which direction can we move the dial? What is the investment case, and how do we fund that?"

There is a funding piece from the UK Government called the Levelling Up Fund. I have had much engagement with my counterpart in the UK Government. Andy Haldane, a former economist with the Bank of England, is leading on the paper. We are engaging to say that we have a very positive, proactive proposition that we can bring. There is also North/South funding through the Shared Island Fund. There are further opportunities internationally, including with the US, which is one of the biggest investors in our technology, innovation and skills.

Part of the mandate will be about saying that we have a strong proposition, engaging with strength and capability, asking not for money but for investment and giving a return on that investment that gets us to somewhere different. The mandate is very much about the next board coalescing and looking at what the three big projects and programmes are that we can deliver. In addition to identifying people for the roles of a new Chief Scientific Adviser (CSA) and a chief data officer, we need an investment officer who, on behalf of the Northern Ireland Civil Service board, brings together those investment pieces in order to deliver on them. I am therefore engaging east-west, North/South and internationally to make our case for our propositions.

Mr McHugh: I raised this point the last time that you were at the Finance Committee. We have had a directive now that employees should work from home where they can. I accept that there are certain roles in the Civil Service that require face-to-face contact to deliver the service, so I am not alluding to those roles at all, but how can you be sure that employees are being given the opportunity to work from home whenever they can? I ask that because a complaint that I have heard from civil servants is that they have found that, in their Department, because of a manager or whatever, they have not been given that opportunity. Is there anything that you can do to assure us that the directive from Stormont that people should work from home where they can is facilitated in the Civil Service?

Dr Brady: First, our direction is taken from the Executive, just as it is by every other employer in Northern Ireland. We listen to the Executive's mandate, and the message, of course, is to work from home.

You talked about encouraging diversity and further engaging a different kind of workforce to come into the service. That gives us a real opportunity to provide a more flexible mix of skills. Ultimately, for me, all partners and the Executive, we need to be delivering for our citizens, so the piece is about where the model works correctly to deliver most effectively for them. That is what every Department has engaged on, and that is why there are different models.

There needs to be consistency of approach to doing that, however. You said that some in certain roles have never worked from home, and that is consistent with that model. Following the discussion that you had with me at the Finance Committee, I discussed with Jill how we ensure that we have consistency, and we have had feedback. The Department of Finance is leading on the policy direction of that approach.

We can talk about how we are logistically rolling that out, but we are here to listen and get feedback as well. You talked about hard levers and soft levers. The direction of leadership from a HR perspective is through a memorandum of understanding (MOU) between me and the Department of Finance, so I have a key role to play in that. We are engaging to make sure that there is consistency of approach.

I appreciate that we are rolling out something new. We had hoped to go live with our hybrid ways of working policy at the start of January. That is not now going to be the case, because we are following what the Executive have said. I appreciate that there may be a level of inconsistency as we roll out that policy, but that is not a reason for us not to continue listening and not to get that consistency. Making sure that we are delivering a fair response to all parties is an obligation that I can give you.

Jill, perhaps you want to come in about —

The Chairperson (Mr Humphrey): Sorry, but Mr Muir has to leave at 4.00 pm. To be fair, I think that the question has been answered. We are pushed for time because you are under time constraints, so, if you do not mind, we will move on.

Mr Muir: Thank you very much, Chair. I appreciate it.

Thank you for coming along. There is a systemic problem in the Civil Service with the delivery of major capital projects on time and on budget. The evidence is contained in the Audit Office report and the PAC inquiry report, but I also hear now that there is capital money in this financial year that is unallocated because there were not sufficient bids from Departments. Although we have a real challenge with resource funding, that challenge is not there with capital funding. We should be using every single penny of our capital money to invest in our communities.

There is an issue with Departments being legally constituted separately, but we need to be able to get over that. What happens is that, whenever there is good practice in one Department, it is not permeating through others. We are having the problem month-on-month and year-on-year with capital moneys not being spent and with projects overrunning, not being delivering on time or being delayed.

