



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Justice

OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

Justice Budget: Department of Justice

29 February 2024

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

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Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Miss Deirdre Hargey (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Doug Beattie
Mr Maurice Bradley
Mr Stewart Dickson
Mr Alex Easton
Mrs Sinéad Ennis
Mrs Ciara Ferguson
Mr Justin McNulty

Witnesses:

Ms Deborah Brown	Department of Justice
Mr Richard Logan	Department of Justice
Ms Andrea Quail	Department of Justice

The Deputy Chairperson (Miss Hargey): I welcome Deborah Brown, director of the justice delivery directorate — very long-winded; Richard Logan, deputy director of the financial services division; and Andrea Quail, head of financial planning, strategy and support. You are very welcome to the new Justice Committee. I will give you the opportunity to open up your presentations. Members may indicate as we move through if there is a lot of detail, or we will try to wait until the end for any questions. Over to you.

Ms Deborah Brown (Department of Justice): Thank you, Deputy Chair, and to the Committee, for the opportunity to come along this afternoon to provide you with an overview of the Department's budget. Joining me this afternoon are our finance director —

Mr Richard Logan (Department of Justice): Richard Logan. Hello.

Ms Brown: — Richard Logan, and Andrea Quail, who is our head of financial planning.

This afternoon is an opportunity for us to give you an introduction to the Department's finances and to outline how the budget is allocated and the types of issues that we currently face. We thought that it would be useful at this stage to give you a high-level overview, but of course we will come back to the Committee with further information on the 2024-25 budget as that process progresses. We very much value the input of the Committee, and we will engage with you throughout this process and take your views on board.

The approach this afternoon will be to talk through the slide pack, which, hopefully, you have all had access to. Before we get into the slide pack, however, I want at the outset to highlight a couple of key

issues around the current year's budget and next year's budget. As I am sure you are all very aware, the budget situation has been extremely challenging for the Department of Justice and, indeed, for all Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) Departments.

First, in the current year, the Department is on course to report a break-even or a small underspend at this stage of the year. That result has only been possible due to the very welcome decision by the Executive to provide additional funding of £75.3 million in order to manage the forecast overspends that the Department was showing and to meet the pay awards. Prior to that announcement, we had been forecasting a potential overspend of around £35 million, which mainly related to the PSNI. That amount excluded some of the elements of pay that we were subsequently funded for.

Secondly, looking ahead to 2024-25, the Department continues to face significant and unprecedented pressures. The Department's most recent analysis has now identified potential pressures of £444 million, which is 40% of our budget, and that assumes that there is no uplift on the current baseline. Further detail and the factors contributing to those pressures will be outlined as we go through the slide pack. You may be aware that the new Executive have already written to the Prime Minister, the Chancellor and the Northern Ireland Secretary of State to press for urgent discussions on the Government's financial package for Northern Ireland. Until a final Budget is set for 2024-25, we cannot be definitive about the impact on the Department's spending areas and their ability to absorb pressures, particularly the recurrent implications of the pay awards that are being negotiated and settled for 2023-24. However, we will seek to ensure that there is openness and transparency with the Committee throughout this process.

We will turn to the slide pack. Slide 2 shows the Department's organisational structure and provides an overview of our structure from a financial governance perspective. There are five directorates within the core Department, and you are in the process of receiving a briefing from each director on their area of work. One of the features shown by the diagram is that there are a range of agencies and non-departmental public bodies (NDPBs). You will see that we have five agencies, and it is worth noting that there are only nine agencies in total across all NICS Departments. The bottom two rows are the eight executive NDPBs, the largest of which, by quite a margin, is the PSNI, followed by police pensions. This range of bodies adds to the complexity of our budget management.

Slide 3 shows at a high level how the budget is allocated. You will note that the vast majority of our budget — 69% — sits with our non-departmental public bodies, including the PSNI, which makes up 65% of our budget. The executive agencies account for 25% of the Department's budget, the largest of those being the Prison Service, the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service (NICTS) and the Legal Services Agency (LSA). You can also see from the slide that only a very small amount is allocated to the core Department: 6% of our budget.

Slide 4 shows the engagement that the finance team normally expects to have with the Committee through the in-year monitoring round process. While the specific details have still to be confirmed for the upcoming year, there are normally three monitoring rounds each year. The Department of Finance is responsible for coordinating the in-year monitoring process and providing advice to the Finance Minister on the proposals in each round. The Finance Minister will then bring her proposals to the Executive for approval. DOF will issue a commissioning letter in respect of each monitoring round to notify Departments of the scope of the exercise and the deadlines for the returns.