What are you, as the head of the Civil Service, doing to try to address that? Investing in infrastructure is a key power that the Civil Service and the Executive have. I am not convinced that we are using that power to our best advantage.

Dr Brady: Yes, I reflected on the report. For me, it is fundamentally important, because drains and cranes are the underpinning pieces. I talk about innovation, but you have to get the basics right, and the basics are infrastructure capability and capacity, and, I guess, all the areas that the PAC has identified.

The PAC report reflected on the professional skill sets of programme management but also on the technical skill sets. Those are key for me in building that stronger core. I have got personally involved in the investment strategy for Northern Ireland, and we have our SIB colleague Brett here for that. I understand how fundamental that strategy is to the overall approach. It talks to what those big investment propositions are and how we are going to join those up. I am therefore looking to the investment strategy and the investment lead to be very closely coupled in that strong core as part of working with the science and technology piece so that it is not an adjunct.

Infrastructure should not sit as a separate programme. It is an enabler, very fundamentally, and it should not sit in any one Department either. There needs to be a joined-up approach taken to infrastructure, so I have spent a lot of time reviewing the investment strategy consultation, which we hope will go out very shortly, to make sure that we are engaging. We talked about funding opportunities such as the Shared Island Fund and the Levelling Up Fund. Some of those are fundamentally infrastructure-related, but they are absolutely fundamental. Part of it is about getting the capability and capacity to make sure that we are that intelligent client when doing this and that we are knowingly engaged. Another part of it is about joining up the overall strategy across the service. That is central to the pieces that I will be leading on and delivering, because that will be the underpinning of the transformation piece.

Interestingly, capital money is easier to get than some revenue funding, so those are areas in which, if we can bring about those big transformative projects and programmes, particularly in some of the areas that we have talked about, such as green growth, we can unlock additional funding elsewhere in the system by taking a very joined-up approach. We absolutely need the project and programme management piece skill sets internally, and I make no defence or apology for where we have overrun. Capital projects do overrun, and that is the nature of them. We need to recognise where we are and then build a system that addresses the issues.

Brett may want to come in on his experience. I have been working very closely with Brett and his colleagues on rolling out the investment strategy. They have been engaging with our NICS board and going through and reviewing the processes.

Mr Muir: My issue is that each permanent secretary reports to a Minister. I will not go through any specific examples, but there are myriad examples in individual Departments of where projects have gone wrong, have been over-budget, have gone beyond their envisaged completion date and all the

rest of it. That is happening in Departments, and it is civil servants who are involved in those projects. I totally agree with your opening comments that there are many great civil servants. I know many of them as good friends, and they have been doing fantastic work, particularly in the context of COVID-19. When those problems are occurring in Departments, what power do you have to say, "Look, we need to be sorting this out"? It is the Civil Service that is accountable, yet we are not seeing the head of the Civil Service reach in to say that there are clearly problems here with the delivery of projects.

Dr Brady: We talked about the division into accounting officer responsibility, which is defined and within my remit. The investment strategy, which is a far-reaching capital investment strategy, is, through that remit, under the Executive Office, but it is Department-led. Fundamentally, it is a core strategic plan, in the best sense of the word "strategic", in that it is meaningful, for not only the next 10 years but the next 40 years. For that programme, I have a role, a mandate and a focus, as it sits in the Executive Office but is significantly cross-cutting. That is the area on which we are focusing currently as part of that piece that will go out to consultation. We are moving through that. It will go out to consultation and come in with the Budget mandate.

Skills are required, and a complement of skills, which we are building. That is one specific element: the skills that we are going to build through the transformation programme. I have a core role to play with DOF through our MOU to build those skills, which will further enhance programmes and projects. The NICS board will have a defined work plan that will have in it significant milestones. We are moving to three months, six months, 12 months, so there will be a normal 12-month cycle for plans, programmes and the key milestones that we will deliver. It cannot, however, be about managing 83 things in a COVID recovery plan. It needs to be about a critical few so that we have strategic-led discussions. The development of the investment strategy and those big milestones will therefore be the bits on which we have to focus. It cannot be just a status update report in which we review checklists and tick boxes. It needs to be properly led strategically. We need to say, "These are the core things on which we need to focus". In delivering that, you will get that cultural and transformative change, because you will deliver the big pieces of substance as well as address those new ways of working. I do not know whether Brett wants to come in on that.

Mr Brett Hannam (Strategic Investment Board): Good afternoon, Chair and members. As Jayne said, a great deal of effort is being put into addressing the causes of the failures that the Committee and the NIAO have identified in the past. Those can be described in four different ways. First, it is about ensuring that we get a realistic starting position and that we get good, high-quality business cases, because we have the best delivery team and project managers in the world, but, if the business case is unrealistic, they will fail. A great deal of effort has gone into it, and we [*Inaudible owing to poor sound quality.*] We last spoke to you about the five-case model. There is more to do to implement reference class forecasting (RCF), which is a technique that I have described to the Committee before, and also to ensure that the assessors of business cases have as much information as the promoters of those business cases. Steps are being taken to do that.

The second essential thing is to have high-quality project teams. Jill has described to you the effort that has gone into improving the quality of project managers, including improving their training and ensuring that SROs are properly qualified, have appropriate terms of reference and know what they are doing. As Jill said, a great deal of effort has gone into ensuring that the standard there has risen.

The third element is good governance, and that point was raised in the initial question about capital projects. There are proposals in the draft investment strategy that would improve the oversight and governance of the delivery of major capital projects. Those include appointing the NICS board as the lead programme board for the delivery of the investment strategy. In order for the board, and the Executive sitting above it, to be effective, it is important that we have comprehensive, accurate, up-to-date information on the performance of individual projects. A second proposal in the investment strategy is the implementation of data collection systems that will ensure that, at any one time, officials, Ministers, the NICS board and the Executive know what is happening and can identify the early warning signs of problems and react to those problems. Without that data, you are flying blind.

The final area of work that we are undertaking is to identify and address the deficiencies in the multiple systems that are needed to deliver infrastructure. The NIAO report identified 10 separate causes of failures in projects. Those causes were pitched at a relatively high level and were certainly not detailed enough for the actions that were required to address them to be able to be identified. We therefore really need to identify the root causes in order to identify the quantity of impact that those causes have and the underlying causes beneath them.

I will give an example. The NIAO identified planning as being a major issue in, I think, 20% of projects. What the report did not and, at the time, could not do was identify the root causes of problems described as planning work. Was it because the planning application was inadequate or because there were not enough planners to deal with the number of applications being received? Was it because statutory consultees did not reply on time? We need to ask those sorts of questions in order to investigate and be able to answer them if we are going to be in a position to make changes to the systems for the delivery of major capital projects and to improve performance.

That is the work that has been commissioned by the Procurement Board and that is under way with the support of the SIB at the moment. If we take each of those elements and work in the way in which we are doing in order to improve them, we have a very good chance of improving the overall performance of the system for the delivery of major capital projects.

Mr Muir: I have to head on, so thank you again, Chair, for taking me earlier.

I thank you for the work that has been done, particularly around COVID-19. We are talking about bigger issues here, but we are still in the middle of a deadly pandemic, and I am conscious that the Executive have to meet again at 5:00 pm to consider COVID-19. It is important that I and the rest of the Committee record our appreciation of the work that is being done by civil servants in really difficult circumstances. That is not something that I am going to overlook. We can talk about these other issues, but we are also in the middle of a very challenging situation.

Dr Brady: Thank you, Mr Muir. That is very much appreciated.

Mr Beggs: Thanks for your answers so far, Dr Brady. One of the areas in which improvement was needed is a specialist area of yours, which is transformation and digitalisation. In the past, we found that box-ticking was happening. One Department felt that it had achieved something because it put fishing fees online, but it had not looked collectively at the big issues that were going to benefit the most people. How are you going to ensure that, in future, there is the greatest leverage and benefit to the public purse and to the public from how the Northern Ireland Civil Service uses digitalisation?