An indicative timetable for the in-year monitoring rounds is generally set out at the start of the financial year. Those are the times for the planned engagement with the Committee, but, as well as the in-year monitoring rounds, we expect to provide the Committee with a briefing on any specific issues requested in light of emerging public expenditure issues throughout the year. As I said, we anticipate coming back to the Committee on the 2024-25 budget.

Previously, we have provided a briefing to the Committee on our monitoring round returns and the spring Supplementary Estimates (SSEs), which are the technical outworking of those returns. The Committee may be aware that the Budget Bill and the spring Supplementary Estimates debate took place in the week of 19 February. In line with our normal engagement with the Committee, we will provide a briefing to the Committee on the Main Estimates for 2024-25, which is normally around May.

I will also highlight that, in the current financial year, DOF did not commission any in-year monitoring rounds. Therefore, Departments were not in a position to bid for additional funding. Instead, DOF carried out a series of exercises to accommodate technical transfers, reduced requirements and the allocation of centrally held funds. That is a reflection of the uncertainties and challenges around the

Northern Ireland Budget in the 2023-24 year. We anticipate that the annual Budget process will return to the normal timescales for 2024-25 once that Budget is finalised.

I will pass to Richard, who will take us through the rest of the slides.

Mr Logan: I will start with slide 5, which shows how the Department's budget is broken down. The main source of financing for public expenditure remains the departmental expenditure limit, referred to as DEL. All DEL allocations are made on the basis of a clear distinction between resource DEL and capital DEL. Resource DEL is further broken down into ring-fenced resource and non-ring-fenced resource. Ring-fenced resource is the budget that has been ring-fenced by Treasury to cover the cost of depreciation and impairments, and those are accounting costs and do not result in actual cash costs. The ring-fenced budget cannot be used for any other purpose, and the Department's opening budget for 2023-24 was £93 million. However, the main focus of any budget is the non-ring-fenced resource DEL, and you will sometimes hear it referred to it as cash. It reflects the ongoing cost of providing services: for example, pay and pension costs for staff; and operating costs, including the maintenance of buildings, utilities and IT costs. The Department's opening budget for that allocation was £1.157 billion. Finally, capital DEL reflects investments in assets that provide or underpin services in the longer term, such as buildings, IT and vehicles. The Department's current year opening budget was £129 million.

Slide 6 outlines the key features of this year's non-ring-fenced resource DEL budget. On 27 April, the Secretary of State announced the 2023-24 resource and capital allocations for Northern Ireland Departments. The opening budget for DOJ was £1.157 billion, and that included a budget cut of £19.4 million —1.7% — as well as Treasury allocations of £31.2 million towards additional security funding and £3.2 million for NI protocol funding for the PSNI. An additional in-year allocation of £11 million for legal aid pressures was provided by the Secretary of State in November 2023. DOF also recently confirmed a £6 million allocation to cover the in-year costs of the PSNI data breach. However, that does not include expenditure for any associated compensation claims and legal costs that will be incurred in future years. On 15 February, the Executive confirmed an additional £75.3 million to cover forecast overspends and pressures in 2023-24.

The chart on slide 7 provides you with an illustration of how the DOJ budget is allocated. The Department has a range of agencies and NDPBs, so the budget is split across quite a range of areas. The PSNI's opening allocation of £750.3 million represents about 65% of the Department's overall budget. Significant elements of the budget sit with the Prison Service, £122 million; the Legal Services Agency, £101.9 million; and the Courts and Tribunals Service, £51.7 million. It should also be noted that the budget for courts is shown net as it receives income of approximately £40 million, so its gross spend is in the region of £90 million.

Slide 8 provides a high-level overview of how the Department's budget is allocated. As I mentioned before, 65% of it is allocated to the PSNI. However, 69% of our total budget is spent on staff costs. Of the remaining budget spent on non-staff costs, 30% is statutory and contractually committed, leaving less than 1% that is discretionary. This means that the final outcome of pay awards and availability of recurrent funding will have a significant impact on the Department in affordability and its ability to manage these costs within a limited budget.

I turn to slide 9. The Finance Minister's written ministerial statement on 15 February provided additional allocations for Justice. First, the £75.3 million non-ring-fenced resource DEL for forecast overspends and pay awards and, secondly, £4.9 million for ring-fenced resource DEL in respect of depreciation charges. Taking into account those additional allocations, the Department's final resource DEL budget, non-ring-fenced, for 2023-24 is £1.259 billion. It is currently expected that the Department will report a break-even or small underspend position at year end.