Dr Brady: We are talking about that core capability piece, which, as I said, is core to diversity. The use of innovation and digital is the other leg of the stool that I bring to that. Before everyone starts their full day of work, I have a brainstorming session at 8:00 am with some of the tech people from around the service. We have seen what we can do digitally, particularly with how the health service has moved in the past 20 months to doing things that we thought would not have been possible, such as online diagnosis, as a result of the restrictions.

There is a really big risk that, once we get through the next period of the pandemic, we fall back into the old ways of working. I am talking not about being in the office but about reverting back to not adopting risk. At the core of that is building the structures that make that happen and putting the focus on those. My proposal, which I am working on with the NICS board, is to put data, technology and innovation at the centre of all the things that we do with those new ways of thinking and to build at the core of our Civil Service the capabilities and specifications for the Chief Scientific Adviser, and to do that alongside building digital and data capability. Part of that is about delivering enhanced benefit of services to our citizens, but it is also about better informing policy development and using the data archives and accesses that we have in the Civil Service in order to make better-informed decisions.

Another key aspect for me is how we use digital data to unlock external opportunities in the market. We have combined health and social care records and available data sets. Are there ways in which we can innovate and use that to be leaders for the Northern Ireland aspects in order to provide opportunities for our economy and for our SME base?

The final element is about making sure that we embolden opportunities in the economy where we can lead overall.

That is a very wide scope, but we need to start by building core professionalism and expertise in the sector. We have done that for a few roles — the permanent secretary piece is under way — but, with the next few roles, we have to build their professional, technical and digital skills. We need to be very mindful not to boil the ocean and have some big, far-reaching strategy for digital transformation at overall system level. We need to look at those areas, and I am having those discussions. What programmes can we deliver quickly that build momentum in doing and delivering? Some of those are in cross-cutting areas, particularly programmes to tackle economic inactivity. It is about how we bridge

those data sets in order to provide new opportunities for bridging services among the large cohorts that we have.

Mr Beggs: I am glad that you are looking at the building blocks, because in our recommendations in our earlier work, we had to recommend that issues such as verifying citizens' IDs be a priority area. I am probably very pleased that that was accepted and that the Department had it in place, because it was a fundamental piece that needed to be there for the high street scheme and the COVID certification systems. Alongside that, how do you ensure that those who do not have that technological ability have a mechanism to join in as well? Certainly, they have experienced problems. How will you ensure that there is a suitable backup system for others?

Dr Brady: Mr Muir made a very pertinent comment about COVID, because it has brought everything into sharp focus. It is almost a lightning rod through our system that shows what we can make work and what we cannot, and I am very mindful of the process that we are going through as well. We talked about part of that: looking at innovation and how we do the transformation piece. However, how do we work at a partnership level? We need to bring everyone with us. On the COVID piece, we need to understand the views of all our citizens, and of course the equality impact assessment, but actually working with those stakeholder groups such as the Commissioner for Children and Young People and the Commissioner for Older People to make sure that our solutions are accessible to them as well. That is a critical piece, because we are here to serve all our citizens. We cannot just go from a digital-first perspective and not provide mechanisms to enable those who do not have digital access.

I am mindful of the digital divide between children, particularly during the pandemic, and how we can bridge those services. I do not have a list of all the answers, but unless we deliver this inclusively, we will not be able to get the outcomes that our citizens deserve that will actually deliver that big transformation. Inclusivity is a key part. Through COVID, we have engaged and worked with the different sectors and stakeholder groups to understand how we can provide them with meaningful access and not leave them excluded from this through digital technology.

Mr Beggs: One of the areas that we investigated was the HR operating model. We found that it was much too elongated. There is a huge risk that the best candidates who may have started the process will have got a job before they get an offer from the Civil Service. I understand that there is a review of the HR operating model under way, to be completed by March 2022. Can you update us on how that is progressing? Is there any indication of the changes that might result from that?