Up to this point, we have been forecasting a potential overspend of approximately £35 million, mainly in respect of the PSNI. That £35 million excluded the cost of pressures relating to pay awards for 2023-24. It is important to note, however, that the additional £75.3 million allocation from the Executive has been provided in respect of pressures in 2023-24 only. This is not a recurrent allocation that will automatically be included in the Department's baseline budget for 2024-25.

Slide 10 shows the key features of our 2023-24 capital budget. We initially received £128.8 million of funding, and this capital allocation contributes to a number of important projects, including ongoing maintenance of the ageing estates in police, prisons and courts, as well as key IT and digitisation projects. Of the opening allocation, £36.8 million was subsequently returned to the Department of Finance as part of the in-year technical exercises. The majority of that — £30 million — was in respect

of the police college. The easements identified are largely due to delays in commencing projects, which means that the costs will now move into 2024-25 and future years.

Slide 11 shows how our capital is allocated. You will see that our main capital spending areas are police, prisons and courts, and they make up most of the Justice estate. Business areas within Justice receive capital allocations each year based on the prioritisation of their bids.

I move on to next year's budget. The Department of Finance initially commissioned an information-gathering exercise for Budget 2024-25 purposes on 8 December 2023. The Executive subsequently agreed that a different approach for next year's Budget is more appropriate, and a revised Budget exercise was commissioned on 18 February, with a return date of 29 February — today. That will be followed by a series of bilateral meetings with the Finance Minister and Executive colleagues, with the aim of bringing a Budget paper to the Executive for consideration in early April.

One of the key issues for consideration will be the long-term affordability consequences of accruing pay awards for 2023-24 in the absence of any guarantee that recurrent funding will be provided for future years. If there is no increase in the Department's baseline allocation for 2024-25, our most recent assessment indicates that we will start the new financial year with pressures in the region of £444 million, or just under 40% of our baseline. Of this, £217 million relates to operational pressures, including pay and pension increases, inflationary costs, increased legal aid requirements, the continuing increase in the prison population and additional demand on courts and police services. The remaining £227 million of pressures relates to items of exceptional nature outside the direct control of the Department. Those include estimated costs due to legal claims for the PSNI data breach, holiday pay and McCloud injury-to-feelings cases. There is a general level of uncertainty regarding the final outcome of the cases and the range of potential costs that will be involved.

Slide 13 relates to capital DEL. As in previous years, Departments will take a zero-based approach to capital DEL and will have to bid for their share of the capital budget that is available to the Northern Ireland block. The Department's initial assessment of requirement was £140.9 million, of which £70.8 million related to inescapable projects, for which there are firm legal or contractual obligations, and £70 million related to high-priority projects. Based on our most recent information, the value of high-priority bids has been revised down to £51.6 million, bringing the overall total to £122.4 million.

The DOJ capital budget allocation for 2024-25 is expected to be significantly below the £120 million requirement that was identified, and we will therefore need to prioritise the bids that are received. A number of high-value building and IT projects over the next 10 years have also been identified, particularly in the Prison Service, the Courts Service, Forensic Science and the PSNI. Given the likely constraints on capital budgets, it will be necessary to take a strategic approach to allocating funding to those projects over the next five to 10 years, in line with ministerial priorities and within the limited budget that is available.

That brings to a close our overview of the Department's finances. We will be happy to take any questions from the Committee.

The Deputy Chairperson (Miss Hargey): Thanks very much for your presentations. I open the meeting to members.

Mr Beattie: Thank you for that. Richard, you kept saying that there was a small underspend. What was it? What figure are we talking about?

Mr Logan: By year end?

Mr Beattie: Yes.

Mr Logan: There are a couple of factors. One is when the pay awards are made. If they are not paid before the end of March, additional employer contribution rates will kick in, and that will increase costs. The underspend will ideally be within 1%, or less than £10 million. That is our expectation.

Mr Beattie: Yes, that is perfect. Do you know what the £6 million that has been spent on the PSNI data breach has been spent on? Has it been spent on legal costs, or on moving police officers' homes — do we know?

Mr Logan: Yes. It involves overtime costs and personal and physical security measures that have been implemented for staff across the PSNI.

Mr Beattie: Those are just the first year costs. What is the rough projection for future costs?