Dr Brady: Yes, thank you. The operating model is a key aspect, and we are going through the work programme for the next board. Brett mentioned that we are identifying the key areas that we want to include, which are the major capital programmes and the development of the investment strategy for Northern Ireland, but also the operating model is fundamental. The HR operating model is not some fundamental machine; it is how you get work done in your Department. In every discussion that I have had with permanent secretaries, Ministers or different levels in the service, it has been clear that getting that operating model right and on a timely basis is critical. Reviewing the input of that operating model will be a key aspect for the next board. There is an ongoing fundamental review, and it is on schedule for March 2022. I will bring Jill in on the delivery of the outlying pieces of that process. Jill, are you available?

Ms Minne: I am happy to do that. It is not being led by HR, obviously, because we are being reviewed. However, the current NICS HR model was created about four and a half years ago. At that point, we opened our doors with a 16% or 17% reduction, but no actual change or transformation to policies, processes or procedures. Within the operating time frame, we saw COVID and we saw EU exit planning. There have been significant challenges throughout that time, but it is timely that the model is looked at in terms of operations and strategic organisational development. That is being led by the central government transformation team. It is in DOF, but it is not part of HR. We are engaging very closely with the team that is leading on that, and, as far as I am aware, it is, as Jayne said, on track to produce findings by March.

Mr Beggs: The area that seems to have caused particular concern is where specialist skills are required, whether it is commercial skills or, perhaps, engineering skills. I am concerned about technical skills in our MOT centres. It has come to light that only about a third of those who are successful in the application process turn up for the training programme. The number of people who were invited to the first number of programmes was not even recorded; the Department can only tell us the number that attended. It seems that, for the past two programmes, only about a third actually turned up. They were recruited through the HR direct process. In terms of commercial awareness, how

does the system react to that situation to review the terms and conditions? That is a priority area for the public, who are really desperate to get their vehicles tested and back on the road. How does the system react when the current model is not working? How do you review what is wrong with the terms and conditions and why people are not turning up for training? How does the system deal with such instances?

Dr Brady: I am going to be very open: I am not over the detail of that specific scenario. I visited the MOT centre in Downpatrick and saw the level of commitment that that team has. It was rolling out upgrades in technology and innovation, which had its issues. I imagine that Jill is probably not over the detail of that, so I give you my commitment to look at that and come back to you. Of course, if we identify that those commercial skills need to be provided, and we provide training and we are funding that, we need to make sure that they are delivered. There is, of course, an obligation to have the competency to do that.

Mr Beggs: The job specification was for a fully trained mechanic with at least three years' experience. They are not being attracted, so how is the system reacting? It seems that we are still operating a very clunky model that does not react to the needs of the market.

Dr Brady: I will come back on that one. Apologies; I do not have a response.

The Chairperson (Mr Humphrey): I am encouraged by what I have heard in the answers that you have given and the presentation that you made at the outset of the meeting. In terms of culture, there was a critique of the Civil Service that it was risk-averse. Previous incarnations of this Committee had ongoing reports around that. Under your leadership, will that risk aversion be consigned to the past?

Dr Brady: Properly managing risk is fundamental to delivering any level of transformation. Reflecting on what RHI and other analysis has done, there is the potential that we could fall into risk removal, which stops you doing anything. When I came into this role, I thought that there was no appetite for risk, but the service has given me so much comfort over the past 20 months; it has done very risky things, because it had to. The service moved to do things because it needed to do them for the people of Northern Ireland. My background is in venture capital. I invested in risk-based decisions with big sums of money, some from pension funds, to give a return. That needs to be brought into the service in a managed way. We cannot make wholesale risk decisions. We need to have a risk appetite in the different environments in which we are working. There are some areas in the Civil Service where we should tolerate a very small risk profile, but there are areas where we need to embrace risk. There needs to be backing from me, because those will not always work out. To be honest, it needs to come with backing from the Audit Office and from this Committee to say that, if we are taking risks, we will fail in some of those areas. That is the point of risks. I find the Committee meetings so valuable in order to get your insights and input.

The Chairperson (Mr Humphrey): Can I provide you with some reassurance? Last year, this Committee unanimously decided to suspend its work at the height of the lockdown. We felt that it was not the best use of permanent secretaries' time — from Health, Communities or whatever — to have to prepare to come to this Committee when they were dealing with life-and-death situations. We also postponed meetings for some permanent secretaries when we recommenced our work a few weeks later to facilitate that. We absolutely hear what you are saying, and I reiterate the point that others have made in relation to COVID-19, whether that is the Department of Finance on the distribution of monies for subventions during COVID-19 or the Department of the Economy, we need to ensure that, for all Departments, that level is there. Those are only examples; I am sure that it is more widespread across the Civil Service.

You mentioned that you have not quite been in post yet for 100 days.

Dr Brady: I think it is maybe tomorrow.

The Chairperson (Mr Humphrey): Oh right. OK. So you are 99 not out. You have heard other members talk about accountability. That is an issue that this Committee is continually concerned about, and particularly the accountability at the top of the Civil Service, or the lack of it. Do you think that your not having — and it is not your fault, because you applied for a job that you did not set the specification for — the powers of the head of the Civil Service in Scotland or Wales, for example, is disadvantageous to Northern Ireland plc?

Dr Brady: I can give you a reflection, coming from a private-sector background and being used to being a chief executive, where you do have that ultimate accountability. I looked at, "What are my hard levers and what are my soft levers? I am in a change agenda. What have I got here to flex with?" Coming in, it was a concern that this is a construction of legislation and is very clearly defined. We have a five-party coalition, so obviously there is ministerial direction and the Executive have their role. I understood what I was coming into, but I wondered about the ability to make actual change and impact. I found that there was no obligation for the board to come together and agree terms of reference. The four areas that I identified were led by permanent secretaries, but at a cross-departmental level. There are absolutely things that we can do to bring those together. I know that I am accountable as a figurehead, so, whether from an accounting officer responsibility or a senior responsible officer responsibility, I am clear that it is my role and objective to lead this transformation and to be accountable as we deliver those. I am pragmatic, so I live in a world of what I can possibly do, but I absolutely know that my role can be to lead and deliver those big, transformative programmes. Since coming into the role, I have been very heartened by the response from my colleagues and from Ministers.

The Chairperson (Mr Humphrey): Obviously, as a Public Accounts Committee, we will continue to monitor that right across government in Northern Ireland. With regard to the Civil Service board, which you have broadened and brought in expertise from outside, how is it working?

Dr Brady: We have agreed the terms of reference, the principles, the areas of focus and a work programme. It is just going through that, and we have agreed to appoint two non-executive directors. We are looking at the skill sets for those. We intend to go through that appointment in January — obviously through the open and transparent appointment process. I was keen not to go in within my first month and say, "It is all worked out and this is what we are going to do. We are going to put in these non-execs". I needed to immerse myself, visit Committees, talk to Ministers and understand it. The non-exec positions for this are critically and strategically important. They are not just another non-exec from another list of things. They are actually core skill sets that we need to do in a targeted way — "These are the skills we need" — as opposed to generic competitions. I have not taken a shortcut in the process. We are now at the end of the process of identifying the programme needs and the skill sets, and we will go into that.

At the moment, my experience of the NICS board is that we now need to organise ourselves more through a programme of work and very clearly define, "This is our 12-month work programme, and, as a NICS board, we have agreed that we will identify a fundamental work programme". That will include a number of different elements. It will include the delivery focus, which includes aspects that we have talked about, such as the investment strategy and where those key pieces come in. It will include very significant elements of the transformation agenda with the NICS HR model and the review of that operating model and those key aspects. It will also include the process for performance management. We have worked through this and had engagement with our Senior Civil Service (SCS) colleagues. One of the critical things that the board needs to have on its radar is the performance management of our SCS, and how we build in those skills is a critical part of that. We are defining our work programme now, and we are defining what non-execs we need to have around that. I am not in a position to tell you how that is going as yet. We have got the fundamental blocks in place. Did I think that I would be in this position in three months' time? I am ahead of where I thought we would be in that coalescence. Will there be challenges ahead? I am very sure that there will be challenges ahead and that we will not get it right at the start, but I am really happy to come back to the Committee to advise.