Mr Logan: Our understanding is that those costs are contained in this year. The bid that went in was for costs incurred this year. We have not gone out to bid for any increase, if there is one, next year. We expect the future costs to be more to do with compensation and legal costs. That will be the significant cost, and it will follow on into next year or beyond.

Mr Beattie: Yes. You are looking at £444 million of pressures next year. I take it that the pressures from the data breach are contained in that.

Mr Logan: Yes.

Mr Beattie: You must be analysing roughly, somewhere, what the cost of that will be. I am just trying to see what the baseline is. I understand the pressures.

Mr Logan: For the data breach?

Mr Beattie: Yes.

Mr Logan: The PSNI has given us the figure of £116 million as the cost of the data breach in compensation and legal costs.

Mr Beattie: Is that £116 million part of the £444 million of pressures?

Mr Logan: The £444 million is roughly split, with £270 million for operational, recurring pressures. When the balance of the one-off legal costs is paid, that is the end of them, but that figure is made up of the data breach costs of £116 million and the costs of holiday pay and McCloud injury-to-feelings cases. The biggest single figure, however, is for the PSNI data breach.

Mr Beattie: So it is £116 million. That is perfect.

Mr Easton: Thanks for your presentation. Your figure of £440 million of pressures in the next financial year, which is 40% of your budget, is absolutely massive. I note that 65% of your budget goes to the PSNI. Will those pressures affect recruitment in the next financial year? Will any police officers be recruited next year? Considering the attrition rate of police officers who are retiring, are we looking at a situation in which there may not be any recruitment of police officers in the next financial year because of those pressures?

Ms Brown: The bid that has been constructed by the PSNI is for maintaining existing services and starting to recruit again to get it back to a more sustainable position. There is a limit to how many officers the PSNI can recruit in one year, so there is an element in its bid to increase police numbers by approximately 145. That is a net figure, which means recruiting probably about 500 officers and a normal attrition of about 355. That is included in the bid. That would start to bring the number back up from the 6,358 that the PSNI expects to reach at the end of March, which is an all-time low and nowhere near the figure of 7,500 that was recommended in New Decade, New Approach (NDNA) or, indeed, the sorts of numbers that we heard the Chief Constable talk specifically about yesterday. It will take the PSNI time to get back to that position. The bid that is reflected for 2024-25 is the maximum that it could bring in in one year.

Mr Easton: So, there will be a slight increase in numbers, but not nearly enough.

Ms Brown: That is dependent on the bid being met, of course. Its bid is quite substantial. The bid from the PSNI, outside the exceptional items that Richard outlined, is £141 million. That is over and above the holiday pay, the data breach and the McCloud judgement. Within that £141 million is £8 million for starting to grow police officer numbers again.

Mr Easton: I am deeply concerned about the police numbers. That is a big worry for me, but thank you.

Mr Dickson: I will be very brief. You talked about the limit at which those police numbers can come in. I assume that that is a physical limit dictated by the training ability of the organisation.

Ms Brown: Absolutely, yes. It is to do with capacity.

Mr Dickson: It is an issue of capacity for the organisation. Therefore, if the budget is met, this will be good rather than bad.

Ms Ennis: I will follow on from Alex's question. Last week, the permanent secretary gave the Committee a presentation on the Department's forward work programme and issues facing the Department. One of the big things in that presentation was the recruitment of Prison Service staff. Taking on board what Alex said, can you tell me how much of that overspend is to do with the Prison Service's attempt to recruit more staff? We know that it is severely understaffed.

Ms Brown: Before the Minister left, in August 2022, the prison officer numbers were starting to increase. The Minister had given approval for an additional 56 officers. As a result of opening up two square houses, officers have had to incur some overtime. The estimated need to manage those square houses is around 38 additional officers, but, at the moment, that is managed through just overtime. We have therefore placed a bid for another 38 officers on top of that. As you probably heard the permanent secretary say a couple of weeks ago, however, the prison population continues to increase, and, if we had to open a third square house, we would probably need another 38 prison officers on top of that. They are not included in that £444 million.

Mr Logan: A total of just over £20 million is included for prison pressures going into next year. I will give context. The Department expects our salary bill for 2023-24 to be in the region of £850 million. Every 1% pay increase will cost an extra £8.5 million. A broad indicator of pay awards is that it would be approximately £8.5 million for every 1% of pay award increase.

Mr Bradley: My question follows on from Alex's. Did you say that, in March, you expect the number of PSNI officers to be 3,580?

Ms Brown: It was 6,358

Mr Bradley: I picked it up wrongly, sorry.

This question relates to an operational matter, so you might not be able to answer. Within that, is there any opportunity to delay retirements to keep numbers up, or is there an ability to re-employ? If so, has that been factored into the budget? Maybe you cannot answer that, sorry. It is an operational matter.

Ms Brown: Unfortunately, I cannot answer that, sorry. It would be for the PSNI to address that.

The Deputy Chairperson (Miss Hargey): You can ask that when the PSNI is here.

Ms Ferguson: On the capital budget, Richard, is the £70 million that you mentioned for inescapable projects based on last year or on forecasting for the year ahead? You also mentioned £70 million for high-priority projects, which has been reduced. That was quite a surprise: how was it reduced by £20 million? What factors were at play? Finally, those are high-priority projects. Do you have medium-priority and lower-level capital projects in the system?

Mr Logan: DOF asked us to submit bids for three categories: the inescapable, where there is a legal or contractual requirement; high-priority projects, for which contracts have not been signed or which have not been legally committed to but are in the system and may be ready to go, or for which business cases are being worked on; and desirable items, which are smaller. Desirable items for next year are in the region of £3 million or £4 million. They do not represent a hugely significant amount, but, if they were being prioritised, they would be well down the list because inescapable items would come first.

The reduction from £70 million to just over £50 million is due to a reduction in the value of the police college. The police college had a total bid included, but it is not ready for the money to be spent during 2024-25, so it has been reduced. It has been profiled for a future year's spend, assuming that the police college goes ahead. That is the main reason for the decrease from £70 million to £51 million in 2024-25.

The bids for next year are new bids from business areas. They have not been taken from last year's figures. We did a lot of work in advance of the DOF exercise. We went out to business areas to get their plans for projects and what they were going to spend. The inescapable bids are for new areas or continuing spend that was in the system in previous years.

Mr Dickson: I appreciate that human resource — staff — is the largest call on the budget. Nevertheless, in budgeting for the Department, to what extent do you identify invest-to-save projects? Do projects get a flag beside them to suggest that there is a strong argument for investing to save?

Ms Brown: Yes, as part of the second exercise that was commissioned. The first exercise was just about where our pressures are. The second exercise asked the Department for its bids. Our £444 million is for bids, but we have also bid £2 million for what we call our transformation projects. There are a few on that list. We have a mental health intervention to reduce reoffending by young people in the criminal justice system. We are starting to scope another — you will have heard the permanent secretary talk about the oversight group that he has put in place on the prison population. We have put in a marker bid on prison population transformation, which involves working with our partners, the Probation Board and the Department of Health. There is a bail support scheme and a pilot for the female remand cohort. There is a project on Prison Service data analytics, which is about collecting data to give us better management information to inform forward decisions. There are some projects for the PSNI, which is starting to think about its transformation journey and what it might start to do on that. There is also a bit on the criminal injuries compensation scheme.

We have put marker bids in for transformation, and, absolutely, they will be about investing to save. They will save the system and other Departments money. Business cases on all of those are being developed at this point.

Mr Dickson: Where that money can be clearly identified not only as savings for the Department of Justice but as serious savings for other Departments, how much of a role do they play? Take the mental health project, which you mentioned first: it goes to the Department of Education, the Department of Health and virtually every Department in Northern Ireland. What is their contribution?

Ms Brown: I think that Stephen Martin will be here to talk to you with Beverley Wall, the director general. He engages with his partners in the Department of Health and other Departments to make sure that a holistic approach is taken on those projects. As we know, Departments have different priorities and challenges, so it becomes challenging, but we all know that if we work together, we will save money in the long run. We are absolutely alive to that.

Mr Dickson: OK. So there is a piece of work to determine that people should not be sitting in their silos and should be looking across to see where the best savings can be made.

Ms Ferguson: I have a quick question on legal aid and the pressures there. Back in November, £11 million was received in-house. I know that it is demand-led, but what is the forecast? What are the pressures in the incoming year?

Ms Brown: Legal aid, as Mr Beattie probably remembers from being on the Committee before, has been a challenge for us over the past number of years in that it has never been properly funded. It had a baseline of about £75 million, and that was never anywhere near what was deemed to be needed for business as usual, which was usually about £84 million or £85 million. That was a number of years ago. In 2022-23, we successfully bid for and secured an additional £20 million into that baseline, which brought the baseline up to about £95 million. However, the demand is still exceeding the budget, and the forecast demand this year is £116 million. We already started the year with a deficit. We secured the additional £11 million, and when we got the £75 million from the Executive on 15 February, we got an additional £3 million. That means that legal aid should finish the year with a backlog of about 12 weeks, which equates to about £26 million. Moving into 2024-25, as part of the £444 million, we have bid for £27 million. It needs £22 million just to keep pace with the demand of £116 million per year, so even that £27 million will not reduce the 12 weeks significantly, but it will start to bring it down. We hope that, over a period of two years, if we get the right budget settlement, we can start to pull that back.