The Chairperson (Mr Humphrey): Perhaps, in three months' time, we might invite you back, because you will then have been in the job for six months.

In relation to working from home, I think that the policy is to work from home "if you can". We had this discussion with permanent secretaries earlier during the COVID pandemic. The experience of working from home — I have witnessed some excellent examples of people working from home, and not just in the Civil Service, but others that are not so good. As a policy, working from home is fine if it is managed properly. Are you confident that the Civil Service has been managing, and will manage, it properly?

Dr Brady: Working from home, as a policy, involves a similar process to any performance management process. If there are performers who are weaker in the office, they will be weaker at home as well. We have to be comfortable that we are doing the performance management process, and I am very confident that we have the processes in place to do that. There will undoubtedly be learnings. We are going from an operating model that has 100% of staff in the office to a blended

model. You talk about innovation and risk in how we do this. We need to be really cycling back and not saying that we are going from this model to this model, and that will allow some time to feed that into the process. We have had to do very significant stakeholder engagement. Each Department has looked towards what the optimum model is for those areas. I spoke earlier in the week with our NICS HR colleagues, and we need to be mindful of the unintended consequences that may come from changing a model in the long term. I am thinking even of the welfare of our employees.

For me, the fundamental piece where this starts and ends is actually delivering the service for our customers. That is the test that we must level and measure. As a consequence of doing that, if we can have a blended model, there is an opportunity to have access to more diverse working models and operating models, which is a really positive thing. There is also an opportunity to look at our real-estate base, and there could be a model of around 40% utilisation in those areas. There is an opportunity to look outside central Belfast and see how we can improve regional working.

I look outside at the private sector and the companies that I was involved with, and actually this is a significant opportunity for Northern Ireland. The likes of those big tech companies have found that their productivity levels have been enhanced. They have not actually found individuals. Companies have invested in Northern Ireland but not actually used a model of having fixed real estate, so this is an area that will be dynamic and changing.

The Chairperson (Mr Humphrey): Given that you worked in the private sector, I do not need to tell you this. When you have goals, targets and figures to meet, need is a great master.

Dr Brady: The Civil Service should have goals and targets to meet. We need to be really clear in that delivery agenda. This is not a strategy on a shelf; it is about delivery and how we up that momentum.

The Chairperson (Mr Humphrey): Finally from me, in terms of joined-upness and cross-government, last week, we had the permanent secretary of the Department of Education and the chief executive of the Education Authority here. You will be aware of 'A Fair Start', the piece of work prepared by Dr Noel Purdy and his team. We are currently doing a report on addiction services as well, and recently we had the Chief Medical Officer and the permanent secretary of the Department of Health in front of the Committee. On both of those issues, joined-upness across government and provision of budget were discussed. Early intervention is cheaper and more effective in education and health and general well-being and wellness and so on. It is crucial. I am not going to ask you the question, because you are only 30 days in, but it is vital that the funding is made available for those issues so that, across government, we can share the responsibility and that it is not just left with the Department of Health to deal with an issue that is a societal problem or that young people and education and general well-being is not just left to the Department of Education, but that there is a joined-upness across government. Do you agree with that?

Dr Brady: Absolutely. On joined-upness across government, we talked about the areas that are cross-cutting and significant. One that I talked about was green growth and getting to 48% emissions. Another area is the economy. We need to get a £12 billion GVA in 10 years so that we are in a break-even perspective. That is about new skills and new roles and getting our economic inactivity down from 27% to 22%. How we bridge that requires an all-of-government approach. It requires Communities; benefits into the economy. Economy is full from a skills perspective, so we actually need to cycle into that.

The third of those areas was health inequalities. You cannot solve the problems of health in Health. There are obviously problems in health that will not be solved in Health. On day 3 of my trip, I visited Maghaberry prison, and 71% of the people in there left school between the age of 14 and 16, while 90% have a drug or alcohol addiction. When our whole system fails, that is where many of them end up.