Legal aid has not been properly funded for a number of years and continues to suffer as a result of that. Indeed, in previous years, legal aid always relied on in-year monitoring to secure the additional funding. We want to try to get the proper baseline for legal aid moving forward. Paul Andrews will be at the next session, and he will be able to give you a whole load more information on that.

The Deputy Chairperson (Miss Hargey): In the same vein, on forward projections, you talked about the exceptional items around legal claims and stuff. Are there projections at this point in what they will look like around the data breach going forward, the holiday pay and the McCloud judgement? Is there any analysis at this point, or a timeline as to when we are likely to see that in the next couple of years?

Ms Brown: We expect business cases to come through from the PSNI on the data breach and on holiday pay, which will give us a little bit more granularity on those issues. We have got the projections included in the bid of £444 million. The timing of that is very uncertain, and it remains to be seen whether the data breach figure that we quoted — £116 million — will all be paid out in 2024-25. It depends on what way that pans out, but we expect some more information from the PSNI over the next couple of weeks.

The Deputy Chairperson (Miss Hargey): On the pressures, particularly on the demand-led services across the board and the increase in costs there, is there an analysis to match the capital or infrastructure needs that would run alongside the resource spends or pressures?

Ms Brown: At the moment, in every capital project that we have, we take into consideration the resource consequential. If we do not get the £444 million, which includes quite a chunk for pay, that means us holding more vacancies. That will require us to go back to the drawing board and ask, "Where can we hold vacancies, and what are the consequences?", and that could have consequences for capital projects as well. We have not gone into that detail yet, but we know that that is a significant risk for us. Our ability to manage vacancies is just about attrition. There is no vehicle to remove posts in any other way. Indeed, £217 million of that £444 million is for business as usual and operational issues, and, if that bid is not met, there is a significant risk that this Department will be sitting with a very big overspend, because the scope to do anything is completely limited.

The other point is that the Department of Justice budget has, compared to other Departments, had one of the worst settlements over the past 10 years. Over the past 10 years, funding has increased by 43%, but funding for Justice has increased by only 3%. For Health, it has increased by 70%, and, for Education, it has increased by 45%. The Department of Justice has continued to take on new initiatives, and it has continued to deliver. All efficiencies have been maxed out: we do not have anywhere else to go. We are in a critical situation, and I do not want to make light of that. We have all the facts and figures that demonstrate what the Department has done over the years to try to live within its settlement, but 2024-25 is the most challenging year that we have ever had.

The Deputy Chairperson (Miss Hargey): If you look at prisons and the increase in demand in that area, it is my understanding that the infrastructure, including the buildings to hold people, is not up to scratch. There has been a lot of work on bringing disused buildings back into use, as you said, with the associated staff costs. Will there be an assessment of that and of the need for a separate women's facility so that there is no mixing or integration? We are hearing concerns about those issues being expressed.

Ms Brown: We have a number of key capital projects, one of which is a new women's facility.

The Deputy Chairperson (Miss Hargey): Next we have Justin, who is online.

Justin, you are on mute. You need to unmute.

Mr McNulty: Thank you, Deputy Chair. Thank you, Deborah, Richard and Andrea. What are the implications for the Department of Justice's budget of yesterday's ruling in the High Court that the Northern Ireland legacy Act is not compatible with the European Convention on Human Rights?

Ms Brown: I am not able to comment on that at this stage. I do not have any information about that to be able to give you any details on what the implications would be for the Department of Justice, but I can try to come back to you on that.

Mr McNulty: Do you have any initial thoughts or assessments?

Ms Brown: Not at this stage.

Mr McNulty: What is your sense of that ruling?

Ms Brown: As I said, I have not had a chance to give it proper consideration, so I do not want to comment on it at this point.

Mr McNulty: Thank you very much. That is all that I wanted to ask.

The Deputy Chairperson (Miss Hargey): You can follow up on that when you are in a position to do so. That would be good.

That is all. I thank the three of you for coming along. I am sure that we will be seeing a lot more of you in the time ahead. Thank you for the information.