I was a volunteer Childline counsellor for six years, and I was on the board of Young Enterprise. Those things about youth are fundamentally important to me. So the third intervention that we are looking at is that early start and how you get early interventions. There is a seven-year life expectancy difference between where I was born in north Belfast and where I live now on the Malone Road, if you are a man. Those things are not right. They are not right from a social justice perspective and they are not right from an economy perspective, because they produce complex comorbidities in health, which we pick up as part of that. However, it needs to start in Education, in Communities and in all those other areas, and those are what will deliver.

If I am choosing my three big things, it is about the economy and getting economic activity; it is about getting towards net zero carbon, to 42%, in the next 10 years; and it is about bridging that gap in those health inequalities. Those fundamentally require a joined-up, all-of-government approach. I actually believe that those things will engender, within the service, traction to get behind them, because those are *[Inaudible owing to poor sound quality]* problems and you cannot solve them in any one Department. Those will be the things that I will be elevating and trying to look for funding North/South, east-west, or from whoever will give it to me.

The Chairperson (Mr Humphrey): OK.

Dr Brady: So I fundamentally agree on that.

Mr Beggs: On the subject of change again, I am curious how you can help to empower civil servants to make changes to the system where it is obvious, and to do so in a timely way. A year ago in here, we had a report on special educational needs. I highlighted the fact that there can be up to three classroom assistants standing at the back of a classroom in post-primary school and not actually doing anything. The senior rep from the EA agreed that that was not a good use of money. A board member said it was disgraceful and that he agreed with me entirely, and the EA chief executive agreed. A year later, they have just started to look at a pilot. Meanwhile, the Committee discovered that Belfast Boys' Model School fought for and got derogation from the scheme so that it could identify the problems for its young people and address them, and it is working. I discovered today that a second post-primary school has managed to do the same. How can we empower our civil servants and officials to ensure that we get value for money and make a difference in a timely way?

Dr Brady: I cannot comment specifically on that case, although I was supposed to visit the Belfast Boys' Model School, which is in my old childhood stomping ground, but it was cancelled because of COVID. They are doing phenomenal work in that school, changing lives very significantly. I cannot be involved in the operational decisions within the Departments, but, for me, part of it is about our mission and our big ambition for the Civil Service. If we can coalesce behind those things and see how everything joins together, we can do those aspects, and it will give freedom to empower individuals to do that.

Can I solve that individual problem? I can obviously speak on a one-to-one basis and try to make that happen. Part of it is creating that culture where we are delivering a fundamental step change for the people of Northern Ireland, and these are the big things that we are going after. The Civil Service is brilliant, and we are getting other people in to refresh it as well. These are good people who want to deliver better things; you do not sign up for that for any other reason. Actually, by elevating that proposition, focusing on a few things that we can really get behind, putting in support and funding and shining a light on that and, in that, not making it about 10 years but about the first three months, then the next six months and the following nine months, elevate all those other pieces as well. I do not have specifics, but tone and focus are critical as is allowing some risk-taking as part of that.

The Chairperson (Mr Humphrey): OK. Thank you, Dr Brady — Dr Brady MBE; I forgot to give you your full title. I recommend that you visit the Belfast Boys' Model School. I declare an interest as a former pupil, but I do think you should go. You have heard the Committee's collective concerns about accountability and joined-upness. Going forward, these are hugely important for governance in Northern Ireland. It has been a refreshing perspective, and I think you for that. We look forward to your coming back in three months.

Before you go, can I ask you to take our thanks to the Civil Service? Throughout the pandemic, staff have been stoic about the work that many of them have done across Departments to make real, life-changing decisions and actions to protect our people. It has been hugely important, and we thank them for that. Will you pass that on?

Finally, I wish you, Ms Minne, Mr Pauley and Mr Hannam all the very best and a happy Christmas. Thank you.

Dr Brady: Thank you very much, Chair.

Ms Minne: Thank you.

The Chairperson (Mr Humphrey): Mr Donnelly, I have omitted to ask whether you have any comments to make before Dr Brady leaves.

Mr Donnelly: No. It has all been said, Chair. Thank you.

The Chairperson (Mr Humphrey): Thank you.